

Aerial Dance: Under the Sea

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

Honors Thesis

This is to certify that the Honors Thesis of

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on May 1, 2012
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Abstract

Aerial dance is an emerging form of circus arts with roots in modern dance, which has gained a large following. As this is a relatively new type of performance art, there is much need for new tricks, techniques, styles, and apparatus invention. In the creative process I designed a performance piece in the modern aerial dance style, as well as created original tricks, techniques, apparatus uses, and styles within each act. To showcase the results, I performed the final product with fellow aerial students and instructors to the theme of "Under the Sea", and produced the show via video recording. The goal for this process and performance is to make a small addition to the world of aerial dance, and show the potential for even larger contributions to the aerial arts as a whole.

History of Aerial Dance

Aerial dance is a type of performance art derived primarily from modern dance, circus arts, ballet, and acrobatic gymnastics. For a more formal definition, aerial dance is an evolved form of modern dance performed on an apparatus above the ground, presented on a three dimensional plane. (Paap, "Dance Genre Buzz: Aerial Dance.") The apparatus itself has its own rotational movement, changing the way the dancer moves in response. Aerial dance is an incredibly demanding art form that requires a high degree of strength, power, flexibility, courage, and grace to master. (Sky Gym, "What is aerial dance?")

How did modern dance influence the aerial arts? Modern dance allows the choreographer to explore and create movement with his or her own personal aesthetic. Due to the freedom of experimentation with modern dance, aerial exploration became a natural evolution and sub-genre of modern dance. Though this new sub-genre was

primarily influenced by modern dance, there are many other forms of performance art contributing to the styles of aerial dance. The use of ballet lines is very apparent in aerial performance art, with many poses including pointed toes and the body in “line” formations. The circus arts clearly have a large part in the development of aerial dance. Many aerial apparatuses were first used in big-top circus productions. For example, the dance trapeze is a variation of the flying trapeze. Theatre is also a very important element in contemporary “Cirque-du-Soleil” style aerial dance shows. These shows often have a storyline, and require elements of theatre to produce. Finally, the use of acrobatic gymnastics has translated into many aerialists performing “drops” in midair. Drops on aerial dance equipment are typically acrobatic flips performed on the apparatus by falling, untwisting, or creating knots that unravel with the apparatus catching the performer. Aerial dance has fused many other styles of performance art to become the genre we are familiar with today.

First introduced to the U.S. in the 1970’s, Terry Sendgraff is credited with being one of the primary pioneers of aerial dance. “Terry Sendgraff’s development of aerial dance, which she calls *motivity*, developed out of her background as a modern dancer, gymnast, and recreational high-flyer.” (Bernasconi and Nancy, 12) According to Terry, “Motivity is an improvisation-based dance form and performance art... Motivity emphasizes the individual's discovery of her or his unique aesthetic using a system of sensory awareness while on the ground and in the air. This form blends that which is personal, political, and spiritual.” Terry believed it was important to help in her students’ development of their own personal expression in aerial dance in order “not to look like another Terry.” (Bernasconi and Nancy, 13) In the 1960’s, Stephanie Evanitsky was also

a choreographer experimenting with various ways to suspend dancers in the air.

Evanitsky's company eventually became known as the "Multigravitational Aerodance Group". (Bernasconi and Nancy, 14)

Terry Sendgraff is credited with inventing the single-point, low flying trapeze which "became the vehicle that launched the aerial dance movement." This is one of the many reasons Terry Sendgraff is known as the "Mother of Aerial Dance" (Bernasconi and Nancy, 12, 13) The single-point, low flying trapeze is a static (non-flying) trapeze hung low to the ground, with a single point on top (rather than two points) which allows the trapeze to spin and gives a rotating view of the performer from all angles. This apparatus is also known as a "dance trapeze".

After creating over 200 concerts, annual birthday performances, founding the "Fly by Night" women's trapeze troupe, establishing her Motivity company, and receiving the Isadora Duncan Sustained Achievement Award, Terry Sendgraff retired in 2005 at the age of 70. She is currently writing her memoirs.

Aerial Dance vs. Circus Arts

What is the difference between aerial dance and the circus arts? Are these genres one and the same? It is difficult to generalize such broad genres of performance art, especially as the lines between the two are blurring more and more with time. There are a few examples, in general, of the main differences between aerial dance and the circus arts. Regarding aerial dance, there is more freedom for expression when compared to the circus arts. The circus arts typically have a standard set of procedures for performing, while aerial dance's roots in modern dance encourage freedom of expression and innovation. The transitions between tricks in aerial dance are as much apart of the

performance as a whole as the tricks are. In traditional circus performances, the tricks are the main focus of the act, with transitions leading up to, and focusing on the trick itself. With a traditional circus act, the tricks are presented to showcase the impressive feats of strength, flexibility, and courage. Sometimes the tricks are even presented to make the act seem harder or more daring than it actually is. In contrast, aerial dance is fluid, choreographed to make each move look effortless so there are not distractions to the overall picture evolving on stage. (Leach, 73)

Interview with Terry Sendgraff

Looking over Terry Sendgraff's website, I wondered if it would be possible to get in touch with her for an interview. Being able to add her thoughts on aerial dance was a dream for this project. I was very happy to be able to contact her, and she kindly agreed to give an interview. Below, her responses are provided.



MC: How do you foresee the future of aerial dance?

TS: I foresee the future of aerial dance continuing to blossom and grow with creativity, safety and intelligence.

MC: How would you like to see aerial dance further developed, and do you envision any new apparatus inventions?

TS: In further developing aerial dance I envision new aerial dance equipment inventions and designs, and a continuation of the blurring of boundaries between aerial dancers and circus aerialists. I feel participants and teachers need to know the difference. I hope instructors will seek excellent training in all aspects of aerial work, including work on the ground as well as in the air, and learn safety issues and injury prevention in class and performance.

MC: What do you enjoy most about aerial dancing? What do you feel is most difficult about aerial dancing?

TS: Before I retired, I enjoyed teaching, choreographing and performing. I loved the flow of energy I felt both on the ground and in the air. I like watching aerial dance now when it is creative, and when the dancers have a sense of presence rather than rote memorization of some tricks. I want to be moved. I believe aerial dance is most difficult when the training hasn't been adequate. Of course some things are physically difficult as in dance, gymnastics, circus, and sports, but good and thorough training helps overcome most difficulty. Difficulty should not be primary.

MC: How would you explain "Motivity" to someone who has never done aerial dance? How would you describe the creative, political, and spiritual process?

TS: I call my personal approach to aerial dance Motivity Aerial Dance. I see it as a living body of work, rooted in the studies that I have engaged in and been inspired by in my life. Over the years, I have struggled to define Motivity, explaining to friends, critics, potential students and audiences unfamiliar with this type of dance. I gesture with my arms up in the air as if holding onto a trapeze bar and I spin around and say that it's a way of dancing and performing on the ground and in the air on low-flying trapezes, ropes and other suspended fun things like bungee cords. The words "trapeze" and "flying" definitely gets attention. If they are curious enough to want more information, I'll talk to more extensively and say, "try it sometime. It's really fun." And I add, "I offer classes for all levels, all ages and for most bodies who are interested in moving on the ground and in the air. It's very different than the high flying circus aerialists."

