

BETWEEN MODERN DANCE AND INTERCULTURAL PERFORMANCE:
THE MULTIPLE TRUTHS OF THE BIRD BELLY PRINCESS

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ABSTRACT

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Cultural appropriation or “theft” is a point of contention among scholars and performers. When American performance artists use non-Western cultural elements—such as music, dance, or material items—questions of authenticity, identity, and entitlement are raised. Researchers, who often have the benefit of objective distance, tend to feel that appropriation is wrong, that a more essentialist approach is needed. Performers tend to take a “Romantic individualist’s” viewpoint, believing that the creative process and the contribution of their art to humanity as a whole should allow them to take inspiration from any source, regardless of the culture.

This thesis is an examination of these stances on cultural appropriation in relation to modern dance, music, and intercultural performance. The focus of the examination is *At Last, The Tale of the Bird Belly Princess, Tien-Savi-Tsuru-Chak*, a production directed and choreographed by Professor Tammyan Starr, a dance instructor at Bowling Green State University, that incorporated elements of Korean and Balinese music and dance. I begin by situating this production within the history of modern dance and the ideology of intercultural performance. I then consider the continuum created by the Romantic individualist and essentialist poles. Ideas of authenticity, identity, and appropriation are examined in light of these two ideologies. A close analysis of the non-Western costuming, props, music and dance used in *Bird Belly Princess* provides the opportunity

for the application of the aforementioned ideas to a specific work. Multiple perspectives on the purpose and perception of *Bird Belly Princess* are also taken into account.

Through close examination of this production, I posit the necessity of examining a single work from many angles in order to understand the various “truths” that it expresses. I also consider the ethnomusicologist’s role in the study of dance; what the ethnomusicologist can learn by understanding dance as a cultural phenomenon.

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GLOSSARY

Hanbok – a traditional Korean costume consisting of a short jacket (*jeogori*), a pair of light pants (*paji*), an under-*chima* (slip), and a skirt (*chima*)

Chima – skirt to a woman's hanbok

Sogo – Korean farmer's dance

Buchaechum – Korean fan dance

Samul'nori – popular name for Korean dance/drumming ensemble

Changgo – hourglass-shaped Korean drum

Jing – medium sized Korean gong

Puk – Korean double-headed frame drum

Kwanggeri – small, Korean hand-held gong

SYNOPSIS OF *BIRD BELLY PRINCESS*

As I will be referring to specific sections of the performance throughout this thesis, a brief synopsis of *At Last, The Tale of the Bird Belly Princess, Tien-savi-tsuru-chak* is in order.

The story called for a total of fifteen performers: two Princesses (one narrating, one dancing), four Spiders, five Cranes, three Fish, and a Spider King. The Cranes and Fish also doubled as Stars, Lightning, and Thunder. In the script, the story was divided into six sections. These sections, however, were often renamed by Professor Starr and/or the dancers during rehearsals. Also, dances were added by Professor Starr that were not initially named in the script. For clarity's sake, I provide a table showing: 1) the sections as divided in the script; 2) each dance performed in the sections; 3) the musical selections used for each dance; and 4) composers for each musical selection.

Script Divisions	Names of Dances	Musical Selections	Composer
In the Night Sky	Stars	“Spiritual Creatures” “Perbawa”	Adam Zygmunt I Made Arnawa
Silenced by Thunder	Thunderstorm; Spiders	Korean drum dancing; “Pomegranate House”	UPD Hwang Byunki
Sticky Bargain	Water Fan	Ambient jing and puk; “Forest”	Strohschein and Yoon Hwang Byunki
Fish Chase	Chase Scene	taiko, bongos, and kwanggeri	Strohschein, Yoon, Murphy
The Fish’s Tale	Crane Reenactment	Gilak	Music in Bali CD
Rebellion/Name Saying Chant	Name Chant; Celebration Dance	Kecak; “Akabanah”	UPD KODO

Table 1: Breakdown of dances and musical selections in *Bird Belly Princess*.

I hereafter refer to the dances by the names found in the second column; these are the familiar (and affectionate) names used by Professor Starr, the dancers, and musicians.

“And now, at last, I can tell the tale of the Bird Belly Princess.” So begins the Narrator Princess, explaining to the audience who she is and why she was kidnapped by the Spider King: the Princess is a great storyteller and the Spider King wants her voice. So he steals her away to his home in the Night Sky, where she is kept prisoner and forced to regale him with stories.

After the introduction of the Spider King and his four Spider minions (the Spidettes), the Dancing Princess and Stars enact the magical night when “a shooting star flashed through the sky—and its path tore open a long shining seam in the side of the sky.” The Princess was free. But, she says, “He wanted me back. He wanted *my* voice for himself.” A thunderstorm ensues, with dancers drumming on *puks*, representing thunder, lightning, and clouds. The scene ends with the Dancing Princess’ escape.

In the interim between scenes, the four Spider minions perform a dance, searching for the Princess. They find her in a swamp and catch her in a long strand of spider web, and the Sticky Bargain ensues. The Spider King tries to convince the Princess to return to the Night Sky with him and becomes angrier the more she refuses him. Finally, in a fit of rage, the Spider King transforms the Princess into a Fish, exclaiming, “Now no one will hear you ever!” As the Spider King storms away, three other dancers join the Princess onstage. They perform Water Fan, a combination of Korean fan dance, Balinese foot movement, and modern dance, to emulate the movements of a fish.

