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CHOREOGRAPHING CABARET; A GUIDE TO STORYTELLING THROUGH
DANCE AND MOVEMENT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.F.A.
Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

CHOREOGRAPHING CABARET; A GUIDE TO STORYTELLING THROUGH DANCE AND MOVEMENT

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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American Musical Theatre is one of the unique American methods of storytelling that exists in performance. In a musical, text, song, movement, and dance tell a story. In Music Theatre, when a character can no longer express what they desire in words, they sing. If singing cannot satisfy the need, the element of dance comes into play. Richard Kislán states, "What sets dance apart is the universality in movement and gesture which is not bound like language to nationality or culture. Dance transcends geography in a way that language cannot. Dance humanizes expression in a way that music cannot." (237) In American Musical Theatre History, dance was, at first, purely used for dance sake. The spectacle of dance was the interest of the public. Choreographers George Balanchine and Agnes De Mille helped to change dance in music theatre, by using dance numbers to

further the plot of the story. They believed a musical number should enhance the tone, energy, and rhythm of the entire piece.

Influenced by my mentors at VCU, I have discovered the important lesson of “telling a story.” A musical number needs to take the audience on a truthful and emotional journey and aid in the flow of the play. Through the many projects that I have worked on with Patti D’Beck, I have learned a way to choreograph that is efficient and, to me, the best way to go about revealing a story to the audience. Using the musical *Cabaret*, I will highlight these important steps.

I was the associate choreographer for the VCU Mainstage production of *Cabaret*. I assisted in all pre- production work and aided in the creation of all musical numbers. As part of my thesis, I was also in charge of teaching the choreography to all who were involved in the musical. Spacing and polishing the musical numbers once we arrived in the space was also a part of my job as the associate choreographer.

The first part of this thesis is a guide for those who have an interest in the world of musical theatre choreography. It outlines a step by step process on how to go about choreographing a dance within a musical. Whether one has choreographed many dances or never choreographed at all, this guide will aid in their creative process as a choreographer.

The second part of this thesis is a case study on *Cabaret*. All the steps that are outlined in the first part of this thesis are reiterated within the analysis of VCU’s Main Stage production.

INTRODUCTION

Oklahoma! was the first musical to incorporate dance as a further development of the plot, *Oklahoma!* signaled a new era for music theatre in many ways. One of its most influential innovations was the use of dance as a story-telling tool. American ballet choreographer Agnes de Mille created dances that joined the songs and libretto, giving the show a power no other musical comedy had shown before” (musicals101.com). Agnes de Mille changed American musical theater by linking her choreography to the words and music, thereby amplifying their meaning.

Before Agnes De Mille’s choreography, dance was primarily a production number. Easton writes, “A dance, either by high kicking chorus line or specialty performer, usually followed a song, but not necessarily for any logical reason” (199). There were some choreographers such as Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Jose Limon, and George Balanchine, who attempted to incorporate a storyline into the dance. Easton observes, “Balanchine’s ballet, *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*, propelled the story line of the musical *On Your Toes*, but it did not actually change the course of dancing in the musical theater. *Oklahoma!* would do that” (200).

It is important to me, as a choreographer, that each dance tell its own tale. If I do not make the audience feel something, I have not done my job. How does a choreographer create a dance that furthers the plot? In this thesis, I will recollect the experiences that I have had as a choreographer. I hope this will guide those who want to choreograph a meaningful dance that furthers the plot. In each chapter, I outline the important steps in

creating a dance for music theatre. To reiterate the points I have made in each chapter, I have written about my experience with the Virginia Commonwealth Mainstage production of *Cabaret*. For each number, I outline the process of how the main choreographer, Patti D'Beck, and I created the dances. I hope this serves as a useful tool for choreographers on their creative process.

CHAPTER ONE

Research

Our first category, Research, is essential in producing a musical number. It is the first step that a choreographer should take when embarking on the process of creating a dance. This important step in pre-production helps in not only beginning to understand the time of the play, but also helps the choreographer to come up with new and innovative ideas. While researching, one finds images or artwork of the time that can be extremely helpful. With today's modern day technology, videos are easily accessible and provide a useful tool in compiling as much research as is needed. The more research one finds the more in depth and rich their work will become.

History of the Time within the Play

Dramaturges research the time of the play, but it is also a choreographer's responsibility to research the history of the play.

When I do a musical, I do research on it, on the decade, on the geographical area, and on the society at that time. Oklahoma is based on the research I have done of the Old West. "The Farmer and the Cowman" is based on square dancing and folk dancing in America at the turn of the century. Even in "Kansas City," the Ragtime stuff that he brings back from Kansas City is based on real immigrant clogging steps. I do a lot of research and then make it into my own style. (Stroman 212)

One should look everywhere for facts and important events of the time. History books, Encyclopedias, books on the main topics of the play, the internet, art books, are all

great resources in the aid of research. However, the most important book to analyze and research is the script itself.

One should look throughout the script for helpful hints or facts written into the plot that tell of the culture, and or status of the day. For example, in *Paint Your Wagon*, a musical in which I assisted Patti D'Beck, there are many lines that tell of the environment of California during the gold rush strike. This led me to research the gold rush atmosphere of California in the 1800's. I found that the men who left their families and jobs had a strenuous journey against the rough land of the West. It was not the happy go lucky journey that the first song in the show portrays, but an arduous trek against nature. This information led to our idea for this number. When the men saw the large mountain that they had to travel across, they needed to make the decision if the promise of fortune was enough to conquer this immense land.

In *Cabaret*, the main ideas in the script are Weimar Berlin cabarets and the rise of Hitler. The script itself never mentions the exact date, but it does show that it is the beginning of the rise of Hitler with the song, "Tomorrow Belongs to Me." Therefore, it was my job to find as much research as possible on the reign of Hitler. To know the real history of what happened in Germany during this horrendous period is essential in producing a truthful and emotional story onstage of Hitler's influence over the people and artists of Berlin. Although theatre is a heightened state of reality, one has to know the real facts before one can stylize them for the stage.

Pictures and Images

When researching, images will appear that will help in the creative process. These images are just as important as the facts found. I find images immensely helpful, because they show tone and movement. Even though the image itself is still, there is an inherent movement within. Photography, painting, and drawing are all forms of art that are helpful images. The artist always has a point of view. They put focus on one major part of the image; the part they feel is the most important to their work. If there are no video resources on the dance steps of the day, and image can help one see how the movement might have been.

For *Cabaret*, I ran across a name of one of the main entertainers in Berlin during the 1930s, Anita Berber. She was one of the more infamous performers in the German cabarets. The following image is a photo of Anita Berber performing her burlesque dance.



Fig 1. Anita Berber. societyofcontrol.com. May 01, 2008.

What can one tell from this image? Anita performed in the nude and was not always by herself. The makeup of the time was extremely dark and the hair slicked back. There is no true sexual orientation to either of the two people in the photo, because the man has feminine qualities and the woman is only recognizable because of the slight appearance of a chest. The lighting is dark, yet the bodies are fully lit. That is only the surface of this image, as a choreographer, one has to dig deeper.

If one looks closely at the image, one can begin to see a rhythm and a tempo to the performers. It will seem as if the image comes alive. From this still shot, the people begin to move and the choreographer's imagination is enhanced. Their movement seems fluid, sensual, snake like and the body is contorted, stretched to its capacity. She is fully draping herself among the man, which shows that performers of the time were not afraid to get close to one another. In an interview with Graciela Daniele, she states, "Fosse taught me some tricks about choreography through research and looking at pictures and imagining things" (159). A choreographer can also use the image as a pose in a certain part of the song. One can emulate exactly what one sees in the image or make it their own.

Modern Day Technology

Technology has helped to open up the immense possibilities of research that was not available in the past. Videos and recordings are what I like to call "goldmines" when it comes to creating a musical number. The internet has become an invaluable resource. However, one must know what sites are valid and which are not. To me, the most helpful internet resources are YouTube, Google Images, and WorldCat.

YouTube is an online search engine that has access to videos from around the globe. It is as easy to access as turning on the computer and typing in www.youtube.com. On this site, one can access old clips from movies or the actual events from any time when video recording was available. For *Cabaret*, I found an old clip called “Symphony of a Great City” Part 5. In this clip, there is actual footage of a German cabaret in the 1930s. It shows the chorus dancers, the acrobats, and the infamous kick-lines. What better way to know what steps were used in the cabarets then to see them live and in action. I also found clips of Hitler and his followers. Although they were chilling to watch, they are tremendously helpful. In watching him speak to the people of Berlin, I noticed that he was theatrical in his arm and hand movements. This led Patti and I to our idea for “Willkommen,” Hitler’s hand movements stylized to look as if they are choreography.

Another great place for video recordings is The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in NYC. At this library, there are four divisions: Jerome Robbins dance, Music, Rodgers and Hammerstein archive, and the Billy Rose Theatre Collection. The Jerome Robbins division contains archives of dance documentation in all dance forms such as ballet, ethnic, modern, social, and folk. The music division has scores and manuscripts from around the world that are from the past to present day. The Rodgers and Hammerstein archive contains recorded sound such as, rock and roll recordings, opera recordings, speeches, and radio dramas. The Billy Rose Theatre collection has all types of performance records from street corner, stage, studio, drama and musical theatre, film, television, radio, and popular entertainment (circus, magic, vaudeville, puppetry) (www.nypl.org). Sometimes, special permission is required to view videos, but not all of

them require this step. If one cannot find any information on the musical that they are choreographing, it is more than likely somewhere within these 4 archives.

Google Images is easy to access as well. One just has to go to www.google.com and find images. Once there, simply type in the image you are looking for in the search box. Within seconds the images will appear. They are a bit tiny, but when double clicked upon, the image becomes its full size. This is how I found the images of Anita Berber. When I clicked on one of the photos, it led me to the website that it came from. This website had an in depth history of Anita and her life as a cabaret performer. Everything in research leads to something else. That is why it is so exciting and yet tiring at the same time.

A helpful library search engine is WorldCat. WorldCat is an engine that finds books, magazines, CDs, librettos, visual aids. It is a library catalog for all libraries. If there is something written or recorded on the time or topic, it will appear on the WorldCat search engine. WorldCat is available on every college library website. Once found, all one needs to do is search the topic they are researching. For example, I typed Berlin Cabarets and within seconds, WorldCat showed me everything available on that topic. It also says whether the item is available in the library where you are. If it is not, it shows the libraries that do carry that resource

Research helps the choreographer begin to use their imagination. It helps them come up with concepts, ideas, and hooks that will aid in their task of developing musical numbers. It is a place to start so that one does not go into pre-production work with a blank slate. The more research compiled, the more the choreographer will begin to feel,

and sense how the dance should look and what story should be told. “All of that research is hopefully for us to create a canvas that has some life and depth to it” (Marshall 159).

CHAPTER TWO

Pre-production

Collaboration in Theatre

Theatre is a collaborative art form. Music Theatre, with all of its elements, is even more so. It takes a tremendous amount of time and effort amongst a group of artists to create a production. The director, choreographer, set designer, lighting designer, stage manager, costume designer, sound designer, producers, actors, and assistants all are important in the creation of a piece of theatre. Each artist has their own unique vision and opinions as to what should go into the piece. To create a captivating story, all of these individuals must come together to create a shared vision of the work. Robert Berkson believes, “The staff should share an image of the finished production; the blending of their contributions must reflect a clear, common goal” (5). The director is there to help guide everyone to that shared vision of the work. This, to me, is what makes theatre truly inspiring. Everyone has their own ideas and images and they are embedded into what becomes the collective work.

Choreographer or Director/Choreographer

When creating dances for a musical, one can be the choreographer or the director/choreographer. Recently, a wave of choreographer also in the role of the director has emerged. Susan Stroman, Kathleen Marshall, and Rob Marshall all choreograph and direct their shows. I believe this is happening because a choreographer and director are the

same. A choreographer shapes bodies in space and creates images to tell a truthful and emotional story to the audience. A director has the same task, but uses movement and text rather than dance. There is barely a difference between the two. A choreographer also has to know the script inside and out. They must see the images within the scene, for scenes lead into the song. In order for there to be a smooth transition from text to the musical number, the choreographer must ease the way into the somewhat “ludicrous” idea of singing. An actor cannot be involved in the scene then abruptly turn away and sing. They must still be connected to the moment in the scene and let that continue through the song. Berkson states, “The best productions are “seamless” in that you cannot tell where or when the authority for direction changed hands” (7).