MC: What advice would you give to aspiring aerialists?

TS: Advice to aspiring aerial dancers: follow your heart, seek the best teachers and take of yourself. Know the history of Aerial Dance.

Equipment

This section is to be used as a reference guide when referring to specific pieces of aerial equipment. The following apparatuses pictured are commonly used in aerial dance.



Figure 1
Single Point Trapeze



Figure 2
Aerial Hoop

Figure 3
Aerial Silk



Figure 4
Aerial Hammock

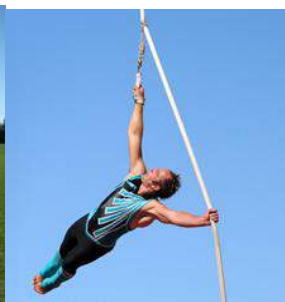


Figure 5
Spanish Web

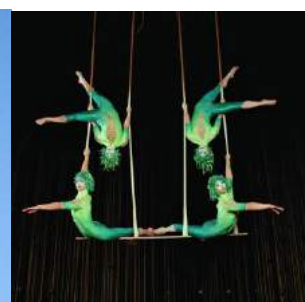


Figure 6
Triple Trapeze

For this project, I will primarily be referencing Figure 1, 2, and 3: The single-point trapeze, aerial hoop, and aerial silk. In the final performance, the aerial hoop used had two points instead of the one pictured above. Also in the final performance was an aerial sling act, which is not pictured above. An aerial sling is shaped like an aerial hammock, made out of material similar to the Spanish web.

There are many other variations of these apparatuses, as well as new pieces of

equipment continuously being introduced. Other styles include, but are not limited to, the aerial net, bubble, star, heart, anchor, etc. To attempt to include all new equipment would be an exhaustive list, so only the mostly used common apparatuses will be referred to.

Goal

The primary goal for this thesis project is to introduce new tricks, techniques, choreography, and apparatus uses to present in a final performance piece alongside what is already taught in the world of aerial dance. The material created will be regarded as new or uncommon, as it is nearly impossible to conclude with complete certainty of the originality with so many aerialists worldwide creating innovative pieces. Uncommon will be defined as untaught, unlisted in aerial dance manuals, or not regularly seen in performances. If along the way a trick created is discovered to have already been in use, proper source credit will surely be given. Any new material created by the performers will be given proper credit in the “New and Uncommon Material” section.

An additional goal for this project is to create the safest, highest quality performance while staying within a limited budget. The majority of us are students (or starving artists) with very tight budgets and schedules, so we must use our time and finances wisely.

With these goals in mind, we intend to create an innovative, captivating, and fun aerial dance performance “Under the Sea”.

My Experience with Circus Arts

From a young age, I was always very interested in the performing arts. Having a beginner’s level of gymnastics experience, I enjoyed tumbling and acrobatics. Growing up, I was involved in various theatre performances, playing parts in plays at school and in

the community. I performed at the St. Petersburg Petite Little Theatre and was in the drama club during middle school and high school.

My first experience with the circus was while attending Florida State University. FSU has one of only two collegiate circuses in the U.S., called “The FSU Flying High Circus“. (Mathews, "The FSU Flying High Circus.") Any degree seeking FSU student is eligible to audition. The show is performed, rigged, designed, and produced entirely by amateur students and rivals any professional performance. After seeing an FSU circus performance for the first time, I was in total awe of the amazing feats the students accomplished. I knew this was something I had to be apart of.



That semester I joined the Flying High Circus and was placed in the Misha Hour act. Misha Hour is an opening act with a variety of performances occurring at once, including hand balancing, tumbling, Rola Bola, and dance. During my second year at FSU, I enrolled in the Circus Activities course, PEM1952. This is a one credit hour course which gives an overview of nearly every circus act available. The students get to try a variety of acts including the flying trapeze, Russian bar, quartet adagio, Rola Bola, teeterboard, hand balancing, the Mexican Cloud Swing, trampoline, Spanish Web, juggling, rolling globe, as well as acquiring skills in safety and rigging. Pictured above is me flying on the Mexican Cloud Swing for the first time. The trick pictured involved falling off the swing backwards and catching by the ankles. This was one of the first acts we tried in class. I also participated in a six-week circus boot camp program to help students get properly conditioned to perform the circus acts. The exercises included normal boot camp

workouts, as well as strength building exercises on the circus equipment.

After transferring to the University of South Florida, I trained at BB's Dance and Circus Arts in Clearwater for over a year. BB's aerial dance program includes training on the static trapeze, aerial hoop, Spanish Web, aerial silk, triple trapeze, and aerial hammock. I also began training in ballet at BB's in the Fall. I performed on the triple trapeze and aerial silk for the Spring Show in June, 2011.

For the Fall semester of 2011, I began taking a circus arts class at Bayside Gymnastics for aerial silk and Spanish web, and attending open gym at Gold Medal Gymnastics. I am scheduled to perform on the aerial silk at Bayside's Spring Show in May, 2012. Overall, I would consider myself an intermediate level aerial dance student. Details of these training programs are provided in the "Training Schedule" section.

So what attracted me to the circus arts? Initially, my love of all things acrobatic. It amazed me to see what the body was capable of. I saw adults with no prior circus experience perform amazing feats. I loved accomplishing skills I never thought I could master, as well as seeing others reach their goals. I enjoy seeing students perform, who once felt the aerial arts would be an impossible dream for them. In addition, I like that aerial dance is a fun way to stay in shape. The routines involve full body strength, flexibility, and balance to perform.

Safety

There are numerous safety precautions involved in aerial dance. Safety is taken very seriously during all classes, as the risk of injury is always present during any kind of physical activity. There are three very important safety rules the instructors emphasize. One, always wrap your thumbs around the bar which you are holding. This is to prevent

the performer from falling off the apparatus while performing. Two, always stand on the balls of your feet while standing on the bar. Students and performers are never supposed to stand in the arches of the feet, as this can severely injure the foot. Three, always keep your shoulders engaged while hanging. If one hangs limp without the shoulders engaged, this can injure the rotator cuff. (Heller, 45)

It is very important these precautions are followed every single time, not just most of the time. Other important safety precautions include always having a spotter present, using mats or a padded floor while training, warming up and cooling down every time, no lotion on hands when using the aerial equipment, no jewelry or gum chewing, maintaining proper form, performing each trick in a slow and controlled manner, and proper entry and exit from the aerial equipment. (Heller, 45) Using lotion before entering the apparatus can create a dangerously slippery piece of equipment. Jewelry is also not allowed on the equipment, as it can tear the apparatus and create a safety hazard for the performer. It is also very important to learn and practice new tricks low to the ground. If the student gets stuck, it is much easier for the instructor to help them out than if they were very high. It is also important to know which way to unwrap the footlock, as unwrapping improperly can create a very tight knot.

