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How Dance Competitions Can Affect
the Artistic Vision and Creation of a Choreographer's Work

Introduction

Picture this: you are walking through the halls of a school at six a.m. on a Saturday. The floor is covered with feathers and glitter. The cafeteria has an aroma of hairspray. Against the walls are girls and boys in glamourized costumes holding their splits. One hears the voices of teachers yelling to lengthen knees and point toes. The contrast of proud parents and stage moms are heard throughout the building. Words of encouragement bounce off the words of threats. Outside are U-Haul trucks and fathers putting large pieces of props together in freezing temperatures. The sound of laughter, tears, cheering, and music are heard for the next forty-eight hours with an emcee announcing entry numbers like it is an auction. Welcome to the world of competitive dance.

Dance competitions have become the forefront of the pursuit of dance education and creation. Many inspiring choreographers and instructors showcase their choreography through this platform. Although it is the dancer that the attention is on during a dance competition, the pressure, the execution, and the overall appearance of a routine is solely based on the choreographer and their decisions. Competitive dance has become widely received over the last

two decades and while there is an increasing popularity in the competitive circuit due to media, the pressure to deliver choreography that can win has increased as well. This paper will explore and demonstrate that the lack of freedom through the pressure and limitations placed upon a choreographer's work in competitive dance is the significant factor in a lack of choreographic creativity in competitive dance.

According to Britannia, the term choreography is “the art of creating and dances” (Britannia). The word choreography comes from the Greeks. It means for “dance” and for “write.” In the 17th and 18th centuries, it meant the written record of dances. In the 19th and 20th centuries, however, the meaning shifted, inaccurately but universally, while the written record came to be known as dance notation. Dance itself was used for different purposes. It was for religious ceremonies, rituals, wars, royalty and for entertainment. Competitive dance for awards and recognition debuted in the early 1970s. Dance competitions were long weekends of many dance routines that were by a panel of judges. Awards would be given on the final day of competition and would only award first, second and third place in each category.

When comparing today’s standards with those of the past, Courtney Ortiz of “Making the Impact” podcast states: “Back in the good old days, the only thing separating dancers were ages and style. Levels are a relatively recent phenomenon in the dance competition world”. Many dancers who have aged out of the competition world cannot recall competing in levels. This was something new that only began in the early 2000’s. This lessens the competition but provides more opportunities to win. Owner and director of Queen City Dance, Leah Speck, reflects on the time she was a competitive dancer. “There was an award ceremony on the last day and you had to sit through all two hundred something numbers to find out what you won or even if you won.

It is not like today where everyone gets a trophy”. Competitive dance has changed and evolved over the years thanks to an increase in exposure through the media.

Competitive Dance through Media

The popularity of competitions grew through the help of social media and reality TV. In the early 2000s, choreographer and dancer Wade Robson introduced a competitive dance show, *The Wade Robson Dance Project* to MTV. With reality competition shows on the rise due to the success of American Idol, network television began to introduce the same concept of a competitive show such as *America's Best Dance Crew*, *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing with the Stars*. This opened America to the world of competitive dance from the comfort of their home. Each contestant eager to hear the judges' feedback to see if they would move on to the next round. It not only opened doors to those who may not have seen dance in this light before, but it opened the minds of choreographers of what else is out there to expose their choreography.

The successful Lifetime show, *Dance Moms* was the first-time viewers could watch the world of dance competitions through a studio eye. Based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the show followed studio owner Abby Lee Miller, six of her prime competition dancers and their moms. Each week, they attended a different competition in a different city giving viewers at home an insight into the “real world” of dance competitions. Every episode would start in the studio in rehearsals documenting choreography sessions and ending with the award ceremony at the final day of competition. This new exposure pushed the stars of the show and the brand of the Abby Lee Dance Company to exceptional stardom which gave an increase of competitive dance across the nation.