If one is working with a director, they must be careful not to overstep their boundary. It is at times a difficult task, because a choreographer may not have the same idea as the director for the scene. However, as I said before, theatre is a collaborative effort. A choreographer who works with a director needs to learn their proper relationship with that certain director. Directors are different and one must adjust their work accordingly. Some director’s will ask for input on the scene and others will block the scene and bring a choreographer in only for the song itself. At times, the director will often do the movement for the “book songs” as well. Book songs are songs that have minimal movement or none at all. They are based on the intention of the characters in the play. It is important that the choreographer knows his/her duties and the director's expectations. Berkson observes,

It is important that the director and the choreographer agree upon the boundaries of artistic authority. Even though the show may be patterned to the director's general scheme, the choreographer should still have a measure of artistic freedom within that framework. There are times when a director has definite ideas about how part or parts of a number should look in order to achieve a certain effect. Nonetheless, since both the director and the choreographer deal with visual aspects of the performances and share a responsibility for directing the cast, mutual respect and courtesy are important to maintain (8).

The Director's Concept

A concept is the director's interpretation of the show. An idea of how they want the world of the play to be. The concept serves to integrate all of the elements of the show, so that it has one unique viewpoint. In other words, what will make their version of the play different from the other productions? For example, in *Cabaret*, director Mark Ramont had his own concept. In Act I, the songs have a performative quality to show that everyone in the play is trying to block out the world that exists outside the safe walls of the cabaret. They choose to entertain and ignore the outside atmosphere. In Act II, the new power begins to invade the cabaret and the characters are forced to deal with the whirlwind of devastation and chaos that has begun to envelop them. They can no longer hide from their problems.

Once a choreographer is given the concept, the next step is to make sure that all of the songs and dances relate back to that main idea. Berkson writes, "The choreographer then creates his or her material to fit into and advance this centralized concept" (7). The musical staging must support the idea that the director has given so that the story of the play can be revealed.

Analyzing the script

As a choreographer, one must dissect every little part of the script and analyze all the different choices that can be made. Keeping in mind the concept, what are the choices the characters would make? How would they dance when they have clear knowledge of their main intention? Are they aggressive or more passive? Why do the characters do what they do? At a certain point in the script, would that character be able to break out into a dance? Does a dance belong in the scene or is the need not great enough?

In musicals that have never been staged before, it is up to the choreographer and director to decide when dance is needed. This is a collaborative discussion, but the director has final say. The only way to know if dance is appropriate is to know every inch of the script. Graciela Daniele states, “I always work from a character’s point of view and what the intent is of the scene. Why are we dancing, is it just a celebration of something or are we trying to say something through dance, to advance the plot, to clarify the characters?” (156). Dance can also be used to help set the tone and create the atmosphere “There are certain points in musicals where it is often wise to exploit the energy dance can supply. Dance in the opening number of Act II can also act as a re-statement or reminder of the atmosphere before the curtain dropped” (Sunderland and Pickering 15).

Every beat, every tactic, every desire has to be known. When the actors begin their work on the scenes and songs, they may come up with different choices than what the choreographer had decided upon in pre-production. Change is inevitable, but a choreographer must always have a starting point. This is important because, some actors

will not have strong impulses and the movement must be given to them. In this instance, it is the job of the choreographer to make the movement seem organic, as if it came from that actor.

Lyrics: Finding the Intentions of each song

In a musical song, each sentence, phrase, and word was written for a specific purpose. It is the choreographer's job to find, within the lyrics, an underlying need or want of the character or characters.. A character in a musical sings when the need is so great that speaking will not satisfy them. The lyrics create a story that a choreographer must portray in the movement.

Before rehearsal with the actors, the choreographer must know why the characters sing. They need to know what their intentions are and what tactics each specific character would use. These needs and feelings are then translated into the choreography. A great place to start any dance is with the story itself. In *Cabaret*, one of the bigger dance numbers is the opening number, "Willkommen." The lyrics are:

[EMCEE]

Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome!

Fremde, etranger, stranger.

Gluklich zu sehen, je suis enchante,

Happy to see you, bleibe, reste, stay.

Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome

Im Cabaret, au Cabaret, to Cabaret

(Repetition of opening phrase.
Emcee's need to keep the
audience entertained)

[Spoken]

Meine Damen und Herren, Mesdames et Messieurs,

Ladies and Gentlemen! Guden Abend, bon soir,

We geht's? Comment ca va? Do you feel good?
 I bet you do!
 Ich bin euer Confrecier; je suis votre compere...
 I am you host!
 Und sagen
 Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome

(Once again repeated, need for
 Emcee to keep the audience
 feeling welcomed)

Im Cabaret, au Cabaret, to Cabaret

[spoken]
 Leave you troubles outside!
 So - life is disappointing. Forget it!
 We have no troubles here! Here life is beautiful...
 The girls are beautiful...
 Even the orchestra is beautiful!

And now presenting the Cabaret Girls!
 Each and every one a virgin! You don't believe me?
 Well, don't take my word for it. Go ahead- ask her!

Outside it is winter. But in here it's so hot.
 Every night we have to battle with the girls to keep
 them from taking off all their clothings. So don't go
 away. Who knows? Tonight we may lose the battle!

[KIT KAT GIRLS]
 Wir sagen
 Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome

(Girls repeat the same phrase,
 all have the need to keep the
 audience feeling welcomed)

Im Cabaret, au Cabaret, to Cabaret!

[EMCEE]
 We are here to serve you!

[ALL]
 Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome
 Im Cabaret, au Cabaret,

[whispered]
 Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome!

(Same phrase...desperation of
 ensemble to entertain)

Fremde, etranger, stranger.

[ALL]

Glücklich, zu sehen, je suis enchante,

[EMCEE]

Enchante, Madame.

[All]

Happy to see you,

Bliebe, reste, stay!

Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome!

(Last phrase in lyrics is the same phrase as the beginning. cyclical..all we want is to forget the outside world)

Fremde, etranger, stranger.

Glücklich zu sehen, je suis enchante,

Happy to see you,

Bliebe, reste, stay!

Wir sagen

Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome

Im Cabaret, au Cabaret, to Cabaret

The Emcee and ensemble are saying,” Welcome to the cabaret. Stay. Forget your troubles. We have no troubles here”. The lyrics tell that they are working to entertain and keep the audience in the cabaret. There is a huge need for the ensemble to keep the audience in the space, which is shown in the repetition of words. There is power in repetition and a sense of desperation. These characters need the audience to stay for their own happiness and survival. How does this story translate to the movement?

How does the ensemble achieve their need of keeping the audience entertained?

What is entertainment? During the 1930’s in Berlin, sex was pure entertainment. We wanted to incorporate this sexual freedom within our choreography. Therefore, the

movement had to be sensual and exciting. In addition, because they are not truly happy on the inside, a slight sense of desperation has to exist within the movement. This is a great beginning to the steps. When one begins to understand the story, images will begin to develop. These images can then be transformed into the dance steps. Not only will the steps convey the story, they will also have great emotional depth.

To further the beginning of the steps, remember the concept of the piece. This will add even more ideas and images. I recommend carrying around a notebook in the first few weeks of pre-production. Many ideas will come and it is easy to get lost in all of them. Write down the ideas and then refer back to them. The concept, the characters will do anything they can to forget the chaos outside their safe walls, coincides with what is embedded in the lyrics. Now, the choreographer has made a choice and feels content with the story that both they and the director have created.

Finding a Hook:

Now that the story has been created and all the desires of the characters have been found, a hook comes into play. A “hook” is a certain idea that makes the number unique or different. Michael Bennett writes, “We try not to do a number until we have an idea, a hook for the number, some sort of concept, stylistically or in terms of the particular plot, or where the number is happening, or the style of movement that leads us to some form of structure”(96). Each musical number has a hook. A hook can be a prop, a piece of clothing, a certain style of dance, or a set piece like a settee or a swing. This is when the

choreographer has to strengthen their imagination and find an interesting and creative way to tell the story.

In the number “Willkommen,” the story is that the ensemble is desperate to entertain the audience, but what can we use as a through line? After watching videos of Hitler’s speeches to the public, Patti and I noticed that Hitler used many theatrical arm and hand movements.

The Emcee is the overseer of all events in the cabaret. He is the one character in the show that knows what is going on outside and comments on it. Therefore, the Emcee can use the essence of Hitler’s hand and arm gestures. I say the word essence, because we will use the gestures but tweak them to make them our own. The ensemble will also incorporate these same gestures in their dance. The gestures will have a different feel and fluidity than the way Hitler executed them in his speeches. Our hook becomes foreshadowing of the events to come. It is not a prop, but a certain piece of historical accuracy that is weaved into the choreography.

All of this work is done before the cast meets for rehearsal. Pre-production work also consists of meetings between directors, choreographers and the rest of the artistic staff. There are often set meetings by the stage management called production meetings. At these meetings, all involved in the production come together and share their ideas. This meeting is also set up to let the director and everyone else know where each specific person is in their process. Any concerns or new ideas are brought up at production meetings.

CHAPTER THREE

The Music

Music is a map, a guide for a choreographer to images and ideas. Music is text to a choreographer. Within the music is a story that the choreographer must find and convey within their dance. Music can take the listener on a journey that is individual and unique. Each rest, each beat has a different meaning. The composers knew why they wrote certain notes on the page. However, they also knew that everyone would have their own experience while partaking in their composition. That is the true power of music.

Breaking Down the Music

Everyone begins with the music in a different way. Some choreographers like to listen to the music and see what images arise first. Kathleen Marshall states, “What is the music telling me to do? That sounds like the sneaky section. That sounds like the frantic section” (159). Others like to break down the music and write how many counts are in a certain section. Each section is usually counted in eights. Even if the meter is not necessarily in eights, choreographers will still count in eights. It is a universal way to break down the music that most can understand.

To break down the music and write out a music map, one simply has to listen to the music. It would take me a long time to write and explain how to count music and know

what meter it is in and when it changes key. Therefore, I will not do so. However, I will say it is extremely helpful as a choreographer to know the basics of music theory. It helps tremendously to know how to count music. This is true not only for creating the music map, but also for communicating with the music director and dance arranger further in the process.

To begin the music map, listen for the different instruments and sounds in each section. Each instrument evokes a certain emotion or feeling within. Drums can evoke passion, danger, or excitement. Saxophone can evoke passion, lust or sensuality. These are the different feelings that these instruments bring to me. Everyone will have his or her own feelings when listening to the music. The music may begin with a solo clarinetist and then add violin or brass. Listen to the whole piece and try to point out these specific changes. I also like to give the sections names that remind me of what it sounded like, such as prideful brass, whisper section, bubbly and bouncy, sounds like a trot, etc. Write down anything that will help one to remember the tone and feel of each section.

Once the sections are broken down, one can begin to count. It is important to know how many measures are in each section and when the major musical changes arise. As I stated before, this is easier to do if one has training in basic music theory. If not, one can write out what they hear in gibberish. If the bar has eight counts of a lyrical legato violin solo, then one could write, "bah dee daah ba dee dah dah". Whatever helps the choreographer in understanding the music is what should be written down. A music map is also helpful for the actors. A choreographer can print out their music map and hand it to the actors so they have a reference of what steps to do on which count.

The music map is helpful for all songs in a musical, but especially handy when it comes to the instrumental musical numbers. The following are examples of dances in musical comedy in which a music map would be a great aid:

The Fruit Shop Dance	<i>Cabaret</i>
Dream Ballet	<i>Oklahoma</i>
Runyontown Ballet	<i>Guys and Dolls</i>
The Funeral Dance	<i>Brigadoon</i>
Snow Children ballet	<i>Carousel</i>

A music map is also wonderful when there are large dance breaks within the song with lyrics:

Marian the Librarian	<i>Music Man</i>
I Think I'm Gonna Like it Here	<i>Annie</i>
Too Darn Hot	<i>Kiss Me Kate</i>
I Wanna be a Producer	<i>The Producers</i>
Lullaby of Broadway	<i>42nd Street</i>

Imagery in Music

Imagery is mental images that arise when the imagination is awakened. Imagery comes from sight, smell, taste, all of the senses. The pictures in one's mind come to fruition when sparked by a certain flash or memory. Music is full of imagery. It is impossible to listen to a piece of music and not have any images arisen in the mind. Susan Stroman explains, "I visualize music whenever I hear music. I imagine hordes of people dancing" (207). There are a few exceptions when people feel blocked or locked and cannot find these images.