I have managed to avoid any circus and aerial-related injuries over the past three years, and have been fortunate enough not to witness any serious injuries. The only injury I saw was an ankle sprain due to the student improperly exiting the equipment. The aerial arts are safe when executed properly, and even according to Ray Pierce, owner at Hollywood Aerial Arts, "We've found the Flying Trapeze and other aerial apparatus to be safer than gymnastics, cheerleading and even competition ping pong!" Though, nearly

every aerialist is subject to the discomforts of bruising, rope burn, and raw hands which become calloused. There is always the potential to have problems later in life as an aerialist, although there are numerous examples of aerialists performing well into old age.

Training Schedule

To stay strong and flexible for the final performance, I attend multiple aerial, dance, and fitness classes during the week. The schedule for the Fall semester is as follows:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 hour personal training	Rest	Ballet 1 6:30pm-7:30pm Intermediate Aerial Fitness 7:30pm-9:00pm	Aerial Silk 6:30pm-7:30pm	Open Gym Gymnastics 4:30pm-7:30pm

On Monday I typically do one hour of personal training with an emphasis on overall strength and core muscle training. We frequently work on upper body strength, specifically in increasing the number of pull-ups accomplished. Upper body strength is very helpful, though not absolutely necessary to participate in aerial dance. I frequently hear audience members say they could never do aerial dance because they have “no upper body strength”. This is a common misconception, as many beginning and intermediate moves can be achieved without a lot of upper body strength. The strength is built along the way, gradually achieving the necessary muscle. Aerial dance also incorporates a lot of lower body strength and flexibility. My personal trainer is Kyle Woodward. He is certified by the National Academy of Sports Medicine, a Health Science major at the University of South Florida, and a personal trainer at Gold’s Gym. Kyle has donated his time to help in the preparation of this thesis performance. We typically train at my

community gym, but training sessions can be almost anywhere. One obstacle I have encountered, is it seems the more muscle mass I have, the harder it is to maintain my flexibility. To combat this, I stretch frequently, especially before and after training sessions.

Wednesday is the busiest day of the week, with two classes totaling two and a half hours of training at BB's Dance and Circus Arts in Clearwater, Florida. I begin with one hour of Ballet 1, a beginner's class with Iliana Babadjanova. Iliana has an extensive background in classical ballet and graduated Cum Laude from the National Ballet Academy in Sofia, Bulgaria. Ballet training is required at BB's Dance and Circus Arts before performing with the company. A background in ballet gives performers an important basis for aerial dance, as it helps with balance, proper lines, flexibility, muscle development, grace, and more fluid transitions between tricks.

After Ballet 1, I move into ninety minutes of Intermediate Aerial Fitness. This class is instructed by Jessica Watson, one of the aerialists performing in this project. Generally the class is structured with twenty minutes of stretching and flexibility, fifty minutes of aerial training, fifteen minutes of conditioning, and five minutes of cool-down stretching. We do a full body stretching routine at the beginning of class with an emphasis on right, left, and straddle splits. After the stretching routine, we move to the aerial apparatuses. The main focus is learning new tricks, and practicing known routines on the static (stationary) trapeze, aerial hoop, and aerial silk. Other pieces of equipment available, but not as frequently used in the intermediate class, are the triple trapeze, Spanish web, aerial hammock, and aerial sling. After training on the equipment, we do conditioning exercises that vary with each class. One conditioning exercise unique to

aerial training is to hold our entire body weight up by gripping the aerial silk only, which helps improve grip strength and build calluses. Following the conditioning, we do five minutes of light stretching for the cool-down. Shown below are a few photos taken from class.



Practicing on the aerial hoop at BB's Dance and Circus Arts of Tampa Bay.
Center: Performing a duet with Blair Woodward. Photos by Arnold Caylakyan.

There are multiple performance opportunities for students throughout the year. Each student performs for the class once every six weeks on a single apparatus decided by the instructor. Most of the six weeks is spent learning new tricks, putting together a routine with music, and performing for the class. Each routine must contain entry and exit choreography, as created by the student. All students are invited to perform in the Spring Show each year, and are welcome to audition for the annual Cirque-style "Faeries, Inc." show, as well as various other performance opportunities throughout the year.

On Thursday I head to Bayside Gymnastics in St. Petersburg, Florida for a class on the aerial silk and Spanish web. This class is instructed by Ashley Jacobson, also a performer participating in the thesis. This class is a new offering at Bayside Gymnastics, having recently expanded to include a circus arts program for the Fall of 2011. The one hour class consists of approximately fifteen minutes of full body warm up and cool down stretching, and forty-five minutes of alternating aerial silk and Spanish web training, and

boot-camp style conditioning. One challenge encountered with this class is after doing two and a half hours of training the day before, it is easy for me to get fatigued during this practice. Sometimes it interferes with my ability to successfully complete some of the more advanced tricks my body would normally allow after proper rest. This is the schedule that fits best for the time being, but for the Spring semester I made sure to schedule classes with sufficient rest-time in between. Proper rest can be as important as the workout itself. Pictured below is a photo taken during class at Bayside Gymnastics.



Practicing the “Assisted Arabesque” on the aerial silk at Bayside Gymnastics.

On Friday, I attend Open Gym at Gold Medal Gymnastics in Pinellas Park, Florida for between two and three hours. The facility has much equipment, including a cushioned springboard throughout, a trampoline and tumble track, balance beams, and foam crash pads. Coach John Stephenson runs Gold Medal Gymnastics with over forty years of experience. Gymnastics can benefit aerial artists by helping with aerial acrobatics, strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. Open gym is an opportunity for guests to freely use the equipment at a studio and follow their routine of preference. My typical open gym session includes thirty minutes of a stretching routine, basic hand balancing practice, tumbling, trampoline work, balance beam, uneven bar practice, and ends with thirty minutes of conditioning. I always begin with thirty minutes of stretching

and end with thirty minutes of conditioning, however the practice in between tends to vary each time with regard to open equipment and preference. As my gymnastics experience is at a basic level, Coach John helps with any additional advancement of skills. This class completes my weekly training routine. Pictured below are a few things I typically practice at an open gym session.



Toe touch jump, elbow stand. Open Gym at Gold Medal Gymnastics.

For training during the Spring semester, I altered the schedule a bit. Through the month of February, I kept the same training schedule as listed above. However, for the final six to eight weeks before the show, I spent less time at the facilities learning new tricks, and more time practicing the routines I was to perform for the final show. I still attended Thursday aerial classes at Bayside Gymnastics, and open gym gymnastics every other week. The final weeks were also spent perfecting new tricks and techniques. I created the routines in the early stages of this project, while adding or modifying with new tricks learned throughout.

This training schedule does not include any additional stretching done throughout the week. I try to include stretching in my free time as often as possible to maintain the maximum amount of flexibility through the muscle training. When first deciding upon this schedule, I wondered if I could maintain five classes per week without overworking my muscles. However, I jumped right in and though it was difficult at first, my body

adapted quickly. It was surprising to find I was feeling less muscle soreness participating in five classes per week, rather than just one or two. The human body continues to amaze me with its adaptation in addition to accomplishing intense aerial acrobatic tricks.

