COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE LIGHTING DESIGNER AND CHOREOGRAPHER

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COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE LIGHTING DESIGNER AND CHOREOGRAPHER

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DEDICATION

For my family and friends

who have accompanied and supported me through

this roller coaster of Graduate School.

Thank you

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Lighting designers and choreographers need to be able to effectively communicate, trust in each other's artistic ability, and be open to each other's creative input in order to successfully collaborate. Collaboration in its simplest form is two or more people working together to create something greater than that which they could have created independently. Within dance performance, that usually entails a choreographer, a dancer or dancers, a lighting designer, a costume designer, and sometimes a composer, musicians, and / or a sound designer exchanging ideas and leveraging each other's imaginations in the creation of a performance piece to be staged and performed for an audience. Through my own experiences and in talking with professional lighting designers and choreographers, I have learned that there are a few key elements essential to successful collaboration: trust, an open mind, and communication. When lighting designers and choreographers collaborate, there are a number of potential obstacles to that communication process. This thesis investigates these obstacles in search of methods to overcome them. Some of the discoveries that will be discussed in this thesis are the advantages of identifying the dancers, the benefits of learning the terminology of each collaborator's discipline, and the value in describing one's process to one's collaborators. These discoveries are invaluable in facilitating the communication between lighting designers and choreographers.

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INTRODUCTION

Lighting designers and choreographers need to be able to effectively communicate, trust in each other's artistic ability, and be open to each other's creative input in order to successfully collaborate. Collaboration in its simplest form is two or more people working together to create something greater than that which they could have created independently. Within dance performance, that usually entails a choreographer, a dancer or dancers, a lighting designer, a costume designer, and sometimes a composer, musicians, and / or a sound designer exchanging ideas and leveraging each other's imaginations in the creation of a performance piece to be staged and performed for an audience. Amid that team of artists, the amount of interaction and escalation of artistic ideas varies with each project and each group of people. Through my own experiences and in talking with professional lighting designers and choreographers, I have learned that there are a few key elements essential to a successful collaboration: trust, an open mind, and communication.

There are a number of ways that trust can be established or built, but in the end, it is generated through communication between artists. An open mind is something that a person either has, or does not have. Therefore, this paper focuses on the communication aspect of collaboration.

When a lighting designer and a choreographer collaborate, they are exchanging ideas about the intent and mood of the dance piece, and how the lighting can augment it. They are also exchanging information about the mechanics of the piece, the number of

dancers, the music, changes in the choreography, etc. For each creative team, there are a number of potential obstacles to this communication process.

I began my explorations into the communication process by reflecting on my previous lighting design experiences. Although I had enjoyed some rewarding collaborations with choreographers, I often found myself in frustrating situations, trying to bridge the communication gap between myself and choreographers. This fueled my desire to investigate the source of these misunderstandings of language, terminology, and process, and compelled me to search for methods to bridge that gap.

While at the University of Texas at Austin, I have had the opportunity to design the lighting for two dance concerts performed by the Department of Theatre and Dance's Dance Repertory Theatre (DRT). For this thesis, I used the lighting design of DRT's *Lived Experience! Dance Reflections Transferred or Layered* as a vehicle to explore the obstacles contributing to this gap. I discovered methods to overcome them through experiential observation and post-experiential interviews with choreographers Mary A. Chase and Julie Nathanielsz, M.F.A. candidates in Dance at the University of Texas at Austin. Both created original works performed in *Lived Experience!*.

In order to validate my discoveries, I compared my findings with the experiences of industry professionals in lighting design, choreography, and education. Some of the discoveries that I will be discussing in this thesis are the advantages of identifying the dancers when talking about the dance, the benefits of learning the terminology of each collaborator's discipline, and the value in describing one's process to one's collaborators.

Chapter 1: Methodology

When I entered the research process for this thesis, I first analyzed the knowledge I had gathered during my previous lighting design experiences. With this information base, I began the design process for Dance Repertory Theatre's (DRT) *Lived Experience! Dance Reflections Transferred or Layered.* I confined my active explorations of communication and its obstacles to the collaboration between myself and two graduate students in dance at the University of Texas at Austin, Mary A. Chase and Julie Nathanielsz. This decision was based on my desire to set controls on the research by isolating the problems that arise between collaborators with a relatively equal level of experience in their respective fields. If there is a disparity in expertise between collaborators, obstacles may be obscured by one person's compensation for the other's inexperience.

As I worked with the choreographers, I kept notes of our discussions and recorded them when possible. Halfway through the process, and again at the conclusion of the performances, I engaged Chase and Nathanielsz in formal interviews. In these interviews I obtained information on their prior experience as choreographers and on their experience working with lighting designers. We also discussed our working relationship, recognizing the communications that were successful, and pinpointing the miscommunications and obstacles we encountered.

I then compared the discoveries I made with the wisdom of professionals at much higher levels of expertise to determine whether or not they encounter similar obstacles in

their collaborations, and if the methods they have employed to overcome these obstacles are similar to the methods I have discovered. The professionals I interviewed include choreographers David Justin, Yacov Sharir, and Holly Williams; portrait artist David Michalek; and lighting designers Jennifer Tipton, Kathy Kaufman, Michelle Habeck, Jeffrey E. Salzberg, and Tony Tucci.

All of the respondents were free to respond or not respond to any of the research questions. They were made very clearly aware that nothing in the interview would remain confidential. All gave me their permission to use their names and the information they provided in the writing of this thesis.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Office of Research and Compliance at the University of Texas at Austin determined this study to be not human subject research and granted their permission to conduct the research without IRB approval.

Biographical Information on Professional Interviewees

David Justin is a professional choreographer and Professor of Dance at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the co-founder and Executive Board President of American Repertory Ensemble, a professional company focused on the collaboration and interplay of live musicians and dancers in performance. Justin began his professional career as a dancer with the Boston Ballet, going on to perform as a Soloist with the San

Francisco Ballet and as a Principal Dancer with Birmingham Royal Ballet. He holds an MA from University of Birmingham, England.[1]

Yacov Sharir, a professional choreographer with forty years of professional dance experience has performed under the direction of Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins, Jose Limon and Anna Sokolow, among others. A dual citizen of the U.S. and Israel, Sharir is the founder of both the American Deaf Dance Company and the Sharir Dance Company, a professional dance company of the University of Texas at Austin, College of Fine Arts. After graduation from the Bezalel Academy of Arts, Professor Sharir studied at the Jerusalem Academy of Music, the Bat-Sheva Dance Company School, the Stuttgart Ballet, and the Ballet Theatre Contemporaine in Paris. He is currently a Professor of Dance at the University of Texas at Austin.[2]

Holly Williams, a professional choreographer and former dancer with the companies of Mark Morris, Laura Dean and Jose Limon, has presented concerts of her own work in Austin and at the Merce Cunningham Studio in New York, and her choreography has been commissioned by companies in California, Texas, Louisiana, Kansas and Oklahoma. In recent years she has created new works for the State Street Ballet of Santa Barbara, the American Ballet Theatre Summer Intensive, the Universidad de Las Americas in Pueblo, Mexico, Contemporary Ballet Dallas, Ballet Austin Senior Young Artists, and Contemporary Dance/Fort Worth. She has a B.A. from Barnard College/Columbia University and an M.F.A. from Texas Woman's University. A

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[1] Jusin, David Biography excerpted from: http://www.americanrepensemble.org/about_us/index.html and http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/tad/people/Faculty_and_Staff/faculty/justin.cfm
[2] Sharir Biography excerpted from:
http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/tad/people/Faculty_and_Staff/faculty/sharir.cfm

professor at the University of Texas at Austin, she currently is Senior Associate Chair and directs the M.F.A./Dance program.[3]

David Michalek is an artist who takes the concept and techniques of portraiture as the starting points for the creation of his works, on both a large and small-scale, in a range of mediums. His focus over the past ten years has been closely tied to his interest in relational aesthetics—specifically using performative and interactive techniques—storytelling, dialogue, movement—relying on the input and responses of others—subjects, collaborators, and audience—as integral to both the creation and the experience of his art. In the summer of 2007, Lincoln Center Festival presented the premier of Michalek's Slow Dancing—a free outdoor, multi-channel video installation of hyper-slow-motion video portraits projected nightly on the facade of the New York State Theater—capturing the beauty of the body in motion by depicting movement of dance icons at 1,000 frames per second. Michalek holds a B.A. in English Literature from University of California, Los Angeles and studied filmmaking at New York University.[4]

Jennifer Tipton, a Tony award winning lighting designer, holds a BA in English from Cornell University. After graduation, Tipton came to New York to study dance. Her interest in lighting began with a course in the subject at the American Dance Festival at Connecticut College. She has been awarded two "Bessies" and a Laurence Olivier Award for lighting dance; her work in that field includes pieces choreographed by Mikhail Baryshnikov, Jiri Kylian, Dana Reitz, Jerome Robbins, Paul Taylor, Twyla Tharp, and

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[3] Williams biography excerpted from:
http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/tad/people/Faculty_and_Staff/faculty/williams.cfm
[4] Michalek biography excerpted from: http://www.slowdancingfilms.com/bio.html