“News outlets and magazine articles have reported this phenomenon. An article on

CNN online profiled Chris John Batters, a ballroom dance teacher in Atlanta, about his observation of increased interest in dance since dance reality shows debuted. I have been at this studio for eight years, and I would say that there has been a steady increase and an influx of people wanting to learn how to dance. People see dance on TV, and they see people learning to dance... and they think, 'OK this is something I could learn to do' (Respers, 2009). In 2007, *Dance Magazine* rated and ranked nine dances reality shows set to air that year. Whether the programs received a good or bad rating, the publication credited this influx in "making dance an exciting and accessible art for both dance and non-dance audiences" (Macel, 2008).

In other words, the burst of televised dance shows influence viewers and the way they see dance. The hunger to be on shows such as this whether in being the dancer or the choreographer set the bar higher for the competitive platform. There was an obvious increase as he stated in the growth of dance education because of what was being shown. Like *Dance Moms*, competitive dance programs show behind the scenes of the process of the performance. This has been a private concept before the media exposed it. With those barriers breaking down, the reality of what it takes to obtain a desired result or outcome of a choreographer's creation has put a significant pressure to not only deliver but to win because the world is now officially watching.

Many competitions give recognition to selected choreographers during the weekend event in the form of a choreography award. *StarQuest* has many opportunities for choreographers through certain unique awards. The Odyssey Award is given to one choreographer for the most memorable dance of the entire competition. The Viral Video of the Year award is given to a dance that is selected for an opportunity to be voted on by the public to be sent to the Industry Dance Awards. The Industry Dance Awards is a night to recognize the best dancers and choreographers in the industry. With award opportunities like these being presented at

competition, it steps up the game not only for the dancers but for the choreographers. According to Christina Fuschetto, a professional dancer, choreographer and competition judge, dance competitions give dancers the confidence to perform so when they are ready to take on the audition scene they are already prepared to be judged.

With every positive there is a negative so for every pro there is a con. The most consistent downside to competitive dance is money. Between entry fees, transportation, possible hotel stays and costumes, the cost of a competition weekend can be outrageous. Both Christina Fuschetto and Leah Speck agreed of how the cost of competitions can take away from the importance of improving a dancer which can be a frustrating perspective for a choreographer. Parents and students could pay two hundred dollars for a costume but not have money to take extra private lessons to work on the routine that they are competing in. How does that make sense? Leah Speck brings up the frustration of the everyone wins a trophy mentality that has entered the competitive world over the past twenty years. From a choreographer's standpoint, how can we justify that a student did not perform the routine correctly or the best if they are returning home with a trophy? According to an anonymous survey that was conducted on SurveyMonkey, when asked about some cons of competitive dance, responses came to a similar conclusion of how competitive dance puts too much emphasis on winning and loses the artistry of dance.

Guidelines for Competitive Dance

For the world of competitive dance, there are different competitions for different styles. As of 2007, there were more than one hundred and fifty dance competitions operating in the United States and Canada. Since there is no universal guideline or judging criteria, every competition has their own making it difficult for studios, instructors, and choreographers to prepare for their season. Competition based studios will attend regional competition events through January to May unless they compete Nationals which go into June and July. These competitions have set guidelines that studio owners and choreographers must follow. If these guidelines are not followed, it causes risk of point deduction or disqualification. The first factor to look at is the time limits per routine. KAR Dance has time limits set for every type of dance. A solo performed by one person has a time limit of two minutes and forty-five seconds. A duet or trio has a time limit of two minutes and forty-five seconds. Small groups with four to nine dancers have a time limit of three minutes. Large groups and lines have four minutes. Productions have a time limit of eight minutes. See Figure 1 for KAR Dance time limit guidelines.

PERFORMANCE TIME LIMITS

Solos and Duets/Trios have a 2:45 minute performance time limit.

Small Groups have a 3:00 minute performance time limit.

Large Groups & Lines have a 4:00 minute performance time limit.

Super Lines have a 5:00 minute performance time limit.

Productions have an 8:00 minute performance time limit.