Ballet Viewing with Paula Nuñez

Professor Paula Nuñez invited me to sit in on her advanced ballet class at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. This was a great opportunity to learn some of the craft, as well as pick up on some tips to translate into aerial dance. Aerial dance often makes use of the lines, tricks, poses, terms, and transitions in ballet.

I was able to view Professor Nuñez's Level 4 ballet class, the most advanced group of ballet students at USF. Professor Nuñez has been teaching this group for almost three years. This a two-hour technique class, which the girls do five days per week. This is in addition to any other weekly training.

Professor Nuñez rapidly calls out the routine the students are to practice. Some of the girls were "signing" moves with their hands as Professor Nuñez was calling them out. Paula said that this was called "marking with the arms", which is sign language for ballet students to solidify the technique they are about to practice. The students spend the first hour stretching and practicing various foot and arm positions on the bar. For the second hour, the students move to the center of the room for floor work. While in the center, their feet move very fast while elegantly pointed. The students then put on Pointe shoes, which are ballet shoes with a hard top so the dancers can perform on their toes. Though Pointe work looks very effortless and graceful, one of the dancers noted that it can still be painful at times. One student with a leg injury was still able to practice by lying on the ground and completing the movements. This is in order for the students not to lose the

technique and muscle while being unable to perform. Injuries do not happen very often, and the more muscle the dancer has, the less likely they are to get injured. Paula designs the classes so the dancers will build muscle to prevent injury. I thought this was a good idea for aerial classes as well. There should be an alternative workout program for students who have injuries or disabilities so they can stay strong and conditioned.

During the class, I heard many French terms that are also used in aerial dance. For example, *demi-plie*, *en dedans*, *en dehors*, and *Arabesque*. (Leach, viii) The basis of ballet is completely in French, similar to the origins of *Cirque-du-Soleil*. As aerial dance has borrowed from many types of performance art, French terms are occasionally used throughout the classes.

Professor Nuñez offered many ballet tips during this session. I found they translated well, or were already used in aerial dance. Paula encourages training in ballet, as it engages the whole body, and is a good basis for many other forms of dance. She stated that ballet looks effortless, but in reality is very hard work. This is similar to aerial dance, as many aerialists make difficult routines look effortless. The dancers have incredible flexibility and a lot of muscle, even though ballet dancers typically look very small. Aerialists must also have incredible strength and flexibility, though aerialists' body types tend to vary. Ballet and aerial dance engage the whole body, even if it looks like only the arms or legs are moving. In ballet, the pointing of the toes and positioning of the arms is also very important. In aerial, we are always told to have straight legs and pointed toes. In ballet, the instructor teaches the correct way to point the toes. Paula mentioned to not "sickle" the feet because it destroys the line. To "sickle" the feet is to break the line between the leg and foot. She also mentioned not to break the line between the wrist and

arm. Looking back at my photos practicing aerial dance, I can now see I often did not have the correct formation of ballet lines. The correct line of the foot can be formed by wrapping the foot around the ankle. However, she says it can be okay for different dance styles, such as some modern dance, to not have perfect lines. Paula stated that it helps to think of the body in different possible line formations, from head to toe. This is similar to aerial dance, as many tricks and poses are in the formations of the lines.

Routine

Listed below are the tricks or descriptions in order of appearance in my aerial hoop routine. In the aerial community, many tricks have unofficial names or descriptions. The terms shown below are ones I am most familiar with, but note there may be more than one name or description for each trick. This routine has a mix of beginning, intermediate, and advanced level tricks.

1. Spin hoop, straddle splits.
2. Running man.
3. Swing up, pose.
4. Graceful kick, sit and style.
5. Splits down.
6. Stag thru.
7. Gazelle split.
8. Mermaid, extend.
9. Knee up split.
10. Back contortion.
11. Back contortion, left leg extend. (New)
12. Drop 1 leg, 1 leg up.
13. Star.
14. Cradle.
15. Beat up, sit and style.
16. Man in the Moon.
17. Dead Man's Hang.
18. Single knee drop.
19. Rainbow splits exit.

Blair Woodward and I put together a new duo act on the aerial hoop-silk. This aerial hoop-silk apparatus will have the hoop attached to the top of the rig, and the aerial silk rigged to the bottom of the hoop. The video recording will begin after we are both on the equipment, so we can focus solely on entering and exiting the equipment safely. As this is a new apparatus duet, Blair will be dancing in place on the hoop to ensure the best safety precautions are taken, and I will perform intermediate level aerial silk tricks below her. Originally, the silks act had twenty tricks in total. I found the tricks on the aerial silk to take much longer to perform and transition into than on the aerial hoop. With the twenty tricks, the act lasted nearly eight minutes. I modified the routine to only include the intermediate level tricks so the timing could better fit the length of the chosen song. Listed below is the modified routine with new additions.

1. Begin in Cocoon. (New variation and transition)
2. Mermaid sequence.
3. Hooked knee layback. (New transition)
4. Assisted Arabesque.
5. Starfish. (New transition)
6. Double footlock splits.
7. Rotisserie.
8. Flamingo hang.
9. Arrow. (New variation and transition)
10. End in Cocoon. (Listed above)

The Performers

Taking aerial classes provided a great way to find students and instructors interested in participating in this project. Listed below are the performers with a brief description of their past experience, as well as their current involvement in the aerial arts.



Jessica Watson is a third-generation circus performer, whose mother and grandmother were both in the circus. Jessica spent ten years training at the P.A.L. Sailor Circus in Sarasota, Florida performing numerous

ground and aerial acts. After graduating high school, she spent summers teaching children circus arts in camps around the country. While attending the University of Central Florida, she created, directed, and trained students in various circus acts. Jessica is currently an aerial instructor at BB's Dance and Circus Arts. She has been featured at Push Ultra Lounge, Casa Tina's Mexican Restaurant, The Largo Cultural Center, The Conmey Center, and at "The Barking Hearts" event to promote the SPCA. She also performs at various venues in the Tampa Bay area with her performance company called the "Aerial Dragons". Recently she performed in Seoul, South Korea underneath a hot air balloon.



Chelsea Meredith began dancing at the age of 5. She graduated from the Pinellas County Center for the Arts at Gibbs High School, with a dance concentration. Chelsea performed a "Cirque-du-Soleil" inspired hand balancing duo routine for her Senior project at Gibbs. Chelsea is trained in

classical ballet, tap, jazz, and modern dance. She has trained at BB's Dance and Circus

Arts for over four years, focusing primarily on silk, solo trapeze, aerial sling and duo trapeze. Chelsea is also an instructor for the children's aerial class. She performs each weekend at Casa Tina's Mexican Restaurant. Chelsea worked for two and a half years on a "twin act" with her trapeze partner, Lucie David. She now performs a male/female duo trapeze act with Jay Silveira. Chelsea performs professionally with Moving Arts of Tampa Bay for various corporate events, recently with Make a Wish Foundation, and has been hired to perform twice at an annual awards ceremony in Hollywood, CA, for the "Writers of the Future."



