

Research Through Process and Change: Bolero

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Bolero, choreographed by Amy Wilkinson and Paola Sorressa, was initially performed on May 28, 2017 for a Cultural Dance Dialogue final performance in Rome, Italy, and was part of a larger performance in collaboration with Mandala Dance Company. Since then, the piece has been performed in October for high school students in the Chicago suburbs who might be interested in pursuing a degree in dance, and again November 21-24, 2019 at Loyola's Annual Dance Concert, *Ecstatic Earth*. The piece was planned to be performed at the American College Dance Association (ACDA) and at Loyola's undergraduate research symposium, but both of these performances were cancelled due to coronavirus.

Dance is a form of qualitative and experience-based research. Because learning occurs fundamentally through the rehearsal and performance experience, research findings can change as new dancers are added to the rehearsal process, or as the piece is performed in different settings. This process is explained through the practice-based research strategies discussed in "A Manifesto for Performative Research" (Haseman 3). Some of these research strategies include participant research, which is necessary in performance dance because participants are needed both to create the work and to view it, as well as collaborative inquiry and action research, which is also necessary because dance is in itself an action (Haseman 3). Through various adaptations of the work, from adding people, to collaborating, to performing in different concerts, *Bolero* and its rehearsal process changed. In fact, the piece looks drastically different from its initial conception to today's current version, but one could not exist without the other. It is through this practice-based research that *Bolero* was able to evolve.

Bolero was initially created for a performance with Mandala Dance Company in Rome, Italy, as a part of an undergraduate research study abroad course. Loyola dance majors enrolled in the course spent two weeks in Chicago learning and rehearsing material by Amy Wilkinson

before departing for a nine-day stay at Loyola's Rome campus. Half of *Bolero* was created in Chicago, and the other half was being choreographed by Sorressa, artistic director of Mandala Dance Company. The portion of the piece that was choreographed in Chicago dramatically changed during rehearsals with the company in Rome, and Mandala Dance Company's half of the choreography changed as well. When both the Loyola dancers and Mandala company dancers were in the room together, the piece adapted immediately, because all people move uniquely, dance together uniquely, and all bring different ideas or backgrounds to a process. Because of this, dance work will change depending on who is performing it. Throughout its initial process, *Bolero* was based on connection and the different ways people form connections.

Furthermore, *Bolero* was performed by Loyola dancers again in November of 2019 for Loyola's Annual Dance Concert, and a portion of the piece was performed for high school students in October. For this process, a majority of the cast was new to the work and a rehearsal assistant was added to the process. This version of *Bolero*, renamed *Bolero: A Hunger*, looks significantly different than the premiere of the piece, due to new people in the room, new voices, and new events going on in the world to explore through movement. Also, dance and dance performance is adaptable to the point where major changes like these are able to happen, and it can be the same work. For the performance at the High School, the piece had to be shorter than usual, so an excerpt was used. The excerpt was what we as a cast learned first, and that section ended up being the ending of the full work.

After the performance for high school students, we began working on the beginning of the piece. The piece came together almost like a puzzle. Phrases of work were created and tableaus were built, and any holes between each bit of the work was filled in towards the end of this process. The piece was somewhat of a quilt to showcase the process, from the performance

in Rome to present day: the pieces work, but each bit of fabric might not have been made with the other piece in mind, so material for new phrases was made to fit the new theme. In addition to the movement, the concept changed as well. Now, Bolero was about hunger and consumption: the feeling of taking things in, media, food, time, attention, and the idea that no matter how much you take in, it never seems to be enough.

However, it was not just the people in the room who helped to shape the piece. From the beginning of the creative process in 2017, Bolero used chairs as a prop. We experimented and found different ways to use the chairs within the dance. This was somewhat of research in itself: how could we stack the chairs? What different ways could we dance with the chairs? How could we adapt a dance phrase to include the chairs? What different ways can we sit or stand in the chairs? Adding the element of the chairs to rehearsals also changed the piece.

The evolution of *Bolero: A Hunger* was not yet done by the time coronavirus interrupted our course, as it was scheduled to be performed again at ACDA in March and also at Loyola's Undergraduate Research Symposium. For these rehearsals, our cast had changed not as drastically as before, but some cast changes had been made. Two dancers were new to the cast: one was formerly an understudy, and the other was completely new to the work. The piece continued to develop but remained very similar to the 2019 iterations. The entire piece was group-based in that all aspects of the piece relied on the performers involved, whether that be moving around props, moving between dance formations, or partnering for lifts. With new members added to the cast, all of these things began to change in different ways, because there were different people in the room doing them together.

Everyone involved in the work had a different, individual experience. If you were to talk to someone else about the process, they may have similar things to say, but their outlook would most likely be different, because this process and practice-based research can be so individual.

Works Cited

Haseman, Brad (2006) A Manifesto for Performative Research. *Media International Australia* incorporating Culture and Policy, theme issue "Practice-led Research"(no. 118): pp. 98-106.