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School of the Arts, Department of Theatre

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Raymont Lee Anderson entitled “COMBAT DANCE: A CREATIVELY HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MOVEMENT PERFORMANCE ART” has been approved by his committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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COMBAT DANCE:  
A CREATIVELY HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MOVEMENT PERFORMANCE ART

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

by

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ABSTRACT

COMBAT DANCE:  
A CREATIVELY HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MOVEMENT PERFORMANCE ART

By Raymont Lee Anderson, M.F.A.

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003

Major Director. Dr. Noreen Barnes-McLain, Director of Graduate Studies  
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“Combat Dance” is an eclectic blend of combat and dance art forms combined and taught from the Fall 2001 to Spring 2003. As defined here, combat dance is a blend of techniques and principles gleaned from both unarmed and armed aspects of stage combat, martial arts (such as aikido and kung fu), modern dance and other expressive movements used to tell a story of conflict. Its primary purpose is to provide both actors and non-actors greater awareness and control of their bodies and to provide a range of creative avenues of expression. Combat dance gives the performers a unique and

holistic set of exercises and skills that leave no part of the body, mind, or - even deeper - the spirit uninfluenced. The thesis begins with the vision and birth of the class, a description of the preparatory research, an analysis of the reasons for the class, and reflection, revelations, and realizations gained through teaching the class. The ultimate focus of this thesis is to aid anyone interested in any type of combat or dance-related movements: dancers, non-dancers, actors, non-actors, movement coaches, and even those in the fields of dance or drama therapy.

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#### Requirements

**To use Microsoft® Works Suite version 2002, you need:**

**Computer/Processor** Multimedia PC with a Pentium 200- MHz or higher processor

**Memory** 64 MB of RAM

**Hard Disk** 1045 MB of available hard-disk space for typical installation of all applications. Custom installation may require more or less hard-disk space.

**Drive** Quad speed CD ROM drive or higher

**Display** Super VGA monitor, 1 MB of VRAM

**Operating System** Microsoft Windows 98, Me, 2000 or XP operating system

**Peripherals** Microsoft mouse or compatible pointing device

**Miscellaneous** Microsoft® Internet Explorer 5.5 software required and included. Up to an additional 80 MB of hard disk space may be required for Internet Explorer upgrade. This installation will not replace your primary browser.

Modem (28.8 baud or faster recommended), access to the Internet, Audio card with headphones or speakers, Microphone required for voice recording.

## INTRODUCTION

Let's start at the beginning. What is Combat Dance? It is, I would venture to say, a newly developing style of dance. Jenny Male (a fellow graduate student) and I created the title "Combat Dance" because of the eclectic blend of combat and dance art forms we combined and taught in the Fall of 2001. While this title may be new, the basics of what it entails are probably familiar. In movies such as Moulin Rouge and Chicago (which display feisty combative Tangos), in the Brazilian martial art of capoeira (where the combat moves are hidden and performed as a dance), in stage performances such as West Side Story (which has the musically stylized knife fight), and in countless other performances on stage, film, and television, one sees some elements of combat dance. Yet, though the art form already exists, I have not found any evidence suggesting that it has received its own style classification . . . until now.

As defined here, "Combat Dance" is a unique and eclectic blend of techniques and principles gleaned from both unarmed and armed aspects of stage combat, martial arts (such as aikido and kung fu), modern dance, and expressive movements used to tell a story of conflict. Its ultimate purpose is to provide both actors and non-actors greater awareness and control of their bodies and to allow new creative avenue of expression.



Combat dance gives the performers a unique and holistic set of exercises and skills leaving no part of the body, mind, or - even deeper - the spirit uninfluenced. Like an automobile, the human body is a well-developed machine that needs to be used. When unused it becomes run down and eventually atrophies. However, the human body can learn, grow, and continue to develop. Elderly people who do not move become chair-bound and bed-ridden, yet elderly people who remain active continue to be vibrant and alive.

Do not confuse “Combat Dance” with “Dance Combat,” as they are not interchangeable terms. When talking about combat dance, I am talking about a style of dance and not a combat or fighting style. The word “combat” simply identifies the style of dance. Therefore, combat dance uses movements that can be used either as combat-like or dance-like. A dancer (throughout the thesis I will consistently refer to participants as dancers or dancer/combatants), can execute an extended leg movement in various ways. For example, this movement can be done as either a kung fu lift kick or a ballet grand battement.

Although each move is similar, the choreographer’s ultimate decision will depend on the type of power and intention behind the movement as well as the overall vision of how the story is to be told. The overall desired aesthetic will also be a factor. There are times when the dancers will be armed and use weapons such quarter-staffs or

iron fans in the choreography. At other times the dancer will be unarmed, as in the lift kick described above. When the dancers are armed, the choreographer must make a decision between using the weapon as a “weapon” or as a prop (See Video\_1.mov). Regardless of the choreographer’s decision, there are a variety of movement possibilities available.

In this document I will explain and illustrate my two-year experience as a combat dance instructor, performer, and choreographer (challenges, obstacles, solutions, and realizations). I will conclude with my vision of combat dance’s future.

## CHAPTER ONE: The Vision and Birth of the Class

By the time I was twelve years old, flashy kicks, clanging swords, and a dialogue oddly mismatched with the moving lips on the screen became the staple of my Sunday afternoons. Anxiously, I waited for Sunday afternoons when I sat glued to the TV; a frozen spectator of “Kung Fu Theatre.” By this time, I had already been practicing martial arts for two years and I knew enough to know that these fights were “nonrealistic” (the method of fighting was more artistic than realistic). Despite the contradictions I observed between the real techniques I learned and the choreographed moves on the screen, I was fascinated. I watched in awe at the varied movements patterned after animals, the sound effects, the flying leaps, and mystical chi powers. What I found most entertaining and inspiring was the attractiveness and aesthetic artistry of the movements and the physical prowess of the martial art actors.

As I continued taking martial art lessons and studying on my own, I progressed beyond the basics and began attempting to emulate what I was watching on the screen. I began to adopt more eclectic methods of practicing the various forms and styles of martial arts. I practiced both unarmed and armed skills, and like my TV role models, I did my drills to a music track. Each time my practice session began, I turned on the tape

player and as I went through the moves, the music went through me until something subconsciously occurred. I eventually noticed that my overall fluidity, balance, grace, and aesthetic began to improve. These improvements were not in small, barely noticed, increments but by visible leaps and bounds. Once I began teaching others martial arts, I applied what had worked so well for me by incorporating the use of music into my classes. This new approach to teaching began to work as I had hoped. My students also experienced huge leaps in skill development. Thus, the musical aspect of training became an integral part of certain sessions.

I continued this method of training for years, over twenty to be exact, and not once did I ever consider labeling it dance or even think of it as dance-like. I was simply practicing and teaching martial arts to music. Observers, seeing the fluidity and gracefulness of the movements, frequently commented that I was a good dancer. As they watched me practice and teach, they commented that my control and style as being very dance-like. I dismissed their comments as uninformed. I said to myself, “I am doing kung fu, not ballet.” When I began to cross-train in varied martial disciplines, instructors also commented about my movement abilities. As I studied varied arts (kung fu, aikido, jeet kune do, tae kwon do, and ninjutsu, among others), I continued to apply my proven technique to these styles as well. Though I could not train to music during class, I made up for it during my solo training time. Looking back now, I can see that it was this type of training that inspired people to constantly ask me if I was a dancer.

During the 2001 Spring semester at Virginia Commonwealth University, while a student in a physical acting class under the instruction of Joy Paoletto, it was my turn to present to the class a fifteen minute segment of my day. As part of my segment, I did a form or kata with my kwan-dao (See Video\_2.mov). At the end of the class, as always, we sat on the floor in a circle and discussed our observations, thoughts, and feelings about each other as movers. When it came time to discuss my segment, people tended to describe my movements as powerful, light, balanced, dance-like, fluid, cat-like, and graceful. Though I had no idea at that time, my segment inspired Jenny to approach me with the idea to co-teach a class in the Fall. Jenny waited a few weeks before proposing the co-teaching idea to me. When she approached me, she asked if we could speak about the thing I did in class. I had no idea what she was referring to and actually had forgotten about the form I had done weeks before.