Blair Woodward has been singing, acting and dancing since a young age. Blair graduated from the University of Central Florida with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and has been traveling the world since. While attending UCF, Blair was trained by Jessica Watson in the circus acts of hand balancing and skating. She also has a background in jazz, ballet, tap, and modern dance. She discovered a passion for circus arts, and has been training at BB's Dance and Circus Arts seasonally since September, 2010 and Bayside Gymnastics since the Fall of 2011.



Ashley Jacobson is from Godmanchester, England and moved to Saint Petersburg, Florida 8 years ago to pursue a degree in Biological Oceanography. She received her Bachelors of Science in Biological Oceanography at Eckerd College in 2009. Ashley is Director of the Girls competitive gymnastics program and Director of the Circus Arts program at Bayside Gymnastics and Cheerleading.



Katie Hasson is from St. Petersburg, Florida and graduated from the University of South Florida with a degree in International Business. Katie has always loved the arts and being active, so aerial dance naturally became a hobby. Katie has been training in the circus arts and gymnastics for only seven months, and yet has mastered advanced skills. She looks forward to seeing what new skills she can accomplish within the circus arts.



Kelley Towne teaches aerial skills with the circus arts program at Bayside Gymnastics. She was trained at aerial arts schools in Philadelphia and New York. Kelley is also a stilt walker in her spare time. In addition, she paints murals and designs costumes for her performances, especially fur coats. Kelley has performed at numerous festivals and events, and is known by her stage name, “Egypt”.



Julia Mirowski is a former competitive gymnast, and has been dancing since the age of 4. It has been a lifelong dream of hers to perform “in the air” at the circus. She has experience in tap, ballet, lyrical, technihop, and belly dancing. She was also on a professional travel team for cheerleading. Julia is involved in pole fitness, and has taught hoop fitness classes. Julia is the creator and performer for her company, Dizzi Dancing,

LLC. She performs astral hoop dancing and aerial acrobatics at various venues in Florida. She has been training for over a year at BB's Dance and Circus Arts.



Marina Petrano is trained in ballet, contortion, and aerial skills. She studied acting at the New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts. She also had an internship with Aerial Angels, a traveling aerial arts studio located in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Marina has worked at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, and was the face for Howl-O-Scream, 2011. Marina has a particular talent for performing as outrageous characters in midair.

Theme, Costumes, Music, and Makeup

The theme for this performance is “Under the Sea”. I chose this theme in order to complement the beach performance venue. “Under the Sea” could include anything at the beach, underwater, nautical, ocean, etc. I designed this as a very broad topic, as I did not want the performers to feel creatively limited. The performers had the freedom to interpret this theme in any way they preferred through costume, music, and aerial dance techniques. I chose a theme versus having a “Cirque-du-Soleil” style storyline to keep this process as simple and flexible as possible in the event of major performance and production changes.

For “Under the Sea” costuming, the performers were free to wear what they were most comfortable performing in. I encouraged the use of the “Under the Sea” theme, but did not require the purchase of costumes as most of us were working with limited budgets. However, come time for the final performance, the performers’ costumes were

very creative and included a vast array of “Under the Sea” styles. Most of the aerialists either made their own costumes, or altered an existing costume they had to match the theme.

For my “Under the Sea” attire, I wore a mermaid style dress without a restrictive fin that opened at the bottom, leaving the legs free to move. I sewed a black leotard with long sleeved lace arms underneath the mermaid fin to allow for complete execution of the tricks. This costume also had a print of scales all over, but they were not sequins. This gave the costume a sea creature appearance, without having real sequins to tear the aerial silks. Kelley Towne sewed shiny purple kelp/seaweed around her black leotard. Kelley’s costume gave the appearance of coming from, and being part of the ocean. Jessica Watson had a flowing, shiny purple and pink skirt with a scale-like pattern. She wore leggings and a tank top underneath, as she did many hanging, upside down tricks. The shiny skirt flowed in the wind and with each trick. Chelsea Meredith sported a black unitard with teal trim, as well as black leggings with a red polka-dot top. The costumes fit the tone of her multiple performances well. Blair Woodward wore a sailor costume for her fast-paced swing and tap dance choreography on the aerial hoop. This costume matched her upbeat, high-energy performance style. For the aerial hoop-silk duet, she wore a mermaid fin with a teal tank top. This costume had a bit of leg room, but for the routine she mainly did arm movements. Lynne Peterson was the costume designer for this act, and she created the mermaid fin Blair wore for the hoop-silk duet. The costume is pictured below.



Mermaid costume for the aerial hoop-silk duet.
Designed by Lynne Peterson.

Ashley Jacobson had a sequined blue top that looked like the sea, with black leggings. Her costume gave a shiny bright blue appearance in the sunlight. Ashley tested the sequins on a silk before she arrived, just to ensure it would not tear the apparatus. Katie Hasson wore a leotard with blue bubble print along with black leggings. It was a coincidence she had access to a leotard with bubbles, just for this performance. Marina Petrano had a green costume that was originally in the likes of Tinker Bell, but translated nicely into looking like a green sea creature. Julia Mirowski altered one of her own pink, iridescent bodysuits by adding fins to the ends. This costume gave the appearance of an aerial-dancing, ocean dwelling being. Overall, the costumes were all very creative and successfully fit the “Under the Sea” theme.

For music selection ideas, DJ Raven Morningstar mixed a CD with a variety of dance beats and compilations. In the final performance, there were multiple “Under the Sea” themed songs. The titles include, “Breathing Underwater” by Brit and the Calvary, “Under the Sea” from The Little Mermaid Soundtrack, and “Underwater” by Bassnectar. I encouraged the performers to utilize the theme, but did not require “Under the Sea” songs, as I wanted the performers to choose songs they felt best fit their routine. The songs that fit my performances best were “Stereo Love” and “Desert Rain” by Edward

Maya and Vika Jigulina. Further song selection details are provided in the “Act Lineup” section.



For makeup, Raven Morningstar also donated a large palette of colors for this project. In the final show, we used iridescent white foundation, bright greens and blues for eye shadow, and green-blue glitter lipstick to give the appearance of fish, mermaids, and sea creatures. We also wore facial gems to mimic the look of fish scales. Blair and Linda Woodward crafted starfish hair clips, similar to the ones in the photo shown to the left. This photo displays the style we modeled our “Under the Sea” makeup after.

Filming and Photography

Arnold Caylakyan kindly donated his professional camera and video editing skills to this project. Arnold is a professional photographer who lives in Toronto, Canada. “Arnold holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Ryerson University in the field of image arts. He recently returned to his hometown of Toronto after a four year stint traveling the globe working with Princess Cruise Lines in the Photo/Video department. He is also an avid filmmaker working behind the camera as a Director of Photography. He most enjoys images with contrasting colour and creating movement with in the still frame. His photography work has been in various public exhibitions in the city and is currently on permanent display at Humbertown Framing Gallery.” (Caylakyan, "About Me.")