Dan Wagoner, among many others. Her mentor was Tom Skelton, an acclaimed dance and theater lighting designer whose work for Mr. Taylor she was soon executing. In the late 1960's, Ms. Tipton became Mr. Taylor's lighting designer, and has remained so ever since. She is a Professor of Lighting Design at Yale University.[5]

Kathy Kaufman, a professional lighting designer with 25 years of experience lighting dance in New York City is a graduate of New York University and the Lester Polakov Studio and Forum of Stage Design. Kaufmann is the resident lighting designer for Ben Munisteri dance projects and at the Danspace Project. She designs for many companies including David Parker and the Bang Group, Sarah Skaggs, Gina Gibney, Guta Hedwig, National Dance Institute, Jody Oberfelder, Charles Moore Dance Theatre, and Reggie Wilson. She is the recipient of a 2004 Bessie award for her lighting during the 2003–2004 season. Kaufman is a resident lighting designer and production-manages the Hudson River Festival during the summers, working with such musical artists as Aimee Mann, Tierny Sutton, The Neville Brothers and Old '97s.[6]

Michelle Habeck, a professional lighting designer in theatre and dance, is a Professor of Lighting Design at the University of Texas at Austin Her work has been seen at many of the nation's leading regional theatres including The Steppenwolf, The Goodman, The Alliance Theatre Company, Centerstage (Baltimore), The Court Theatre, Writer's Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre Company and many others. Habeck has worked as an associate and assistant lighting designer to Tony award-winning designer, Donald Holder on numerous Broadway projects including *The Boy From Oz, Movin' Out,*

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[5] Tipton Biography excerpted from: http://www.abt.org/education/archive/designers/tipton_j.html
[6] Kaufman Biography excerpted from:http://www.munisteri.com/index2.html

Thoroughly Modern Millie, and *King Hedley II*. Habeck holds an M.F.A. in Lighting and Scenic Design from Northwestern University.[7]

Jeffrey E. Salzberg, a professional lighting designer, has designed the lighting for dance, theater, opera, and puppetry throughout the United States. Among the companies with which he has worked are the Houston, Pittsburgh, and Washington Ballets, for whom he has lit such ballets as *Caliban*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Nutcracker*. He has lit several solos, including *A Shropshire Lad*, featuring former New York City Ballet principal dancer Peter Boal, for Manhattan-based Dance as Ever, and has also lit a new work created on Royal Ballet's Alexandra Ansanelli.[8]

Tony Tucci, a professional lighting designer, has created lighting designs for the current Ballet Austin repertory, Austin Musical Theatre, Washington Ballet, Fort Worth Dallas Ballet, Bruce Wood Dance Company, Dallas Black Dance Theatre, Houston Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre, as well as Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre's *Carmina Burana*, Cynthia Gregory's staging of *Swan Lake*, Fernando Bujones' dances for Ballet de Monterey, and Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*. For the 1996 Summer Olympics, Mr. Tucci designed lighting for the Cultural Olympiad, which showcased six national and international companies. [9]

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[7] Habeck Biography excerpted from:
http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/tad/people/Faculty_and_Staff/faculty/habeck.cfm
[8]Salzberg Biography excerpted from: http://www.jeffsalzberg.com/
[9] Tucci Biography excerpted from: http://www.balletmet.org/Notes/Tucci.html

Chapter 2: Exploring Collaboration in Dance Performance

Collaboration is a broad term with many definitions. To narrow the term and uncover its manifestation in dance performance, I consulted professional choreographers and other artists working in the world of dance. I determined that the essential elements of a successful collaboration are trust, an open mind, and communication. Choreographer David Justin feels that trust is the most important element in a collaborative relationship. In a recent interview, he stated:

> Working in a professional arena, you work with people that you trust. You work with people that you either share a similar esthetic, or that you trust to be able to create your vision…In a professional world, collaboration happens at a very high level of thinking that requires a great amount of trust.[10]

In starting a new collaborative relationship, he often begins to build that trust by researching and looking at the other artist's previous work. When communicating ability through evidence of work, trust of that artistic ability is engendered in one's colleagues. The converse of that, seeing collaborators' work to gain familiarity of their talent, completes that framework of trust.

Visual artist David Michalek also values trust in a collaborative relationship. In addition, he feels strongly that being open to the contributions of the people he is working with can bring great rewards. His answer to my question "What elements are necessary for a successful collaborative relationship?" follows:

> Openness and trust are the two most important things. Again, I think so many of these things are characteristic of ones person. It is just my nature to be curious in other people and what they have to say. To leave my own headspace and try to get into other peoples

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[10] Justin, David, personal interview, March 24, 2008

points of views, angles of interest. If I have a natural gift in regards to how I deal with people, I am open rather than shut down. I'm comfortable and confident in an exchange in most situations and with most people. And because I've been open, I've been rewarded by this surprise, this gift that comes my way.[11]

Allowing imagination to be inspired by the input of colleagues requires an open mind. When there is a free exchange of ideas, the artists are able to build off of each other, creating a richer and more cohesive production.

For communication to occur within the collaborative process, one person must convey his or her ideas to another person. The other person must understand those ideas, and reflect that understanding back to the first person. A mutual language forms as the ideas are merged, and it is within that exchange that collaboration occurs. An attempt to communicate must be made, the other person must be willing to listen, and an understanding of each other must be reached. Choreographer Yacov Sharir also feels that effective communication is necessary to build a collaborative relationship with colleagues:

Communication, absolutely. There's a change in your mind, you assume that it's communicated; it's not. You have to go and say there's a change. Progress: communicate progress. Retreat: communicate retreat. Delay: communicate delay. Change: communicate change, the earlier the better. Information, [a] constant flow of information and conversation.[12]

This constant flow of information facilitates the open exchange of ideas between artists. It is through communicating previous work and current ideas that trust is established in a collaborative relationship. For these reasons I focused my research and analysis on communication.

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[11] Michalek, David, telephone interview March 18, 2008
[12] Sharir, Yacov, personal interview, March 25, 2008

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Methods of Collaboration in Dance

In the professional dance world, choreographers are most often asked to generate work. They become the "creative nexus."[13] It is through them and their work that the lighting designer often becomes a supportive collaborator.

> If it's more of a traditional way of working then the choreographer is the central creative force because he or she bears the responsibility to come up with the concept.[14]

In this model of creation, the choreographer composes a dance and teaches it to dancers, or creates work with dancers. When the choreography is close to completion and the dancers are rehearsed enough for the design team to see what is happening with the piece, the lighting designer attends a rehearsal, observes a run-through, and begins to talk about the staging of the dance with the choreographer and other designers.

In telephone interviews with lighting designers Jennifer Tipton and Kathy Kaufman, I learned they both prefer not to see a dance piece until it is completed. If they see it too early in the choreographer's process, they may be misled as to the final outcome and the earlier version of the work may be too present in their minds when they are trying to design lights for the final product. They also prefer to see the work before talking with the choreographer about it, much in the same way that a theatrical designer would read the script of the play before talking with the director. They want the opportunity to see the piece as the audience would be seeing it without any background knowledge of the choreographer's intent. This allows them to have a clear, unbiased

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[13,] Justin, David, personal interview, March 24, 2008
[14] Sharir, Yacov, personal interview, March 25, 2008

response to the piece. They can then act as a filter, letting the choreographer know what ideas are being clearly communicated, and what ideas may need to be enhanced with the lighting design, or clarified within the choreography. In effect the lighting designer becomes an instrument for the final evolution of the piece, rather than one of the generative artists.

In an alternative method of collaborating, choreographers might work with an entire creative team to create a performance piece, or work closely with a composer, a projection designer, or a lighting designer in creating the piece from the beginning. In this scenario, the lighting designer and choreographer are equal collaborators in generating the performance piece. Of the professionals I interviewed, many of them have had that experience, but only under unusual circumstances. Jennifer Tipton worked closely with choreographer/dancer Dana Reitz, who has been developing and producing work since 1973, and dancer Sara Rudner, an original dancer with Twyla Tharp Dance. Together, over the course of two years, they created *Necessary Weather,* an experimental dance piece that explored the interaction of light and movement. The piece premiered in 1994 at the *Kitchen* in New York, and focused "on the relationship of one dancer to the other and on their awareness of a third partner: the changing light."[15] Kathy Kaufman and New York choreographer Ben Munisteri received a grant in 1999 from Danspace Project to develop a dance piece together from the beginning. It was a new experience for Kathy, but one she would like to repeat. The choreographers and lighting designers I interviewed had all enjoyed the experience of working together to create a piece, and would like to

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[15] Kisselgoff, Anna, *Dance View: A Dance That Literally Lights Up,* New York Times, April 24, 1994

work in a similar way again. The hindrance to this method of collaboration in the world of dance is most often the lack of time and money for such explorations.

As a graduate student in lighting design at the University of Texas at Austin, I am expected to engage in a collaboration process that is somewhere in the middle of these two professional models. Working with the choreographers, from where they are in their process when I am given the design assignment, through the final performance, I have worked on pieces that are completely choreographed when I first see them, and followed pieces throughout their creation from a few movement phrases to the final product. When I am involved earlier in the choreographic process, my contributions may influence some of the choreographer's decisions, but as the generator of the work, the choreographer ultimately has the final decision about the presentation of the piece.