Extended performance time is available (up to 1:00 minute for a fee of \$3.00 per performer) for Small Groups, Large Groups, Lines, Super Lines and Productions. Solos, Duets and Trios are not permitted extended performance time.

Dancers are expected to perform in the order of the printed program, unless granted special permission by the Competition Director or pre-approved by the KAR Customer Care Specialists prior to the competition. Unauthorized delay of the performance schedule may result in a point deduction and/or disqualification. Dances not performing within 10 acts after their scheduled performance time may not be eligible for Overall High Point awards, unless pre-approved by the Competition Director or the KAR Customer Care Specialists. Incompleted acts may result in point deductions or be scored lower by the judging panel. An act that re-performs may only be re-adjudicated if during the original performance, the technical error was committed on KAR's behalf. If the original performance is not completed, the act will receive an automatic First Place award and is ineligible for High Point awards.

A tentative schedule with the performance time of each act will be available via the online [Studio Center](#) one week prior to the competition. Contestants in the first 10 scheduled acts should arrive ready to perform in full costume, hair and make-up. All other competing dancers must be ready to perform at least one hour prior to their scheduled performance time. ***If the competition is running ahead of schedule, dancers are expected to perform in the order of the program and when called upon backstage.*

SET-UP TIME LIMITS

Solos, Duets, Trios, Small Groups and Large Groups are expected to set-up props in 1:00 minute and remove props in 1:00 minute (2:00 minutes cumulative).

Lines are expected to set-up props in 1:30 minutes and remove props in 1:30 minutes (3:00 minutes cumulative).

Super Lines are expected to set-up props in 2:00 minutes and remove props in 2:00 minutes (4:00 minutes cumulative).

(Figure 1)

Tap, Jazz, Ballet, Pointe, Acro, Lyrical, Contemporary, Hip Hop, Musical Theater, Voice, Song & Dance and Open are all potential categories to participate in. When deciding a style, it is important to consider technical elements and the strength of the dancers in a genre. Every style has their own syllabus with technique that may contradict with an opposing category of dance. For example, Lyrical and Contemporary are extremely similar and in fact where most choreographers struggle in choosing which category for their dance to be submitted because of how similar they are. Both contain strong elements of a Ballet and/or Jazz syllabus. However, contemporary leans more towards a Modern or even Hip-Hop fusion whereas Lyrical strives on the appeal of a free-flowing Ballet look, but when one watches the styles on stage, they practically look identical. Musical Theater and Song & Dance are extremely similar. The only exception is one is singing live vs. lip syncing. The Open category gives total freedom to choreographers to do whatever style in whatever way they choose without a limit on certain

elements such as number of tumbling skills in a routine. So, with this being a category, is there a point to competitions offering guidelines to what they expect of their styles if there is an option for complete freedom? Why do choreographers and studio owners not use that category for artistic freedom in the competition circuit? It is a lot to think about during the process of creating.

After deciding what style of dance and what category to place it in, it is time to decide levels. Levels determine the scale of difficulty in which the routine is considered. The levels are based on age and how many hours one trains a week. There are primarily three levels at most competitions: novice, intermediate and advanced. Novice is the recreational or beginner level. Advanced is the most elite at the competitions showcasing the best of the best. Intermediate is a gray area at competitions as it is a middle ground between the other two levels. Most studios utilize the intermediate level as “seeking to gain the system for a win”. (Maze) The level impacts the choreography because the score sheets reflect two factors: technique and artistry. IDA judge Amy Maze points out how the structure of competitions and levels affect the artistry for choreographers. She states, “I think people will structure their choreography around it and feel like they do not have much artistic freedom because they are trying to structure it to what the competition says is allowed”. When taking the guidelines into consideration when creating High school dance teams have a different set of guidelines. Dance is taken from the regulations of cheer, so the expectations are different. Dances are only permitted to perform no more than two minutes and fifteen seconds. It is illegal to use props during a performance unless it is something, they are holding to dance with such as pom-poms. There are limited dance categories to participate in. There is jazz, hip hop, pom, and kick line. Jazz can be considered as lyrical, contemporary, or jazz. In hip hop, the judges encourage the use of vocals throughout

performances. Every school is provided with a list of tricks that are allowed and not allowed. Acrobatic tricks cannot be forward or backward over the head without assistance from a team member. Lifts are only allowed if the dancer's feet do not go above the spotter's head. (casciac.org). Formations and technique are strong factors in the judges scoring. There are restrictions on music choices and costumes.