Blair Woodward filmed the performances, and the footage was sent to Arnold Caylakyan back in Toronto where he edited this nearly hour long show. Arnold added music, titles, and transitions to the footage as needed. There were a few instances when

the elements of nature were against the performers. To combat this, Arnold edited the clips to make the transitions as smooth as possible. Blair also photographed some of the performers, but mainly used the camera for filming purposes. To obtain additional photos, I took still frames from the video clips.

Venue

The location for the final performance has been one of the most challenging aspects to this thesis. My initial goal was to have the performance located at a theater in which we could rig aerial equipment. After researching options for theater rentals, I discovered many difficulties involved with renting a theater. For one, this service is not free. Renting out a theater can be very costly, and often the space is available only for a limited amount of time. With a limited budget and flexible performance days necessary, a theater venue was not looking to be the best option. In addition, though we are executing our routines in a safe manner, I could foresee theater management not being too keen on the idea due to liability. Finally, rigging could be a problem in a theater. We would have to know with complete certainty that we could safely rig the equipment for the proper amount of weight necessary, and be able to change equipment relatively quickly between acts.

With these thoughts in mind, I searched for new ideas. When I discovered an affordable free-standing rig to perform on, this gave many new opportunities for performance venues. Suddenly, anywhere with a flat, stable surface could be used as a performance venue. Details of the free-standing rig are listed in the “Rigging” section. Seeing photos of Michelle McDaniel, a fellow aerial student, practicing her aerial dance

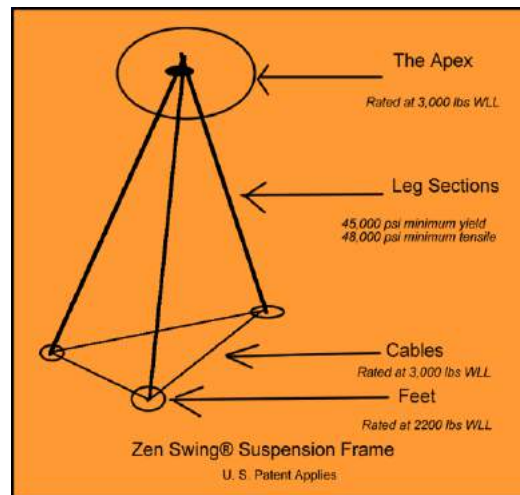
routine at the beach inspired the location for the final performance. I realized I had never seen an aerial dance performance at the beach. After further research, I was only able to find one video of an aerial dance show with a similar location. The venue would be included as an uncommon element to this project. The ocean would also be an ideal backdrop for the show. The “Under the Sea” theme was then subsequently chosen based on this performance venue. I felt it could also help the performers reduce “stage fright” if they got to spend a day at the beach instead of performing on an intimidating stage.

After the venue and theme were decided upon, the next step was to get the approval and permits for such a project. I tried contacting the filming departments for multiple public beaches, but all locations ended up being too costly or too difficult to secure. I thought of private beaches, but found the same procedures applied of securing these locations. Due to liability concerns, we would need very expensive insurance to perform at a public or private beach. After I nearly gave up on the prospect of a beach venue, I realized a great location was right in front of me: The University of South Florida, St. Petersburg Waterfront. The USFSP Waterfront has a small patch of beach, which would fit the free-standing rig perfectly. The waterfront has a backdrop of the marina, with many boats in the background. There would also be convenient changing rooms and restrooms, as well as sitting areas for the crew. I immediately contacted the university, hopeful we would be granted the necessary permits and documentation. With the help of the Honors department, Dr. Thomas Smith, Daun Fletcher, and Don McCarty, we were able to successfully secure the USFSP Waterfront for a weekend of filming.

Rigging

For rigging, equipment, and set up, we had the help of Mark Woodward. Mark is a construction manager with over 30 years of experience. He helped with the set up and take down of the "Suspendulum" rig, and the construction and repair of equipment.

For rigging the equipment for the final show, we used a new product specifically designed for aerial dancing called the "Suspendulum". The Suspendulum is a steel structure set up like a tripod, in the shape of a tetrahedron. According to the manufacturer's website, the tetrahedron is "the strongest structure in our known universe". (BeBe, "The Suspendulum by ZenSwing.") The Suspendulum's design can hold between 2200 and 3000 lbs as shown on the figure below.



The Suspendulum™ by Zen Swing®

This rig has a maximum height of 20 feet. For the final performance, we kept the rig at full height to showcase all skills. The Suspendulum can be set up by one or two people, and only takes approximately fifteen minutes. Below is the rig set up at USFSP's waterfront at maximum height.



Rig set up at USFSP's Waterfront

The apparatus is clipped to the very top at the "Apex" through a steel loop with a carabiner and swivel. The rigging of a typical aerial dance apparatus would include a swivel connecting two carabiners with one carabiner attached to the rig, and the other carabiner attached to the apparatus. Carabiners are necessary, and the swivel is optional. The swivel allows the apparatus to spin in order for the performer to be viewed from all angles. For safety, all equipment needs to be steel, and the carabiners need to have a locking component. Pictured below are the typical rigging components for an aerial silk.



From top to bottom: Carabiner, swivel, carabiner, figure-eight rescue.
The top carabiner is attached to the rig, while the figure-eight rescue holds the silk.

Final Performance

The final performance was set for April 7th and 8th, 2012. The week prior included two rehearsal days practicing on the rig at full height. I set two performance days to accommodate each performer's schedule. The performers all ended up being able to attend the filming on Saturday, so we completed the filming in one day. The shoot lasted twelve hours, from sun up to sun down. It was a very long day of performing, filming, and set-up, but worth the hard work.

Some performers brought and donated their equipment for use during the final performance. Kelley Towne's sea-blue aerial silks were used by multiple performers. Beth Brier, Artistic Director at BB's Dance and Circus Arts, had Chelsea Meredith perform on the studio's aerial sling. Jessica Watson also included her dance lyra.

I considered the final performance outcome a success. Simply completing the show was a major accomplishment. In addition, the routines, music, and costumes were well planned, creative, and innovative. The new material introduced flowed well into the performance as a whole. The sections below include greater detail of the final performance day.

Act Lineup

Listed below in order of appearance are the featured acts, performers, and songs in the final performance video. I put my performances closer to the beginning, as I felt they were a bit more basic compared to the other acts. The acts following are in no particular order in regards to difficulty, rather they are mixed up to give the final show more variety. (For example I did not want four silk acts in a row, so instead we ordered them silk, trapeze, hoop, etc.)