In creating the lighting design for these dance pieces, I am expected to gather research in the form of visual images that reflect the emotional content of the piece and represent the color, quality, and angle of the light I plan on using for the piece. This research is a useful tool in communicating my design ideas to the choreographer. The next step in the process is to create a plan of what the lighting will look like throughout the dance piece. The academic setting of this collaboration process provides the luxury of time and the close proximity of the artists involved. The opportunity to witness the creation of a piece and work with choreographers throughout their creative process benefits me as a lighting designer by allowing me to gain a greater understanding of both the piece I am designing and the choreographic process. This educational experience has given me the tools to work in the faster paced professional arena where the depth of the collaboration process is limited by time and money.

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Obstacles to Collaboration

In the collaboration between a lighting designer and a choreographer, there are a number of potential obstacles to communication. Inherent in dance is the unique challenge of working from movement vocabulary instead of scripted text. Many designers come from a theatrical background and are accustomed to using the text of a play as a basis for communication with the director and design team. Without an understanding of how to talk about movement and choreography, new designers can find it difficult to communicate with choreographers. Choreographers, coming from a dance background, may not have the opportunity to gain an understanding of lighting design before they are in the theatre working with a lighting designer to mount their first piece. Without the character names found in the text of a play, another obstacle in dance is being able to identify and refer to the dancers onstage in discussions with the choreographer.

Movement is the medium choreographers use to create their art. They are fluent in the language of movement. Their years of dance experience give them the ability to quickly understand and memorize choreography as it occurs to music, poetry, or in silence. It is often a challenge for lighting designers without that training to comprehend and remember everything about a dance piece quickly enough to talk about and create a design for it after seeing only a handful of rehearsals.

Education and experience give artists an understanding of each other's creative process. Without that understanding, communication can be obstructed. Information that

is important for one of the collaborators to know may not be communicated if the other person doesn't know it is important to communicate. An understanding of what each other's process entails helps the lighting designer get feedback from the choreographer at a useful time in the tech process and informs the lighting designer of the information the choreographers need for their work.

The discovery of these obstacles and the methods developed to surpass them are the results of my explorations into the theoretical framework of collaboration: trust, open-mindedness, and communication.

Chapter 3: The Lighting Designer's Responsibilities and Tools

Lighting designers' creative process for dance often begins when they first see the choreography of the piece and hear the music. They must interpret the mood, emotion, tempo, and overall quality of the piece, and determine the most effective way to help the dancers communicate that information to the audience using the visual language of light. In communicating dance to an audience, the most important responsibilities of the lighting designer are shaping the dimensionality of the dancer's body and creating the mood of the piece while keeping the dancer visible to the audience. Other factors to take into consideration when designing light for dance are:

- the number of dancers onstage
- how the stage is used by the dance
- the style of movement in the choreography
- any narrative or ideas that the choreographer has based the piece on
- the structure and progression of the piece
- where the audience's attention should be focused throughout the piece

In fulfilling these responsibilities, the primary tools a lighting designer has to work with are:

- angle or direction of the light
- intensity
- color
- quality of beam
- movement
- placement of light cues

The angle of the light is determined by where the light is placed in the space and where it is pointed or focused. The intensity is controlled by a computerized lighting console. The color of the light is altered by placing a color medium in front of the light source, and by altering its intensity. The quality of a beam of light can be described as soft-edged, hard-edged, solid, or broken with a pattern. Movement of light can be created by varying the speed at which lights increase or decrease in intensity or by moving the actual beam of light across the stage. The illusion of movement is created when a dancer moves through a patterned light. "Light cues" are each specific lighting looks that the audience sees on the stage. The placement of cues within the dance is determined by shifts in the mood or intensity, changes in the music or choreography, and changes to the location of the dancers on the stage. Most of the decisions about how to use these tools are made before the creative team enters the performance space to create the light cues.

Lighting designers' primary representation of the design of a piece during the preparation phase is their cue sheet. This essential paperwork is where we keep track of what the light cues will look light, the effect, mood, or emotion we want to convey with the cue, when the cue is called, what is happening onstage when the cue is called, and the speed of the light change. The cue sheet becomes a conversation between the designers and their design ideas, as well as a communication device between the designer, the choreographer or director, and the stage manager.

The final step before entering the theatre for lighting designers is the creation of the light plot. The light plot is a graphic representation of the theatre space diagramming where all of the lighting instruments will be placed, what kind of lighting instruments will be used, the color chosen for each instrument, and channels or control numbers

assigned to each instrument. After the electricians have installed all of the elements represented on the light plot, the lighting designer directs the focus of the lighting instruments. During the focus, the electricians point each light and adjust the edge of its beam according to the specifications of the lighting designer. Once the lights are focused, the dance floor is laid down, and the masking curtains are in place, the stage is ready for the creative team and dancers.

Chapter 4: The Technical Rehearsal

After much preparation and discussion of ideas and concepts for the work, all of the artists meet in the performance space for the technical rehearsal. Depending on the time and money available, the technical rehearsal could last anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour and a half for each dance piece. The rehearsal usually entails creating light cues, setting volume levels for sound, the dancers and choreographers spacing the dance on the stage, and dealing with any other technical issues involved with the performance of the work. The light cues are then timed with the dance and/or music and any other visual elements and the piece is run or performed with all design and technical elements in place.

The dancers have been rehearsing the piece in a rehearsal studio that most likely does not have the same dimensions as the stage or performance area. The technical rehearsal is the choreographer's opportunity to adjust the movement and spacing of the choreography to work within the new dimensions of the performance space, using the markers of center/center, downstage, upstage, stage right, stage left, and the quarter marks as references in both the rehearsal space and performance space. (See Fig. 1) When performed on
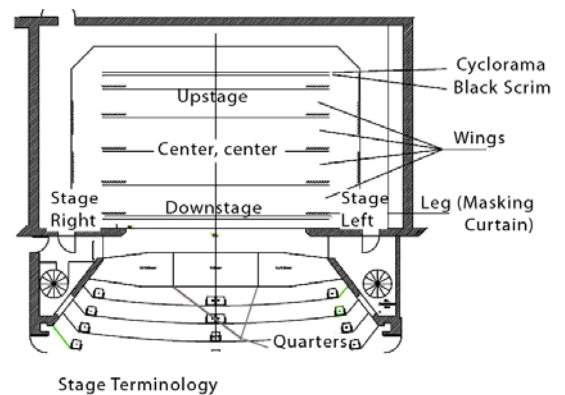

Fig. 1

a proscenium stage, the dance is framed with legs on either side of the stage, placed at intervals from downstage to upstage that create wings or entrances for the dancers.

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The location of these wings is pre-determined and is another element that the choreographer must adjust for. The dance changes when the viewer's perspective changes from looking at the movement in a rehearsal space to seeing it from an audience's perspective in a theatre. The technical rehearsal is also when the choreographer has the opportunity to make any changes needed to accommodate the new perspective of the theatre.

For the creative team, the technical rehearsal is the time when all of their preparation and previous conversations come together. The dance can now be performed with costumes, sound, and lights on the stage. The technical rehearsal, for the lighting designer, is when design work is realized. Not until the choreography is performed on the stage, in costume, with the lighting colors and angles chosen for the piece, is it clear if successful design choices have been made. The lighting must enhance the colors of the costumes and the dancers' complexions while conveying the mood and intent of the dance. The collaboration of the design team is put to the test. All of the groundwork they have laid and the work they have done in preparing for that day is evaluated as they see how all of the elements come together on the stage. At this point adjustments and changes can still be made, but time is limited. A strong understanding of each other and the ability to communicate effectively makes the most of that limited, precious time.

Chapter 5: Lighting Designer's Context

I began my explorations of communication and its potential obstacles to the collaboration process by reflecting on my previous lighting design experiences. During my eight years as a lighting designer before coming to the University of Texas, I designed lights for multiple dance concerts, community based dance performances, and theatrical plays and musicals. A dance concert performance typically consists of multiple dance pieces, each between seven to thirty minutes in length, creating a cohesive performance of approximately ninety minutes. Community based dance performance is often two to three hours of dance generated in dance classes for dancers aged three to eighteen. Theatrical plays are based on scripted text, while musicals are comprised of text, music, and dance.

My prior experience in lighting dance was primarily intuitive, an in-the-moment design process. I typically saw the piece for the first time in the theatre when the dancers, the choreographer, and I had gathered to tech[16] the piece. As the dancers ran the piece for the first time, I would create lighting cues or looks that fit the piece and take notes as to when the cues should be executed within the piece. Typically, the dancers and choreographers would then take some time to fix any spacing issues or other problems with the dance while I went back and refined the cues and added any light cues that I did not have time to create during the run. When the choreographer and I had made the

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[16] Tech: A common term used in production as a shortened form of "technical rehearsal". It is the act of accomplishing all that is required in a technical rehearsal.

necessary corrections, the piece would be run again with the lighting cues executed at the appropriate times within the dance. I would continue to adjust the lights through this run, and the choreographer would give me any feedback or notes he or she had while we watched the dancers perform. Depending on the time available, we may or may not run the piece again before the performance. The number of dress rehearsals for each design varied from none to three, contingent on the available time and budget. In these situations, the dance was developed completely independent of the lighting design, and the lighting was the final step before the work was performed.