As a movement teacher, I have discovered an exercise that helps to free the actor from this mental block. Using the Grotowski plastiques, isolating the different body parts

of the human body, I put on different pieces of music and let the actor's explore and "play". There were still some students who said they could not find any images within the music. I explained to them that an image might not be a clear or full picture; an image can be a color or a flash of an object. I mention this, because most have the ability to see images within music.

These images are highly important. When beginning a dance for a musical, put on the music and simply listen to it. One can close their eyes or lay down, whatever helps to relax and let your imagination truly run. I recommend having a notebook handy to write down the pictures and stories that appear. Do not write anything down until the music is over. If one begins to write, one could miss an image towards the very end or disrupt the story and not come to its resolution.

Sometimes a choreographer does this step in the process before meeting with the director. The director's concept must be followed, but it is fun to see what arises before one knows the ideas of the director. In addition, in the collaboration process, a choreographer can suggest the ideas they have come up with as well. It once again depends on the director and the role that they would like the choreographer to play in their production. If one is the choreographer/director, this step is extremely important. The concepts, hooks, images, etc. are all their responsibility.

Musical Indicators: Rests, Accents, Etc.

A composer writes rests, accents, musical trills for a specific reason. Each adds a different feel to the music. These are all assets to a choreographer. They become parts of

the story and help the choreographer hear the way the story should unveil. I may listen to one piece of music and see the image of a romantic love story between two people but then all of a sudden a rest happens. Immediately after the rest, the music picks up the tempo and drums are added. This change in the music sounds, to me, as if turmoil has happened. An obstacle has come into this love story. After the *a tempo* drum section, the music has a trill with a flute that seems panicky and increases in volume until the music stops. Perhaps, this is the obstacle being defeated or maybe the lovers lose. That is the intrigue of music. It can go any way one wants it to.

It is also an interesting choice to go against the music. If the music has a legato, smooth, and sensuous line, the choreographer may want to explore a fight scene that would typically not be associated with this tone of music. Just as actors make choices, so must the choreographer. As one develops a strong artistic eye, they will know when something works and when it does not. Until then, continue to take risks and try something new and daring. Let the music take one on an emotional journey.

Rewriting or Adding Music to the Musical

When working on a new musical or a musical revival, the choreographer has the opportunity to rewrite or add music to the musical. Once again, it is helpful to have a background in music theory. If not, the choreographer must collaborate and have a good artistic relationship with the musical director and dance arranger. The choreographer can know that they want, a longer dance section that is upbeat and is a celebratory expression of the characters in the musical, but not know how to write music. This is when one must

work with the music director or dance arranger. The dance arranger may come in after the dance has already been choreographed and compose music that fits the choreography or they compose the music before seeing the choreography. It varies within the production. Some productions do not have a dance arranger. It is then the music director's responsibility to help create the dance arrangements.

I had the opportunity to help add music to a new revival of *Paint Your Wagon* at Pioneer Theatre Company. I assisted Patti D'Beck on this show and aided in creating a new section of dance within the song "Can O Beans." While we were listening to the music, we both heard an opportunity for a clogging challenge. We knew what we wanted, and the story we wanted to portray, but were unsure of how to create music with the set. Our idea was to have a background beat with the props and sets around. Patti had a great relationship with the music director, Mearle Marsh,. Marsh helped us to create a dance section that seemed as if it was always there. It was exactly what we had envisioned.

A choreographer can also simply add accents. If there is a kick or a large dance step that needs an extra bit of something special an accent in the music is a great way to achieve this. Cymbals are also nice when it is a large kick or maybe there is a drum roll as someone does a gymnastic trick. It is up to the choreographer to realize when these certain moments need the back up of music.

CHAPTER FOUR

ADDING STEPS

Notating Choreography

The next step in the process is adding the steps. It is important for a choreographer to know how to notate the steps that they create. One can have an amazing memory, but sometimes, the steps will slip out of the mind. It is extremely important that the choreography be written down. Some choreographers have assistants for this purpose. An assistant will write down all steps. It is the assistant's job to remember everything the choreographer created in their past session.

Each choreographer has his or her own system of notation. For example, *a pas da bouree*, Patti notates as a PDB. As an assistant, one must learn the notation of the choreographer they are working with. The assistant has to be on the same page as the main choreographer. The reason, if a choreographer wants to look at the assistant's notes, they would not be able to understand them if they did not use the same system of notation.

I find it helpful to write the notation in the script itself. Some like to write down the steps beside the lyrics, others like to have a separate page in their script for the writing of the steps. That is all up to personal preference. It is all about what works for each specific person. The main idea is to be able to recall everything that was created in the past.

Style

Each musical has a specific dance style. For example:

MUSICAL	STYLE
<i>Chicago</i>	Fosse- Jazzy
<i>Hairspray</i>	1960s Dance
<i>Carousel</i>	Balletic
<i>The Producers</i>	Comedic, Tappy
<i>Once on this Island</i>	Caribbean

The choreographer will have an easier time creating the steps, if they know what style they are working in. Some musicals require specific styles, others, the choreographer has artistic freedom to create their own style. Bob Fosse created his own style of dance by overcoming his own physical limitations of pigeon toes and had poor flexibility. He used his obstacles to create a unique style of dance that is well known in the dance world.

Improvisation

The way of creating the steps that works best for me is improvisation. Put the music on and move. This is easier if one has dance training. One has to know basic steps in all techniques such as jazz, ballet and tap. If not, that is when research comes into play. Let your body and the music tell what to do. A sense of freedom is required in order for improvisation to work. Find how the character would move in their emotional state, “Exploring how someone with particular character traits, and in a specific setting, would express the emotional state indicated in the script” (Berkson 89).

Kathleen Marshall explains, “When I choreograph, I like to be able to dance it. If you have an idea, you need to be able to dance it to see if it feels right” (152). If one is stiff and cannot play, the improvisation will fail. If one is nervous about letting go and dancing, it is helpful to be in a room by oneself. Do whatever one can to make a comfortable atmosphere for the creative process.

Space

At first glance, the set can be viewed as an obstacle. However, finding out the space one has to work in can take the choreography to the next level. Levels in the set design can give a whole new look to work that seemed flat when in the rehearsal space. Places to hang off or kick legs over are also wonderful. If the space is very small, that could lead to new steps that are more contained and tiny. Wayne Cilento questions when choreographing, “What do I have, what are the obstacles? Are there chairs? Do I have desks-could I stand on them? Is there a staircase? Then I can figure out the ups and downs, the jumping over, the carrying on” (209). Let the set design encourage change. Change is good.

Dance Training of the Actors

The dance training of the actors is invaluable to know. At times, the choreographer will already know the cast of the production they are working on. This is a huge advantage, for they will know how the cast members move. A choreographer cannot give a split to a girl who is inflexible. The obstacles of the actor’s dance background affect the

choreography. Stroman states, “It does change, again because I’m inspired by them. I am prepared for the actor to take me someplace else” (220).

Other times, the choreographer will have to create the steps without knowing who is cast. If this is the case, the choreographer has to trust his or her own instincts. When they begin to teach the choreography to the cast, once again things may have to change. I will reiterate, because it is a choreographer’s motto; Change is good!

Dance Styles of the Time

Most musicals have a specific time when they are set. This is also helpful in creating the steps. It is important to keep the essence of the time, but make the steps one’s own.

For example, in *Cabaret*, Patti and I used many steps from the Charleston. However, we tweaked all of the main steps to make them look a bit different. We gave it an edge that did not exist in the 1920’s. Researching the steps of the day can lead to the style of the show. Graciela Daniele remembers,

When I did the show *Once on This Island*, I had two coaches come in and I studied Haitian culture with them. Not to do what they do but to have some signature movements. It does not matter how much you’ve been trained or how many different forms of dances you have, when you go into a show that demands the flavor of a different culture, it’s up to the choreographer to do the research. Not do the traditional thing, but take the influence and mix it (162).

Making the Work One’s Own: Careful not to Copy

Some choreographers like to watch videos of other productions. If they are choreographing *Oklahoma!*, they may want to watch Agnes De Mille’s original

choreography or any production of it they can find on YouTube. I warn, do not simply steal the choreography off the videos. This is illegal and called copyright infringement.

That was that choreographer's idea or concept for the dances. It is not right or fair to take the steps directly from the video. Let the video give more ideas for a different concept or hook. Also, do not let the other productions intimidate. Each choreographer is unique, one's work on a video will not be better, but rather different from the others. I find watching other productions helpful when I am completely stuck on a number. The other productions give me new images that jump-start my own creative process.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rehearsal

Teaching the Choreography

After pre-production comes rehearsal. Rehearsal is the time when ideas are actualized and the steps are taught to the cast that will perform them. Berkson observes, “An effective choreographer must be a skilled communicative teacher. What good are all the creative and dazzling dance combinations if the choreographer cannot get the performers to do the steps accurately or effectively?”(156). Keep in mind, what worked on one’s body or a helper’s body may not look good on the performers. In this instance, the steps must be changed. It is a choreographer’s job to make the actors onstage look good. The dance should almost appear to be effortless and easy. The actor’s should feel comfortable with all movement.

It is hard to teach the steps if one cannot perform them themselves. In this case, an assistant is a great aid. An assistant may be able to perform steps that one’s body does not allow. It is very helpful for the cast to see the actual movement rather than just explaining it. It is wonderful for the choreographer to show the steps themselves, because when they do you can see the emotion and imagery behind what they have created.

To get the right essence out of each step, give the actors imagery to work with. Bob Fosse used this system a lot. For example, in *Cabaret*, Patti and I gave the imagery of sexual acts quite frequently. If the girls were pointing their fingers and twisting them

slowly, we told them they were teasing another person's nipple. If the actors have images in their head and a clear intention, the steps will be filled.

Drilling

After the dances have all been taught, it is time to clean. In order to clean the steps, the numbers must be drilled. In this step, transitions are fixed, steps are cleaned, and emotions and imagery are added. The numbers are rehearsed repeatedly until the story is clearly told and all movement is in the actor's bodies.

Sometimes, only a specific part of the dance will be drilled. It is up to the choreographer as to what needs the most work. The choreographer's eye has to see what is working and what needs to change. They need to be efficient in their cleaning, for there is not a lot of time allotted for this drilling process. The actors must go home and get the steps into their bodies. If not, the cleaning will take a very long time.

Adding the Band/Orchestra

Adding the band/orchestra gives a fresh tone to the rehearsal process. The traditional term for this step is called, Sitzprobe. The actors and singers come together with the band or orchestra without scenery or costumes. The sitzprobe can bring new excitement and energy to the cast, yet it also can cause a bit of chaos.

It is important for the choreographer to collaborate with the music director before the sitzprobe. Many times during pre-production and rehearsal, the choreographer and musical director should have discussed tempos and accents. At the sitzprobe, tempos

can be adjusted, but the music director should already have an idea as to what tempo to begin with. Everything needs a starting point that can be tweaked or changed for the betterment of the production.

CHAPTER SIX

Tech and Spacing; Change is Good

Tech Week

Tech week is the week when actors are placed upon the set with the elements of lights and costumes. All of the technical elements are added and worked. During tech week there are a number of considerations that the choreographer has to keep in mind. The set and costumes can prove to be obstacles. Instead of viewing them as obstacles, use them to one's advantage. If the costume allows for minimal movement, that may cause a change that proves better than what one originally had.

However, if the costumes are so difficult to move in, the choreographer has to consult with the costumer. The choreographer should have already spoken with the costumer earlier in the process so that they can now have a reason to ask the costumer to change the costumes. Keep in mind, asking to change costumes costs time and money. Only ask for a change if there is no other possibility.

The choreographer can also have a say in the lighting design. Usually a director will let the choreographer give the ideas for the lighting during the musical numbers. The reason why, the lights help give focus to the dances. The director has seen the dances many times, but the choreographer created the dance. They know what their vision is and have an easier time creating that vision when they have a say in the light design. Berkson writes, "For the choreography, good lighting can be the frosting on the cake" (105).