Running Time: 52 minutes, 45 seconds

1. Fast motion rig set up. Song: “Entry of the Gladiators” by Julius Fucik
2. Thesis title screen.
3. Miranda Cooper, Aerial Hoop. Song: “Stereo Love” by Edward Maya and Vika Jigulina
4. Kelley Towne, Aerial Silks: “Dream Within a Dream” by The Glitch Mob
5. Chelsea Meredith, Single-Point Trapeze. Song: “La Del Ruso” by Gotan Project
6. Blair Woodward and Miranda Cooper, Aerial Hoop-Silk duet. Song: “Desert Rain” by Edward Maya and Vika Jigulina
7. Blair Woodward, Tap Dancing and Aerial Hoop. Song: “Mambo No. 5” by Lou Bega
8. Ashley Jacobson, Aerial Silks. Song: “Breathing Underwater” by Brit and the Calvary
9. Chelsea Meredith, Aerial Sling. Song: “Les Ailes du Borak” by Anouar Brahem
10. Jessica Watson, Juggling, POI Spinning, and Aerial Hoop. Song: “Revival” by Beats Antique
11. Katie Hasson, Aerial Silks. Song: “Underwater” by Bassnectar
12. Julia Mirowski, Aerial Hoop. Song: “In the Air” by Morgan Page
13. Chelsea Meredith, Aerial Silks. Song: “Saudade” by Chinese Man
14. Marina Petrano, Contortion and Single Point Trapeze. Song: “Under the Sea” From the Little Mermaid Soundtrack
15. Julia Mirowski, Astral Hooping and Aerial Hoop. Song: “Antidote” by Swedish House Mafia
16. Panorama shot of performance venue: USF- Saint Petersburg.
17. Credits and special thanks.

New and Uncommon Material

The final performance showcased many new and innovative aerial dance creations. The performers, crew, and designers contributed many unique aerial dance tricks, techniques, styles, and apparatus uses. Listed below are the new and uncommon findings which resulted in the final performance. All new material is categorized into the sub-sections of “Beach Venue”, “Set Decoration”, “Tricks”, “Apparatuses”, and “Styles”.

Beach Venue

An aerial dance performance at a waterfront venue is very uncommon. This may be due to the fact that free-standing, portable aerial rigs have only recently entered the market. Also, based on my experience in trying to get approval to perform at the beach, many aerialists may have difficulties being allowed to perform on publicly owned property. More common venues include theaters, rigging from trees, backyard rigging systems, outdoor stages, and businesses rigging indoors from the ceiling.

Set decoration



In most aerial performances with a free-standing rig, the rig is not decorated with a theme. Linda Woodward decorated the Suspendulum rig with nautical netting. The netting was to emphasize the “Under the Sea” feel, as if we were sea creatures being caught by the fishing net. Linda decorated the net with buoys, seahorses, starfish, shells, a lobster, and various fish.

An additional set decoration idea included the safety mat beneath the performers. Staying within the beach theme, we covered the mat with a beach sheet with designs of



sand and shells. The sheet used is very similar to the one pictured to the left. However, I am guessing decoration of the safety mats is uncommon because it is difficult for the audience to see the mat. As shown in the final video, the decoration of the mat is hard to see.

The use of bubbles was a set-decoration idea to give the performance an “Under the Sea” feel. Originally, we planned to blow the bubbles close to the aerialist to make it appear as though they were underwater. Linda Woodward, in charge of set decoration, came up with the idea to instead blow the bubbles in front of the camera lens. This would ensure the bubbles would actually show up on film, as well as keeping the bubbles from harming the performer. Leigha Woodward also helped with the bubble-blowing during filming.

Tricks



Ashley Jacobson created a new descent, or way to exit the aerial silks. This new descent begins in the “Cat’s Cradle” position, which is a trick where the aerialist is sitting on the silks, held by a knot below them. To descend from the silks, the performer slowly gives the fabrics slack until they gradually lower the aerialist to the ground. Ashley performed this new descent many times at the training facilities, but unfortunately was unable to showcase this trick at the final performance due to windy conditions. Though the elements were against her, Ashley still created a very graceful, elegant way to exit the aerial silks.



In my aerial hoop routine, I created a new trick from the “back contortion” pose. While in this pose, I slowly took my left leg off the bar and extended it down. Though I thought I developed this trick originally, Chelsea Meredith

confirmed that though it is very uncommon, it has been done before but not officially taught or named.



The first trick in my aerial hoop-silk routine is a new variation of the trick “Cocoon”. “Cocoon” is where the performer is wrapped up in the silks, giving the impression of being in a cocoon. This trick is normally done in a single-footlock. Instead, I began this trick by splitting the two fabrics and making a footlock on only one of the pieces of fabric. With the free flowing half of the silk, I wrapped it around me to give the appearance of a cocoon. I altered this

trick because the next series of tricks performed are done so with the fabrics split, and only one foot in the footlock. The variation to “Cocoon” made this an easier transition from the initial starting pose to the next tricks. For “Hooked knee layback”, “Starfish”, and “Arrow”, I created new transitions to make the tricks more dramatic. These tricks are typically done in a slow, graceful fashion. Instead, I created “mini-drops” by falling into the trick positions. This gives the illusion of almost falling, but in reality being in control of the trick and ending in the graceful pose. To make the “Arrow” mini-drop safer when falling, I used a wrist lock to safely keep me in place instead of utilizing grip strength alone.



Chelsea Meredith successfully transferred a difficult trick performed on the trapeze to the aerial silks. This trick is a pose using the body's core strength to move from one side of the apparatus to the other.

Apparatuses



Jessica Watson owns her own trapeze and aerial hoop hybrid. This piece of equipment is known as the “dance lyra”. The dance lyra has multiple uses. One can use the top in similar ways to the single-point trapeze, while still using the bottom as an aerial hoop. This apparatus is manufactured, but is a very uncommon piece of equipment seen in performances.



Blair Woodward and I performed a duet on the aerial hoop-silk apparatus. This is a normally rigged aerial hoop with a silk rigged to the bottom of the hoop. The apparatus itself has been created before. However, there has yet to be a duet with an aerialist performing on the hoop and silk simultaneously. Typically, a performer uses the silk to climb up to the hoop for a hoop performance. Blair focused mainly on elegant arm movements while holding on with at least one hand at all times, and I performed intermediate tricks and poses closer to the ground.

Styles



One of the main goals for this thesis was to incorporate fast paced choreography in a safe manner, set to a modern popular song. Aerial dance is typically performed in a slow, graceful fashion, pausing for each trick. Blair Woodward added her own spin to the aerial hoop act, incorporating fast paced tap dancing, and swing dance styles to the modern song “Mambo No. 5” by Lou Bega. According to Blair, “For my piece I wanted to incorporate a form of dance I had never seen used in aerial performance, tap. I also wanted the tricks to complement the music, with rhythm and posing to go with the beat. Most aerial is done slowly and fluidly and I like to pick up the beat and keep the audience on their toes!”



One of Julia Mirowski’s many talents is performing with light up astral/LED hoola hoops. Julia wanted to fuse her astral hoop skills with her aerial hoop act. She successfully performed a combination of light up hoola-hooping with an aerial dance routine done at night. One of the challenges was to keep the hoola hoop spinning while on the apparatus, and not allow it to fall off.