Not to be outdone, the Spider King calls for his friends the Cranes and tells them of a demon hiding in the swamp. This “demon,” he says, has “cleverly taken the form of a fish, specifically a carp.” He then entreats the Cranes to “Find him! Destroy him! Save us all!” The

Chase Scene begins. The Cranes discover the Fish and “rip” it apart, flinging dancers left and right until only the Princess remains. At this point, the Large Crane enters and swallows the Princess whole. At last, the Princess can tell her story, for as she says to the Large Crane, “Now that I’m inside you, you can hear my little tiny fishy voice.” So the Cranes learn the true story of the Princess and how she came to be a fish. As the Large Crane listens to her tale, the two smaller Cranes act out a mini-review of the story.

The Spider King returns to find the Cranes furious at him for lying to them. They listen to the Princess’ name and begin to chant, “Tien-savi-tsuru-chak.” As the script indicates, “Kecak continues, reducing the Spider King to a helpless jelly of legs. At the section’s climax, the Princess Dancer is regurgitated whole again.” The Cranes urge her to tell her stories. The Narrator Princess declares happily to the audience, “I told my tale to the Cranes. They brought me home and I told my tale to everyone I knew and everyone I met. Then the Cranes brought me here, to you.” The narration ends where it began, with the Princess free to tell her story. The show concludes with the Celebration Dance with everyone, including the Spider King, taking part.

INTRODUCTION

How I Tell the Tale of the Bird Belly Princess

Backstage. Smoke curls softly through the air creating a shadowy haze in the blue light. Dancers move silently but decisively, setting props, checking costumes, and working off general nervousness. Members of the tech crew perform last-minute checks of equipment and whisper to each other over headsets. I check and double-check the placement of my *changgo* and rub my sweaty hands on my *chima*. The houselights go down. Whispered giggles and frantic last-minute questions are silenced. The music, and the story, begins.

In February, 2007, the University Performing Dancers (UPD), a pre-professional dance company of students attending Bowling Green State University, presented a show entitled *At Last, The Tale of the Bird Belly Princess, Tien-savi-tsuru-chak*. The production was a half-hour-long narrative, with script by Dr. Sean O'Malley. It included dances choreographed by Professor Tammyan Starr that incorporated Korean and Balinese dance elements over a “modern dance core.” The live music selections were created by ethnomusicology instructor Dr. Paul Yoon and me.

UPD had been rehearsing the show since the previous August; Dr. Yoon and I joined them in October. As the rehearsals progressed and the story took shape, uncertainty began to grow in me. What exactly was Professor Starr doing and what was I an accessory to? This was the first full-length dance production that incorporated music and narrative that I had ever been involved with; up until that point, my role in the dance department had been that of accompanist to “traditional” Korean dances, choreographed by Halla Pai Huhm, founder of the Halla Pai Hum Korean Dance Studio in Hawai'i and taught to UPD by her student and protégé, Mary Jo Freshley. These dances, while not ancient, sacred traditions, have a direct connection to

traditional Korean dance.¹ Was Professor Starr committing an act of appropriation by using these elements out of context? And was I, as co-music creator, helping her?

The appropriation of non-Western material culture and/or intellectual property is often considered exploitation of Third-World and/or minority cultures and a continuation of colonialism.² The idea of “cultural theft” or of stealing another person’s voice is taken very seriously by scholars and human rights advocates. Was Professor Starr committing cultural theft by using elements of Korean and Balinese material and social culture? It certainly looked that way at the beginning. As a performer, co-writer (in regards to the music), and ethnographer, I had unique insight into the making of *The Tale of the Bird Belly Princess*, but I did not begin to truly understand what went into the show until my conversations with Professor Starr turned toward the project’s intent, the history of modern dance, the proclivity of modern dancers, and her beliefs and feelings on appropriation. As my research and our conversations continued, I discovered that there are many layers of appropriation and many factors to be considered when applying this term to dance. Many scholars take the issue very seriously, but they do not stop to ask the performers *why* they are doing it. They do not consider the multiple perspectives and “truths” inherent in any production.

Taking an example from my own experience, I came to realize that the subject of appropriation or cultural borrowing could not be seen in simply black and white terms while researching Halla Pai Huhm’s background. Mrs. Huhm, though Korean by birth was raised in Japan, studied ballet and modern dance in Europe, and performed with Japanese, Chinese,

¹ Mrs. Huhm had been born in Korea and was continuing the tradition of her homeland in Hawai’i among the Korean-American population there.

² See Georgia Born and David Hesmondhalgh, eds., *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, eds., *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); and Sunil Swaroop, “Towards A Dialogical Theatre” (master’s thesis, Bowling Green State University, 1999).

Okinawan, and Filipino, as well as Korean, dance groups in Hawai'i. Mrs. Huhm choreographed new dances for her students that utilized performance techniques and movements found in traditional Korean dance. This does not mean, however, that her choices of movement and her ideas about movement were based solely on Korean dance and not informed by her experiences with other cultural dance forms. She passed leadership of her Korean Dance Studio on in 1973 to a Caucasian student, Mary Jo Freshley, who, while ethnically a cultural outsider, has taught at the studio and remained dedicated to the continuation of Korean culture in Hawai'i for over thirty years.