Curious to know what she had in mind, I agreed to meet with her. As we talked, a variety of subjects came up (stage combat, dance, movement for the actor, American Sign Language, and martial arts). By the end of our conversation, Jenny had begun to hint at this idea to teach a class that incorporated all of the things we had just discussed. Blankly, I stared at her and thought she was joking. She continued to explain her idea despite my disbelief. Finally, she ended her exposition by stating that we should co-teach a “Combat Dance” class during the Fall Semester. My disbelief turned to shock. I

was dumbfounded to now realize that she was serious. My only response at that time was to ask, “What is Combat Dance?” Her reply was simple, “It’s that thing you did in Joy’s class and everything we’ve been discussing!” I was not sure where she was going with this idea but I listened and even brainstormed with her. Our discussion did not end there. Over the next few weeks we discussed the myriad of ideas more in depth. Once I was convinced and could see clearly what she was describing, we moved on to planning a curriculum for the Fall Semester.

The 2001 Fall semester arrived and we began by teaching the class the basics of stage combat: unarmed (See Video\_3.mov) and armed, some basic theories and practices of the rapier (See Video\_4A.mov, Video\_4B.mov, and Video\_4C.mov), knife, escrima (See Video\_5A.mov and See Video\_5B.mov), quarter-staff (See Video\_6.mov), iron fan (See Video\_7.mov), and katana (See Video\_8.mov). We taught each skill for approximately two class periods (each class was held on Fridays from one to four). At the end of the lesson, Jenny or I taught a choreographed piece which they had to rehearse and later, for a grade, perform for their classmates. This process continued until it was time for the class to choreograph their own pieces to be presented in a public presentation in the music hall. Jenny and I also participated during the public presentation by choreographing and dancing our own individual pieces. The semester ended and we met to discuss grades, the papers they had to submit (response papers to

the fights in the theatre department's production of Romeo and Juliet) and our overall feelings of the class (what worked and what didn't). We were so pleased (with not only the students final presentation but by their overall enthusiasm, diligence, and creativity throughout the semester) that we joked about creating a "Combat Dance Performance Company." As I recall, the only thing we found disappointing was the lack of in-depth analysis in the response papers.

The semester ended, all grades were submitted and Jenny's coursework was completed. I was left with the decision to either drop the class or to teach by myself in the Spring. Jenny encouraged me to continue teaching and people were already asking about registering for it in the Spring. I considered the idea and then the "Ah Ha!" moment hit me: "This is thesis material." Once I decide that this could be my thesis project, I began to move forward by wondering about the changes I would need to make as a solo teacher. My first immediate changes were to find a TA (teaching assistant) to help demonstrate and monitor the class since I was recovering from ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament) reconstruction surgery. The second change was to shift the focus from being exclusively for actors to being for both actors and non-actors. I wanted make this class accessible to a wider segment of the student body so that more people could benefit from the class. I also wanted the class to offer an even greater level of body awareness and control via the skills taught; similar to what I had done with my

martial art students. I began to think long-term. I wanted to know how a combat dance class could potentially become a style of dance taught in college dance departments and studios and - even deeper than that - how it could potentially fulfill a niche in not only the performance arts arena but also in the arena of personal development.

With my new vision clearly established in mind's eye, I began my research. In the beginning, my research was quite broad because I wanted to have more information from which to pull. I started wide, then narrowed my focus so I could fine-tune my vision.



## CHAPTER TWO: Preparation and Research

My research was quite extensive as I attempted to incorporate not only many theories but many practices as well. It was my plan to develop a curriculum that would be beneficial to the students in my class, to me as an instructor, and to people reading this thesis. Realizing that this class was about a journey and a search rather than a destination, I looked for information that would assist students as they practiced and learned more about themselves. The journey, I hoped, would develop in them an overall awareness. This awareness would be achieved by learning and practicing the various new skills I taught.

First, I began by looking into the S.A.F.D. (Society of American Fight Directors) to find information on certification (such as weapons, requirements, and any other pertinent information). The S.A.F.D. search was for my own information. It was not my intention to adopt similar weapons, have similar criteria, nor prepare students for certification. I simply wanted to know more about what they offered and what they were about. I also began looking at various vocabularies and movements of dance. I started making comparisons, identifying the similar and dissimilar between dance and various martial art styles. I looked through the huge collection of dance magazines

(Dance Teacher, Dance, and Dance Spirit) which were already in my possession. I looked through each of them and searched for anything that was applicable to my vision for the class. Ravenously, I devoured issue after issue. The rewards reaped were greater than I had anticipated. I found a plethora of information (quotes, images, inspiration, and possible skills) I would be able to implement. I also found information that supported my beliefs, experiences, and vision.

There was one drawback to my research. The more I read, the more questions I often found needed answering. I began to wonder about body types, true definitions of dance, dance vocabularies, dance notation, and methods of choreography. Masters student Tracey Maxwell's words gave me a perspective when she said: "Any class you take is going to reflect who you are as a dancer and what feels right on your body. When teaching, there is a lot of opportunity to explore what works for you and then to transfer that to your students" (Jarrett 123). As a teacher - of martial arts for over twenty years, of art for over six, and American sign language for over five - I was now again faced with the realization that I was passing on to my students a part of me. Having made that connection again, I realized that this new style of dance had to first be a part of me. I had to identify and acknowledge that one aspect of myself was that of a dancer. I had to become the very thing I had for years denied, ignored, and resisted being called. That realization meant that I had to reassess what it meant to be a dancer

and more specifically what it meant for “me” to be a dancer.

As I stated earlier there were many observations and inquiries about my dance-like movements and abilities. While I had been interested in dance as an art form I never considered taking formal lessons. Although, I respected the skills and athleticism of the dancers, it wasn't until I established S.T.A.R.S. (Sticking Together Always Results in Success), a sign language performance company that incorporated dance movements as part of performed translations to music, that I began to engage in dance-like movements. In the beginning, the choreography of the company consisted of an interpretive dance style yet I still did not or could not accept the title of dancer. Even when we began to incorporate more formal dance skills and I was promoted as company choreographer, I could not accept a title that I felt I had not earned. So, as the company increased our audience base, I decided that I needed to learn more about dance.

I began taking various classes (modern, ballet, and hip hop) at the Pittsburgh Arts Council. Despite the fact that I was taking these classes, I still did not say that I was a dancer. This denial continued over the years and did not change until I found, during my research, answers to two of my most pressing questions: “What makes a person a dancer?” and “Am I qualified to teach this (dance) class?”. By searching for these answers, I began to embark on a journey; a journey that I later realized most of my students would also undertake. It was a journey of self discovery leading to the

realization that all humans, as they are now, have the skills and capacity to dance.

An article in Dance Spirit entitled “To Infinity And Beyond” supported this idea (33-34). In the article, author Nicole Flender talked about dancer and founder of “Infinity Dance Theatre,” Kitty Lunn. Flender addressed some of the limitations faced by Kitty as a dancer. Kitty (forty-nine years old) was as she put it, “beyond the age traditionally associated with dancing” (Flender 33). Her age was not the only limitation she faced. She and two other members of her company are wheelchair-mobile dancers. The article went on to discuss the ballet training Kitty received before her spinal injury and how she has taken her knowledge and training and applied it to the partnering and choreography work she does for dancers both in and out of wheelchairs (Flender 33).

Bill T. Jones, modern dancer and choreographer, seemed to be quite untraditional in his selection process of many of his company’s dancers. I located a video, which I referred back to again and again, of his company performing The Last Supper At Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Dancing To The Promise Land. On it he mentions the work, “a retelling of the Harriet Beecher Stowe story of Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” as having a lot of anger and violence expressed through a series of dance pieces interwoven with text, poetry, and rap. My curiosity was piqued. I had not bargained for this additional information related to dance and violence. I wanted learn more, to see how he would demonstrate or portray this anger and violence through dance. I took notes as he

commented about violence and then to my delight he mentioned his unorthodox selection process of dancers. He talked briefly about looking for what various people in this production had to offer the company. One of the dancers in his company, a non-traditionally built man named Larry, candidly talks about his experience and how he had previously felt embarrassment and an inability to accept himself as a dancer. He went on to say that Bill had pulled more complex dance movements out of him and that now when asked, he proudly states that he is a “dancer” with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company.