During my first year at the University of Texas at Austin, I designed lights for Dance Repertory Theatre's (DRT) *Proof,* a dance concert consisting of four original works created by three different choreographers. For the first time, I entered into an elongated design process with choreographers and costume designers that I had previously experienced solely in my lighting design work for theatre.

When given the assignment to design DRT's *Proof*, my first reaction was to attend as many live performances of dance as I could including the works of Delfos Contemporary Dance in the 500-seat B. Iden Payne Theatre and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in the 3,000-seat Bass Concert Hall, both at the University of Texas at Austin. Although I enjoyed seeing the choreography from a spectator's point of view, my real focus of study was how the dances were lit. As I have continued to work with dance as a designer, I have begun to see the value in understanding what I am looking at from a movement analysis point of view. In order to really understand the dance and know how to light it, I need to know the story the dance is conveying and the movement vocabulary

it is using to tell the story. The more closely I worked with the choreographers, the more I began to find a number of things that made communication easier.

One facilitator of communication I discovered was the identification of the dancers. When working on a play, the design team discusses the story using the character's names. Within dance, there are rarely specific character names. I found that in order to converse with the choreographer about the piece, it greatly facilitated the conversation if I learned the dancer's names. I added to my process the idea of taking a digital photo of the dancers at rehearsal and writing down their names.

While talking with New York lighting designer Kathy Kaufman, I asked how she dealt with the issue of identifying dancers. She shared that she did try to learn the dancers names, but if it was her first time with a dance company and she hadn't learned all of them yet, she would fall back on physical characteristics like gender, hair color, build, or perhaps give them character names using action based words such as "Sad girl" or "Thoughtful boy"[17].

Learning the dancers' names was also very useful in creating the cue sheet for the piece. In referencing what is happening onstage during a light cue and when to call the cue, it is very helpful to be able to identify the individual dancers.

Considering my previous experiences lighting dance, and compiling the knowledge gleaned from those encounters, established a framework of information to use as a foundation for my further explorations of communication.

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[17] Kathy Kaufman, telephone interview, March 31, 2008

Chapter 6: Dance Repertory Theatre

With this framework of experience, I entered into the design process as the lighting designer for Dance Repertory Theatre's *Lived Experience! Dance Reflections Transferred or Layered* in October of 2007. Dance Repertory Theatre (DRT) is the resident student dance company in the University of Texas at Austin's Department of Theatre and Dance. Most of the choreography for DRT's dance concerts is developed and taught during the dancer's class time three days a week for two hours each day. The choreography is performed for the public twice during the academic year. At the end of the fall semester, it is performed as "a work in progress" showing of the dance pieces. It is performed again during the spring semester in a concert of the completed works. To differentiate the two performances, the production team refers to them as the Showing and the Concert. For clarity, I will continue to use this distinction throughout this paper.

The Concert is performed on one of the Theatre and Dance Department's main stages. It is fully produced and designed in collaboration with a lighting designer, a technical director, costume designer(s), and sometimes composers, sound designers, and scenic designers. The Showing may or may not be performed on the same stage as the concert and is minimally produced. For the Showing, the dancers most often do not wear costumes other than black leotards or rehearsal clothes. The light plot is not specifically designed to light the dance pieces in the Showing, but is typically adapted from the light plot designed for the previous performance in that space. The available time in the theatre to work with the technical elements of the dance is also significantly reduced.

With DRT's *Lived Experience! Dance Reflections Transferred or Layered*, for the first time the design faculty assigned the same lighting designer, myself, to work on both the Showing and the Concert. This year both the Showing and the Concert were performed in the B. Iden Payne Theatre, a proscenium stage. *Lived Experience!* consisted of seven dance pieces in the fall Showing:

Remembering Qualities: choreography by Lyn C. Wiltshire, UT Faculty
Nursery: choreography and performance by Mary A. Chase, UT M.F.A. Candidate
Sister: choreography by Mary A. Chase, UT M.F.A. Candidate
The Fugue: (Excerpts) choreography by Twyla Tharp ©1999 Twyla Tharp
      Staged by Shelley Washington, former member of the Twyla
      Tharp Company and Repetiteur
Existir no es Ser: choreography by Yebel Gallegos, UT B.F.A. Candidate
Isabella: choreography by Julie Nathanielsz, UT M.F.A. Candidate
Futari Tomo: choreography by Holly Williams, UT Faculty.

In four of the pieces in the Showing, the dancers wore the costumes they would wear for the spring Concert. In the other three pieces, they wore black leotards or rehearsal clothes because the costumes were being designed and built. The light plot was adapted from the plot that was already in the space and only three nights of tech/dress rehearsals were scheduled. The first two tech/dress rehearsals were split up with only half of the pieces being rehearsed each night with the end result being that I only had the opportunity to work on each piece on two of the three evenings.

In the spring Concert, *Nursery* was omitted from the program due to Mary Chase's maternity recovery as she was the solo dancer and could not perform it. The choreography for the remaining six pieces was finished and polished. The final costumes were built and in place. I designed the light plot to fit the specific needs of the dance

pieces, and we had a full technical process consisting of two nights for spacing and building cues, an eight hour day of tech, and three dress rehearsals. The dances each had rehearsal time on one of the two cue build days, the technical rehearsal day, and two out of the three dress rehearsals.

This unique opportunity of mounting the pieces twice, once as works in progress with the freedom to experiment with different possibilities, and then again as fully produced, polished works was a real luxury. The elongated design process, with the opportunity to realize the design twice, including time to analyze the results of the first performance before designing the second, provided a rich field of study to investigate communication.

Chapter 7: Choreographers' Context

My interactions with Mary Chase and Julie Nathanielsz provided a wide breadth of experience. Mary Chase has been choreographing and working with lighting designers to produce her work for eleven years. She is a Certified Movement Analyst (C.M.A.) and Bartenieff Fundamentals (BF) Practioner. While earning her B.F.A. in Dance Performance and Choreography at the University of Illinois, Chase worked on stage crews, stage managed dance performances, and designed the lighting for her thesis project. She has been teaching dance since 1998 and was an instructor at Kansas State University (KSU) for three years, teaching technique, composition, improvisation and dance sciences.[18] In discussing her choreographic process, Chase said it has evolved and changed with experience and the dancers she has worked with. When teaching and choreographing at KSU, she tended to create the work on herself, needing to feel it in her own body, then teach it to the dancers. When creating the dance piece *Sister* for *Lived Experience!*, Chase could not create the movements in her own body because she was in the third trimester of pregnancy. She worked with the dancers, giving them an image or quality and asking for them to come up with a physical expression of it. She then shaped and edited the gestures and movements the dancers had created.

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[18] Some biographical information is excerpted from
http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/tad/degree_programs/graduate/mfa_dance/current_students.cfm

Julie Nathanielsz's background stems from improvisational dance and instant composition. She performed for eight years with the dance-theatre company of Margery Segal/NERVE of Austin, TX, and was a founding member of the Improvisational Movement Project in 2004, presenting improvisation in performance in a wide range of venues in Austin, TX. She has studied with Joan Skinner, Julyen Hamilton, and Russel Maliphant among others, as well as performing the works of Deborah Hay. Nathanielsz has taught Skinner Releasing Technique classes and workshops since being certified in 2001. Her undergraduate degree is a B.A. in Near Eastern Studies from Cornell University, and she holds an M.P.A. from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.[19] Her dance experience is all outside of the realm of academia, so her only experience with lighting design, prior to entering the graduate program in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Texas at Austin, was as a spectator. *Isabella*, the dance piece she created for *Lived Experience!* was only her second piece of choreography produced for the stage, and the first time she collaborated with a lighting designer through a complete design and technical process. Nathanielsz entered into the process for *Isabella* with very little knowledge of what a lighting designer's job entails, and how the technical process progresses when mounting a piece of choreography for the stage.

Nathanielsz's choreographic process for *Isabella* was quite brief. She was asked in May of 2007 to create a dance piece that would showcase a mechanical dress that Eleanor Fluharty, a graduate student in costume technology at the University of Texas at

Austin, was building as her thesis project. With the summer to ruminate on it, Nathanielsz created the choreography during the first week of school in September. Throughout the fall semester, she taught this choreography to the dancer, Meg Brooker, a graduate student in Performance as Public Practice at the University of Texas at Austin.

Working with and engaging in post-experiential conversations with Mary Chase and Julie Nathanielsz provided me with a wide basis of comparison while maintaining a relatively even level of experience. Chase has been choreographing for approximately the same length of time that I have been designing lights. Nathanielsz has not been staging fully designed choreography for that length of time, but she has been dancing professionally. Chase provides the perspective of a university trained choreographer and dancer, while Nathanielsz provides the perspective of a professional dancer without training in production skills or design. Both perspectives are equally valuable in discovering the obstacles that can arise in the communication process between lighting designers and choreographers.