To the Window to The Wall: West Coast vs. East Coast

Competitions and choreography styles vary from coast to coast. The West coast is considered the commercial industry where advertisement, music videos and large productions are occurring. According to Dance Magazine, the choreographic trend for the west is "B-boying, breaking, popping and locking are hugely trendy with Los Angeles choreographers. Most Hollywood B-boys and B-girls can rock a head spin and a triple pirouette with equal prowess. As a result, choreographers in L.A. demand that all dancers be incredibly versatile. "It's important to have a foundation of a lot of different styles," says Balen. "So many of the styles are being mixed and meshed, and often the choreographer will make a fusion of his or her own. They are inventing new ways to move, and lines are being blurred." (Dance Magazine) When speaking to IDA judge Christina Fuschetto, she stated that west coast dances at competition appear more elegant and take the viewer on a journey. However, most would argue that the west coast is a whole different game. Six to eight-year old dancers are holding quadruple pirouettes and double leg hold turns. That may be considered as a beginner level.

Now looking at the opposite side of the country, the east coast has a more moderate tone when it comes to choreography. According to *Dance Magazine*, "One of the most exciting trends is humor. Dance can take itself seriously, and in our post-9/11 environment, audiences (and

dancers) can watch only so much onstage suffering. Laurie Taylor, a Nicholas Leichter Dance member, says, “Dancers are now interested in work that combines technical prowess with athleticism and, most of all, fun.” Broadway spotlights specific dance styles like salsa in *In the Heights* and ballroom in *Burn the Floor*. NYC’s fusion trend continues attracting choreographers from across the globe, notably through Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet’s collaborations, and Brooklyn Academy of Music and City Center’s Fall for Dance annual global lineups. The sheer volume of artists living closely on the island creates an incubator for small companies, projects, and startup groups.” (Dance Magazine) IDA judge Christina Fuschetto spoke on the east coast dances for competition. As being a competitive dancer herself, she sees east coast dancing as more of a chance for presentation and overall appeal. It could come from the east coast Broadway inspiring choreographers to think big with their projects or the old-time argument of technique vs tricks.

Yes or No? - Technique vs. Tricks

Technique was once mentioned as the science of dance. Science is based on facts. Facts are based on right and wrong. Therefore, technique is either right or wrong. Every style of dance has its own form of technique providing a foundation to execute movement in a controlled and safe manner. It can be overlooked when choreographing due to lack of training within a certain genre. As stated in the podcast Making the Impact, the episode “Why Technique Will Never Go out of Style”, IDA judge Erica mentions how learning technique is different from learning choreography. Technique she states is like building a house. There needs to be a foundation set to build up. In the case of choreography, advanced skills cannot be placed on dancers if the foundation has not been set yet. When choreographing for competitions, technique is the highest percentage of the score. Queen City’s Leah Speck believes in creating pieces that show the talent

and the technique of a dancer. Precise lines and a clean presentation are necessary. Many instructors agree that competition dance should showcase strong elements of technique.