Throughout the video, as we see the work in various stages (first rehearsed in the dance studio and then segments presented on stage), Bill offered commentary. Bill elaborated more on his process of selecting people to be in the company. He addressed how he looks for a performer’s special-ness, what can they offer the group, and who are they as human beings. He continued: “As in other aspects of the dance world, we’re looking for a vocabulary for the language of movement. What I love about my group is, we all speak this language so differently.” Though they speak the language differently, each person is capable of communicating with each other and the audience. From this I accepted the realization that it does not take a specific number of years in a formal dance class or a degree in dance for a person to be called a dancer. The more I watched the Jones video, the more I was surprised and swept into his passion. He had this ability

to pull from his personal heritage (generational stories, culture, sexual orientation, life, love, and personal loss) all that he would need to inspire his choreography and dance. Again one of my worries was laid to rest. Each student would have myriad stories to tell using both the materials learned in class and their own personal experiences. I also noticed that my vision ran adjacent to his eclectic style of dance and choreography. Like me, Bill pulled source materials from various places (emotions, mental images and thoughts, and physical experiences) and incorporated movement patterns from various sources as well. I knew I was right on track.

In the February issue of Dance Teacher 2001, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, founder and artistic director of “The Urban Bush Women,” made three poignant comments. She said: “I’m interested in giving my students a physical intelligence” (66). . . “A lot of people think of dancers as being one kind of look; very thin, tall, with straight hair” (67). “We offer another way to look at dance: a diversity of look” (68). Inspired by those three comments, a precious gem began crystallizing in my mind: First, the class must be open to varied skill levels of movement and varied levels of body (kinesthetic) awareness and must also be open to various body types. Second, the movements I give students must challenge all and yet set no one up to fail. In order to accomplish my goal (much like Zollar, to give them a physical intelligence), my teaching style would need to be as diverse as the population I was teaching.

With every two steps forward in my research, I often found myself one step back. I returned to the beginning with one of my initial questions, “Am I a dancer?” Hearing myself now answer “Yes” was almost funny. Although that was the more accurate response, I somehow found it almost difficult to acknowledge. Again, I realized this to be a potential bridge my students would also cross. Now that I was a dancer, I needed to know: “What do I do now? . . . What is the next step I am to take on this journey?”

I returned first to the various magazine issues. Every so often I found information which at first seemed to make things worse by adding more questions. But, remembering Confucius' comment, “He who does not ask, does not learn,” I realized that the questions actually aided me in my quest. Despite my findings, I had a second major barrier to face: battling feelings of not quite being qualified to teach a class rooted in dance. Those feelings of inadequacy were alleviated when I read what Martha Curtis, Chair of the Virginia Commonwealth University dance department, said in Dance Teacher (March 2000) about prospective students auditioning: “If a student is borderline technically but they have the guts, the passion, we keep looking at them” (Mattingly 41). That is what I wanted to see (passion and courage regardless of technical proficiency) in both my combat dance students as well as myself. I already knew I had those qualifications and with the background I had in martial arts, sign

language, and dance, I had more than enough to offer. Therefore I decided that whatever I did not have, I would learn and develop.

The next step had arrived. Having accepted the reality that we are all dancers (regardless of appearance, formal training or lack there of), I felt confident in referring to myself and the students as dancers. Having passion and personal life experience as the pools from which the dancer would pull for choreography, I felt confident in forging ahead. Now I had to decide what to teach and why that particular skill or lesson. For example, I knew I would incorporate martial arts in to the class though I was not sure what style or aspect of the arts to teach. I was not sure what I wanted the students to learn from the martial arts. I also was not sure how much to teach or how in-depth to go. Many factors needed to be considered as I took this next step. I remembered an article in the September 2002 Dance Teacher that discussed capoeira and compared it to more traditional dance moves and vocabulary. I realized that a comment by Master Jelon Vieira in Dance Magazine regarding capoeira, “It’s a fight like a dance, a dance like a fight” (Samuels 67), is what won the style entry into dance magazines and dance studios across the country.

People already unknowingly embrace combat dance in small increments on various levels. For example, even those unfamiliar with the history or specifics of capoeira are exposed to its influence: as seen in the break dancing style of the eighties



and its resurgence in the hip-hop culture today. While break dancing shares some of the combat-like movements from capoeira and has earned the right to be taught as a formal dance style, it is not the same as combat dance. It is missing two elements crucial to combat dance: storytelling and conflict. I decided that I would need to have some form of connective tissue. I would need a vocabulary of sorts to link all of the skills in the class. No matter if I was teaching a kick, a staff block, a knife cut, a pirouette, or a plie' there would need to be some type of universal vocabulary. I sought a general vocabulary before selecting the more specific skills I would teach.

I decided not to aim specifically at one set vocabulary. I gleaned from a few sources. One of my sources, A Sense of Dance: Exploring Your Movement Potential by Constance A. Schrader used terms related to space, movement, time, rhythm, pace, and form. I also adopted aspects of the Laban eight basic effort actions (pressing, flicking, wringing, slashing, thrusting, gliding, floating, and dabbing) as found in Movement from Person to Actor to Character by Theresa Mitchell. I also took a good deal of terms and later skill building from The Lester Horton Dance Technique. I found his fortifications especially useful. After selecting a suitable general vocabulary (using terms from dance, martial arts, acting, and stage combat), it became easier to relate and unify all of my lessons. I no longer felt pressured to conform to one format or lexicon. I could speak of all and reference all of them using the select terms I felt comfortable

with. Moving on from the vocabulary, my next step was to look at the art of story telling.

I wanted to have a grasp of storytelling as an art in general. More specifically, I wanted to know how it was used in dance. I looked at dances both on video and in person. From my observation, I realized that most dances were abstract in nature and did not tell a story. While they had a movement arc, they had no story arc. There was nothing wrong with this. It was merely my observation. While the dancers and the choreography were expressive, powerful, and entertaining, most pieces lacked a trail that could be followed. I also observed that some pieces, even if used in a story, were missing character development, conflict, and resolution. I knew that this storytelling aspect was something I wanted to introduce into the class. Not every piece had to have a story, but the dancer should be able to think in terms of a story. They should know what they are trying to tell the audience through the dance. I found in American Theatre Magazine an article titled “Mystique Meets Technique” about Tadashi Suzuki. “Suzuki, says author Randy Gener, seeks to create an actor who can make the whole body speak, even when one is silent” (Gener 43). This was a perfect concept to apply to the genre of dance. Often a dancer is silent or even motionless but his/her body must still speak volumes. Stillness cannot simply be about striking a pose but about what that pose is saying.

The words of David Leong, Fight Master and co-founder of SAFD (Society of American Fight Directors), came to mind from lessons I learned in his fight choreography class. At various times during class he reminded us that, “fights are boring. It’s what happens between the actual fights, between phrases, that draw the audience in, that engage us and make us care about the characters.” Acclaimed director of Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Ang Lee, said in a BRAVO interview (also found on the DVD): “Physically they (the actors) have to be a fighter and an actor. Usually they don't combine in one person. I wanted them both” (DVD Bravo interview). Mr. Leong also reminded us in his fight choreography class that when casting a show, he would always select the more competent actor over the more competent fighter because any telling of the story comes through the “acting” of the story. An actor with even basic fight skills will be able to pull the audience into the story much more effectively than a proficient fighter with only basic acting skills. I also wanted the story more than the fighting or dancing, so I borrowed and altered the SAFD term “Actor/Combatant” to “Dancer/Combatant” to fit my needs more appropriately. I wanted dancers who would tell the story through dance and combat. The audience would not care about how well the actor/combatant or dancer/combatant could fight, swing a sword, or take a punch. Audiences only want to know why the combatants are fighting and what they are feeling.

Though skill demonstrations are impressive and have their place (much like the abstract non-story dances), if there is nothing else, it grows weary rather quickly. Therefore the story comes first and how the dancer/combatant uses those skills in the telling of that story comes second. The “story” of the dancer/combatant is the goal. I continued to read various texts regarding storytelling and did as Bruce Lee did when he developed his martial art jeet kune do. I took what I thought I could use in my class and discarded what I thought I couldn't.