While providing Koreans in Hawai'i a cultural outlet and means of expression, Mrs. Huhm did not limit herself to only Korean dance and/or Korean students. She was interested in many diverse movement forms and did not deny herself the experience and influence of other cultures. Should one say Mrs. Huhm committed appropriation because she drew on personal experiences with other dance forms or because she did not belong to all the cultures she represented in dance? Should one say that Ms. Freshley has no right to teach Korean dances, not being Korean herself? These questions can only be answered honestly if one considers the two cases separately and if one looks at Mrs. Huhm and Ms. Freshley as individuals.

This eclectic backdrop became the touchstone of *The Tale of the Bird Belly Princess*, but it did not start with Mrs. Huhm. Modern dancers of and before her generation were interested in exploring the possibilities of different cultural dances. Professor Starr continued this tradition with *Bird Belly Princess* but the questions remain: What is considered inspiration what is considered cultural appropriation? When, if ever, is it permissible for performers to appropriate traditions from other cultures? Is *Bird Belly Princess*, in the end, an act of cultural appropriation and, if so, what are the implications?

This thesis explores the multiple “truths” and complexities of authenticity, identity, and cultural appropriation as evidenced in Professor Starr’s production and advocates for deep consideration for the judgment of any single production.³ It is not enough to simply look at something created by an American choreographer and say “That is cultural theft.” One has to look deeper and discover what the truth is for the choreographer, the dancers, and the outsiders viewing the production for the first time. There are many truths, many perspectives, to modern dance. This fact must be recognized if we are to move beyond simplistic labeling to uncovering deeper meaning afforded by modern productions.

Chapter One provides an overview of modern dance—its history, influences, and innovators—and of intercultural performance, which, while covering a wider swath of dramatic production, both draws ideology from and influences modern dance. Understanding the ideologies of modern dance and intercultural performance is crucial to the understanding of Professor Starr’s cultural borrowing.

Chapter Two focuses on issues of authenticity, identity, and appropriation, and places these ideas on a continuum created by Romantic individualism and essentialism. This exploration also reveals the differing cultural attitudes toward authenticity, identity, and appropriation. Chapter Three analyzes elements of *Bird Belly Princess*—costuming, props, music, and dance—to determine the layers of meaning. Chapter Four considers Professor Starr’s impetus and reasoning for the creation of *Bird Belly Princess*, what she feels is the show’s purpose, what she senses are her responsibilities to her students and to her art, and her personal opinions on appropriation. This chapter also includes insights from the student performers, differing interpretations of *Bird Belly Princess*, and the complexities that arose in trying to assign

³ Not single “performance.” I stipulate that one must listen to and watch a performance many times to become truly familiar with it. My research is, for example, based on months of rehearsals, five full-length performances, and two excerpted performances.

the label “cultural appropriation” to it. Chapter Five presents some of my own insights and perspectives on the subject of cultural appropriation. In this chapter, I address my struggle with ethical issues involving borrowing from other cultures and the conclusions I reached because of this struggle.

My Role in the Tale

Many events led to my involvement in *The Tale of the Bird Belly Princess*. My introduction to Korean music and dance began in the summer of 2003. During a week-long intensive workshop taught by Bowling Green State University alumna, Mary Jo Freshley, I learned *changgo* (Korean hourglass-shaped drum) accompaniment to a medley of Korean Drum Dances. Ms. Freshley returned in 2005 for another week-long workshop, this time teaching *Sogo*, a farmer’s dance, and *Buchaechum*, fan dance. I learned the accompaniment to *Sogo* as well as *Changgo Chum*, a dance during which the performer straps the *changgo* to his/her body, playing while he/she moves.

This interest in playing *changgo* led me to South Korea, where, for six weeks during the summer of 2006, I participated in Yonsei University’s International Summer Session. I was inundated with Korean culture, language, history, food, music, and dance. When registering for classes at Yonsei, I chose the *samul’nori* course as part of my curriculum. *Samul’nori* was the name of a Korean band that popularized *pung’mul* or *nongak*, a folk ensemble associated with farmers. The main instruments in *samul’nori* are *changgo*, *jing* (medium-sized gong), *puk* (two-headed, frame drum), and *kwanggeri* (small, hand-held gong). As I had already been playing *changgo* for three years, I was eager to learn these other instruments and how they worked

together as an ensemble. We spent most of the time in class focusing on the *changgo* and *puk*, however.

It was during this class that I grew to love the physicality of playing Korean drums. I was the only student who could not speak Korean and my teacher did not speak English. When she wanted to demonstrate something to me or fix an inaccuracy in my playing, she had to show me. Many times, she physically moved my arms and/or hands into the correct positions. We started communicating through drum patterns. Suddenly, for those few hours each week, it did not matter that we could not speak to each other. I realized how important the drums had become when my class visited a local restaurant for lunch one day. The other students took advantage of this free time, telling our teacher all about themselves, while I sat mute. One of girls tried to translate some of the conversation, but it was hard for her to keep up. I found myself longing to be back in the music studio where our situations were reversed; where, due to my previous experience, I was able to translate the drum language for my peers.