Chapter 8: Background Information on *Isabella* and *Sister*

As I began to work on the lighting design for Dance Repertory Theatre's (DRT) *Lived Experiences!*, my relationship with each of the choreographers was quite different based on their individual experiences and our previous collaborations. *Isabella* was the first occasion Julie Nathanielsz and I worked with each other as a designer and choreographer, requiring more conversations to reach an understanding of each other's work. Mary Chase and I had previously worked closely together as collaborators on multiple projects. This allowed us to enter into the process for *Sister* with an established relationship of trust and communication.

When I entered the conversations about *Isabella* and *Sister*, the two dances were in very different stages of development. *Isabella* was fully choreographed aside from the interaction with the movements of the mechanical dress, and the costume was designed and in the final stages of construction. *Sister* was in the beginning stages of choreography, and the costumes were undecided. As a result my process was quite different for the two pieces.

Isabella

With *Isabella*, I was introduced to the music and choreography the same day I saw the mechanical dress, and the three elements seemed to have equal weight and importance to the work. The movement and the music are very energetic, and playful. In creating the piece, Nathanielsz based the character of the woman on Isabella Blow, a

prominent figure in the world of fashion who loved to wear outlandish outfits. She conceived of the piece as a duet between a woman and a dress. The first part of the dance was choreographed to Lily Allen's *Knock 'Em Out*, a sassy, upbeat song. The second part was choreographed to a series of sound effects and it was at this point in the piece that Nathanielsz envisioned the audience seeing the dress move on its own.

The dress consists of a full bodied, silk skirt, dyed a mottled deep turquoise and blue. The bodice is a similar color and there are flower petals attached at the waist and fitted around the dancer's torso that are a deep maroon color. A large, sculpted collar, the same maroon as the petals, and embedded with white L.E.D. lights, frames the dancer's face. The dress is rigged with pulleys and motors allowing the skirt to raise and lower. In its raised position, the fabric is gathered up and creates many layers that bounce with the dancer's movement. (See Fig. 2) In its down position, the fabric of the dress is smooth and looks like a ball gown. (See Fig. 3) The petals are rigged with a release mechanism. At the beginning of the dance, they are in a bud-like position around the dancer's torso. At a certain point in the piece, the flower opens, and the petals fall to encircle her waist.

Fig. 2: *Isabella*, dress in up position.   Fig. 3: *Isabella*, dress in down position.

Sister

In contrast, Mary Chase began the fall semester with the intention of including a different dance piece in the DRT Concert. As she worked on that piece she realized it was not evolving as she had hoped, and four weeks before the December Showing, she began creating an alternative piece called *Sister*. I did not see any part of the new piece until one week before the first technical rehearsal. Additionally, choreography was added to the piece in the afternoon the day of the tech rehearsal.

My initial conversations with Chase about *Sister* were very brief. She gave me a copy of the music she was choreographing to and told me that the dance piece was warm, loving, and whimsical, but she had not yet given it the title of *Sister*. The music is a combination of two songs by Mark Huffman, *Gustate Et Videte* and *A Madre Do Que Bestia*. The piece was choreographed with eight female undergraduate dancers. The movement is very fluid and smooth. The phrases consist of movement that includes all eight dancers, interspersed with various duets and trios.

When I saw the completed section of the piece for the first time, the words that came to mind were fluid, tender, compassionate, caring, and loving. After watching the piece, Chase and I talked and she told me that the choreography was based on the gestures of caring and love that make up the relationship between sisters and/or close female friends. So we were of the same mind about the piece emotionally.

It was decided by the production team that there would not be a costume designer assigned to this piece, and Chase would be responsible for deciding what the costumes

would be. When I asked Chase what she had in mind for the costumes, she thought they would be tops of various pinks with brown bottoms, but they had not yet been confirmed. In the end, the eight dancers wore short, solid color sweater dresses that were a medley of deep turquoise, purple and burnt orange. (See Fig. 4) I saw them for the first time when the dancers wore them onstage during the tech rehearsal for the showing.

Fig. 4 *Sister*: Illustration of costumes; "Putting hair into a ponytail"

Chapter 9: Video as a Tool

Movement is the medium choreographers use to create their art. They are fluent in the language of movement. Their years of dance experience give them the ability to quickly understand and memorize choreography as it is performed to music or poetry. It is often a challenge for lighting designers without that training to comprehend and remember everything about a dance piece quickly enough to talk about and create a design for it after seeing only a handful of rehearsals.

I am amazed by the skill of choreographers that I have worked with to read a piece of movement as though it were words on a page. They seem to grasp the meaning and remember it as quickly as I remember a story I've read in a book. Without a choreographer's depth of experience, I have not yet gained a similar level of expertise. To compensate for my slower comprehension, I relied heavily on a video recording of the choreography throughout my design process for both *Proof* and *Lived Experience!*. The video gave me the time I needed to analyze the dance, commit it to memory, and transcribe it into blocking or tracking notes. Blocking notes translate the dance from the language of movement, to a written language of pictograms and words, and are used as a reminder of where the dancers are onstage, and what movements they are performing. I also found the video to be a very useful tool while talking through the pieces with the choreographers. It was helpful to have the ability to stop the recording to talk further about a specific moment, or to go back and watch a section again. During the tech process, the video became invaluable in discussing cue placement with the stage manager

and talking through changes that needed to be made to the light cues with the choreographer.

I was so impressed with the usefulness of this tool that I was eager to discover if other lighting designers and choreographers used a video of the choreography as well. I was surprised by the consistency among answers I got to the question. I was under the impression that rehearsal time with the dancers is very valuable and not the time to distract the choreographer by talking about the piece. What I discovered is that professional choreographers and lighting designers alike prefer to talk about the work in rehearsal with the dancers. Choreographer David Justin prefers to have a rehearsal specifically for the lighting designer.

> I'll let the dancers run it and I sit and talk to the lighting designer as they do it and if our conversation is taking longer than the dance, … then I'll stop. Because that rehearsal is a rehearsal for the lighting designer … I'll say dancers please go back and do this section again and we talk about it. You know video is so flat and working in live theatre, it's important to steep yourself in the environment in which your work is going to exist.[20]

It was fascinating to hear him describe the same process in rehearsal that I had gone through with the video. Upon further questioning, he did admit that "In smaller organizations it's a luxury and often cost prohibitive."

When I asked lighting designer Kathy Kaufman if she ever uses a video of the choreography, her answer was immediate:

> Yes, all the time! I love it, best thing ever. You know if it's a solo that's fine, I can track it. But if I have a video I can hit pause and it helps me track the dance really thoroughly. … I just get it on paper so that then when I go and either watch it again on video, or hopefully get to go back to the studio and watch it, I've already got the movement down and then I can free my mind to think about what I want it to look like visually. It's a great thing.[21]

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[20] Justin David, personal interview, March 24, 2008
[21] Kathy Kaufman, telephone interview, March 31, 2008

Kaufman uses the video to translate the movement into writing, giving her something tangible to refer to when the dancers are not available. She then uses her notes instead of the video in discussions with the choreographer and stage manger.

Lighting designer Jennifer Tipton had a similar response to the same question, although she has the added benefit of beginning her career as a dancer before transitioning to lighting design.

> Sometimes I have to, sometimes I must admit that my memory is pretty terrible and so sometimes I've seen a run through but it happened a very long time [ago], I may go see a run through and then the company goes off on tour and its several months before we really are lighting the piece, really putting the piece on stage, so I may need a reminder with the video. But video is not like the real thing, and you know I am so sensitive to the dynamics of things, I need the real thing to get that dynamic. [22]

Tipton was adamant about not using the video to talk about the piece with the choreographer. When asked if her early dance training gave her the language to help that conversation, she agreed that it did. So the consensus is that a video of the choreography is a useful tool, especially in situations where it is not possible to talk through the piece with the dancers performing the choreography live, but it doesn't compare to the real thing.

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[22] Jennifer Tipton, telephone interview, March 22, 2008

Chapter 10: The Language Barrier

Within the communication between lighting designers and choreographers, another obstacle that arises is the language barrier generated by the artists working with technical codes specific to their disciplines. Lighting designers' terminology is born out of the technology used in lighting design and the terms used to describe the color and qualities of light. As a lighting designer my obstacle came from the challenge of working from movement vocabulary instead of scripted text.

When designing traditional theatrical plays, the communication of the design team begins with the common language born out of the text of the play and the characters involved. The text gives specific markers to establish the placement of cues. In designing dance, the choreography or the movement within the music is the text, and the characters are created by the dancers. Dancers and choreographers have their own vernacular for talking about the movement involved in the dance. The movement vocabulary consists of dance specific-terminology and action-based words such as run, jump, or waving goodbye. The dance-specific terminology is based on traditional terms for specific gestures from ballet such as "Jeté"[23], and "Chassé"[24], or other dance forms such as "Horton Hinge"[25].

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[23] Jeté, pas [*pah zhuh-TAY*]: Throwing step. A jump from one foot to the other in which the working leg is brushed into the air and appears to have been thrown. There is a wide variety of pas jetés (usually called merely jetés) and they may be performed in all directions.

[24] Chassé [*sha-SAY*]: Chased. A step in which one foot literally chases the other foot out of its position; done in a series. Ballet definitions are from American Ballet Theatre's online dictionary http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html

[25] Horton Hinge : a term from Lester Horton's technique as classified by Bella Lewitzky.