My investigation of storytelling continued. I wanted to find more dance-story evidence if I could. I rented and borrowed various videos from the video rental stores and library. I watched tapes that were strictly dance performances, such as The Tribute to Alvin Ailey, A Hymn for Alvin Ailey, and Paul Taylor Dance Maker. I also watched films that had dance in them, Center Stage, Flashdance, Fame, and The Wiz. The list also included dance videos which I analyzed for their combinations of storytelling and dance. That side of the coin examined, I flipped the coin and began a second list which included movies with fights (such as Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, the Rocky series, and the Star Wars series). Through my investigation, similar elements began to emerge and overlap, such as the rhythm and musicality of film combat and the obvious dance like qualities it presented. I also looked to see if I could follow a story by just watching the fights. Could I tell what was going on with the characters just by watching the fight

scenes?

In many of the materials I viewed, I noticed combat dance-like elements. I also found entire dances performed by the Dance Theater of Harlem that were concrete stories in dance rather than the usual abstract dance pieces. Also, as I stated earlier, there was the Bill T. Jones production The Last Supper At Uncle Tom's Cabin: Dancing To The Promise Land. It is the story of Uncle Tom's Cabin done using the vehicle of dance. In the music videos I found examples like "Janet Jackson's Velvet Rope Tour" where the song "What About the Time?" takes the domestic violence theme and makes it a dance performance. There was Usher's "My Way" video which used 80's break dancing combat style of fighting to aid in the telling of the story about romancing a woman away from her old boyfriend. There were some pleasant surprises as I did my research as well. Occasionally, I stumbled across things I was not expecting to find. For instance two unexpected findings were The Shaolin Wheel of Life and Voice of the Dragon tours. These are full-length stage performances of Chinese fables from the Shaolin Temple. Both performances used martial arts (kung fu), music, and dance-like elements to tell the story. A third unexpected finding was the stage show, Unleash the Warrior Within, produced and directed by Ernie Reyes Jr., that also combined martial arts and storytelling into theatre performance.

Once I found enough information related to vocabulary, storytelling, and to further support the rationale and principles of combat dance, I began to develop my curriculum and individual lesson plans. As I conceptualized the curriculum, everything I focused on was based on the fact that movement is much more than moving a part of one's body from point "A" to point "B." In order to remain upright and on balance the body is in constant conflict against gravity. Movement in everyday life is filled with intentions and objectives. People walk for a reason, reach upwards and stretch for a reason, even twiddle their thumbs for a reason. While no one is ever constantly conscious of their intentions and objections, careful observations of movements could very easily reveal the root origin of an action. As Stanislavski admonished: "Don't run for the sake of running, or suffer for the sake of suffering. Don't act in general for the sake of action; always have a purpose" (39-40). This can be said of combat dance as well.

When someone enters a room, solely by their actions, movement style, and movement patterns the observer is given an introduction that speaks volumes about this person. From their movements, one can distinguish their comfort in the situation, their overall comfort within their own body, and their confidence. Does the person tend to cover their mouth when they smile? Does the person over-compensate or accentuate a certain body part to be more or less noticed? The body truly speaks, and to those skilled

in its unique language more is often said by the actions of the person than by their words. David Leong also use to say that he could look at a person and within fifteen minutes of watching them move he could describe what kind of actor that person was. From watching them move, he could tell their strengths and weaknesses as actors. I would add that it is therefore possible to discern information about them as everyday people as well.

People, actors and non-actors, need tools that can give them the language skills to communicate with their own body. Like a novice pianist unwittingly banging on the keys of an out of tune piano, the average person is not in tune with his/her own body. I would add the comparison that many athletes are also not fully aware of their body. One can easily find people skilled in one or multiple sports who are impressive on the field, court, or track; however, in everyday life, those same people demonstrate how out of tune they are. They may stomp or drag their feet when they walk, have awkward or clumsy habits of bumping into or knocking things over, or poor posture displayed as they stand, sit, or carry a backpack.

Sports and athletics are not “holistic” in their training, objectives, or purpose. An athlete does not learn to integrate body awareness with their mind and spirit. One must realize that if an athlete - who does train his/her body in their select discipline - does not necessarily have body awareness, then the average person has even less overall

awareness. Few movement disciplines actual take a holistic approach and give people the language skills of body mastery. Some popular forms are practiced that are holistic, such as tai chi chuan, yoga, and pilaties. Yet many of those disciplines, that at one time had altruistic motives and did in fact impart this wisdom and awareness to the practitioner, have become the newest gym craze, and have now lost that focus.

In this age of apathy and hunger to be more aware and healthy physically and spiritually, people are looking for things that can bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical. I assert that combat dance bridges the gap on many levels. In the arts, combat dance is a theatric style of performing (as is ballet, modern, or jazz dance) that takes elements of storytelling to a new level of development. In health and science, combat dance can offer a basic level of creative exercise. Beyond exercise, combat dance offers a form of therapy similar to drama, art, or dance therapy. In metaphysics, combat dance allows the practitioner a form of moving meditation. So, no matter which way it is approached, combat dance has the potential to alter lives for the better.



### CHAPTER THREE: What and Why

The process of teaching this class was quite challenging at various times for various reasons. In this chapter, I will give examples to explain the following: What did I teach? Why did I teach it? How did I do it (safely)? How did I evaluate the effectiveness of the lesson (was it learned?)?

After the first class (which covered the general introduction to the course and a more extensive warm-up session), I began the second class (week two) by introducing a few movement patterns or centering exercises found in the martial art of aikido. I began by demonstrating the first of the exercises - rowing. As I continued to do throughout the semester, I demonstrated the movement first. Students would simply observe at first. After doing this a few times, I then had them slowly do the movements along with me. After doing this a few times, I conclude the sequence by having them demonstrate the movements without me. I was then able to observe the students and make corrections and comments as needed. I selected the rowing exercise because I found it to be an excellent exercise to get the dancer/combatant connected to their center. It enabled them to learn to move not from their torso but rather from the hara or “center of gravity” found by moving their hips. Once the rowing had been done

multiple times and everyone had at least demonstrated that they understand the basic goal, we moved on to the following exercises:

- ☯ Extensions -As with rowing, the hips move and then the arms. The student sinks weight down into their hara and legs, allowing the arms to rise and fall without excess energy or effort.
- ☯ Tenkans - a stepping movement designed to teach the student to move forward while keeping themselves grounded. According to aikido master Gozo Shioda:

“It is important for your own center of balance to be firmly fixed.

If your own center of balance is wobbly, you will not be able to

make a stable turn. Maintaining this strong center of balance is

also one of the principles that allows you to smoothly transfer your

weight from one foot to the other” (Shioda 19).

As we neared the end of the series, I began to explain what the exercises were used to teach. It was at this time that I gave examples of why an actor needs to be grounded, why a person walking to their car needs to be grounded, and that this lesson would apply to everything throughout the semester.

After the basic exercises, I moved on to the first of the immobilizations in aikido - (Ikkyo) against the first basic attack: Shomenuchi. As I demonstrated the cutting attack of shomenuchi and then had the students do the technique, I introduce the concept

of intention. Each movement in the martial arts must be fully committed, just as each movement and each line must be in acting, and each action in life. Half commitments yield half results, no result, or - even worse - the opposite result desired.

Through this basic aikido lesson, I began to safely introduce, in a non-combative manner, the concept of having an objective and committing to the action. Beginning slowly, the uke (attacker) raises his/her arm over head to do the shomenuchi cutting strike. The nage (defender) steps out of the way while moving forward into the attack, and by executing ikkyo unbalances and redirects the uke slowly to the floor.

After demonstrating the safe manner in which I wanted this done, I let them feel their way through the first five to ten repetitions before addressing their techniques and cleaning it up. I found it is better to let them discover various aspects of the movements rather than examine and critique each and every movement as they went through them. I then had them stop and observe me again as I demonstrated the techniques slowly. As I did so, I explained the following concepts and principles:

- ☉ **Centering:** Being grounded in your hips, weight down rather than high in your body, a feeling of being solid.
- ☉ **On line and Off line:** When facing one's partner, it is the imaginary line connecting you both. Think of it like standing with your partner on train tracks. If you both are on the same track, you are on line.