When I returned to Bowling Green in the fall of 2006, Professor Starr approached me about accompanying for a new production she was staging. I figured it would be similar to the accompaniment I had provided in the past. I slowly came to realize that this performance was much larger, much more complex than anything I had worked on before. I enlisted the help of Dr. Paul Yoon, an ethnomusicology instructor at BGSU, and together we began creating soundscapes for different sections of *Bird Belly Princess*. As the dancers rehearsed in the studio, we huddled in the hallway, experimenting with rhythms on the *kwanggeri* and drumming out patterns on the floor. Everyone was almost too accommodating as we tried to take our cues from the dancers and they tried to take their cues from us. Slowly, the production grew as we learned from each other how best to sonically represent the action.

My Field

Once I decided to use *Bird Belly Princess* as the focal point of my thesis, my role in the story changed. My work with the University Performing Dancers on *Bird Belly Princess* presented some unique situations for me as an ethnographer. My fieldwork was done at an American university; I interviewed and interacted with American dancers, choreographers, and storytellers. My “field” was the dance studio, the theater stage, and the practice room. Changing trends in ethnomusicology have—for American ethnomusicologists at least—shifted the focus of study from distant lands and foreign people to subjects much closer to home. As Bruno Nettl said, contemporary ethnomusicologists have redefined their field, establishing “different physical venues and different relationships to teachers...[and] contemplating their own home community.”⁴

I was in my own culture, working among my own people. This made me, as Nettl suggests, a “compatriot,” but not an insider. I shared the dancers’ status as Professor Starr’s student but had slightly higher ranking because I was a graduate student. I was an outsider because I was not a dancer. I did not understand the rules of behavior, the terminology, or the customs (one might even say “rituals”) of the dancers. I relied upon them to teach me—not music and not dance specifically—but their way of doing things, to make sure that I comported myself properly.

My outsider status increased once I began to document rehearsals and conduct interviews. I stepped outside my role as accompanist and collaborator, and into that of researcher. Suddenly, I was studying them. Our tenuous bond became all the more fragile. It saddened me because, instead of hanging out with the dancers and talking to them as equals, I was busy scuttling around documenting, taking pictures and constantly videotaping. Suddenly

⁴ Ibid., 185.

everything was important; everything was fraught with potential meaning. I questioned the reasoning behind everything and I could tell some of the dancers did not understand my actions. For them, *Bird Belly Princess* was just another show. They found the non-Western elements novel but just another way of dancing. The costumes, far from being exotic, were just pieces of clothing that had to be laundered; the props, instead of artifacts imbued with specific cultural meaning, were just one more thing to be counted and put away. By the end of the run, they were tired, “a little sick of it,” and wanted to move on to other performance opportunities. I differed from them greatly in my views of what they and I were doing, and this added to my outsider-ness.

My role as participant/observer was also distinctive. The point, when studying the traditions of another culture, is to interfere as little as possible; just by being there, the ethnomusicologist disrupts the normal flow of daily life. I could not help but “interfere” since Professor Starr had put me in charge of creating the live music sections. With Dr. Yoon’s help, I was producing the very thing I would later study. And, I was not studying the traditions of another culture, but the adapted traditions of non-Western cultures as performed by Western dancers. I was observing and participating in the physical actions on stage, but on another level, I was also observing how these dances were being used and changed. *And*, I was helping to change them.

An Ethnomusicologist Looks at Dance

It is perhaps unusual for an ethnomusicologist to be so interested in dance. But dance and music inform each other, and the study of dance is parallel to that of music. Through personal experiences, I believe there is interconnectedness between music and dance that neither

ethnomusicologists nor dance ethnologists have fully addressed. This interconnectedness is important and should be apparent to ethnomusicologists; after all, when performing the music of the culture they are studying, ethnomusicologists are more often than not accompanying dancing and/or dancing themselves. The relationship of music to dance opens up new areas of study in non-Western cultures but also possible study in the realm of Western dance, an area fairly neglected by music scholars.

Ethnomusicologists do recognize the importance of dance in some respects. Helen Myers includes a chapter on dance, written by Judith Lynne Hanna, in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*. The main focus of this chapter is on dances of non-Western cultures and how their social, political, religious, and economic views are reflected in their dances. Hanna suggests that “Western theatrical dance is compartmentalized in the sense of being largely relegated to the sphere of entertainment or art for its own sake.”⁵ It is, however, no reason to ignore contemporary Western dance traditions or their use of music; even if the dance is perceived by outsiders as being “only entertainment,” this does not mean that the performers feel the same way. Their perspectives and those of the musicians that accompany for them or the composers who write for them should be taken into account. Hanna, in an earlier publication, commented on the physical connection of music to dance, saying, “It is not clear how motor patterns are linked to definitive features of musicality: some groups do not dance to music. Perhaps music is linked to the definitive features of dance! Or perhaps the human psychobiological basis of rhythm generates both.”⁶ If this is true, then music and dance are more similar than previously suspected and should be studied by musicians and dancers alike.

⁵ Hanna, “Dance,” 323.

⁶ Hanna, *To Dance is Human*, 22-23.

A few dance historians and other scholars have taken an “ethnomusicological” approach to Western dance, in which they explore dance as a reflection of Western culture. Joann Kealiinohomoku’s “An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance” is one example. In this article, Kealiinohomoku reminds readers that every dance, including those considered culturally ubiquitous such as ballet, is tied to and representative of the cultures that create them. Deidre Sklar’s “Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance,” while applicable to all cultural dance forms, encourages scholars and dancers to look beyond movement to the meaning suggested by it. She states, “To speak of movement as a way of knowing implies that the way people move is as much a clue to who they are as the way they speak.”⁷ Ethnomusicologists look at music the same way.