Choreographer Mary Chase used these dance-specific terms to communicate with her dancers during a rehearsal I observed. When I asked her about it, Chase said she mixes up vocabulary from different genres. She will use ballet terms, but also terms referring to modern/contemporary movement (e.g.Horton Technique). She tends to use certain terminology only if the dancers she is working with would understand the vocabulary or if she is in a teaching situation and is trying to expand the student's knowledge. In explaining the movement she wanted the dancers to do, she used the following terms and phrases: "Lean back into a Horton Hinge, catch her head then spiral her to the floor." Other names are comprised of action-based words, but are also dance-specific in that they evolve out of the creative process as certain gestures or movement phrases take on new meaning and are given a name. Another example from Chase's rehearsal was a movement phrase that they called "putting your sister's hair into a pony tail." (See Fig. 3) In order to talk about the different sections of the piece with the choreographer, I began learning the names the dancers and choreographer had given to movement phrases. However, each "term" was established based on the piece, the dancer's knowledge and Chase's experience. With each new piece of choreography comes new terminology to learn.

The recognition of terminology as a barrier between artists with differing backgrounds influenced me to investigate that barrier in my research. It was helpful to confirm with lighting designer, Jennifer Tipton that her cross-disciplinary training in both dance and lighting design has helped her communicate with choreographers as a lighting designer. The question becomes, how do artists without that beneficial cross training communicate?

I began by asking professional lighting designer Michelle Habeck, in a personal interview, what language she uses to communicate with choreographers. She told me that she has made a concerted effort to learn "a lot of the basic classic language about the positions" from books and "by watching other people light dance."[26] When working with choreographers who are creating new movement, she will give names to movement phrases, and learn the names the dancers and choreographer have given to movement. Habeck addressed my query about designers and choreographers learning each other's language when she said:

> At this stage a lot of the choreographers I'm working with have a developed breadth of "designerly" language where we can use words to describe movement, and I can use words to describe light, and we can use words to describe things that we are not physically doing, or we can't physically see. As a younger designer I didn't have that breadth of vocabulary, but now I do.[27]

Early in her career, there was more of a language gap between Habeck and the choreographers she worked with. As she pursued her lighting design career, she sought to fill the holes in her knowledge, learning about dance and dance terminology by any means possible.

In an interview with professional lighting designer Tony Tucci, he told me he took technique classes to learn the terminology early in his career:

> I had no dance experience, but what I did do early on when I first started working with dancers and choreographers was to take classes. It was with a modern company, but it was a ballet class with a lot of modern elements. I did that to figure out words and to understand the steps. I thought that was what I needed to do. It was helpful in some ways because then I could say to the stage manager you need to take that on the third pirouette after the arabesque.[28]

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[26] Habeck, Michelle, personal interview March 19, 2008
[27] Habeck, Michelle, personal interview March 19, 2008
[28] Tucci, Toni, personal interview April 16, 2008

Tucci also recognized the barrier that terminology could present in his career and took steps to bridge that language gap. As far as the language he uses when talking with choreographers about their dance piece, he enjoys communicating with a more theoretical vocabulary:

> The interaction with choreographers and directors specifically is very different from one person to another. The ones I prefer working with are those that give me more images of what their piece is about or if they talk about the general feeling of the piece or the kind of ideas they are trying to create or portray in the dance. I tend to gravitate to those kind of choreographers and directors as opposed to those who say I need a blue light here; I need another kind of light here; I need it to be red. They also trust what I do because they have communicated the idea and not so much what the essence of a light source is.[29]

In Tucci's experience, trust is generated between artists when they share ideas, and allow each other the freedom to express their creativity in their respective mediums.

For the choreographer's perspective, I talked with Yacov Sharir and Holly Williams. Both choreographers gained their knowledge of lighting design by observing other choreographers working with lighting designers while they were dancing professionally. When asked about his background in working with lighting designers and learning the terminology to talk about lights, Sharir answered:

> I always observed how they [choreographers] worked with designers so I took what I liked and threw away what I didn't like. There was a continuum because I was exposed to seeing how lighting designers work with choreographers all the time. When we were touring we would see other companies and they would be onstage teching and we would wander around and see how they interact. I really have seen the very best in the field so I really have had a very good education, hands-on.[30]

Williams, a former dancer with the companies of Mark Morris, Laura Dean and Jose Limon, also learned all that she knows about lighting design by observing the professionals at work during her dancing career. She did add that she wishes there had

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[29] Tucci, Toni, personal interview April 16, 2008
[30] Sharir, Yacov, personal interview March 25, 2008

been an opportunity to learn about lighting design when she was earning her B.A. at Barnard College/Columbia University.

To learn about the other side of the language gap, I asked Sharir what terminology he uses to talk about the movement in his choreography. In his work, the vocabulary is more likely to "come out of the dance itself. I don't really have specific terminology unless there is text involved or a story to tell." When asked if he uses the same terminology to talk with the lighting designer, he answered: "Yes, and usually they pick up on it very quickly"[31].

Among the artists I have talked with, they are in agreement that there is often a technical code or vernacular particular to specific disciplines that can be a barrier to communication unless the artists involved make a concerted effort to learn each other's language. Visual artist David Michalek sums this topic up well when he says:

> I would be the lesser if I was not able to speak a technical language to a camera technician or a gaffer or a grip. I do think it's important that you learn the code.
> I asked: *In your work have you made it a point to learn the code?* He answered, "Absolutely."[32]

This learning can take place on the job, or better yet while the artists are still in school.

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[31] Sharir, Yacov, all quotes from personal interview March 25, 2008
[32] Michalek, David, telephone interview March 18, 2008

Chapter 11: Understanding Your Colleague's Process

Education and experience give artists an understanding of each other's creative process. Without that understanding, communication can be obstructed. Choreographers each have different approaches to how they think about light in relation to their choreography based on their experience and the way they approach visual images. What I learned through this experience is that as a lighting designer, it helps the communication process to understand each choreographer's thinking about light. If I learn through discussion what their thought process is concerning light, then I know what additional information or clarification I should provide to facilitate our communication when we are under the pressure of limited tech time. Additionally, if I have communicated what my process is during the technical rehearsal, the choreographers have a better understanding of what feedback is useful to my process and when I prefer to receive that information.

Conversations at the Tech Table

An understanding of each other's process can help the lighting designer get feedback on the design from the choreographer at a helpful time in the tech process. The interactions and communication between a lighting designer and choreographer at the tech table, when the lighting designer is creating and adjusting the lighting cues, varies with every pairing of artists. Each person brings with them the baggage of their experience, good or bad. I tend to get very focused on what I am looking at and adjusting

on the stage. At times I may hear what my colleagues are saying and respond to their suggestions with my actions, forgetting to verbally acknowledge that I heard them. This can get frustrating for the receiving party.

I was given one piece of advice during the tech for the Concert that inspired me to analyze my interactions with others while I am at the tech table. One of the design faculty who had not overseen my work previously advised me to bring a light to full when adding it to a cue to make sure it was the light I wanted to add. Adding the light at full intensity also allows the designer to see the full potential of that lighting instrument and decide more quickly the appropriate intensity for the light. When he said that, I realized I had been getting that note from my lighting design advisor throughout my time at the University of Texas at Austin. I would start to follow the advice, then fall into my previous habit of bringing the light to the level I though I wanted it at and adjusting from there. When I stopped to think about it, I realized that my habit of sneaking a light on when adding it to a look that has already been built was born out of working with choreographers looking on. I often get gasps and worried comments whenever I bring up levels too high. In trying to not disrupt the stage picture, I automatically adjust how I am working.

A more effective practice may be to explain this process and its benefits to the choreographer so they understand why I am turning the lights on brighter than necessary, and not assume that every change in the look of the lights on stage is something I am planning on keeping. Sometimes it is a helpful communication process to have the choreographer responding to every level change, and sometimes it becomes an added stress. Often this can begin to feel like the choreographer doesn't trust my decisions, or

believes I think a certain level looks good, when it clearly doesn't. Too much specific feedback can make a designer feel like a light board operator instead of a designer. David Justin put it well. He said "[when there is] a great amount of trust…you don't often communicate every single, itty, bitty thing because that can be stifling to your collaborator."[33]

Mary Chase understands this needed space; she tends to let me work on a cue, without commenting, until I turn to her and indicate that I am satisfied with the adjustments to the lighting and I am ready for her feedback. When I asked how she arrived at this method of interaction, she shared that she prefers to let the lighting designer work through the design and feels like it is similar to her choreographic process. She needs to see all of the possibilities and then edit out what doesn't work and keep what does. In working with lighting designers, she tries to speak up only when she really likes something until she gets the sense that the designers are finished with their decisions and are ready for her feedback.

Nathanielsz, in her uncertainty of how the tech process works, hesitated to give me any feedback during the cueing process for the Showing. She contacted me with her notes the next day when it was almost too late to address them. At the first dress rehearsal for the Concert in February, as we began *Isabella*, she was five rows behind the tech table. I encouraged her to come closer, assuring her that I welcomed her feedback about what she was seeing as we watched the piece.