If you are on different track, you are off line.

- ☯ **In distance and Out of distance:** If you are close enough to touch the person with your out-stretched hand or foot (depending on if striking or kicking), you are in distance. If you cannot touch them, you are out of distance. The important safety note here is that when in distance, you must be off line or you will hit the person. Likewise, if out of distance you must be in line or the technique will read as fake (unless that is your goal in choreography).
- ☯ **Partnering (uke and nage):** Both partners move in sync. As one moves to attack, the other moves to retreat, duck, block, defend, or counter the attack. This is not a competition or a sparring match. This is choreography between two or more people and each person must be respected and valued as a partner there to help the other learn.
- ☯ **Objective/Intention:** Each person has an objective. There is something they want and they must go for it. Commit to your intentions fully rather than half heartedly.

As the partnered pairs practiced the movements, I walked around to adjust and/or correct certain misaligned or potentially unsafe movements. The major notes consistently given were related to their tendencies not to follow through with their

intention, to step to the wrong side of the body (making the technique ineffective as well as potentially unsafe by stepping directly into an on coming attack), and not being centered in their bodies. At the close of the exercise we gathered for a group discussion and I asked, “Can anyone name a character from any story that had NO objective or intention in the story?”

As hands went up, those who choose to speak eventually agreed that every character has an objective or intention because it is what motivates them to move. I responded by asking: “What if your objective is weak, not followed through, or if you are not committed to it?” They answered: “The story flops because the characters are weak and uninteresting. We don’t care about them or what they want because they don’t.” I ended by asking: “What about a friend or family member you know? Do you know anyone who has no objective or intention?” They thought for a moment and some answered that they did in fact know people who had no objectives or intentions in their lives. I asked for examples of what these people were like. Lazy, pessimistic, couch potatoes, and slugs were some of the adjectives they came up with. “Do they ever walk? What about eat?” The class laughed. I then reminded them that these people did in fact have objectives. They did have intentions. Even the act of laying on the couch and watching TV is an objective for them. It may not be active or one worthy of much, but it is one they are committed to. The only people with NO objectives or intentions

are those lying in the cemetery.

I then stood and repeated the shomenuch ikkyo technique. I took the role of nage and defended against the shomenuch. I demonstrated it with full commitment and then without. Next, I took the role of uke and did the attack again with full commitment and then without. I ended by asking if they could see a differences and if they could see any connection to what we just spoke about. There was a unanimous, “Yes.” I asked them to do the technique eight more times slowly with full commitment to show me they understood how to physically embody the intention.

Seeing an improvement in their actions, I moved on to demonstrating nikkyo in order to demonstrate an important principle about realism and pain. I explained that you do not need to actually do a technique for the audience to read it as real. Combat dance is not a martial art, boxing, or wrestling competition, and one does not EVER inflict pain on one’s partner. I demonstrated the ease with which one could potentially injure one’s partner using nikkyo, and how to do the same movement pattern without the pain. I took this time to introduce the concepts of negative and positive energy. I explained that positive energy is the following through of the energy one sends to their partner, and that negative energy is stopping that energy just short of the follow through. Imagine you are holding a water balloon in your hands and you begin to squeeze it. If you put enough power into it, it will burst open. Yet, you can simulate squeezing it

without busting it open. That is negative energy. I then had them practice this concept by pushing a partner. A real push using positive energy will move the person, while a negative energy push will not move them. A student then asked: “But if I do this (negative push) it looks like he’s Superman or something. How do I make it look real, like I beat him in the scene?” I replied: “It is his responsibility to ‘act’ your push. He has to make your negative push read to the audience as if it were a positive energy push.” After demonstrating what I meant, we moved on.

We returned to the nikkyo technique which they practiced six times before we moved on to aikido rolls so they could begin to have an understanding of how to hit the floor safely. We covered the following basic aikido rolls:

- ☉ **Forward Roll:** A forward falling rolling movement over the shoulder. Rolling diagonally across back from shoulder to hip.
- ☉ **Back roll/sit:** A backwards falling rolling movement over the shoulder. Rolling diagonally across back from shoulder to hip.

In addition to this, I covered a basic lesson in stage combat falling.

At 3:30PM, I told the class to get their journals and have a seat in a circle on the floor. Together we reviewed what our day consisted of: materials, terms, concepts, and principles. We also used this time to address questions they may not have had earlier.

Some of the questions they had were:

Q: Is it ok to start looking for music for choreography?

A: Yes, the earlier to begin to listen, the larger your possible selection to choose from.

Q: Is it ok to start choreographing now?

A: No, there are specific choreographic lessons you will learn as the semester goes on. Also, there are specific movement skills you need to acquire before you can actually choreograph. You can't plan to paint a picture of a dolphin if you've never seen a dolphin before.

Q: Should we bring our journals to every class?

A: Yes, you will need to have something in which to write notes.

The review completed, I ended class with one last stretch from aikido, the back stretch, and dismissed the class.

The third class began as it had the previous week and as it would from now on: the students entered the room, removed book bags, jackets, and other personal belongings, signed in, and assembled in the circle awaiting further instruction. We then proceeded to do warm-ups. As a method to increase the students' confidence and abilities to communicate effectively giving instruction, each week two different students directed the warm-ups. After they completed this portion of class, I took over with the skill building section. Week three, we began kung fu. I had them stand an arms length



apart in four rows facing the mirror. I proceeded to demonstrate the following kung fu skills:

- ☯ **Stances:** Each stance had a particular benefit, whether it was balance, control, shifting of weight from one to the other, or from both legs to one leg, or over all strengthening.
  - ☯ Square Horse
  - ☯ Side Horse
  - ☯ Cat Stance
  - ☯ Twisting Horse
  - ☯ Snake Posture
  - ☯ Crane One Position
- ☯ **Strikes:** Each strike focused on a particular hand position and began to train the student in more specific body control as they altered the shape of their hands for each particular strike.
  - ☯ Straight Punch
  - ☯ Tiger Claw
  - ☯ Vertical Spear
  - ☯ Horizontal Spear
  - ☯ Dragon Claw

☯ Snake Fang

- ☯ **Blocks:** Each block, like the strikes, focused on a particular pattern of movement. Each block is a defense against a particular attack.

The specific arm positions developed new movement patterns and increased the kinesthetic awareness and ability of the student.

☯ Slap Block

☯ Down Slap

☯ Upward Forearm

☯ Circle Out

☯ Wrist Snap

- ☯ **Kicks:** The same was true for the kicking movements as for all of the preceding skills. The student trained their lower body in new movement patterns. All of which increased muscular strength, flexibility, and overall awareness and control.

☯ Front Snap 1

☯ Roundhouse

☯ Side Kick

☯ Turn Kick

Once the above skills were drilled for approximately an hour, I introduced them to a partnering drill. The drill was a sensitivity exercise: flowing wrists (with eyes open

and then closed). This exercise teaches tactile awareness, being in physical contact with your partner at all times, feeling the speed of your partner, and complimenting the movements rather than conflicting them (which would only result in loss of the contact). The students stood facing one another, eyes open at first, with right arms touching at the wrist. Without signaling who would begin, one partner began to move their arm slowly in a variety of directions. The partner moved along and gently followed. At some point, again without signaling, the second partner then became the leader and the other partner followed. This transition was difficult and took time to develop but was rewarded when both partners became in tune to the point where they could change at will and follow effortlessly. This skill was not mastered, but the students did develop enough of an understanding and practice of it to grasp the lesson. I then moved them to level two of this exercise: eyes closed. This exercise proceeded as before but now the students' eyes remained closed. Level three was eyes open with footwork (walk slowly, move forward, backwards, laterally). Level four included both footwork and closed eyes.