Tech week can be extremely taxing and stressful. The way to avoid any problems is communication and collaboration. Production meetings throughout the pre-production and rehearsal process are of utmost importance. All involved in the production should be in constant communication at all times. This way, there are no surprises during tech week.

Does the Audience Understand the Story?

During tech time, the show will have a few full run-throughs. This is a great time for the choreographer to watch the full picture. Do the dances tell the story the choreographer wanted them to tell? Do the hooks work? Is the spacing clean? Are the steps filled with emotion and imagery? Do the dances have an arc throughout the entirety of the play? Does the dance belong or should it be taken out of the production?

This is the last chance the choreographer has to make any changes that will help make the production the best it can be. Even though one may love a certain dance they created, it may not work within the frame of the play. A choreographer has to do what is best for the cast and the production. The director can also give notes to the choreographer at this time. They can ask for changes in the dances or ask for the whole dance to be taken completely out.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Performance

Finally comes the exciting day of the first performance. Sometimes productions will have an invited dress rehearsal or a preview week before the official opening. At an IDR, the artistic staff invites friends and colleagues so they can receive feedback before the show opens. A preview week is also to receive feedback, but anyone is allowed to come and watch the show. It is not a specific invite. Once the director and producers decide the show is ready to open, they announce an opening date. On opening night, the choreographer needs only sit back, try to relax, and enjoy their visions coming to life. All that they have worked so hard for appears onstage and is no longer only in their mind. They are able to see the audience's reactions to all that they have created.

The choreographer notices what works and what does not. The audience will respond if the story is clear. One can look at the audience's body language and degree of attentiveness to see if their choreography is working. A choreographer can opt to continue giving notes to their actors or they can leave the cleanliness of the show to an assistant or dance captain.

The dance captain is chosen by the choreographer from the cast. The dance captain should be chosen in the first few weeks of rehearsal. They are very helpful, especially if a choreographer does not have an assistant. Either way, both the dance captain and assistant

will remain with the show and make sure it stays clean and intact. They have now received the responsibility to keep the show fresh and alive.

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Appendix I

Cabaret: A Case Study

It is much easier to understand all that I have mentioned by looking at a particular show. I have decided to choose the Virginia Commonwealth University production of *Cabaret*. *Cabaret* is based on the true-life observations of Christopher Isherwood and his novel *The Berlin Stories*. Playwright John van Druten turned these stories into the play *I Am A Camera*, which was produced on Broadway in 1952. *Cabaret*, the musical, opened on Broadway in 1967. The famous Broadway composers, Kander and Ebb, wrote the music for *Cabaret* and Joe Masteroff wrote the book. The original Broadway production was choreographed by Bob Fosse and directed by Harold Prince. For our production, VCU decided to bring in a guest director from Washington DC, Mark Ramont. Patti D'Beck was asked to choreograph and then asked me to assist her on this task.

Patti and I have worked together on many shows and now have a certain system for choreography. She allows me to help create all stories, hooks, and movement. She also lets me teach the choreography to the cast. This is not always the case when it comes to the job of an assistant. Patti is my mentor and teacher at VCU. Therefore, when she includes me in all of the steps in the process it is to help further my education.

“Willkommen”

The Director’s Idea::

“Willkommen” was the opening number in *Cabaret*. Director Mark Ramont’s idea was that the musical number serves as the introduction of all the characters in the play. He also wanted to show that life is beautiful inside the cabaret, while the outside world is falling apart. The obstacle on the outside was Hitler’s emergence of power over Germany. All of the cabaret performers were desperately trying to entertain the audience and make them forget their troubles. The Emcee, who ran the show, was adamant that the outside world be forgotten.

The ensemble needed to entertain with passion and feeling. Each member of the ensemble was unique and was not yet brainwashed into the emergence of Hitler’s ideals. They all came from different parts of the world and had their own opinions on the new power that was beginning to come into play. In 1930, Berlin was one of the major Meccas for the performing arts. Entertainers from around Europe flocked to get their chance to perform. They wanted to be there and gave it their all at every performance. “Willkommen” was the opening performance of the Kit Kat club in Berlin. Everyone was working to the best of their ability to make all troubles recede.

The Story:

Once we had an idea of what Ramont was aiming for, Patti and I listened to the music for the number “Willkommen”. The music serves as a map, as mentioned in Chapter 4. The tone, key changes, and accents all help to create images and storylines. It

was helpful for us to have a basic through line of the pattern of events. This through line helped to hear and to see the different sections in the number. This was an easy way to organize the story line so the number did not feel overwhelming. The basic through line for “Willkommen”:

1. Emcee appears (in a theatrical way) he is alone onstage
2. He introduces the band. The band plays
3. The Emcee introduces the cabaret Girls
4. The cabaret men join the women in the ladies chorus
5. The ensemble dances while the Emcee talks with the audience
6. Whisper chorus. The ensemble is on stage in sexual poses. The Emcee oversees the entire space.
7. The Emcee and principal actors join the ensemble and they have a big finish.

This breakdown is very similar to how music is broken down in Music Theory. Instead of saying, "This music is AABA" we simply say, “this first section begins with this lyric, and the next section starts at the key change, etc”. In other words, we break the music into acting beats. This through line is a great way to know what kind of steps need to be added. For example, if I know that the Emcee is singing with the women, I know that I need steps that have the women surrounding and enticing the Emcee.

The Hook:

The next task Patti and I had to undertake was finding a hook for the number. Part of the concept of our production of *Cabaret* is that life was beautiful inside the cabaret and

the entertainers were passionate about making the audience happy for a few hours. What could we use as a through line throughout the number? After watching videos of Hitler's speeches to the public, we noticed that he used many theatrical arm and hand movements. His addresses to his public were in a way a performance.

The Emcee was the overseer of all events throughout the play. He was the one character in the show that knew what was going on outside the cabaret and commented on it to the audience themselves. Therefore, the Emcee could use the essence of Hitler's hand and arm gestures. The Emcee was aware of Hitler's growing power in Germany. These gestures were not used to signify that the Emcee was on Hitler's side, but rather to comment on the political stance of Berlin. I say the word essence, because the gestures were tweaked to make them our own. The ensemble also incorporated these same gestures in their dance. It was extremely important that they had a different feel and fluidity than that of Hitler's staccato and over exaggerated gestures. Our hook became foreshadowing of the events to come.

Adding Dance and Movement:

Now came the fun part, adding dance and movement to help reveal the story to the audience. Patti and I came up with steps many ways. We used images, videos, research of the period, dance styles, and lastly, put the music on and move. For this number, we tried all of these. First, we started looking at images that inspired us. The images gave us the feeling of sensuality, androgyny, and passion, but not the style.

Next, we turned to period dance styles. *Cabaret* took place in Berlin, Germany in the 1930s. The Black Bottom was famous at this time in both the United States and Europe. This dance was incorporated in the choreography of the movie “Roxie” starring Ginger Rogers. It is always a great aid to have an actual video so one can see the feel of the steps and not just the moves. Patti and I tried doing these steps, but it did not feel right for the music in “Willkommen”.

Patti then showed a video she found of animal dances of the time. Seeing these moves gave us an idea. What if the girls were all an essence of a certain animal? There movement would be earthy and grounded, but have a unique quality. We then began to improvise with the music with these images in mind and had a “eureka” moment. When one is dancing the steps, one can feel whether or not the step is right. However, these motions did not work for the girls. We kept the same qualities of earthiness and low to the ground, but the actual animalistic movement was taken out. After having the idea of animals, we came up with an image, the Emcee is a farmer and he herds all the women into him. One idea always leads to the next. It is hard to begin choreographing, but once you are on a role it is hard to stop.

The next obstacle we encountered was what do the men do when they enter the space? Do they move the same way as the women or are they different? Sometimes talking gets in the way, so we put on the music and began to improvise. This time, our improvisation led to an earthy grounded movement with an essence of hail Hitler. The ensemble dance became unique movements that have a bit of an edge to them. The moves had strong accents that incorporated slapping the floor and their own bodies. To help with

the androgynous theme, everyone onstage danced the same steps. The men did not do one thing and the women the other, they all moved the same way.

Patti and I struggled with an idea we had for the ending of the number. This idea was to have a “parade” to show off all of the characters within the show. Ramont warned of making it not seem like a “freak” show and it was beginning to look as such. There are over twenty people in our cast. Because of the large cast, the figure eight formation that we created was not working. The stage itself is not very large and instead of the ensemble enticing the audience, it looked like all they could focus on was running into one another. Eventually we realized the figure eight would work, but it had to be broken down and simplified. Only a few cast members were used in the figure eight. The others surrounded the space and enticed in their place. This, to me, seems like the first step to take if one feels that a section of their dance is not working. Simplify and clarify; two amazing words.

“So What”

The Director’s Idea:

The first act of *Cabaret* should have a performance quality to it. Most of the songs are not played as “book” songs, but rather as if they are taking place in the cabaret club. The character, Fraulein Schneider, sang this song to the character, Cliff, when he first arrived in Berlin. In this song, she was recounting the story of her life. She sang of why the events that have happened to her do not really matter. She has lived through a lot

and survived, the days still go on. Ramont had the idea to add the ensemble in at the end of this number.

When he listened to the music, Ramont had the image of a German beer hall. This is again to incorporate the idea of the song as a performance. Fraulein Schneider steps out of real life and into the happy imaginary world of the cabaret. He also saw Fraulein Schneider with a microphone and stool, representative of the famous French singer, Edith Piaf.

The Story:

Fraulein Schneider was telling this story to Cliff so that he felt welcome into his new home. She wanted him to be happy in his new room, for then she will finally have a new tenant. She was an intelligent woman and knew that she can make some money off this man if she made him feel at home. She even stated in the play that she barely had any guests anymore. All she had in her life were a few rooms to let, the sum of her lifetime.

This song had only three main parts in its division:

1. Fraulein Schneider welcomes Cliff and asks him to sit
2. Fraulein Schneider goes into her imaginary performance world
3. The ensemble enter

Sometimes, only the director directs this type of song. Again, one must find out which numbers they are in charge of and which they are not. The director can also ask for assistance by the choreographer, as Ramont did with this number.

The Hook:

Ramont came up with the hook for this number. When he was listening to the music, he imagined the microphone and stool idea. He knew this was what he wanted from day one of pre-production. He was very strong on this hook and simply asked us to give it the movement.

Adding Dance and Movement

The woman cast as our Fraulein Schneider was extremely tall. She could pick up movement, but it took a bit of time. For this reason, the movement was simplified. It is always important for a choreographer to find what looks good on the person on stage. One may have an idea, but when it is placed on another's body, it will look completely different. A choreographer has to know that changing the idea will serve to better the production.

For the basic movement, Patti and I watched video clips of Edith Piaf. Edith had specific arm movements that she would do while singing, such as conducting or keeping the beat with her one hand. She barely moved from the microphone. Her eyes and arms told the story. We took these movements and made them our own.

Patti and I also let the actor playing Fraulein Schneider "play". In other words, we had her follow her impulses when she first sang her song. It is always nice when the movement comes directly from the actor. She found some great moments through this "play" and we decided to incorporate them into the choreography. An actor can come up with ideas that the choreographer would have never thought of. Everyone is

unique, so therefore everyone's ideas will be unique within themselves. This "play" is easier to do when it comes to book songs, or a solo. I do not find that "play" works with a large ensemble number.

It is important to remember that a choreographer should always have their own ideas; even if they will allow their actor to "play". Some actor's are not comfortable with improvisation. They have trouble listening and responding to their impulses. In this case, the choreographer will give them everything or help them to find their impulses. Usually, there is not enough time to aid them in their discovery.

To create Ramont's image of a German beer hall, Patti and I had the ensemble enter on the last phrase of the song. They entered from all around the space and joined in, "For the sun will rise and the moon will set, and you learn how to settle for what you get." They continued singing and tried to get the audience to join in. This was to reiterate the idea; the ensemble wants to entertain the audience.

They began to sway to represent the German tradition of singing along and enjoying oneself while being surrounded by friends. They are a prideful people who all believe in Fraulein Schneider's philosophy, "So what." They have survived a horrible war and are living through some awful times, but their days still go on. Germany and its people will survive.