Tricks have become a part of the competition scene with the increase in Acro and tumbling. Shows such as World of Dance have showcased dancers who can contort their bodies to showcase flexibility and tumbling passes to show strength. Prior to television, Cirque Soul first fused tricks and dance. It really brought the idea of balancing and partnering work like lifts or throws to be executed in the air. Varsity Dance and NDA (National Dance Association) that represent high school and college dance teams take their tricks and stunt work from the perspectives of cheer. The only downside to tricks in a high school or college team setting is the restrictions due to performing without a mat unlike cheer. Choreographers for teams such as those must re-adjust “wow factors” to floor work for tricks to avoid penalties. Derek Piquette who is affiliated with Acrobatic Arts states how tricks are “catchier” to the viewer's eye because of the T.V recognition. “It is so publicized”. If tricks are not properly executed, then it will be a distraction for the judges because they can tell from the prep. Teachers and choreographers have this assumption that by putting tricks into a dance will give them bonus point when actually it is more of a risk as it often leads to deductions. Bridging back to the conversation of technique, tricks that a student may be able to execute may not be appropriate for the genre of dance. In a ballet class setting, one would not be working on back handsprings. Although choreography does explore and fuse styles together, if it is not executed across the floor during that specific style of dance's classroom setting, is it correct to put it in a routine? Judges such as Lesley Meador stated that this is important to consider when presenting pieces on stage. She wants to see the technique of a style over the tricks. According to her, tricks should be saved for categories that are more acceptable to it such as Hip Hop, Acro or Open. Keep in mind, competitions have a limit of tricks

for certain style but not a limit of technical elements. There is not one specific right or wrong answer to technique vs tricks.

Here We Go- A 5,6,7,8: The Choreographic Process

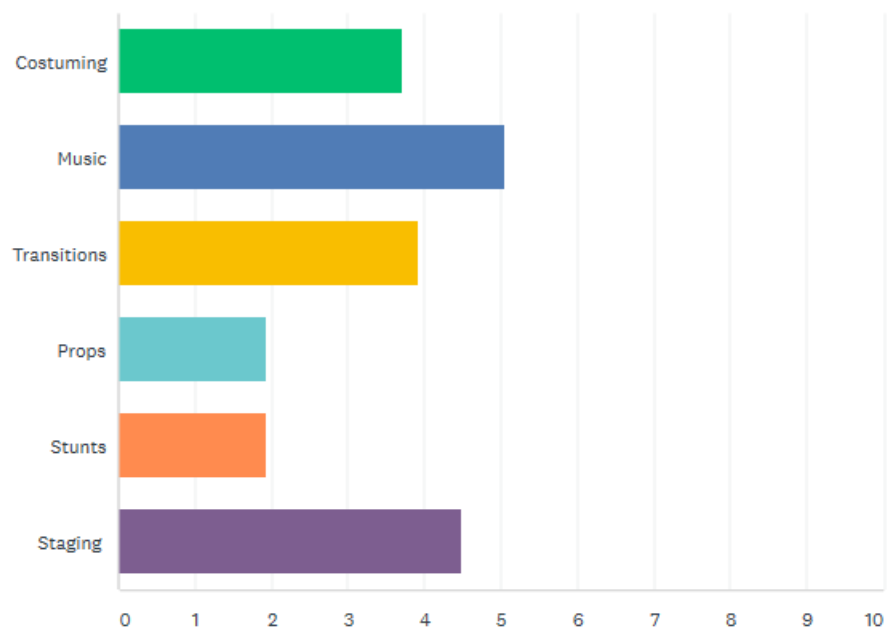
So how is a dance created? The process of choreography is different for every choreographer, but the motive is always the same. The motive is inspiration. Where does the inspiration come from? *Dance Teacher Magazine* interviewed nine choreographers for their February issue in 2009 about how they transform their creative visions into works of art. One choreographer by the name of Otis Sallid mentions how everything inspires them such as cooking, architecture to how someone walks across a floor. It could be a color pallet or a costume choice. However, when interviewing choreographers, most of them have stated music is a key factor of inspiration. Choreographer Molly Long spoke in an interview for *Dance Spirit Magazine* stating: "Late, late at night is when I feel most creative. Even when I was 16 and was just getting started choreographing, I would always go into my bathroom and listen to the music at one in the morning. Maybe it is something about the sleep deprivation that hits at that hour, but that is when the ideas and plans and outlines come" (Dance Spirit, 2018). Steven Butler at TED Talk in Pasadena California about the process of his choreography. He states his inspiration comes from music. "Musicality is the transcription of rhythm, tone, lyrics, textures and melodies of a song through dance... Translates the music into the visual language of dance in a way that directly or indirectly that complements the auditory and emotional qualities of a song."(TED Talk).