I next upped the skill level by increasing the amount of body involved. Wrist exercises maintained contact with wrists only. Next we moved on to a full body exercise called "water meets water." Like the wrist exercise, this focused on contact with the partner and moving with the partner, while also focusing on moving with an

intention and commitment to the intention. Both partners stood facing each other about three feet apart. Partner “A” then moved forward committed to get past “B,” not simply to pass “B” but to get something that is behind “B.” I told them to imagine their intention as a cookie “A” wanted. “A” commits to walking forward to get the cookie. “B,” however, redirects “A” back to get an apple. It is important that “B” not stop “A” from moving, but rather move with “A” and redirect him/her. Also, “A” must not resist being redirected. “A” would feel the impetus from “B” and would willingly move as directed. The exercise then increased in difficulty and skill as I increased the levels of resistance (one having no resistance at all / ten having total resistance). I explained that the first level of difficulty was a zero; neither “A” nor “B” was to resist the other. At a level two through eight, the resistance increased as “A” resists giving up the intention to get the cookie. When “A” feels “B” trying to redirect, “A” resists but ultimately will be redirected. This exercise should never go higher than a level of eight for two major reasons. Levels higher than eight increase the likelihood of accidental injury because partners will then have begun wrestling. Second, in the realm of storytelling if one goes as high as one can, there is no where else to go. Show the audience a ten and there is nothing else to show. You want to keep the audience wondering what more you have to show; tease them.

After these skills were taught and repeated ten times, I moved on into a more

introspective exercise by introducing the concept of emotions in movement. I gave an example of how you can often look at someone across the street or in the store and by their movements alone, you can get an idea if they are happy, sad, or angry. I asked for examples of how someone might move that would demonstrate these emotions. I asked the students to think about walking and what walking says about the person who is walking. The students one by one offered feedback. For example they noted that: When people are happy they might skip, dance, walk fast, or smile. When they are sad they might walk slow, frown, or drag their feet. When they are angry they might stomp, walk fast, or frown. I pointed out from their examples that some things may overlap such as fast walking. Walking fast does not automatically represent or demonstrate a singular emotion. If onstage and walking fast you may need to add something other than the walk to depict a happy character. For example, a fast walk may be read as anger if the facial expression does not correspond accordingly.

As a building block to what we had discussed, I taught them sections of the white crane form and asked them to select any five movements from the series and to give the movements an emotional life. I gave them thirty minutes to experiment with the following emotions: joy, sadness, sensuality (lust), and rage. At the end of the time they presented the movement patterns with their selected emotion. They were also told not to include any vocal cues. The audience should know which emotion the dancer

was displaying without having a sound to rely on. A few students experienced anxiety. They approached me for more direction and wanted me to tell them specifically what to do. I repeated the instructions and told them to begin playing with the emotions and movements.

I noticed during the presentation of the exercise that most of the students accomplished the objectives successfully. However, a few students overlapped emotions or did not fully commit to the emotion (which made it vague and unreadable). I opened the floor to critiques by first reminding them of the difference between a criticism and a critique. The major critique was what I stated earlier about vague and uncommitted emotions. After they presented, critiqued, and had feedback, we moved on to the following stage combat techniques: punching, kicking, choking, hair pulling, ear pulling, nose pulling, masking, and knaps. Once we completed what I felt was adequate time on the combat basics, we moved to dance basics.

I began the dance lessons with some ballet basics. We covered positions one through four to develop a basic postural understanding and to have movement patterns that were different from what we had focused on thus far. I added plies'(demi and grand), elevés, relevés, arabesques, and grand battements. Having completed these basics I moved on to some of the Lester Horton Fortifications. I selected Horton because, as my research revealed, he developed a dance technique reputed to fortify,

stretch, and strengthen the human body in preparation for its use as an instrument for expressive dance (Perces 7). It was interesting to that one of Horton's ex-principal dancers credits Horton's love of Oriental theatre with the work he developed in which every muscle of the dancer's body was trained to the point it could be isolated (Perces 7). It was this element of control and awareness that I wanted the students to gain from the Horton technique. I taught some of Horton's vocabulary via the fortification warm-ups we practiced.

Two of the predominant Horton warm-ups we studied and their variations are as follows:

- ☉ **Flat backs:** Stretches the hamstring and back muscles and strengthens the abdominal muscles.
  - ☉A. With arm reach
  - ☉B. With arms in high parallel
  - ☉C. With demi-plie'
  - ☉D. Flat back-back bend
  - ☉E. With demi-plie' and flat-back back bend
  - ☉F. With releve'
- ☉ **Laterals:** Increases the range of lateral movement. The torso stretches sideward as the hip presses in the opposite direction.
  - ☉A. With flat back

☯B. With horizontal swing

☯C. With release swing

Other Horton skills I introduced were: coccyx balance, front “T,” laterals, and release swings.

Rather than focus on specific dance techniques, I continued my focus on building specific skills which could then be translated to (performed) combat, to dance, and to life in general. For example, we did no barre work as done in ballet. However, as stated earlier, we did do some skill development drills such as plie’, tendus, and releve to work on strength, balance, and control. Throughout these drills my focus remained on personal awareness and control of the students’ body. Never was my intention to make anyone the next Baryshnikov or Jet Li.

Once the basic dance vocabulary and skills were introduced, I moved on to some improvisational dance exercises to teach and reinforce concepts in partnering, balance, symmetry, asymmetry, sharing of weight between partners, traveling across the floor, and rhythm.

The next class session continued our dance and unarmed work. Having completed that, we began weapon work the following week. Each semester I experimented with a variety of weapons in an attempt to discover what weapons worked best to teach a variety of concepts. The weapons that have been taught were the following: quarter staff, rapier, bokken (samurai sword), jian (tai chi sword), iron fan,



nunchaku, escrima sticks, rubber knife, sai, and kama. The central lesson of all of the weapons was how to use the weapon as an extension of the body to increase over-all awareness and control. Through the various weapons the dancer also learned - as he/she did with their body - how to isolate and manipulate the body and the weapon as one unit.

I closed this lesson by integrating the concept of locus of control. I told the class that on stage as in life the reality of what happens is not the focus of importance. Rather, the important thing is what someone thinks and feels about what has happened. What is important is how one processes the situation and what is done based on their thoughts and feelings. This is one of those places where the more holistic aspect of combat dance was revealed. Martial art instructor Burt Richardson believes that a teacher can easily determine the level a student will attain in the martial arts by asking the question: “do you believe your life situation is controlled by external circumstances and powers, or do you believe the way you feel inside and the actions you take based on those inner feelings determines the course of your life?” (Richardson 14). Through each drill, each skill, principle and theory, two things - awareness and control - continued to surface. If the student is aware and in control, more possibilities are open to them. Controlling one’s body and controlling one’s intentions are the keys to controlling one’s destiny.

After completing the various weapon work, the students were responsible for creating a choreographed piece that demonstrated the lessons taught. I expected them to demonstrate cumulatively the principles from the very first class up to the present class. I alternated between having them use music that I selected for them and allowing them to select their own music. Throughout the class sessions, music was always integrated in the class. We warmed up to music and did drills to music. I wanted to make sure that the students were beginning to think of the music as a part of the process and not a separate entity. From what was demonstrated, I believe they grasped the concept.

At the end of the semester, each class did a public performance to showcase their choreography. The public performances proved to be not only popular but entertaining as well. Based upon that popularity, I knew combat dance had a future beyond the gym walls of the Franklin Street Gym.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Reflections, Revelations, and Realizations

At the end of the semester, after the students presented their works both for a grade and for the public performance, I was left sitting and thinking about the journey we undertook. The first thing I did was to ask if I found the semester successful. I evaluated the semester not by the evaluations written by the students or the comments of audience members who watched the public presentation but by the improvements I witnessed over the weeks. I looked at each individual student to see if there were any realizations made, physical improvements (greater balance, strength, and control) or awareness gained. I looked for those moments when the “light bulb” went on as the student finally understood and made connections. While there is never a time when every student in every class will get everything I wanted them to grasp, my major attempt and hope remained in the planting of the seeds and the expectation that one day - “viola’!” - they would understand.

I am certain that my students would find it interesting to know that this class was as much a journey for me as it has been for them. While the lessons learned were not always the same, many of the inner realizations were. Just as I planted seeds within them, there were seeds planted within me. The students, I am sure, were unaware that

they were contributing to my growth as a teacher, performer, and person. By thinking about lessons to teach them, I had to first find the lesson within my self.