Another avenue of exploration available to ethnomusicologists is modern dancers’ perceptions and use of music. Ethnomusicologists could investigate what kinds of music are preferred, why a choreographer chooses recorded music or live, and how the dancer sees music—as a tool or an equal partner. All these questions and more were suggested to me by my investigation into modern dance and my work on *Bird Belly Princess*.

Literature Review

Having a limited background in dance, my interaction with Professor Starr, both one-on-one and in the classroom, was particularly valuable. She recommended that I read *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader* (2001), edited by Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright, and *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (1997), edited by Jane C. Desmond. Both these texts provided cultural analyses by dance performers and ethnologists. Judith Lynne Hanna’s chapter on dance in Helen Myer’s *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*

⁷ Sklar, “Five Premises,” 30.

(1992) was also important in making connections between the study of music and the study of dance. She focused specifically on the dances of non-Western cultures, so her chapter placed in relief the actions of modern dancers and the study of dance in the West. The article “What Has Become of Postmodern Dance?” (1992) edited by Ann Daly addressed issues of contemporary dance, its relationship to previous dance forms, and performers’ personal opinions on the state of dance in the early 1990s. Two publications were extremely helpful in providing a basic understanding of modern dance were Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick’s *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (2003) and Walter Terry’s *The Dance in America* (1956). Both texts explore the history of modern dance from the perspective of its founders and most famous advocates.

Information available on intercultural performance is extremely varied. Each author had a slightly different perspective on the subject and so each provided his/her own definitions and interpretations. Patrice Pavis’ *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (1996) and Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins’ *Women’s Intercultural Performance* (2000) were helpful in establishing definitions of “culture” and “intercultural” in terms of performance.

Articles by Stephen Snow (1986) and Andrée Grau (1992) shed light on specific artists’ use of different cultural traditions. Snow interviewed three Americans who incorporated Balinese theatrical traditions into their own work. His concept of “deep learning” was useful as I approached ideas of authenticity in *Bird Belly Princess*. Grau’s article dealt with the combination of artists and researchers in an attempt to determine common theatrical forms in different cultural traditions that allow audience members to understand messages conveyed by the form without detailed knowledge of the cultures themselves. This article acknowledged not

only the work of the artists but also the difficulties faced by Grau's team when their priorities clashed with those of their subjects.

Victor and Edith Turner's article "Performing Ethnography" (1982) presented an unusual take on intercultural performance. Coming from an anthropological perspective, the Turners reported on the activities of their students, who were asked to read ethnographies and field notes of recently returned anthropologists and then to perform those ethnographies for a grade. The dichotomy of students performing for a grade rather than nurturing a deeper understanding was particularly useful as I sought to understand the UPD students' perspective on *Bird Belly Princess*.

Ideas of authenticity are unique to each artist. Many articles stated that performers and directors have to deal with issues of authenticity and accusations of appropriation. These articles did not clearly define either of these terms or discuss how performers view these issues, however. Sunil Swaroop's thesis *Towards a Dialogical Theatre* (1999) examined the "appropriateness" of appropriation in terms of two intercultural performances and posed the question: When might appropriation be morally justified by an artist? The Artworks Video *Asian/Asian-American Perspectives on Modern Dance* (1995), filmed during a dance festival held at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, provided information from dancers and choreographers. Three Asian-American panelists gave insight into their feelings about identity and how it shapes their work. *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (1997), edited by Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao, offered a look at many instances of cultural appropriation, not only in the arts, but in areas of science and tangible cultural property as well.⁸

⁸ I feel it telling that while this book addressed issues of appropriation from many different sources, dance was not among them; it was not even listed in the index.

My relationship—as performer, creator, and researcher—with *Bird Belly Princess* has been unique. As such, I sought a different way of expressing my thoughts and reactions to what I was seeing, hearing, and doing. Ron Emoff’s *Mementos, Artifacts and Hallucinations from the Ethnographer’s Tent* (2002) was helpful in providing examples of different approaches to writing about the field. In this respect, *Shadows in the Field* (1997), edited by Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley, was also useful in highlighting the work of specific ethnomusicologists and their placement of emphasis, both personal and professional, while conducting fieldwork.

These texts presented me with ideas and created a line of questioning I was able to utilize in my fieldwork. Through engagement with these works—along with multiple interviews and discussions with Professor Starr and members of the University Performing Dancers, and my previous experience with music, dance, and ethnomusicology—I set out to discover more about performers and scholarly perceptions of cultural appropriation.

CHAPTER ONE: MODERN DANCE AND INTERCULTURAL PERFORMANCE

Cultural appropriation, also termed “cultural theft” or “borrowing,” used in contemporary intercultural performances can trace its roots back to the modern dance movement that began in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The ethnocentrism of that time period helped to facilitate the use non-Western theatrical forms. It is very easy today to criticize early modern dancers and accuse them of cultural theft. The truth is never quite so simple. Modern dancers, then and now, were utilizing non-Western forms in order to find a universality—a common thread, not just in movement, but in life—that binds human beings together. This was and is the goal; whether this utopian vision is feasible or not remains to be seen.