Ramont wanted to end the number with the ensemble surrounding Fraulein Schneider with their fists raised to her. This was to show the essence of raising a beer glass to her. However, to Patti and me, it looked very similar to the Black Panther's fist raise. We knew that this was not the image Ramont wanted to create. We decided we

had to say something. It is a good thing that Patti and I have a great relationship with Ramont. He said that he did not see that within the image and thanked us for telling him. He then asked us if we had another idea. We did not, so we came up with another on the spot. This time the ensemble raised both hands, not in a fist, and dropped them on the last beat. As their hands dropped, Fraulein Schneider's hands are raised. Ramont liked this new image and it became the set choreography. Once again, a collaborative effort made the image stronger.

“Don’t Tell Mama”

The Director’s Idea:

Ramont wanted this number to be a cutesy showgirl number. This was to reiterate the idea, the ensemble truly wants the audience to enjoy their time in the cabaret. During the 1930s in Berlin, these types of shows existed all over the city. Women were scantily clad and performed the popular dance crazes of the time. Anita Berber was a well-known performer as well as Marlene Dietrich.

The audience of our production needs to feel that they are part of the cabaret. This is no longer a show that they see on stage, but rather a performance that is surrounding them. An audience member will have to listen to the lyrics of the ensemble, because they are enveloped around them and invading the audience’s personal space.

The Story:

The lyrics in “**Don’t Tell Mama**” said

Mama thinks I’m living in a convent, a secluded little convent in the southern part of France. Mama doesn’t even have an inkling that I’m working in a night club in a pair of lacy pants. So please sir, if you run into my mama, don’t reveal my indiscretion. Give a working gal a chance.

Sally Bowles, the lead female character in *Cabaret*, was telling the audience a secret, “Mama thinks I am living one life, but I am performing scantily clad in a cabaret”. It was the yin and yang idea of, mom thinks I am sweet, but really I am quite naughty. This number was a play within a play. This was not the real life story of Sally Bowles, but a dance number and skit routine in this cabaret. Once again, Patti and I listened to the music and created a rough outline of the shape of the number:

1. Sally enters the space
2. The girls appear surrounding the audience
3. The girls join Sally onstage
4. They perform their dance routine
5. The girls exit
6. Sally is left onstage

The Hook:

For this number the hook lied within the lyrics. The girls said, “Mama thinks I am nice, but I can be naughty.” Rather than using a prop or a certain set piece, the hook was in the style of the movement. It was the yin and yang moments within the dance.

Therefore, the beginning dance moves showed naughty girls who were in touch with their sexuality yet had moments of being sweet and innocent. Since this was a play within a play, the girls ended the number by revealing they were not sweet and innocent and exited the stage with the same rough movement that was seen in the opening number, “Willkommen”. This hook was helpful in the overall frame of the show because it gave a different flavor and texture to the steps.

Adding Dance and Movement:

For this number, we began with focusing on Sally’s movement in the beginning. She set the tone for what is to come when the other girl’s enter the space. Patti and I decided that she needed something to play with and touch during her introduction. We came upon the idea of a robe since it coincided with our hook of naughty and nice. Her steps were playing with the robe and revealing the naughty outfit underneath. At the end of her solo, the robe was taken off.

Next, we had to come up with the style of steps for the women. Patti and I found the Black Bottom while researching for “Willkommen,” but it did not work for that number. However, it was the perfect tone and feel to the steps for this number. The upbeat and jerky moves fit perfectly into the fun show business style of “Don’t Tell Mama.” The steps of the Black Bottom also led us to the creation of some of our own steps. We would take the framework of the original steps and alter them into a new and unique move. We also used the Charleston. This was another popular dance craze during the 1920s. The music suggested this dance with its bouncy and upbeat rhythm patterns.

While researching the actual performances in the clubs in Berlin, I came upon video footage of women performing a kick line in Berlin during the 1930s. Patti and I studied the video and created our own version of these infamous kick lines. Sally has a vaudevillian type ending to “Don’t Tell Mama,” in that she has three ending phrases. To accentuate this part of the song, we added a kick line that changes shape and direction within each ending phrase.

While beginning to shape this number during the rehearsal process, the director decided to keep Cliff, Sally’s love interest, in sight. This was a new fun idea to play with. Sally, throughout the entire number, directed certain lines to Cliff and danced where he could see her best. This blocking gave the dance a new level so that it was not just a “showgirl” number. It furthered the plot of the play and helped to build character. Sally had two intentions, perform and entertain but also entice Cliff.

“Perfectly Marvelous”

The Director’s Idea:

Ramont wanted to continue with the idea that everything was still a performance. The characters in *Cabaret* still want to pretend that everything is all right. Sally was the number one culprit. She saw what is going on, but chose to act as if everything was perfect. She was happy working at the club and lived in a fantasy world of drama, passion, and fun. Sally covered up the way she truly feels with laughter.

To aid in the performance aspect of this song, Ramont wanted the bed to be on wheels. He had the image of the bed spinning off, while Sally and Cliff are holding out

their last note. The ensemble moved all of the set pieces to show that all scenes were in the cabaret. The audience saw the fantasy of all characters. Nothing was truly real.

The Story:

Cliff has just told Sally that he does have affection towards men, but that Bobby is not his type. He was worried that he has shocked her with this information, but Sally replied, “I don’t think people should apologize for anything they do.” She was letting Cliff know that she was not judging him, because people are people. She also wanted Cliff to let her stay in this room.

Her jealous boyfriend, Max, had recently thrown Sally out of the club. She had no place to stay. Sally could go elsewhere, but she had an attraction towards Cliff that she recognized. She knew he was pleasing to the eye and was unlike any other man with whom she has been. In order to entice him to let her stay, she flirted, seduced, charmed, and used every tactic in the book to get him to give in.

Sally had two major parts to the song, which showed that one tactic she was trying was not working and that she must try another. The song must build in order to keep the truth of the situation. When one really wants something, they stop at nothing to get it.

1. Sally tricks and teases Cliff
2. Sally charms and flirts
3. Taxi man enters
4. Sally begs Cliff to let her stay
5. Cliff gives in

6. They celebrate in a final line together

The Hook:

Ramont also had the idea for the hook in this number. He wanted Sally to be over the top, as if she is performing. She should have the movement of vaudevillian actors and dance all around the room. The lights would help to add to this idea. Every time the play was in performance mode, the footlights of the stage lit up. This will help the audience have a visual of when the play is in real life or a performance.

There was not much on the stage at this point in the production. Patti and I knew we had to have Sally stand on everything in the room. Sally is not afraid to do so, even though this is her first time in Cliff's room. We decided to add another piece of scenery, which led to the idea of a trunk. In this trunk would be Cliff's clothing and underwear. Since she is not worried about invading Cliff's personal space, Sally opened the trunk and pulled out Cliff's underwear on the line, "Scandalous life". Our hook became using all of the scenery, props, and costumes in fun and unique ways.

Adding Dance and Movement:

The actor playing Sally Bowles moved very well. We knew that she would be able to listen to her impulses so we let her "play". Patti and I had our own ideas, but we wanted to see what would organically come out of her when she was in the moment. It also helped that the actor playing Cliff has strong impulses as well. They had an amazing connection and fed off each other.

They found some wonderful moments that we incorporated into the choreography. Since everything is this number had to be timed musically, we had to give a basic outline of the movement. We took their ideas and our own, mixed them together, and came up with what is one of my favorite numbers of the production.

Patti and I found the movement by improving with one another. We simply put on the music, chose which character to play, and followed our own impulses. We thought about what each character really wanted and let the music tell us what to do. We will do this as long as it takes. Sometimes, we put on the music and the perfect idea comes. Other times, we will have to play around for hours until something feels right. For this number, the movement and story came easily. Sally had a strong intention and was so over the top that anything could happen. Patti and I did not feel limited in any way.

“Two Ladies”

The Director’s Idea:

“Push the envelope.” These are the words that Ramont used when discussing this number. His idea was that the two ladies are a boy and a girl. The boy will be dressed as a woman. However, the audience should not know right away that it is indeed a man in woman’s clothes.

Patti and I had the idea of using a dressing room screen in this production. In past productions of *Cabaret*, a sheet was used. The sheet had a shadow-play story behind it at the musical interlude in the middle of the song. Our idea was that the three characters would switch clothes when they came out from the dressing room screen. Rather than

seeing what was happening behind a sheet, the audience only heard what was going on behind the screen. When the characters appeared, they were in each other's clothes.

The Story:

This song happened directly after "Perfectly Marvelous" in the construction of the play. The Emcee led into this song with the lines, "Everybody in Berlin has a perfectly marvelous roommate. Some people have two people!" This song did not further the plot, but rather commented upon the events that have just happened. That idea continued throughout the play. The Emcee began to be the observer of life.

The layout of this song was simple:

1. The Emcee runs behind the screen
2. The two ladies appear followed by the Emcee
3. They all dance
4. They run behind the screen
5. They come back out in each other's clothes

The Hook:

This was one of the more difficult numbers for Patti and me. We had the idea of a hook, three characters would all be in positions that looked like sexual moves throughout the song. However, when we began to teach the choreography, our hook was not working. The actor's that we cast were not finding the sexuality in their bodies and appeared cutesy rather than sexy. Change is a choreographer's friend. Ideas do not always work.

Therefore, we changed our hook into sexual positions and cutesy slightly ridiculous movements.

Adding Dance and Movement:

To find the positions for this dance, all we had to do was think of sex. I know that sounds raunchy, but it is true. What is sexual for three people to do together? What body parts are sexy and when you touch each part what happens? What sexual moves can we place our bodies in and still be able to move across stage?

We also had a day of improvisation. Three of us got together and simply explored all different ways to connect to one another. To have all three people is much easier than to try to find moves with just two. It is especially important in a number such as this, because all three characters have to be in tune with one another or the number does not work.

Everything that we came up with did not necessarily look best upon our actors. We had to go back to the “drawing table” and come up with new moves. This time it was just Patti and I. We had an image in our head of the way our actors moved and what worked and what did not. In thinking of these obstacles, we came up with the idea for the patty cake, skips, and all the other fun cutesy moments. These are my favorite moments in the song. Obstacles are a choreographer’s friend. It helped Patti and I discover a level to the song that was missing.

The most challenging aspect of this song is the screen. What Patti and I find funny is not necessarily funny to anyone else. It is hard to choreograph physical comedy

numbers. Everything has to be so truthful and timed perfectly. The ideas also have to be rediscovered every time the actor does them. We had the ideas that the actor's could pop out from behind the screen or throw underwear up. These were all to signify that they may or may not be having relations behind this screen. However, none of these ideas worked.

The actors had to change at the same time, so two other people assisted behind the screen. It was crowded and extremely hard to move around while also attempting to change costumes. Our idea failed. Patti and I struggled with what to do and thankfully, Ramont helped us. He had the idea of only sounds being heard behind the screen. This worked perfectly and the animal noise at the end was, in my opinion, hysterical. This is why it is important to have a great relationship with the director. Collaboration is the key.

“It Couldn’t Please Me More”

The Director’s Idea:

Still in the world of performance, this number, which is generally a “book” song, was a cabaret number. The footlights were bright and the two characters, Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz were whisked away into a world of romance and old vaudevillian humor. They were in a room with only a settee and he handed her a most wonderful gift, a pineapple. As soon as she opened the bag, they were transported into their dreams of a happy life together.

Patti and I also wanted to add in a Vaudevillian soft shoe to aid in the performance aspect of this particular song. The musical interlude was not included in our score. Therefore, we had to speak with the musical director in order to add it into our production.

Our musical director, Blantan Bradley, was more than willing to add those few bars into the song.

The Story:

Herr Schultz was a tenant of Fraulein Schneider and the two have had an attraction to one another. They have never done anything about it until this point in the play. They have spent time together, but never admitted their true feelings. Herr Schultz owns a fruit shop and brings fruit to Fraulein Schneider to show that he cares. This time, it is the most wonderful fruit she has ever received, a pineapple. “It Couldn’t Please Me More,” represents the innocence of falling in love and the hope for a cure to loneliness.

The structure was simple:

1. Herr Schultz hands her the bag
2. Fraulein Schneider discovers the pineapple
3. They sing about their affections
4. Soft shoe interlude
5. Herr Schultz finally admits his feelings
6. Fraulein Schneider leaves feeling faint

The Hook:

The hook for this number was written into the script. The number had to be about the pineapple and the connection it brought between the two characters. The pineapple was a magnet that drew them together.