Details are important as visual creators. Why is this specific movement being placed there for the artistic purpose of the piece? The process of creating a dance is so much larger and

detail-oriented than what the final product appears on stage. According to SurveyMonkey, the results of what choreographers find most important when creating a dance is music and what they find least important are stunts and props. (See Figure 2)

Rank in order from most important to least important when creating choreography for competition?

Answered: 40 Skipped: 0



(Figure 2)

According to Figure 3, sixty percent of participants believe that music is the most important part when it comes to competition choreography.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	SCORE
Costuming	2.50% 1	25.00% 10	22.50% 9	40.00% 16	10.00% 4	0.00% 0	40	3.70
Music	60.00% 24	12.50% 5	12.50% 5	7.50% 3	2.50% 1	5.00% 2	40	5.05
Transitions	10.00% 4	20.00% 8	32.50% 13	27.50% 11	10.00% 4	0.00% 0	40	3.92
Props	7.50% 3	0.00% 0	2.50% 1	5.00% 2	37.50% 15	47.50% 19	40	1.93
Stunts	2.50% 1	5.00% 2	2.50% 1	7.50% 3	37.50% 15	45.00% 18	40	1.93
Staging	17.50% 7	37.50% 15	27.50% 11	12.50% 5	2.50% 1	2.50% 1	40	4.47

(Figure 3)

According to Figure 2 and Figure 3, staging is the second most important component for choreographing a competition routine. Staging in this sense would be formations, entrances and exits and the choreography itself. This is all essential in the artistry of creating and in fact is a category on the score sheet. Leah Speck mentions when she is choreographing, she finds it important to add movement that the students can execute well as opposed to putting a dance move in that may

Some studios have been known to bring in guest choreographers to set pieces on their students. These choreographers may or may not have worked with these students prior to the rehearsal. Christina Fuschetto who has guest choreographed for an east coast studio in Pleasant Valley, NY, her process of choreography begins with an evaluation of what skills were executed last season, so she knows how to push the students.

Costumes are the final piece to the puzzle of a choreographer's creation. What is the overall appeal or look one wishes to portray? What is the color theme? What is the time period that this piece may take place in? Costumes are meant to be an expression and an extension of a piece, so it is important when choosing a costume that it best reflects the overall image and message that the choreographer is trying to present on stage while still flattering the dancer's appearance. Across the competition circuit, custom costumes have become an important component to ensure that dancers will not have similar looks when competing. These types of costumes can range from \$100 to \$500 depending on the detailing and type of rhinestones used. Costume construction for a piece does not just stop at what is on the torso of a dancer, remember it is the overall look. What will a dancer wear on their feet? Will they have shoes if it is a jazz or contemporary piece? If it is a musical theater piece, should female dancers wear character shoes with a heel even if they may not be strong enough technically to dance safely? The debate of tights or no tights has come up many times during the last few years. The wrong choice in any of these elements can break the storyline of a piece. It would not make sense if the work were about a dance party at a beach and the dancers were in black dresses. Costumes need to highlight the story of a choreographer vision and should be taken into consideration when creating. A costume choice that may fit the story on stage may be pushing boundaries off stage.