In order to determine whether *Bird Belly Princess* constitutes cultural theft, one must understand where it came from, and the history of its kinesthetic structure, namely modern dance and intercultural performance. This chapter will explore modern dance—its beginnings, its performance ideals, and a few of the innovators who defined the genre—and intercultural performance. Intercultural performance can include all forms of theater, not just dance; my focus here will be to examine the many definitions of intercultural performance, explore some general themes that materialize, and discover what intercultural performance has taken from modern dance in terms of performance strategies, ideals, and goals.

Modern Dance

The political history of the United States has affected the development of the arts, particularly that of modern dance at the turn of the twentieth century. While the U.S. was not as

strong a colonizing power as countries in Western Europe, it does have a history of slavery, forced assimilation, and cultural slaughter. This imperialist attitude toward minority groups affected how non-Western peoples were represented by Western performers. The situation, however, was not completely black and white, and this is where new issues of representation and cultural appropriation emerge. While subjugated peoples were exploited, abused, reduced to stereotypes, and mocked by those in power, colonialism also brought performers from the West into contact with those in other parts of the world. From this contact, new forms of art, music, and dance developed. The rich, virtuosic freedom of modern dance came about, in part, because of the appropriation of non-Western dance forms, often used without permission of the native culture. It would be easy to accuse those particular modern dancers of cultural theft and dismiss their works as “merely” appropriation without merit of their own. This would deny the work and dedication of thousands of dancers around the world, not just in the U.S., who use modern dance, not as an imperialistic tool, but as a way to learn about other cultures, to experience them physically. As such, a closer inspection of modern dance and its ideology is called for.

Modern dance is a highly complex, virtuosic means of self-expression. At its inception in the late nineteenth century, this form constituted a break from the rigid structure and “unnatural” movements of ballet. Modern dancers emphasized freedom in the body and often shocked audiences by dancing in bare feet and refusing to wear corsets. The dances themselves were very different from the highly choreographed ballets; modern dances were experimental and iconoclastic, giving the impression of improvisation. The performers strove for an unexpected and spontaneous effect.

The modern dancer’s approach to movement was also very distinctive. The emphasis in ballet was a lightness, an upward lift in the body, a physicality based on a high center of gravity

and a strict adherence to alignment, whether in an individual dancer's own body or between a group of dancers. Modern dance transformed these ideas. The innovators explored different ways to move the body. Martha Graham focused on the "breath pulse," on the idea of muscular contraction and release driven by the breath. She exposed "discord" in the body: "Instead of concealing the dancer's exertion and trying to make her look serene, Graham made dancers use their tension, show their power."⁹ Doris Humphrey looked at gravity's effect on the dancing body, the dynamic instability of movement, and the concept of falling and recovering.

Contemporary modern dancers also explore the idea of gesture, small movements in the hands and how these movements can convey meaning. In contrast to ballet, which places focus on being above the floor, modern dance looks at how the body can use the floor—"letting the floor receive your weight, relaxing into the floor."¹⁰ Today, these ideas are still evolving. At the 2007 American College Dance Festival Association (ACDFA),¹¹ adjudicators asked choreographers to push the boundaries of their concept of dance, to ask themselves what would happen if their dancers were confined to a very small space. How would their dancers move if they could not stand up? What would happen if the dancers could not break physical contact with each other?

More than just movement changed with the development of modern dance. Choreographers became interested in analyzing the dancer's movement; they wanted to understand not only what the body was doing but how it was doing it. Modern dancers looked at

⁹ Marcia B. Siegel, "The Harsh and Splendid Heroines of Martha Graham," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 308.

¹⁰ Tammy Starr, interview.

¹¹ The American College Dance Festival Association was established in the 1970s in order to support the development of dance at American colleges and universities. Regional conferences and national dance festivals provide students and teachers the opportunity to participate in masterclasses and workshops. Student dance companies are also afforded the opportunity to perform for their peers and to be adjudicated by professional dancers and choreographers. The University Performing Dancers attended the 2007 Festival and presented an excerpted version of *Bird Belly Princess*.

and analyzed weight shift; they examined where different movements were initiated in the body. Choreographers investigated developmental theories, how babies moved and why, and how these movements could be incorporated into their own dance vocabulary. The notation of dance was also a new development. Directional and qualitative language to describe or “notate” dance was developed by Rudolf von Laban. First published by Laban in 1928, Labanotation provided dancers a way of recording and documenting movement. Laban used symbols to represent points on a dancer’s body. These symbols also depicted the direction, tempo, and “dynamics” of the movement. All this was done to better understand how the body could be used to convey meaning.

Modern dance drew inspiration from many sources. One of these was the spectacle of vaudeville, which included not only dance, but music, lighting, costuming, and special effects.¹² Other sources of inspiration were the dance traditions of Asia, Africa, and Native America. Almost from the beginning, modern dancers were using movements either drawn directly from cultures in these regions of the world or, more often, using stereotyped movements and images to convey the flavor of the exotic Other.

A dichotomy exists in modern dance between more abstract movement that is conceived around certain ideas of structure (e.g. contract and release, fall and recovery), and the option of drawing inspiration from established dance forms from the non-Western world. It is the use of non-Western movement by early modern dancers that I wish to highlight in order to examine their intentions. I will underscore just a few of the modern dance innovators whose personal outlooks paved the way for the conception of *Bird Belly Princess*.