However, I must admit that everything was not perfect. There were definitely things that did not work out well. Some of those things that I now realize do not work are related to class size, length of class, and duration of course. I purposely allowed various numbers of people to register for the course. I had as few as fourteen and as many as twenty four. I wanted to have an accurate gauge of what numbers worked most effectively. Based upon my first-hand experience, I would now advise that keeping the class between twelve and fourteen works best. Beyond that, space becomes an issue and the ability for the instructor to observe practice becomes a challenge. Having taught both small classes and large ones, I can attest to the fact that larger numbers, while being possible, are the least effective overall.

I also found holding class only one day a week a challenge for the students. One class for three hours was a lot of wear and tear on the students. Fatigue became an unwanted companion in class many times and warranted constant reminders that focus and awareness were needed. Fatigue had a way of making the students' movements more careless and haphazard, thus opening the door for potential accidents and safety issues. Thankfully, we were blessed with no injuries resulting from careless behavior. In relation to my concerns about the length of the class, I would like to have had the

opportunity to experiment with a one year course which met twice a week. This would allow greater in-depth study of all of the concepts.

My reflections have constantly pointed to one thing that I now have mixed feelings about. I tended to introduce the concept or purpose of the lesson at the end of the lesson rather than teaching the concept right after the exercise. I am not sure if this was due to my own martial art training and fascination with the old kung fu movies that seemed to do this. Like Mr. Miyagi from The Karate Kid movies, I preferred to teach the movement first and let the student meditate on it, to live with it for a while and then let it come out. There are many benefits to learning like this. In the Karate Kid movies, the student Daniel had to wash cars, wax cars, paint fences, and sand floors as his training. He had no idea what was going on until he confronted his teacher who then opened his eyes to the realization that he had been learning blocks by doing these chores he felt were pointless. Having also been a public school teacher, I realize that with so many learning styles, this type of training cannot be the only way. I believe that if students are forced to think, even if an answer is not arrived at, the practice of thinking never-the-less does them a great service. Once having thought about it, the teacher can discuss and reveal the moral to the story. As I mentioned, I was a public school teacher and this was something I did while teaching in that environment. I realized early on that the things students find on their own are always held longer than those given by the

teacher. Only after I give them time to experience and think, if they don't grasp it, then I will explain. Only once students have thought for themselves will I give them the lesson, concept, or principle in clear terms.

Yet, even reflecting on the things that did not work as well, I must honestly admit that everything did work to some degree. Some things worked better - were more effective - than others, and based on that I would make adjustments. Overall, there was nothing that simply did not work. For example, I found some weapons were easier to teach certain concepts with, while other weapons (like escrima) were met with repeated resistance from many students. The escrima, I believe, was difficult due to the limited class time and relative complexity of the movements. I also believe that with more time on that weapon, every student could have grasped the concepts. However, this was not a weapon to be taught in two classes. It would be better to spend maybe three or four weeks on it. Yet, again, there was nothing that simply did not work. Everything worked to some extent and with more time could have an effective place in the curriculum.

My reflections revealed more to me than just what worked and what did not work for the class. I also found personal barriers which I had to overcome. When I began teaching this class I had to face my initial frustration with people's general unawareness and lack of control over their bodies. It consistently amazed and frustrated

me that people generally had no kinesthetic awareness, and as I said before, this included those trained in a particular sport. Even many top professional athletes have no true body awareness or control beyond the swinging of a bat or the throwing of a football. An old samurai maxim proclaims that, “a man who has attained mastery of an art reveals it in his every action.” This was what I aspired to embody. In the beginning, I expected others to have a similar drive or aspiration. Yet, I realized that if I wanted people to learn this, it was my job to teach them. Believing that anyone having attained proficiency in their kinesthetic awareness and control would exhibit that awareness and control in every aspect of their life, I wanted people to have ultimate awareness and control: on the baseball field, on the dance floor, in a busy airport terminal, the aisle of the supermarket and when doing laundry. For this reason I attempted to introduce more holistic elements into the exercises and concepts of the class. I wanted more from the students than to be good at dancing from center stage to stage left with a sword. I wanted them to be able to move well when walking to the bus stop, when walking through the snow, getting out of a pool, and when sitting on a plane for a six hour flight.

My last revelation was that this was just the beginning of my exploration and journey with combat dance. For every exercise I chose, there were hundreds of others which I could have potentially used. For every concept I conveyed through a particular

method or skill, there were thousands of other way to convey the same lesson or concept. There were also many other things - such as using American Sign Language - that I wanted to experiment with, but did not incorporate fully into the course. I would like to develop a greater foundation in formal dance, stage combat, storytelling, acting, and martial arts so that this can be taken to a totally new level of experience. I believe that if I have this to offer, my students will develop even greater awareness, control, and expressive potential. I must now decide how I will continue this adventure . . . or will I let it end?



## CONCLUSION

Teaching combat dance has been a very educational experience. It has been an experience that has changed me forever and knowing what I now know, there is no way I could allow the torch to be extinguished. I know there is a future for combat dance. I believe the next natural progression is to take this to the level Jenny suggested to me two years ago. Though, at this present moment, I am not sure how one starts a dance or theatre company or many of the other things I dream of creating one day. I am certain, having founded a sign language performance company without prior knowledge, that it is possible. As my experience at this university - both as student and as teacher - ends and this chapter of my life comes to a close, I must now begin a new journey. I must begin a new chapter with new struggles and triumphs. Thinking about the future of combat dance, I realize that there are many things I did not have time to experiment with (such as: speaking lines, developing a full scene or story, lights, sets, and costumes), that I can now begin to develop on my own.

I will end with these empowered words of Jamel Gaines, A Brooklyn-based choreographer and dancer: “Dance is a total package. It brings together mind, body, soul, and spiritual healing. When all of these elements come together you’ve got something powerful” (Weeks 61).

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APPENDIX ONE

**COMBAT DANCE FALL 2002**

Instructor: Raymont Anderson  
Phone: (804)254-8801 message only at 828-6741  
Office Hours: By Appointment  
STARS4ASL@yahoo.com

**Class Objectives:** The student will be able to integrate elements of stage combat, martial arts, and dance into safe and performable choreography.

By course end the student should also have-

- 1: a basic understanding of musicality and how it moves the body and emotions.
- 2: a vocabulary and understanding of basic martial art and stage combat terms.
- 3: demonstrate an ability to present a choreographed piece safely each week as required for each weapon and skill.
- 4: demonstrate ability to choreograph and perform solo and group pieces.
- 5: demonstrate an ability to tell stories implementing class skills.

**Required Materials:** Each weapon to be learned.

**Learning Activities:** Lecture, demonstration, both in and out class study and practice activities, and delivery of choreographed pieces.

**Evaluation**

**Grading:** Everyone begins this class with an “A”. To retain all points and thus retain the “A”, the student MUST completely fulfill the requirements of the assignments given this semester.

Performance/ demonstration of skills and routines	40%
Final Choreographed piece	25%
Participation/Attitude/Safety	20%
Journal	15%
Total	100%

### Penalties

**Late assignments-** One letter grade per day.

**Missed Choreography-** Failing grade for missed work. Pieces may be made up at *instructor's discretion* based upon on the reason, time constraints, and documentation.

**Absences-** You must realize that a missed class will in mean missed information, skill development, and practice time. Therefore two missed classes (2) will lower your overall grade by a letter. If you anticipate the need to miss PLEASE notify the Instructor as far in advance as possible. Note: Illnesses and emergencies do occur but be professional and notify Instructor.

**Tardiness-** Being late three times will equal one absence and will carry the same penalty as a full absence. Again, if you anticipate being late, notify Instructor as soon as possible.

### Tentative Class Schedule

(NOTE: The following is a listing of class events and *are subject to change*)

[Due date and requirements for “Journals” will be given verbally at some point in class!!]