Controversy Over Appropriateness in Competitive Dance

With every creation, there have been consequences for the creation. Although competitions are platforms to showcase work, where is the line of appropriate movement when dancing for entertainment. A movement that could look and be acceptable for a sixteen-year-old may not be received the same for a nine-year-old. Choreographer Molly Long was under

question when she sparked controversy for her “Single Ladies” routine for Dance Precisions located in Orange County. The students ranging between nine and twelve performed a technical yet provocative number in costumes representing what was supposed to be burlesque. The media began to question the appropriateness of children’s dance education and choreographer’s choices. Organizations such as Y.G.A.P has connected with competitions like Starquest International to put a stop to routines that are over sexualized. Starquest has listed in their guidelines “Any choreography, music, or costume considered inappropriate for family viewing by our judges will become “adjudicated only”. Performances with thematic elements and “highly charged” issues reflecting a lack of discretion and awareness of the age and nature of a competition audience will be deemed inappropriate by our judges and will become “adjudicated only” (starquestdance.com) Choreographer Kayleen Gray spoke about her opinion on the appropriateness in competition choreography in the 2017 issue of *Dance Informa*.

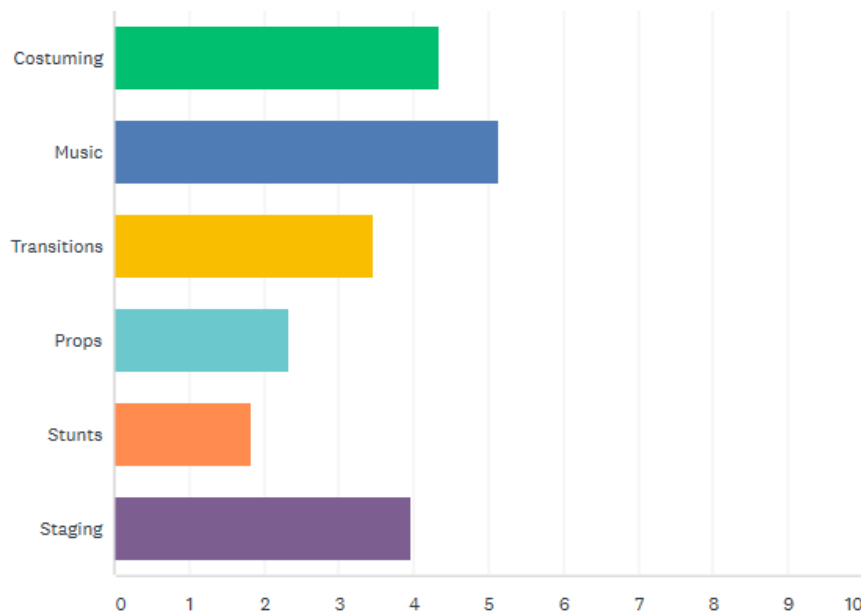
She shares, “My work at the time was teetering on that thin line, and I took complete offense the first time a studio owner complained about a routine of mine at a competition. I was so upset that my ‘freedom of art’ was being deemed inappropriate and chalked it up that the woman was very conservative. I had *zero* education about the short- and long-term effects of music and movement, the cognitive changes that take place, the connection of body image/esteem regarding costuming... I was simply uneducated. And I always say, ‘How can you know what you don’t know?!’” (Dance Informa). As dance competitions are public events, a choreographer must understand that anyone could be watching these children dancing on stage and to remember that they are children. Judges such as Christina Fuschetto have made it a point that dances should not make the audience feel uncomfortable to watch. If there are ratings and sensors on movies and music, then dance should be no different.

Is competitive dance, the only form of performance to showcase choreographer's creations and dancer's skill? For a moment, let us look at other showcasing opportunities to see what freedom or limitations lie in a non-competitive setting. Concert style performances such as recitals are a great opportunity to have work shown. A recital normally occurs at the conclusion of an academic semester or year. This is to showcase what each dancer has worked on throughout their lessons. Competitive dance has a limited time frame in which choreographers can create so the pressure to have a piece look clean with proper executions becomes apparent. Recitals have longer time to prepare and has forgiveness when viewing because of the permission to be a little messier as it is showcasing skills that have been taught and are being worked on.

In comparison to Figure 2 and Figure 3, recital choreography has the same three elements choreographers find to be important when creating a routine. The first being music. The second being staging. The third being costuming.