¹² Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) was one of the first American modern dancers. She claimed that “dance is the movements of the human body in harmony with the movements of the earth.”¹³ She emphasized a freedom of the body, a defiance of the constraints of ballet. For Duncan, the desire to dance “grew from an inner urge to action,” and she postulated the idea of dancing from the core, saying “the soul [has] its home in the solar plexus.”¹⁴ Professor Starr’s desire for inward contemplation and unique choreographic vocabulary finds its roots in Duncan’s philosophies:

[Duncan] resented imitation, and not merely for reasons of jealousy. ‘Others,’ she said, ‘begin to imitate me, not understanding that it was necessary to go back to a beginning, to find something in themselves first...the dances of no two persons should be alike...I shall not teach the children to imitate my movements—I shall help them develop those movements natural to them.’¹⁵

This proclivity for modern dancers to create something totally unique was confirmed in Reynolds and McCormick’s later work where they state, “[T]he basic tenet of the entire modern dance movement was the discovery of personal vocabularies.”¹⁶

Another initiator of modern dance was Ruth St. Denis. St. Denis, born Ruth Dennis¹⁷ in 1879, is believed to be the first American dancer to appear in full-length dance performances instead of short, recital pieces. Walter Terry credited her with being the first American dancer to use “the profound themes of the Orient”¹⁸ in her dances. Inspired by the picture of Isis on a poster advertising Egyptian Deities Cigarettes, St. Denis said, “Hereafter, I will be Egypt...”¹⁹ Her goal was not to perform authentic Egyptian dances but instead to somehow portray the nation of Egypt through movement. Early on in her productions, “no attempt was made for

¹³ Terry, Walter, *The Dance in America*, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1956), 38.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁶ Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ David Belasco, one of her teachers, “canonized” her from Ruth Dennis to Ruth St. Denis (Terry 53).

¹⁸ Terry, *The Dance in America*, 49.

¹⁹ Ibid., 53.

ethnic dance authenticity.”²⁰ Even though she appropriated Asian techniques and stereotyped movements, St. Denis was striving for a more universal expression of humanity. According to Terry, the dancer “was torn...by inner conflicts. Had the public understood that she was not merely an ‘Oriental’ dancer but an artist who had selected the Orient’s forms to convey her message of man’s spirit?”²¹

Martha Graham (1894-1991) is one of the most well-known American modern dancers, not only among dancers but among musicians as well.²² Graham was inspired by “primitive dance.” Here she was referring to “primitive” in the sense of primal, the connection of the body and blood to the “bone of the land.” After her production *Frontier*, critics commented “Wasn’t dance supposed to be pretty, or, if it had to be serious, shouldn’t it tell a story with nice pantomimic gestures everyone could understand?”²³ Up until that point, dance had used linear narrative to convey meaning; Graham’s performances broke with that tradition.

Many dancers incorporated aspects of non-Western dance into modern theatrical productions. Ruth St. Denis and her partner Ted Shawn used Hopi, Aztec, “Hindu,” Spanish, Balinese, Siamese, North African, and ancient Egyptian elements. In keeping with the ethnocentrism common in the early twentieth century, “Sometimes they strove for ethnic accuracy, but more often they chose to use ethnic materials creatively in modern ballets with racial flavors, colors and idioms.”²⁴ St. Denis herself once said “I agree...that the artist just plain does what he wants to do and the world can go hang as far as he is concerned.”²⁵

²⁰ Ibid., 55.

²¹ Ibid., 58.

²² She collaborated with composer Aaron Copland on the ballet “Appalachian Spring” (1944).

²³ Terry, *The Dance in America*, 78.

²⁴ Ibid., 188.

²⁵ Ibid., 50.

A contemporary of Graham, La Meri (Russell Meriwether Hughes 1898-1988), used authentic traditional movements and dances from non-Western countries. She presented dances from India, Spain, Bali, Siam, Burma, Java, Japan, China, Hawai'i, the Philippines, North Africa, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador. In an attempt to prove the universality of dance, La Meri “used the classical movements and gestures of Hindu dance to retell the story and reproduce the choreographic form of *Swan Lake*, a notable and fascinating achievement.”²⁶ We may construe from Terry’s statement that the use of non-Western dance and movement to tell familiar Western stories may have begun here.

There were, of course, many other dancers who contributed to the growth of modern dance in the United States. The concept of bodily freedom, the incorporation of non-Western movement/cultures, the desire for universal expression, the dichotomy of authenticity and creative license, and the use of non-Western forms to tell familiar stories lay the groundwork for the intercultural works that were to follow.

Intercultural Performance

The term “interculturalism” came into prominence in the mid-1970s. Perhaps in response to the work of the Civil and Women’s Rights Movements, performers began to look for more authentic and respectful ways of representing and using non-Western cultural elements. Richard Schechner first used the expression “interculturalism” as a contrast to “internationalism.” He differentiated the two by defining interculturalism as an exchange among individuals of different cultures rather than an exchange among nations, which implies “official exchanges and artificial

²⁶ Ibid., 189

kinds of boundaries.”²⁷ Schechner was looking for something more egalitarian, an “ethnicity without racism.” This idealistic, almost utopian view permeates definitions and perceptions of intercultural performance.