Adding Dance and Movement:

Patti is terrific at all forms of dance, but my number one strength is tap. I know many tap steps, as does Patti. It was easy for us to choreograph the soft shoe interlude, for we did not have to research the period steps. There are specific moves for a soft shoe, the most well known is called an “essence”. It is always important for Patti and me to have a reason behind the movement we choreograph.

The soft shoe comes out of their excitement of the pineapple. We also added a dance on the settee that tells the story of the flirtation between the two. At first, we only had them performing a soft shoe while standing, but when we walked into rehearsal Ramont had a settee in the center of the space. He told us that the settee was part of the set for this specific scene. Patti and I knew we had to incorporate the settee and came up with a new section of the dance. While on the settee, Herr Schultz tried to touch Fraulein Schneider’s leg. She became embarrassed and took his hand off her leg. They both shrugged and then continued in their dance. At the very end of the dance, Herr Schultz dipped Fraulein Schneider. The choreography furthered the plot of the story and showed the increasing attraction the two had towards one another. At the very end, Herr Schultz went in for a kiss but gets scared and goes back to the pineapple.

We also added in the ensemble to further the idea that all numbers take place in the cabaret. The ensemble appeared in the doors while the two characters were singing, “I can hear Hawaiian breezes blow.” As the two characters were singing this line, they heard the

ensemble, but did not know where they were coming from. They heard them, but did not see them in their existence. The worlds were not separate.

“Tomorrow Belongs To Me”

The Director’s Idea:

This was the first number in *Cabaret* when the outside world appears to the audience. The character, Ernst Ludwig, also hinted at what is to come earlier, but not as strongly as this song. Ramont wanted the audience to have a slight reaction of fear, but still feel comfortable enough to sit and watch the rest of the play. In many productions, this number is a slam in the face that the outside world is falling apart. In our production, we melted into the chaos and gave a peek at what was to come.

We had three African American men in our cast. One of the three was the Emcee. The other two were members of the ensemble. Ramont wanted to highlight the historical information that not only were Jews attacked in this awful period of history, but anyone of color or different from the white male race was ostracized. He wanted one of our African American men, Joshua Boone, to want to join in with the group within this song. However, they do not let him join and the lead boy hurts him by shoving him to the ground.

The Story:

This song was not written as the Nazi theme song. This song was a song of German pride. The Nazis took it over and changed it. The words are beautiful and the harmonies are as well. Something that can appear to be beautiful can be dark underneath. In our story, a young man appears singing this song. We began to see other men appear humming the same tune. They all began to join as one force and one man was left out. He wanted to be a member of the group, but he is of a different race. They enticed him into them and hurt him. They left him alone and in pain. The lead young man also made the Emcee retreat out of sight. This group, that we do not know are Nazis, had an undeniable power.

The Hook:

The hook was the idea of the separation of anyone different from the dominant white male race.

Adding Dance and Movement:

The movement was simple. The men slowly came together as one main force. They were drawn together by the words of hope in the song. Germans have suffered enough and tomorrow belongs to them. The African American tried to join, but when he went to shake the leader's hand, the leader squeezed his hand until the man fell to the ground. In this production, a stage combat choreographer, Drew Vidal, choreographed the violent handshake.

“Don’t Go and Maybe This Time”

The Director’s Idea:

Ramont wanted to add in the songs “Don’t Go” and “Maybe This Time” to our production. Neither of these songs existed in the original Broadway production. “Maybe This Time” was written for the *Cabaret* movie, starring Liza Minelli. and “Don’t Go” was in the London production of *Cabaret*.. Ramont wanted to have a scenario where the two songs exist within the same scene. He wanted to cut some of Cliff’s song, “Don’t Go” so that it would transition smoothly into the scene. This is the first song in the show that was “real”. Cliff’s song to Sally is not a performance; he really meant that he wanted her to stay.

However, Sally’s song, “Maybe This Time” was still in the world of the cabaret. She walked away from Cliff, the lights changed, and she was back on her stage. Cliff was beginning to live in the real world, but Sally remained in her world of performance. This conflict continued throughout the play until it caused their separation.

The Story:

Sally just found out that she is pregnant. She did not tell Cliff about the pregnancy and entered the scene in an awful mood. She blamed her mood on a man that keeps calling for Cliff. However, she was not upset about the phone calls, she was using the phone calls as a cover up for her real sadness and anger of her pregnancy. Sally was afraid of reality and thought that if she told Cliff of her frustration with Gottfried Von Schwarzenbaum

that she could easily leave him. Instead of telling him of her pregnancy, she wanted to run away. She began to pack her suitcase when Cliff stopped her with his song, “Don’t Go.”

Sally began to contemplate that maybe this was the one. Maybe this time she will not be hurt and a man will treat her well. Maybe this could work. Sally was not one hundred percent sure and still had doubts, “Maybe This Time.” She then decided to tell Cliff of her pregnancy. She wanted to see how he would react to the shocking news. When Cliff reacted positively, Sally was taken aback. She was not used to this kind of treatment and it scared her. Instead of enjoying the fact that Cliff wanted the baby, she disagreed and stated that it would never work out. Cliff kept urging her that it could and she began to listen.

She once again began to ponder if this relationship with Cliff could be the one, “Maybe This Time.” At the end of the song, Sally decided to give it a chance. She was going to have the baby and live a normal life with Cliff, “Who knows? I mean Cliff and I may just turn out to be the two most utterly boring people you ever met!”

Since these two songs are a combination within the scene, it is easiest to look at the breakdown with all combined:

1. Sally enters knowing she is pregnant
2. Cliff reads her a letter his mom has written
3. Sally tells about the phone calls she has gotten for Cliff
4. Sally begins to leave
5. Cliff stops her with his song
6. Sally contemplates staying

7. Sally tells Cliff of her pregnancy
8. Cliff is positive and wants the baby to help bring them back together
9. Sally sings her song and decides to give it a chance

The Hook:

There was no hook. These songs are close to “book” songs. No hook was needed.

Adding Dance and Movement:

The movement came purely from the actor’s impulses. Since this was to be the first “real” song of the show, it was important that the movement be organic. It should come out of the character’s needs. Cliff wanted Sally to stay, so he treated her with kindness and was very gentle with her. He took away her suitcase and set it on the ground. He was not forceful and made every attempt to show Sally how much he cared.

In Sally’s song, she was transported back into the cabaret. To create this image, Sally took a few steps downstage and the lights changed. There was no movement. The story was told within her body language and breath. In the second verse of her song, she removed her coat to signify that she was setting her emotions free. She was not going to be tied down by her fear of getting hurt. Sally was going to give this relationship a chance.

“Sitting Pretty and Money”

The Director’s Idea:

The first song, “Sitting Pretty” showed the appearance of happiness with money. The women were covered with money and the Emcee was sitting pretty on his throne. It seemed as if money was a wonderful thing, but the lyrics told a different story, “My father needs money. My uncle needs money. My mother is thin as a reed. But me, I’m sitting pretty, I’ve got all the money I need.”

The audience should be taken into this upbeat song and not listen to the lyrics. The change came in the transition to, “Money.” This transition revealed the underlying darkness that the Emcee had in, “Sitting Pretty” but was hiding within the bouncy, fun song. Ramont wanted to go deep into the darkness and greed of money. He wanted us to explore what people will do for money and how evil one can become based on material wealth.

The Story:

Post World War I, Germany was among the poorest of countries. Their money, armies, and ships were all taken away because of the reparations that they were demanded to give. They had to continue to pay money to the countries that they attacked in WWI. The German people were left with nothing. Many went into prostitution to make any bit of money that they could. This was a period of extreme poverty for the city of Berlin.

Many wanted money and Hitler gave the hope of regaining their material wealth. He persuaded the German people that if they followed him, they would no longer be

hungry and poor. “Money” commented on how easy it was for Hitler to come to power. Money is a great tool for persuasion. We had another foreshadowing moment in the play, which hinted at the rise of an evil power. The ensemble had become puppets for social commentary on the outside world. The two worlds were beginning to collide.

The through line was a bit complex. This was a very large number. This was one of the numbers that Patti and I could not have done without the breakdown:

1. The Emcee appears
2. The girls surround the Emcee
3. The music changes to a slower tempo and so do the girls
4. The Emcee begins to have an eerie quality
5. The ensemble enters
6. Slow motion dance break, money falls from ceiling
7. The ensemble belittle those asking for material things, while dancing on the money
8. The ensemble begin to fight over the money
9. The Emcee breaks up the fight

The Hook:

For, “Sitting Pretty” Patti and I listened to the music and saw an image of showgirls. These showgirls were beautiful women, with fans. They were at the bidding of their master, the Emcee for he had tons of money. They surrounded themselves with

money, because the fans themselves were made out of money. We loved the idea of being so obsessed with money that one wants it all over themselves.

In “Money” the hook was the dark side of money. The dark side contained the emotions that money brings out in individuals: greed, lust, desire, anger, jealousy, etc. The ensemble will struggle in trying to retain their public persona while being manipulated by the Emcee. The Emcee had an endless supply of money and liked to cause the chaos among the ensemble. He became a puppet master.

Adding Dance and Movement:

The showgirls’ movement was the essence of an old Busby Berkley dance. Patti and I have already choreographed a fan dance for a production of *Chicago* that we worked on. Therefore, we had already researched fan moves and had a lot of steps in our vocabulary. It did not take long to figure out a movement pattern for the girls. What was unique this time was an image that came into play when listening to the transition between the two musical numbers.

When the music slowed down, both Patti and I had the image of desensitized showgirls going through the steps, but with no passion and no emotion. We loved one move I like to call the butterfly and had the girls did it in slow motion. The butterfly was done by placing the fans behind the girl’s backs as if they had wings. The fans were opened and closed, creating the essence of flying. When the girls were changing, the Emcee was as well. He looked straight at the audience and changed his facial expression

to that of the dark side. His body began to tense and his song became choppy, forceful, and manipulative. The girls exited and the ensemble was brought onstage.

The ensemble all had to have their public persona in their bodies when they entered. Patti had an idea from a production that she worked on, on Broadway, of *Evita*. She told me they had a section in one of the dance routines where everyone was connected to one another and moved in small steps switching angles and directions every few beats. Patti showed the video and we instantly decided that this would be a great idea to play with. We were very careful to not steal the idea, but rather make it our own.

Out of this image came the proper amoeba. The proper amoeba was all of the ensemble members in their own specific rich poses connected to one another. They were not separate entities, but one amoeba. The Emcee was controlling the ensemble and they switched between their proper pose to that of distorted greed every time the Emcee brought the money near.

Patti also had the idea of a group of hands reaching for money. When she said this idea, I then came up with the idea to melt the two amoebas into one and go into her money grabbing story. Our collaboration of both ideas helped create the first section of the dance. After this, we were a bit stuck with where to go. We sat around and brainstormed and then I recalled a childhood memory.

While we were discussing the images of money, Scrooge McDuck came into my mind. Scrooge is a Disney cartoon character who is so greedy and stingy with his money that he has a special vault. In this vault, he keeps money that he uses as a swimming pool. He loved the feel of money on his body. This image led me to an idea of money coming

down from the ceiling and the ensemble literally swimming in the money. I must be honest, I was afraid to tell Patti of my idea, for it was a bit bizarre, but I said it anyways.

Thankfully, Patti was intrigued. I am not sure that she was sold on the idea right away until we began to play with the movement. As we put on the music and thought of rolling in the dough, we came up with some very innovative and creative steps. She then told me that all of this made her think of the Emcee with a snow globe. He turns over the snow globe and all of the snow falls down. This is what led us into the section being dreamlike and in slow motion. Once again, collaboration created a unique idea.

We loved this section of the number and then realized we had two other sections to go. When we listened to the next section, it reminded us of the musical, *Les Miserables*. The reason why, it had the same tone in the singing of the lyrics and the rhythm is very similar. The movement in *Les Miserables* is very choppy and rough. As those images began to appear in our head, we put on the music and improved. The lyrics helped tremendously in this section. The ensemble was making fun of the poor. The steps were moves that coincided with the lyrics. For example: “Coal in the stove”, became a bouncy step with the ensemble appearing as if they were shoveling coal and “Shoes on their feet” the ensemble does a dance step where they step on their heels.