Rank in order from most important to least important when creating choreography for recital

Answered: 40 Skipped: 0



(Figure 4)

After reviewing the data from Survey Monkey, choreographers have come to a similar conclusion regarding how they choreograph for a concert style setting. With seventy-four responses, most choreographers had similar answers. Some stated how there was freedom in what they created because boundaries such as skill level and difficult movements could be portrayed on stage without the risk of judgement and a loss for the dancers. Competitive dance is an open public event while concert settings require an admission fee. Sarah Olsen, choreographer, and instructor from *In Motion Dance Center*, says that there is more of a push to make recital or concert dances more of a production due to admission fees. If one is paying to see a performance, then there is an expectation to deliver top quality. Unlike competitive dance which the goal is to win, concert dance setting is meant to perform.

After processing the expectations and the knowledge of how a dance should be formatted for competition, it is time to create. Choreography is the art of creating as art is the expression and application of creative skill and imagination. If art is the expression of imagination and imagination is the ability of the mind to be creative, how can there be guidelines and regulations set on creativity? Is it a challenge to have to work within limitations or is it a frustration because of the limitations? Isn't art supposed to be non-judgmental? Isn't art supposed to be freedom of expression? So, what are competitions doing for the creative and artistic process of a choreographer? Is it just hoping for recognition and validation for the work that has been created or is there more to it? With competitions and organizations putting a stop to certain pieces of work that may be inappropriate, does that ruin the choreographer's overall vision of the piece because it is not received by the correct audience? And because it is not received well, how does a choreographer's true artistic vision get attention? All these questions are hard to answer. These questions are needed to be asked because the overall appeal of the competition circuit is where choreographers can be exposed. If a piece does not have an award attached to it, is it worth anything? Is it credible?

A question that needs to be asked to change the conversation is what can be done differently to allow the competition circuit to not limit an artistic vision of a choreographer? The first suggestion is the score sheet. The score sheet is for the dancer where they are judge on five factors: technique, costume, choreography, musicality/stage, and overall appeal. Yes, there is a choreography score. However, it is only out of five possible points. Competitions should be separating a dancer's score from a choreographer's score. It is not the fault of the dancer for the choreography that is set on them so why are they being judged for it? It would step up the game for choreographers to branch out their comfort zone or pay more attention to the detail of their

choreography if they personally are obtaining their own score sheet along with the dancer. Perhaps, competitions should hire a judge that is specifically to give feedback and critiques to the choreographers themselves. A choreographer needs to know how to grow just as much as a dancer. It is unfair to punish a choreographer for the set of dancers they have obtained as much as it is to punish the dancer for a choreographer's choice. Simply, it is best to separate the two in terms of scoring.

Another recommendation to change the way competitions limit choreographers is to have subcategories under a choreography award. Just like award shows, they have categories for every type of film or music. Competitions offer a choreography award, but only one or two. By expanding the category to subcategories, perhaps for each genre, would open doors to more appreciation of a choreographer's work. It would eliminate the limitations to choreograph to what the judges want and push choreographers to create in a new profound way knowing that there is something in it for them as well.

Until that happens, a choreographer needs to understand that presenting their work in this environment is no longer just the art of the creation but simply playing a game. The lack of freedom through the pressure and limitations placed upon a choreographer's work in competitive dance is understood by those wishing to play out their creations in this setting. There is an understanding that the competition circuit is for dancers. It is for studio owners to collect trophies to advertise their wins for new clients. As for the choreographers, it is a platform to practice creating in a box. It is unfortunate for choreographers, especially young ones who are growing up in this setting to ever know the true freedom that comes within choreography for the purpose of art. What one would see on stage at a competition would not be the same as one would see on a tour or film. So, is it a choreographer's job to learn how to choreograph for

different elements? How are they able to do that if they only have this platform to practice with? By choreographing for the competition circuit, it is not only diminishing the opportunity to grow but it is having choreographers second guess their decisions due to the negative response it may receive from an award ceremony. Until the day it all changes, let the games begin.

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