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[33] Justin, David, personal interview, March 24, 2008

Another choreographer I worked with for *Lived Experience!* is Holly Williams, choreographer of *Futari Tomo.* She is a much more vocal choreographer. During the cuing process for the Concert, that became quite helpful. We talked about what was working and what was not, and ended up making some major changes to the look of the piece, that made it much stronger. The following weekend, we took the piece to the Southwest Region American College Dance Festival Conference, where I needed to adapt the lighting design to the repertory festival light plot. The tech time was limited; we only had twenty minutes to look at the cues, adjust levels, and run the piece. During those twenty minutes, Williams started suggesting what lights to add and commenting after every level change I made. I understood with the time constraints that she wanted to make sure we got it right, but I still had to fight the feeling of frustration this amount of feedback engendered, and remind myself that it was necessary under the circumstances.

From this analysis, I have gained an awareness of the potential problems of too much feedback, or not enough. I now have tools to deal with similar situations in the future.

Communications Regarding the Effect of Lighting

on the Performance of *Isabella*

Julie Nathanielsz, a choreographer with minimal experience in lighting design, did not know what to expect when we got to the theatre. From our conversations before the Showing, I learned she was concerned that the lighting would be too strong of a presence onstage and overwhelm the dancer and the dress. The first section of the piece,

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danced to *Knock Em' Out,* travels over the entire stage. The song and movement are one continuous thought and it would have detracted from the piece to try to follow the dancer around the stage with the lighting. The lighting needed to create a single environment that encompassed the whole stage, while not overwhelming the solo dancer. Nathanielsz agreed with this design choice. I also talked with Nathanielsz about wanting to use the light to define the space, giving it structure and architecture. I created the architecture for this environment with a strong pattern wash covering the stage. This gave definition to the space and the broken light played beautifully over the costume, highlighting the mottled colors in the skirt.

After agreeing that the entire stage would be illuminated, Nathanielsz and I continued our discussion to the topic of the background behind this section of the dance. We were both concerned that it would overwhelm the soloist. In an interesting juxtaposition of artistic visions, I was concerned that a fully lit background would emphasize the large scale of the theatre versus the proportionally small dancer, while Nathanielsz was concerned that a black background would make the stage feel like a large void and the dancer would seem small and lost. Taking into consideration the effect either of these options would have on the dance, I solved this dilemma by putting colored light on only the lower half of the center of the cyclorama[34], and grazing the front of the black scrim[35] downstage of the cyclorama with two of the patterned lights. Having only a portion of the background lit helped define the space and provided a focal point for the

[34] Cyclorama: A large drop at the back of a stage used either for the lighting effect of a colored background or projections.
[35] Scrim: An open weave fabric that appears solid when lit from the front and transparent when lit from behind.
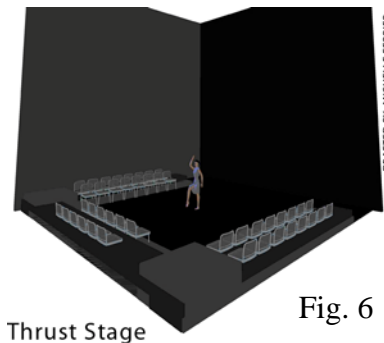
action to happen around without pulling focus from the dancer. It is very likely that I would not have arrived at this design choice without the collaborative conversations with Nathanielsz. By seeking to understand how Nathanielsz thought the lighting would affect the choreography, I was able to share my lighting expertise, and we arrived at the solution together.

In a conversation following the Showing, Nathanielsz said she was pleasantly surprised that the lighting enhanced the performance without pulling focus away from the dancer and the dress. This was the first time her work has been presented on a proscenium[36] stage. To her, the spectacle of theatre is more present on a proscenium stage than in a thrust[37] or arena style performance space. She thought this spectacle would detract from the audience's experience of *Isabella.* She wasn't sure what parts of the choreography would be conveyed to the audience,
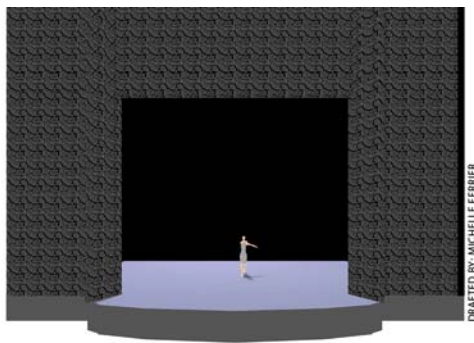
Proscenium Stage

Fig. 5

Thrust Stage

Fig. 6

and what would be lost. She realizes now that the theatre is an amplifier for small things and the small things are made more potent instead of disappearing. This thought resonates with what David Justin said in response to my question "Do you think the inclusion of lighting design is very important to choreography students' education?"

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[36] Proscenium: Stage framed by a proscenium arch. Seating is on one side.
[37] Thrust stage: Stage with seating on three sides,

I do, especially for dance more so than theatre where … whether it's text or an idea or a concept or an emotion, you're boiling it down to the barest of elements in order to communicate it. In doing that, something that can be an amplifier, a magnifier, is lighting design. If I boil down a movement to the simplest clearest purest, single thing, then if I put that movement in the center of the stage with all of the lights on, it gets totally washed out, it doesn't mean anything, but if you put it down stage left with just a silhouette, suddenly you're talking about a lens to see this through that can really crystallize.[38]

This idea of how lighting enhances performance was illustrated well during the second section of *Isabella*. The movement is subtle and the dancer travels very little. The choreographer imagined the dancer entering through a foyer and into a powder room to prepare herself for a party. If the stage was still fully lit, but the dancer was not traveling in a way that filled the space, she would indeed have been lost. By only lighting the small area of the stage occupied by the dancer, I was able to define the space and amplify the movements, while giving the moment the intimacy it needed. My understanding of Nathanielsz' vision for that section of the piece informed my design choices.

Overall, through my discussions with Nathanielsz, I gained an understanding of how she saw the lighting design affecting the performance of *Isabella*. This enabled me to build from her vision, as well as share my expertise in lighting to clarify and explain my design choices for *Isabella*.

Discovering the Choreographer's Thought Process Regarding Light

In working with Mary Chase on *Sister*, I discovered that she had a sectional point of view (as described below) when she started thinking about the lighting for her work. In

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[38] Justin, David, personal interview, March 24, 2008

Figure 4: *Sister*

our conversations before the tech for the Showing she was primarily concerned with the placement of the cues. She had three sections of the choreography that she wanted to make sure I was highlighting with different looks. There needed to be a change after the first two minutes when the music and movement changed from calm and soothing to joyful and upbeat, and she wanted to make sure I was intending to isolate a particular gesture between two dancers in the middle of the stage. (See fig. 4) In talking with her, and showing her my research images, I said I felt the piece should begin in a cool morning light and shift into a warmer world with the change in music and movement two minutes into the piece. Chase said that sounded fine, but when we looked at the cues onstage, she didn't think the coolness of the initial cues conveyed the emotion in that portion of the dance. I modified them, bringing some more warmth to the first cues. She had not been able to visualize the combination of the lighting and the movement until she saw it onstage.

I discovered Chase's segmented way of thinking through two instances of conflicted communication; once during the tech for the Showing and again during the tech for the Concert. In the initial choreography presented at the Showing, I decided eight different looks were needed. One of them Chase thought we did not need because to her it was not a major shift in choreography. I saw the need for it as a transition. Because of a shortage of time for discussion and experimentation, we cut that cue in the Showing. After reviewing a video recording of the Showing performance, I realized that my first

instinct to have a transition cue before the isolating cue was correct. As it was cued in the Showing, the transition between the two separate looks was too abrupt.

During the cue build process for the Concert performance, we had a similar miscommunication. Chase saw two places in the new choreography that she wanted highlighted with specific lighting. She did not know what it should look like, but she felt the moment called for a lighting change. She had the dancers show me those two moments in the dance and I built looks for them. When we ran the piece again, the specific lighting cues did not work for the movement that connected the two moments. We discovered the need to create the transitions between those two moments, but we did not have time during that rehearsal.

The next time we worked on this piece was during the eight hour technical rehearsal. As we began to create the transition cues, Chase started out having the dancers go from one moment to the next, skipping the choreographic transition again… I explained that in order to create a transition between those two moments, I needed to see the choreography that connected them.

In talking about these instances with Chase after the Concert, she made the connection between this experience and her choreographic process for the piece. She had certain phrases that she knew she wanted at the beginning, middle and end of the piece and worked on finding what connected them. When thinking about lighting them, those specific moments stood out as important, but she did not realize the lighting would need transitions in the same way that choreography needs transitions. The solution to this miscommunication was to recognize a problem existed and talk about it. Once the problem was identified, the solution was apparent.

Communicating Changes to Performance Elements

There are a number of factors that enter into the equation when dealing with communicating changes to any of the performance elements within a piece to the other team members: the previous working relationship of the artists, the experience level of the artists, whether or not the importance of communicating changes was included in the educational training of the artists, and an understanding of what information is significant to convey to whom.