The final section sounded like a fight. We had to make sure that we built up in the dance enough to end with a fight, but we knew that was the perfect way to end this song. For the fighting moves, we went to the stage combat choreographer, Drew Vidal. With the help of Drew, we found an ending to this number. The ensemble tried to grab the money off the floor and they did anything to get as much as they could when suddenly, the Emcee

held up a special jewel. They all wanted this jewel, and began to fight and push each other to try to get this precious gem. The ensemble was caught red handed in the middle of their fight and the number ended.

“Married”

The Director’s Idea:

In our production, Ramont wanted “Married” to be the first real life song. As I mentioned before “Don’t Go” became real, but Sally’s number was still in the world of the performance. This song, in its entirety, was real. It should be simple and honest. There was no movement, for it would take away from the moment.

The Story:

Herr Schultz decided to ask for Fraulein Schneider’s hand in marriage.

“Fruit Shop Dance”

The Director’s Idea:

This dance is generally cut out of most productions of *Cabaret*. The reason is because it does not further the plot of the story. However, Ramont wanted us to keep it in

the play. He liked the tone and atmosphere the dance created. The dance was upbeat and joyous and gave the audience no warning that the play was about to take a huge turn. The audience should feel happiness towards Fraulein Schneider's engagement. There should be no hint at what was to come.

The Story:

All that was written into the script itself is that the dance takes place in Herr Schultz's fruit shop. They were all dancing in celebration of the engagement between Herr Schultz and Fraulein Schneider. It also stated that Fraulein Schneider begins to dance with a sailor. This is all that is given within the book for *Cabaret*. Since Patti and I believe in always having a story within a dance, we decided to create our own story of what goes on in this dance. We wanted the dance to further the plot of the story and highlight each character.

In order to create this story, we had to listen to the music and find each section. Since this is a very long piece containing only dance, Patti and I decided to write out a music map. This helped us to have a visual of when the music changes and what ideas we wanted for each section. This tedious task takes awhile, but is well worth it. It helps the choreographer to see how many counts are in each section. Then, the choreographer knows how many steps they have to create for each section. The following is the music map for this production of *Cabaret*:

FRUIT SHOP DANCE – Music Map – 11/26/07

Intro: Vamp

1/8
 1/8 (Sailor 1 bows)
 123, 567 (on 123 P Woman crosses Sailor 1, 567 The Sailor grabs he
 her hand to make her dance, she gives a slow look
 123, 56 (strings) 78& (Sailor 1 sneaks around P Woman and gets her in dance
 position)

Pineapple Melody: Fr. S. w/ Sailor #1(Essence of Fox Trot)

A.
 1/8 (4 steps in place, P Woman begins with R foot)
 1/8 (Q, Q, Q, Q Q, Q, Q, Q(3/4 turn) to SR
 1/8 5 678 Lean back and forth (2), P Woman goes back first, Q, Q, Q, Q
 on the diagonal back to the party members
 1/8 Sailor 1 turns P Woman

 1/8 6&78& P Woman gets distracted and Sailor turns her in
 1/8 (Light)1&2&3&45&, 7
 1/8 Sailor 1 brings P Woman into his arms)

Vamp – Herr Sch. Tries to cut in from SL, but Sailor 2 beats him. So, he goes to drink
 more. Also, 2 other couples join in.

1/8 (P Woman and Sailor 2 dance US, the other two couples
 dance DS)
 1/8

A'. Accordion starts here

P WOMAN AND SAILOR 2
 1/8 (4 quick steps, woman begins with R foot 4 quick
 steps turning in a circle)
 1/8 1 – Tacit – 345, 6(triangle) Sailor 2 slides away from P Woman, offers hand to
 dance she takes the hand, on 6 they turn forward

2 OTHER COUPLES

(4 Quick steps DS, then 9 Quick steps crossing in
 front of P Woman and Sailor 2) on the ting they go
 hip to hip

1/8 P WOMAN AND SAILOR 2
 (Sailor 2 teaches P Woman a step, He points with R

Foot 1, 2, on 3, 4 she point L forward, he points..etc
P Woman gets carried away and does it fast

2 OTHER COUPLES

(Lean back and forth in hip to hip position)
step back, side...separate and come palm to palm)

1/8

TWO MORE COUPLES JOIN

1/8 (Bouncy) 1&2&3&, 5&6&7&

P WOMAN AND SAILOR 2

1/8 to Do si Do around one another

4 OTHER COUPLES

Cross each other on the diagonal with duck waddle
palm to palm

1/8 1&2&3&4 5& 7(triangle)

P WOMAN AND SAILOR 2

Step hops, stepping with R foot (4) on the ting

Sailor 3 gets a hold of P Woman

4 OTHER COUPLES

With hands together..lean to side and side then push
away

1/8

The couples come back together and then run off

Vamp(Tempo increases, more drive)

1/8

Sailor 3 grabs P Woman and twirls her around they
Are separated by Herr Sch. tango

B. Bridge – Twisty, Tango-y

Herr Sch. w/girl (to make Fr. Sch. jealous), then they end together. Maybe
this is only w/them.

1/8 1 2 &34 5 6 &78

Herr grabs a girl and tango walks to SL

1/8

Throws her and grabs another girl

1/8 1 2 &3& 5 6 &7&

Grabs a 2 girl and plays swinging statues

1/8 1 / 2 3 / 45 &6&7&8&

He falls into Girl #2's arms

While this is happening the Sailors have their own
solo around the P Woman...she chooses to go back
to Herr who has fallen

A2: Fuller orchestration(Brass/strings)

- 1/8 1 **23 45** 6(crash) 7& Kangaroo Hop(6 couples) facing each other
In two vertical lines
In partner position step 1 kick with inside leg in
Attitude on 2 step 3, 4, kick on 5 turn around 6, 7, 8
Repeat this above step
- 1/8 1 **23 45** &6 7&
1/8 Crossing lines.. step and kick chug on 2 3, 4, chug
kick on 5 step 6, 7, 8
1/8 Connecting by one hand Charleston circle
- 1/8 **2**(crash) ball change kick(2) on 3, 4, finish the Charleston
Turn slowly on 5, 6 and 7, 8
- 1/8 (Low volume) 1 2 3 4 &56& facing partner chug to one side then the other
5, 6,7 The woman turns around and puts her bottom
to the man's stomach
1/8 They exit sliding feet on ground, similar to a ronde

Key Change – Full Orchestration

Wilder now, boys dance w/boys, etc.

The Bear Step

A3:

- 1/8 2 4 6(brass) Men jump out on 1, 3, 5, and 7 in a bear pose
1/8 Get other people to join them
1/8 Do si Do around partner with bear claws
1/8 dab buh dab buh dah Back to back step together 12 34 56 on 7 8 prepare
heads on each others neck to do bear turn
- 1/8 Bear turn staying connected at head 7, 8 arms into
Next bear position
- 1/8 12 &4&5 &7 Bear ball change (2)
1/8 Bear ball change in a circle
- 1/8 12 3&4 5(staccato) 678(strings) Partner jumps on other in the front like a bear...they
exit the dance floor

Stop Time

Cliff & Sally dance

A4:

- 1/8 12345 7(triangle), 8& Sally comes out on floor and wants to do the Bear..
On the triangle, Cliff says no
- 1/8 12345 7&(brass) Cliff goes up to Sally and puts her in dance position
1/8 (Brass) 1 &3 &5 678 Hesitate 3, 4 Hesitate 7, on 8 he pulls her in hip to
Hip tightly
- 1/8 1&2&3... Suspends & Ritards Cliff spins her around hip to hip than lets go
Of her to spin on her own
He goes back to catch her in his arms

Full Orchestra

1/8 Swivel step cross on 1 side ball change 2, 3
Repeat to other side cross 7 step 8

1/8 1 23 45 67 Hesitate to side step 3, 4, cross 56, cross 78

1/8 12&3 Sally pushes Cliff away

1/8 Descending Triplets: 1&uh 2&uh 3&uh 4, Whoosh up Sally does a fancy
Step and Cliff chases
After her to SL

Bridge: Flashy, Big Tango

Kost w/sailor. There is a build as some others add on. Comes straight DS

B2:

1/8 12&34 56&78 Kost comes DS by herself

1/8 REP Grabs one sailor and then another

1/8 REP She leans back onto Sailor 1 and then leans forward on
Sailor 2

1/8 The Sailors lift her up and sit her in a special place

A5: XX Lines? Charleston Side kicks...P Woman tries to do this

1/8 Girls enter from all around doing a Charleston side kick

Key Change:

1/8 REP above 1/8 Continue doing this step to peppered positions

Charleston-y JUST WOMEN

1/8 With R hand on chest and L hand flicked out to side
Charleston side kick to R on 12....on 34 one more
Charleston side kick with L hand up this time and R hand on
chest on 56 push back with L Hand in front
Pirouette turn on 78 to the R

1/8 Repeat the above step

1/8 With feet turning in and out, chest circles on 12 34
Then hands on Thighs, hips, chest, head

1/8 on 12 Leave hands on head and push pelvis forward and
Back 34 push hands out and 5 push hands out
With feet turned inwards hands flick up, chest, down
And jump feet together on 8

MEN JOIN

1/8 78 Charleston flying fan kick jump turn 78

1/8 78 Charleston flying fan kick jump 7 on 8 jump and clap
Hands with a partner

1/8 Descending: 1 3 5 7 Black bottom jza jza step with hands together
 1/8 REP above turn around back to back and swivel hips

MAXIXE in a CIRCLE

Build: Move to new partners and dance around, &/or pass 2 drinks to the couple.

1/8 With hands around each others waist step together
 Step together step together, switch sides 78
 1/8 Repeat up above switch to other side

 1/8 Step together step together step ball change, spin the other
 on 78
 1/8 Repeat above step

1/8 12&34 (Rep) 12&34 Step together step chug to switch sides, Repeat
 1/8 1&27374&576&7&8&9Swirly) Switch partners

KEY CHANGE – 3 different Variations for couples -- everyone is dancing

A6:

Charleston Couple

1/8 Face to face Charleston side kicks double it up on 5, 6, 7, 8
 1/8 Charleston side kicks in a circle with same foot -- hit hand to
 Foot on 7, 8 come together
 1/8 Jump hop together 1234 stop on 5 step on 6, 7 on 8 arms open
 And together
 1/8 turning together with hands attached

 1/8 Cheek to cheek low slow walks
 1/8 One partner rises and the other is in their chest
 1/8 Softer, lower volume Moment to realize that they are there
 1/8 Continue with same slow walks and enjoy it
 1/8 Stop Time: 1 45 8(thud)
 They toast, start to drink, she stops him, and she drinks.

Cake walk Couple

1/8 Repeat swivel step of Cliff and Sally with hands pushing together
 1/8 Pick up the partner and swing them around
 1/8 The partner falls over onto hands -- the other grabs their butt brings
 Them up and slides hands from bottom to hands into cake walk
 Position
 1/8 same toe step as in beginning of dance
 1/8 One partner is lifted with a hitch kick

1/8	Both people move to the side
1/8 Softer, lower volume	tango circle around the partner
1/8	

Tango Couple

1/8	Tango arms 12, 34 feet switch and body but not arms on count 5
	Switch arms as well on count 6 look at partner
1/8	

Swing Ending, Big Finish

1/8	Charleston fan kick with R leg ball change 3 and 4
	Kick with R leg across body and then to side..hold 78
1/8	run to find another drink..a diff person..any story etc

The Hook:

Our hook for this number came out of creating an actual story between Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz. Fraulein Schneider was embarrassed to dance, but was taken away by the sailors. Herr Schultz became jealous and tried to impress Fraulein Schneider with a tango. The problem, Herr Schultz had a bit too much to drink. She saw that he has fallen from dizziness and went over to help him. They watched as the ensemble danced in celebration. Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz joined in on the dance and ended with a celebratory drink to their engagement.