As aerial dance is usually performed in a graceful fashion with little clowning around, Marina Petrano wanted to make her performance a bit more lively. Marina has much experience performing as expressive characters, including playing a zombie for Howl-O-Scream at Busch Gardens, Tampa Bay. Marina has a particular talent for



incorporating comical characters into her routine. For her act, she performed as a combination of sea creature, crab, and lobster on the single-point trapeze. She was able to successfully pull off multiple tricks while keeping in character.



Jessica Watson choreographed her own juggling and POI spinning intro before performing on the dance lyra. POI spinning is a type of performance art with light up LED globes which make colorful patterns when spun. With aerial dance and the circus arts being so closely linked, one would assume juggling would be a common performance element in aerial dance. However, this is not the case.

Jessica's juggling and POI spinning intro was the first I had seen performed before entering the apparatus.

Obstacles and Successes

As a whole, I would consider this project a success, with many expected and unexpected obstacles along the way.

After deciding on the topic of "Aerial Dance" for the thesis, the initial obstacle was putting together a committee of faculty members to guide in the thesis process. After all, I did not know of any circus professors at USF. Thinking a bit deeper, I dissected the other elements of aerial artistry. Dance, for one, is one of the most emphasized skills of aerial performance. In addition, shows like Cirque du Soleil have a large theatre element to each performance. I knew my best option would be to contact faculty at the College of

Arts at USF in Tampa. I was a bit worried that no faculty members would be interested in this project, due to liability, as well as aerial dance not being very well known. Since USF in Tampa was not my home campus, I was not familiar with any dance professors, much less any professor at that location. Essentially, I had to do “cold calling” to present my idea, and ask the faculty members to be apart of this thesis. I was very lucky to find multiple professors who wanted to help with this project. I would consider the thesis committee a huge success. I could not have asked for a better group to work with. The thesis director is Paula Nuñez, a ballet professor with the USF Dance Department. Having a ballet professor as a director is great for aerial dance. It was very helpful to be able to view one of Paula’s ballet classes for tips to transfer to aerial dance. The second reader for this project is Dora Arreola, a theatre and movement professor with the USF Theatre Department. Theatre is essential in a cirque-style show, often incorporating storylines and characters into the performances. Dora gave useful advice at our first meeting, encouraging me to make plans and reservations early, treat the performers well, and work on the project daily.

One of the biggest obstacles was securing a location for the final performance. It is not easy to get approval to hang midair whilst doing various tricks and poses, even if you explain that everyone is trained properly execution and safety. They usually stop listening before you get to the part about safety training and spotters. To anyone unfamiliar with the art, it just screams “liability”. I was incredibly lucky to have an honors program that believed in this project, and helped in securing the location for the final performance.

There were a few challenges while creating the routines. For one, as an aerial

dance student it was hard to decipher what is new, uncommon, or already in use. For this aspect, I had to use my best judgment and research skills to determine the best answer to this question. Another obstacle was finding “Under the Sea” themed songs that fit my routines. In the end, I chose songs with alternative themes as they fit very well with my performances.

I consider the new material introduced a great success. I did not expect such a vast array of creative work in the final performance. The performers helped in creating new tricks, styles, techniques, and apparatus uses, while the crew introduced new set decoration ideas. Coupled with the creative costumes, makeup, music, and routines, this performance turned into a successful production of innovative aerial dance ideas.

During the performance, there were a few elements of nature to overcome. We initially thought the sand would be a hassle, going upside-down and getting in the eyes of the performers. Surprisingly the sand was not a problem. This was probably because there were so many small bushes full of spurs, that the sand was stuck in place. This brings me to my second point: SPURS. The sand spurs were without a doubt the most painful element of nature to overcome. Unbeknownst to us, the patch of beach on the waterfront was covered in them. All of the performers had to be very careful while walking, making sure not to walk barefoot. The sand spurs would get stuck in the aerial silks, which is very bad and could potentially be very painful for the performer. Before each routine, we would painstakingly remove each spur from the bottom of the silks. Luckily, there were no major sand spur accidents. The wind was also an obstacle to overcome. The wind would blow the aerial silks very hard, making it difficult for the performer to transition into some tricks. Watching the video, I could tell the performers

were no amateurs. They maneuvered the wind element effortlessly, with the audience barely noticing anything out of the ordinary. The last element was the heat. We were very lucky to have a cooler than normal day for the final performance. However, while performing in direct sunlight it was still very hot for some performers.

A very real challenge to this project was organization and time. Having to juggle school, full time work, training, a thesis project, and producing a show proved difficult at times. Through this process, I learned that producing a show is a full-time job in itself. In the end, having such a great experience and seeing the work come together made all of the hard times truly worth it.

One of the most exciting moments during this thesis was when USFSP's student newspaper, The Crow's Nest, caught wind of the project. I had never been in the paper before, and never thought this project would turn into a headline. Tara McCarty and Lenay Ruhl conducted an interview, and Margaret Spears took photos during an aerial silk class. An article on this thesis project landed the front page of the Crow's Nest for the March 26, 2012 issue. That was something I will never forget.

Overall, this project took an incredible amount of hard work to successfully put together. However, this has been by far the most enjoyable project I have ever undertaken. All of us- the performers, riggers, photographers, costume and makeup artists, set designers, trainers, instructors, music mixers, university coordinators, directors, and readers really went the extra mile to create an innovative, captivating, and fun performance. And we were lucky enough to have had a great time while doing so. If I could do this one hundred times over, I would. This project is something I will never forget.

Conclusion

This aerial dance performance and production successfully introduced new tricks, techniques, styles, and apparatus uses in the final performance. We successfully secured an uncommon venue, created new variations of tricks, transferred techniques from one apparatus to another, designed unique set decorations, invented new apparatus uses, and included uncommon styles and skills in the performance. We managed to create the safest, highest quality of a performance while keeping within a limited budget. Along with the creative costumes, makeup, music, and routines, this performance turned into a successful production of innovative aerial dance ideas “Under the Sea”. This performance made a small addition to the world of aerial dance, and shows the potential for even larger contributions to the aerial arts as a whole.

Special Thanks

I would like to give a very special thanks to everyone who helped and volunteered their time in the process of making this show come to life. I sincerely could not have done it without you. This has been the most fun and rewarding project of my college career, and I have you all to thank.

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Professor Dora Arreola, Theatre and Movement

Mark Woodward, Rigging and equipment

Arnold Caylakyan, Camera & Editor

Lynne Peterson, Costuming

Linda Woodward, Set decorations

Leigha Woodward, Bubble Blower Extraordinaire

Beth Brier, BB's Dance and Circus Arts

Kyle Woodward, Personal training

Raven Morningstar, Makeup and music

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Ashley Jacobson

Chelsea Meredith

Katie Hasson

Kelley Towne

Blair Woodward

Julia Mirowski

Marina Petrano

Training Facilities:

BB's Dance and Circus Arts

Bayside Gymnastics

John's Gold Medal Gymnastics

Crow's Nest:

Tara McCarty, Journalist

Lenay Ruhl, Journalist

Margaret Spears, Photographer

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