I became aware of this obstacle through other miscommunications that arose during the tech process for *Sister.* Because Chase's choreographic process was shortened, she made changes in the choreography before both the Showing and the final Concert, and did not communicate them beforehand. The costumes for the dance were found and purchased the afternoon of the technical rehearsal for the Showing. I was quite surprised when they appeared onstage and were different in color and style from what had originally been communicated. It was not required that the final costumes be used in the Showing. If Chase had not found what she was looking for when she did, the dancers would have performed in alternate clothes, but once the costumes were added, they became an element that I had to integrate into the design at the last minute.

The change before the final dress rehearsal for the Concert involved an alteration in the opening tableau. An additional dancer had been added and this had not been communicated to me. As a result, when the piece started during the dress rehearsal, the additional dancer was in the dark. With prior knowledge, I could have looked at the cue

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with the dancers and adjusted it before the dress rehearsal. These communication lapses can become extremely frustrating, especially when working with someone close or familiar. In a later discussion, I discovered that part of the reason I was not contacted *was* the comfort Chase had in our working relationship. In this instance the trust we had established in each other's ability backfired. She didn't worry about me needing the information because she trusted that I would handle it at the tech table.

I asked lighting designer, Kathy Kaufman if she runs into the problem of last minute changes not being conveyed to her and her initial response was "All the time." She then qualified her response saying:

> well that's not fair, you know it [does not happen] so much lately because quite honestly I think that a lot people who are coming up, particularly through university systems, are better educated with how to deal with lighting designers.[39]

In looking for a solution I asked her if she ever made it a point to ask choreographers to alert her with any changes. This is where experience or education comes into play. Kaufman does not like to have a preemptive conversation because at the level she is working at, it is assumed that the choreographers should know that already.

> To me, that's more of a matter of etiquette that you should know that any change would affect me… now if I were working with a student choreographer I would try to make sure that was something I taught them so they would know to do that.[40]

Kaufman's experience as a professional lighting designer as well as an educator is reflected in her responses to these questions. Teaching "a dance production class to students in the dance education department"[41] at New York University, has given her a broader perspective. In her professional opinion at a certain level of production the artists

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[39] Kathy Kaufman, telephone interview, March 31, 2008
[40] Kathy Kaufman, telephone interview, March 31, 2008

involved: chorographers, composers, designers, stage managers, should have an understanding of what information should be communicated to whom. Additionally, she feels strongly that the discussion of this topic is an important element to include in the education of new artists.

For professional lighting designer Jeffery Salzberg, his repeated frustration with choreographers' lack of understanding of lighting designers' process motivated him to write an article entitled *How to Work with a Lighting Designer[42]* in 1997. This article describes a lighting designer's process in lighting dance and the tools and information lighting designers prefer to have for their creative process. In an e-mail correspondence, I asked him if he has continued to experience this lack of understanding. He answered:

> Oh, yes. It's a constant process of education. It seems to me, though --
> and this is purely subjective -- that choreographers are more open to
> learning; this may be the happenstance of my working with more receptive
> choreographers these days.[43]

When asked if the experience level of the choreographer seems to factor into the likelihood of their understanding, he replied:

> The experience level definitely is a factor, if for no other reason than that the more
> experienced choreographers have had more opportunities to
> observe lighting designers in action.[44]

Salzberg also supplied his personal hypothesis of the source of these misunderstandings:

> Until recently, most college dance programs other than those in major conservatories
> have not exposed their students, in any formal way, to course work in design and
> production (and of course, many dancers -- especially in ballet, have not attended college
> at all).[45]

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[41] Slingerland, Amy L., *Kathy Kaufman, LD,* Live Design, Mar 1, 2000
[42] *How to Work with a Lighting Designer* can be found at: http://www.jeffsalzberg.com/lighting.htm
[43] Salzberg, e-mail correspondence, February 11, 2008
[44] Salzberg, e-mail correspondence, February 11, 2008
[45] Salzberg, e-mail correspondence, February 11, 2008

As artists gain an understanding of each other's process through experience or education, communication and therefore collaboration are facilitated. As a lighting designer, knowing how choreographers I am working with think about light in relation to their choreography helps me communicate my vision for the dance piece and begins a dialogue that can only improve the final product. Establishing an open pathway of communication about the importance of certain information gives me the opportunity to complement the choreography with my best design work.

CONCLUSION

Through recognizing the obstacles to communication, discussing them with the choreographers, then researching the methods professional lighting designers and choreographers use to overcome these obstacles, I developed tools that will make me a more successful collaborator in future endeavors. The first step in overcoming these obstacles and often the solution was simply recognizing that there was a problem or miscommunication, and talking about it.

I began my investigation with one definite tool I had discovered during the design process for Dance Repertory Theatre's *Proof*. While trying to talk about the dance piece with the choreographers and describe the movement of the dancers in my notes, I quickly discovered the need to learn the dancers' names. To help me with this task, I took digital photos of the dancers during a rehearsal, and then asked the choreographer or one of the dancers to identify everyone for me.

Another tool used throughout my design process is a video recording of the choreography. While it should not be a substitute for attending a rehearsal unless it is simply not possible to see a rehearsal, a video of the choreography is a very useful tool for lighting designers. It allows them the luxury of time to familiarize themselves with the choreography, carefully notating the blocking of the dance piece. It can also be used as a visual reference in discussions with the choreographer, the stage manger, and other members of the design team when the dancers are not available.

The obstacles of terminology and language can be very destructive to the communication process. Unless collaborators have an understanding of each other's language, "they spend more time trying to explain themselves to each other than they do creating work on the stage."[46] When working with any artist or technician outside of one's area of expertise, it is a beneficial practice to make a concerted effort to learn the other's technical code. As a lighting designer for dance, I have begun to and will continue to actively learn dance terminology as well as learning the vocabulary created by each dance piece I design for.

Understanding your fellow artists' creative processes is another important element to the facilitation of communication in a collaborative team. Although lighting designers prepare and visualize the lighting design before entering the theatre, the most creative, organic aspect of their artwork happens when they are in the theatre using light to paint and sculpt a dynamic visual image. Lighting designers love to work with choreographers who understand this and give them the space to create while contributing productively to their process.

Working with Julie Nathanielsz and Mary Chase showed me the value in engaging each choreographer I work with in a conversation about light to learn how they envision lighting and determine what lighting vocabulary they know. If I know where they are coming from, I can meet them halfway. I know what information they will understand and what aspects of lighting and my design I need to clarify further.

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[46] Justin, David, personal interview, March 24, 2008

The recognition of the miscommunications between myself and Chase proved the best solution to the problems. Instead of plowing through the tech process in a haze of frustration, we recognized when we were not communicating effectively, discussed the issues we were trying to resolve, and arrived at a greater understanding of each other's process. With this understanding, we were able to communicate more effectively and together create a richer, more cohesive design.

When lighting designers and choreographers collaborate, if they trust in each other's artistic ability, are open to each other's creative ideas and input, and engage in a constant, freely flowing, unobstructed communication process, the result is a more successful collaboration and a performance that utilizes the best of their artistic impulses.

APENDIX: Production Credits

Dance Repertory Theatre's

Lived Experience! Dance Reflections Transferred or Layered

Artistic Director: Lyn C. Wiltshire

Co-Artistic Director: Holly Williams

Sister: Choreography by Mary A. Chase

Costume Design: Mary A. Chase

Lighting Design: Katy Hallee

Composer:	Mark Huffman Deep Flute Dulcinea
Dancers:	Amnih Abotteen, Amanda Beittel, Ashley DePalermo, Jessica Gallardo*, Mariclaire Gamble, Erin Lee, Elissa Marshall, Emmy Walker

Isabella: Choreography by Julie Nathanielsz

Costume design: Jennifer Madison

Lighting Design: Katy Hallee

Draper:	Eleanor Fluharty

Technical consulting: Chad may

Composer:	Lily Allen
Sound Design:	Julie Nathanielsz, Blair Ferrier
Dancer:	Meg Brooker

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VITA

Kathleen Bridget Hallee was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut on June 1, 1977, the daughter of Kathleen M. and Joseph R. Hallee. Growing up in Walpole, Massachusetts, she graduated from Walpole High School in 1995. In 1999, she received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a major in Theatre from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. In the following years, Kathleen was the Assistant Technical Director for the Theatre Department at the College of the Holy Cross. Additionally she worked as a freelance Lighting Designer and Technical Director in the Massachusetts and Rhode Island area. Kathleen entered the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2005. While at the University of Texas at Austin, she has been honored to travel with the Department of Theatre and Dance's Dance Repertory Theatre as the lighting designer for two dance pieces awarded the honor of performing at the National College Dance Festival:

> *Solemn Opus: A Journey of Lost and Found*, Choreography by David Justin, performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. in 2006
> *Futaro Tomo (Two Together),* Choreography by Holly Williams, performed at the Miller Theatre in New York, New York in 2008.

In 2006, she was awarded one of six national spots as an ETC: LDI Sponsorship Student. Kathleen has taught for six semesters at the University of Texas at Austin as a Teaching Assistant in lighting technology. In the summer of 2007, she completed an internship with PRG, Production Resource Group, in Los Angeles, California. Kathleen will earn her Master's of Fine Arts in Theatrical Design in May of 2008.

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