**DATE: SUBJECT COVERED/ ASSIGNMENTS DUE**

#### August

30 Intro/ Review Syllabus/ Overview of “What is Combat Dance?”, **Workout!**

#### September

6 Unarmed-Aikido, begin Kung Fu

13 Kung Fu, Dance intro

20 Bo Staff

27 Bo Staff/ Nunchaku

#### October

4 Escrima

11 Escrima

18 Knife

25 Bokken

#### November

1 Bokken

8 Tai Chi Sword

15 Tai Chi Sword

22 Rehearsal

29 Rehearsal

#### December

6 TBA

Final Performance TBA

### **SELF-GRADING QUESTIONNAIRE**

Did you arrive on time and use class time appropriately? 😊😊😊

Did you dress appropriately for class? 😊😊😊

Did you come to class prepared with your weapons each class? 😊😊😊

Did you maintain safe practice and procedures? 😊😊😊

Did you practice the skills taught and demonstrate learned skills? 😊😊😊

Did you do all assignments and submit them to instructor on time? 😊😊😊

#### **Journal entries:**

Answer these questions as you go through each class.

These questions are the starting point for your journal entries, you can add alter and adapt as needed but you MUST address these types of issues!

DO NOT simply list the events of the day. I want reflections and answers to questions.

-----  
 What are my initial expectations of this class?

What do I hope to learn?

What do I see as my obstacles, fears, anxieties?

What was difficult or particularly challenging about a particular exercise, weapon, skill?

How did I handle the obstacle? Did I face it, avoid it, overcome it?

How might this class/ skills be applied to my life as a performer and person in general?

What am I taking from this class to apply, use in my life? How will I do it?

What comes naturally for me?

What do I find that I struggle with?

Do I work well with others?

Am I a take charge kind of person when it comes to choreographing?

What is most challenging about choreographing?

Is this a class that I'd recommend to others? Why or Why not? If so, who?

What weapons were more difficult? Why?

What weapons were my favorites and least favorites? Why?

Why did I select the music I selected for my works?

In an ideal world what would I like to have learned in this class?

What would I have wanted more or less of?

Activity Chart Activity/Place/Time (Passive-Active)

The three most flexible parts of my body are.

The three most inflexible parts are.

The three strongest areas of my body are.

The three weakest are.

I am really impressed when I see someone who can.



## Sample Lesson Plan

**GENERAL AIM:**

A: Title-"Introduction to Stage Combat"

B: Skill-To develop basic vocabulary and use of skills demonstrated in relation to stage combat by copying and practicing instructor.

C: Level-Beginner

D: Class Length-Three Hours

E: Estimated Lesson Length-Fifty minutes per section/ 3 sections with 10 minute break between sections.

**TEACHING AIDES/MATERIALS:**

A: CD Player

B: Various genres of music at varied tempo and familiarity. (All instrumentals)

**STATED OBJECTIVES:**

\*General: Students will demonstrate their ability to follow directions as the instructor verbally explains movements. The student will also demonstrate their ability to copy movements based upon the instructor's demonstration of the movements.

**BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES:**

\*Psychomotor: Students will move each section of their body becoming kinesthetically aware of how it feels physically. They will also replicate the movements as demonstrated by teacher per skill taught.

\*Cognitive: Students will demonstrate their understanding of the material presented by demonstrating the skills without instructor intervention and explain concepts related to skill.

\*Affective: Students will develop greater confidence in their ability to be in control of their body, in their increased motor control (coordination), and in their learning of new usable skills.

**FOCUS/ANTICIPATORY SET:**

A: Today we will begin to use learn a variety of the skills involved in stage combat.

B: We will begin by doing a general warm-up followed by more specific isolated movements to help train your body and mind for the fight related skills.

C: Your skills will improve as you practice more daily!

**PRESENTATION AND EXPLANATION:**

Guided Practice: Teacher will explain and demonstrate each movement prior to the students doing them either in pairs or in solos (Except when the movement is general; as in walking)

Independent Practice: The student will copy each movement as demonstrated to the best of his/her ability both in solo exercises as well as partnered exercises.

Summary: At the end of the class lesson the students will evaluate how well they feel they did the exercises. They will add these observations to their journals as well as verbally participating in the end class discussions.

Vocabulary: KNAP, Cueing, Masking, Water meets Water, Levels of intensity, Intention, Commit to action

**EVALUATION:**

A: Did the student attempt to move as demonstrated?

B: Did the student observe and practice safety in movement?

C: Did the student participate in discussion?

D: Did the student come to class prepared and maintain preparedness during class?

## APPENDIX TWO

### Vocabulary

**Hard style (External style)** - A martial art that commonly has two main principles: first, physical reactions precede mental reactions; second, the opponent's force is met with equal and opposite force. Examples of hard styles are karate and taekwon do.

**Soft style (Internal style)** - A martial art that commonly has two main principles: first, the mind dictates actions; second, the opponent's own force is used to defeat him or her. Examples of styles are aikido and tai chi chuan.

**Capoeira** - Afro-Brazilian martial art created by the slaves in Brazil. The slaves hid their martial techniques in a dance-like series of movements that was 'performed' to music. The style is known for its acrobatic movements and fast paced rhythms to the music.

**Aikido** - A Japanese term meaning, literally, 'way of divine harmony'. Aikido, a defensive way of combat was created in Japan in the 1920s by Morihei Ueshiba.

**Kung Fu** - A Chinese term meaning, literally, 'hard diligent work,' 'an adept,' or 'a man of attainment and skill.' This term has been adopted erroneously (but has become accepted) in the West as a name for the hard Chinese arts.

**Jeet Kune Do** - Cantonese term, meaning literally, 'way of the intercepting fist.' This style of martial art was created by Bruce Lee. Lee's emphasis was on the style having no style, but rather an adaptable flowing fighting form.

**Ninjutsu** - Japanese term for the style of martial art developed by the Ninja of Japan. Commonly, though incorrectly, called 'the art of espionage.' Ninjutsu more accurately is the art of forbearance and perseverance in the physical, mental and spiritual realms.

**Tae Kwon Do** - Korean martial art that incorporates both elements from the Chinese and Japanese styles. It is a hard style that is well known for its kicking and breaking techniques.

**Chi (Ki)** - The Chinese term meaning, 'energy,' 'life-force' or 'vital essence.' Ki is the Japanese translation of this word.

**Hara (Tan Tien)** - The spot, approximately three inches below your belly-button, where your body's center of gravity is located. The source of Chi (Ki), Tan Tien, is the Chinese translation of this term.

**Uke** - Japanese term used to refer to the partner who is attacking.

**Nage** - Japanese term used to refer to the partner who is defending.

**Kwan Do (Kwan Dao)** - Chinese weapon. Large axe-like blade mounted on a long pole.

**Jian** - Chinese sabre. Commonly called a tai chi sword.

**Bokken** - Japanese training tool. A wooden replica of the katana. Literally, wooden sword.

**Katana** - Japanese sword commonly called a samurai sword.

**Sai** - Japanese / Okinawa tool for farming that was later made into a weapon. Recognized by its forked shape and dual prongs.

**Kama** - Japanese / Okinawa tool for farming that was later made into a weapon. A sickle.

**Escrima** - Filipino double sticks.

**Nunchaku** - Popular and well known weapon made famous by Bruce Lee films. Two short sticks joined by a cord or chain.

**Tai Chi Chuan** - A Chinese soft martial art, literally, the 'supreme pole (or "ultimate") fist.' The style is based upon the Taoist concept of chi and on the principle of yielding.

**Kata (Form)** - a series of prearranged movements repeated in the same manner and order each time practiced to teach a variety of skills.

**Grand Battement** - Large leg lifting movement.

**Degages** - Small leg movements almost like very small kicks.

**Arabesque** - Can refer to both a position and a direction. As a position- the action of extending one leg straight back. As an action- 'to the back' as with tendu arabesque meaning tendu to the back.

**Plie'** - An outward motion where the dancer bends the knees.

**Revele'** - Rising movement where the dancer stands on tiptoes.

## Vita

Raymont Lee Anderson was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on March 25, 1966. After high school he attended The Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He received an Associates degree in Graphic Design and Illustration in 1986. He then attended Carlow College and received his BA in Art Education in 1993. After graduation he began working as a full time art teacher for the Pittsburgh Public school system. While teaching he enrolled in the Interpreter Training Program at The Community College of Allegheny County and later received an Associates degree in Interpreting and Deaf studies in 1998. In 1995 while teaching and while working as a freelance interpreter, he founded a sign language performance company called S.T.A.R.S. In the 2000, he was accepted to VCU and graduated in 2003 with his MFA in Theatre pedagogy.