Adding Dance and Movement:

When Patti and I listened to the music for this dance, we heard many rhythms that coincided with the dance, the Charleston. We also heard that the music sounded as if stylistic period movement would work best. Patti and I are not trained in period partner dancing and knew that we had to do some research on this subject. Patti found a

wonderful video on period dancing which included Animal dances, The Maxixe, The Tango, and The Cakewalk. We studied the video and learned every step as it was on the recording. After we knew the proper way to do these steps, we tweaked them and made them our own. Patti and I combined all of the different dances within the framework of the “Fruit Shop Dance.” As the ensemble became progressively excited, the dancing became wilder and less contained. For example, the two characters Bobby and Victor, came up as if they were about to do The Minuet. The Minuet was very proper and the bodies remain upright and tense. Instead, they surprised the party and began their wild dance, The Bear. This dance was low and loose. It was less contained and the hands were in the position of bear claws.

“Tomorrow Belongs to Me”

The Director’s Idea:

This song came after the joyous dance of the fruit shop. Ramont saw this as a huge shift in the play. When Fraulein Kost began to sing this song he wanted the audience to feel as if they just ran into a brick wall. The rest of the ensemble joined in and created an image of the chaos that was about to erupt.

The Emcee was the overseer of all events and communicated with the audience. At the end of this song, Ramont wanted the entire ensemble to freeze in their poses. After they were frozen, the Emcee walked slowly through this picture. The Emcee faced the audience and begged them to clap as he announced, “It’s nothing.”

The Story:

Ernst Ludwig was upset that Herr Schultz is a Jew. He attended the party unaware that he was celebrating a Jew's engagement. Fraulein Kost was the character who tells Ludwig this fact. He was furious and began to leave the party, when Kost stopped him by singing the Nazi theme song. Ludwig joined in, as did the rest of the ensemble. The rise of this terrifying power has spread. This was also the first time in the play when we saw the image of a swastika on Ludwig's arm. The Nazis have invaded the cabaret. There was no separation.

The Hook:

There was no hook.

Adding Dance and Movement:

Kost walked to the tempo of the music to give her strength. She walked around to everyone at the party and sang to them. She knew that some of these people were on her side and some were not. Those that were not were of no concern to her. As Kost and Ludwig became more passionate about the words and hope in their song, they began to stomp their feet on the floor. The ensemble began to back up Kost and stomped their feet along to the haunting melody.

“Kickline or Nightmare Ballet”

The Director’s Idea:

In the script that we were given, the kick line consisted of the ensemble girls plus the Emcee. The surprise was that the Emcee was dressed as one of the chorus girls. It was not until the Emcee said the word, “Acht” that the audience became aware that he had fooled them. In our production, Ramont had a different idea. This was Cliff’s story. We began with Cliff in Act I and Ramont wanted to begin with him in Act II as well. In order to do this, he came up with the idea that this was Cliff’s nightmare. He wanted Patti and me to incorporate Sally, Bobby, Ludwig, the ensemble girls, the Emcee and the Nazis all into his nightmare. The Nightmare showed all of Cliff’s fears and emotions at this point during the play.

The Story:

Ramont wrote this story. Patti and I added ideas and helped create the music along with the musical director, Blantan. Cliff entered the space and Sally came on as she did in “Don’t Tell Mama” with her shimmy. Sally and Cliff danced as she slowly began to fade away. Bobby, his homosexual interest, entered the space. Bobby embraced Cliff. At first, Cliff was uncomfortable with this advance but eventually gave in to his temptation. As soon as Cliff began to enjoy Bobby, Ludwig entered the space. Ludwig challenged Cliff, but Cliff stood up to his aggression.

All of a sudden, the drum kicked in and Sally reappeared with Bobby. They all began to dance the Charleston. This dance represented the chaos that ensued Cliff at this

point during the play. Sally, Bobby, and Ludwig exited and the ensemble girls appeared with an essence of Can-Can girls. Cliff enjoyed this image and began to dance along. As he is wrapped up in the joy of a kick line, the Nazis enveloped the space. The girls disappeared and Cliff was left onstage surrounded by the Nazis. The Nazis gave the heil Hitler sign and dragged Cliff off. He struggled to break free from their grip and looked to the Emcee for help. Cliff wanted to wake up from this nightmare.

The Hook:

The hook was that this is Cliff's dream. None of this is real; it was all in Cliff's head. Therefore, we had freedom to play with movement that was in the realm of fantasy.

Adding Dance and Movement:

The important aspect of the movement was that the audience had to be able to follow the story. Every move and step had to signify the story. Patti and I decided to start out simple and add more dance steps when the ensemble girls enter the space. The beginning of the nightmare was about relationships, not steps.

To capture the essence of can-can girls, Patti and I looked to YouTube. On this site, there are many videos of girls dancing the can-can. One has to be careful to find authentic footage and not footage of people who think they know the steps. It is helpful to look at the date as to when the video was taken to avoid a mishap.

We also looked on YouTube for footage of the Nazis. It was terrifying to watch how strong they all were. Every march was perfectly together with their heels raised high and there stomps loud and overpowering. They raised their hands in respect and honor of

Hitler as they marched. It is important to keep the exact movement, since that is what society today associates with the Nazis. In order for an image to work, the audience must understand it.

“If You Could See Her”

The Director’s Idea:

This was a vaudevillian type dance where the Emcee danced with an ensemble member, dressed as a gorilla. Ramont wanted us to push the envelope with this number. The gorilla represented the Nazis’ ideas of a Jew: hairy, unintelligent, dark, and clumsy. The gorilla attempted to be graceful and proper but could not escape his gorilla nature.

The Story:

The Emcee was caught kissing the hand of someone. This someone turned out to be a gorilla. The Emcee understood, “You may not think she’s pretty, but if you could only see her through my eyes”. He tried to get the audience to change their point of view on his ladylove, and continued to say wonderful things about her while she was clumsily dancing around the stage. The very last line was the whole point to the number, “If you could see her through my eyes, she wouldn’t look Jewish at all”. The Emcee was commenting on the social ideals of the audience. The Nazi power had invaded his cabaret routine.

The Hook:

The hook was with the gorilla. She went between being proper and ladylike in the movement to falling into her gorilla ways. For example, the gorilla walked alongside the Emcee gracefully, and decided to pull him into an embrace. She pulled a bit too hard, because she is a gorilla, and the Emcee was roughed up a bit.

Adding Dance and Movement:

Since this was a physical comedy dance, Patti and I decided to use typical ballet moves. *A jete*, *pas de chat*, and *tour jete*, are all very funny when a gorilla is attempting to do them well. It is the distortion of a beautiful move being executed poorly.

“What Would You Do?”The Director’s Idea:

This was another real song, not a performance. Fraulein Schneider had just been witness to a brick being thrown through Herr Schultz’s window. She knew that this was an act of the Nazis and decided to call off her engagement with Herr Schultz. She came to return the fruit bowl and apologized that she could not keep it. Cliff urged Fraulein Schneider that she could not give up on her relationship with Herr Schultz and she then said,

Oh, yes! I can. That is easy to say! Easy for you. Fight! And, if you fail, what does it matter? You pack your belongings. You move to Paris. And if you do not like Paris, where? It is easy for you. But if you were me...”

She was speaking to Cliff of her life and all that she has survived. He would not know because he is so young and does not know how cruel the world can be. There was no movement. Fraulein Schneider planted herself like a tree rooting into the ground.

“I Don’t Care Much”

The Director’s Idea:

Ramont added this song in a different section of the play that was in the script. He wanted the Emcee to sing this song while being witness to Ludwig and the Nazis beating up Cliff. The ensemble members also entered the space and witnessed this horrific event. Two men who used to be friends were now fighting one another. When the Nazis left., the Emcee took out makeup and smeared white foundation on his face. He now realized the danger he was in and that the Nazis could no longer be ignored.

Patti and I came up with the idea that this fight should exist simultaneously with the music, rather than the fight happening and then pausing for the music. The song was slow and legato which led us to the idea of a slow motion fight. The fight happened in slow motion while the Emcee sang the horrifying lyrics, “I don’t care much”. The stage combat choreographer, Drew Vidal, choreographed the movement for this piece.

“Cabaret”

The Director’s Idea:

This was Sally’s famous song in the cabaret. This song was her act that everyone came to see. Sally and Cliff recently got into a fight because Cliff wanted her to come with him to America. She did not want to go and told him she was going back to the club. Cliff was furious and told her to call the club and tell them goodbye. Sally did not listen and went back to the club. At the club, she witnessed Cliff being beat up.

Ramont wanted this song to seem as if Sally was trying to hold all the strings together and the conflict of does she manage to do so or not. Does she go to America? Does she stay in the relationship with Cliff? Does she have the abortion? At the end of the song, he wanted Sally to make the choice of getting the abortion and continuing with her theatre lifestyle. She loved the world of performance and could not escape it.

The Story:

Sally entered the stage to sing her song and was in a state of high emotion. Her life was falling apart and she had trouble getting into her act. Sally began to sing her song and tried to convince herself that she could still perform. The obstacle of everything that was going on inside her head affected her performance. She then recalled a story of her friend Elsie who died, but did so with a smile on her face. Elsie was wild and crazy, but she lived her life to the fullest. Sally realized this is how she wants to go as well and began to come

to many revelations. She decided to continue with her performing career for she loves a cabaret. In order to do so, she must go through with the abortion.

The Hook:

The hook was this is Sally's usual act that she performed at the Kit Kat club. She tried to perform but could only get out the moves.

Adding Dance and Movement:

The actress playing Sally Bowles was extremely connected to the character. Therefore, Patti and I let her follow her own impulses. This was such an important moment in the show. It could not seem as if we choreographed her into any of the movement. We gave her a few moves, but mostly followed what she felt her character would do in certain moments. Ramont had an idea for Sally to turn around at the very end and reach for the cabaret. This was my favorite image in the show. I played around with the actress and found a shape that looked amazing on her body. It also had to look as if she was giving it her all to pull the life of the cabaret back to her. That one image represents everything that was Sally Bowles.

“Finale Ultimo”

The Director's Idea:

In the finale, the cabaret fell apart. The outside world has taken over. To represent this idea, Ramont had an idea for an image of everyone as a whole. Every character that

was in the play was only a part of Cliff's memory. Some broke forward and others struggled to break free and are sucked back into the society.

The characters had no feeling behind their lines or movement. Everyone had become locked into an emotionless and desensitized world. The characters faded into Cliff's memory and he was left with an idea for his novel. He began to write feverously and the lights faded.

In Conclusion

Overall, I was very happy with the result of *Cabaret*. I feel that most of the dances told the story that Patti and I intended. However, it seemed as if it was two separate shows. The director, Mark Ramont, separated the leads from the ensemble. He gave notes to the leads, while Patti and I were to give notes to the ensemble. This is normal for a director to do. Mark and I communicated a lot, but for some reason it still did not seem as if it was one show. I say this because when the actress playing Sally Bowles was onstage with her Kit Kat girls in "Don't Tell Mama" she never looked and or reacted to them. It seemed as if she was onstage by herself and the girls were merely part of the background. The dances had a different tone and energy than the scene work. The dances should seem to melt right out of the scene, but this was not the case.

I feel that Ramont's idea of most musical numbers in Act I taking place in the cabaret world, because the character's are choosing to ignore the outside world, was a great concept. However, I do not feel that concept came across to the audience. The reason

why, to me, is that we did not transition into the world of performance, but went right into it. In the song “So What” Mark wanted the microphone to be brought out at the beginning of the number. This was confusing to many audience members. They did not know why the show went from a real scene into a song. I think it would have made more sense if she began the song like a book song and transitioned into her performance world. Then, there would not be such a jump from scene to song.

I also believe we should have transitioned out of the song. “So What” ended with the ensemble surrounding Fraulein Schneider. After the song ended, they simply walked offstage and Fraulein began to talk to Cliff again. I think it would have made more sense to have the ensemble fade off on the final lines so that she is left alone at the end of the song. That, to me, would give the idea that this was all in her head.

It is very hard to have a show seem like one full idea when there is both a director and choreographer, but it is possible. Once again, collaboration and communication is the key. Patti and I followed Ramont’s ideas and concepts, and yet there was still a separation between the scenes and the musical numbers. It might be the style that Patti and I have when it comes to musicals and Ramont’s personal style of directing. I am not quite sure.

In this Thesis, I set out to create a guide that would aid future choreographers in their endeavors and demonstrate, with my work on VCU’s production of *Cabaret.*, how to use the steps outlined in the guide. I have an unyielding passion for the world of the arts, especially the aspect of choreography. I hope that the passion of mine is translated into this work and will help others in their future choreography.