How does one define intercultural performance? The term is often used in a broader sense, referring not only to dance but to spoken theater as well. Many scholars, like Schechner, attempt to define the idea by explaining what it is not. Andrée Grau (1992) differentiates between “multiculturalism,” or what he sees as many cultures existing side by side, and “interculturalism,” or the creation of something completely original. He states, “To do intercultural work is not about picking something from this culture and something from that, it is about creating something new, belonging to no existing group, to no existing culture.”²⁸ Schechner takes another approach, asserting that interculturalism pre-supposes interaction between cultures while multiculturalism is complete differentiation – “institutionalized, homogenized presentations of the multicultural, in mere touristic and colorful presentations of difference.”²⁹ This suggests that the multicultural is a celebration of perhaps stereotyped differences, with an emphasis on the exotic and dramatic. In both cases, interculturalism implies an intermingling of cultural attributes to create an original whole, while multiculturalism emphasizes the unique qualities of individual cultures.

Patrice Pavis, in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, delves deeper into the problem of definition and provides specific examples of what she feels constitutes intercultural performance. Pavis first identifies four definitions of “culture” before moving on to six alternate

²⁷ Patrice Pavis, “Interculturalism and the Culture of Choice,” in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Edited by Patrice Pavis (London: Routledge, 1996), 42.

²⁸ Other scholars might argue with, or qualify, this statement, saying that while the creation might belong to no culture, the “many elements will be clearly identifiable as coming from a particular culture” Sunil Swaroop, “Towards a Dialogical Theatre” (master’s thesis, Bowling Green State University, 1999).

²⁹ Mark Maufort, ed., *Staging Difference: Cultural Pluralism in American Theatre and Drama* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 3.

categories of “-culturalism.”³⁰ She distinguishes between “intercultural” and “international,” saying,

‘Intercultural’ does not mean simply the gathering of artists of different nationalities or national practices in a festival. In this banal sense of *international* (or cosmopolitan), one may say that contemporary theatrical or choreographic production has become international, often for simple economic reasons: in this way artists and producers stand a much greater chance of making a profit, since their productions can be understood everywhere without adaptation. This may seem to justify them, but it also risks reinforcing national stereotypes...[T]he internationalization of festivals and productions and the cosmopolitanism of certain groups...do not necessarily result in an intercultural experience.³¹

Internationalism provides for an exchange of ideas and “cultural pilgrimage[s], while still recognizing the hard laws of marketing.”³²

What, then, constitutes an intercultural performance? Pavis provides a few examples: those that use Western performance techniques to tell non-Western stories, e.g., Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata*, and, conversely, retelling of Western stories using non-Western performance techniques, e.g., La Meri’s Indian-influenced rendition of *Swan Lake* and Japanese director Suzuki Tadashi’s Noh staging of Shakespeare. The focus of Pavis’ book, however, is on the intermingling of performance techniques; for her, this is where the true interculturalism lies. She says, “One should avoid turning intercultural theater into a vague terrain for comparing themes or cultural identities...or for contrasting ways of thinking. Instead, one should locate it as a crucible in which performance techniques are tested against and amalgamated with the techniques that receive and fashion them.”³³ In other words, stop thinking, start moving, and see what the moving teaches you.

³⁰ These being: intracultural, transcultural, ultracultural, precultural, postcultural, and metacultural. For more details see Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996).

³¹ Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), 5.

³² Ibid.

³³ Pavis, *Intercultural Performance Reader*, 2.

Holledge and Tompkins define interculturalism as “the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions, a temporary fusing of styles and/or techniques and/or cultures. Interculturalism is sometimes confused with theatre anthropology which analyses another culture’s ‘theatre’ ...without a sharing of traditions.”³⁴ The emphasis here is definitely placed upon exchange; performing someone else’s culture is different than performing interculturally.

So far the focus has been primarily on the “intercultural” side of intercultural performance, but the second term is worth considering as well. The first entry in the *Encarta Dictionary: English (North America online)*, defines performance as “a presentation of an artistic work to an audience, for example, a play or piece of music.” The fourth entry defines performance as “a public display of behavior.” Performance is not necessarily something that people pay money to see. People perform their own cultures everyday by conforming to or rebelling against societal norms. In theatrical productions, artists publicly display behaviors that audience members recognize, identify with, and that challenge or maintain the *status quo*. As anthropologist Victor Turner states,

Cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances. [...] A performance is a dialectic of ‘flow,’ that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and ‘reflexivity,’ in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen ‘in action,’ as they shape and explain behavior.³⁵

In performing theatrically, one is performing their own culture. What happens, however, when one is also performing another culture? Which voice becomes dominant? Can the production truly be equal? While this thesis will explore a staged theatrical performance, the “performance

³⁴ Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins, *Women’s Intercultural Performance* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

³⁵ Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, eds., *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

of behaviors” by the artists involved will not be ignored. Chapter Four will elaborate on the performance of the dancers’ own culture(s) during rehearsals and how they adopted elements of Korean and Balinese culture into their own.

What consensus can be drawn on intercultural performance? It is an interaction and exchange, between two or more cultures, of performance techniques and/or stories. Out of this exchange emerges a creation that is totally unique, that belongs to no culture, but has aspects that may be recognized as belonging to specific cultures. And, as Holledge and Tompkins suggest, it is temporary. While the performers may be touched and/or changed by what they have experienced, they have not been initiated into a new culture.

Perspectives

In researching literature on intercultural performance, several general themes emerge that may have been influenced by modern dance, the first being: intercultural performance as a prerogative of the West. Modern dance had its foundation in the United States and Germany. While neither the U.S. nor Germany were major colonizing powers, there existed in both countries feelings of superiority and entitlement that facilitated the use of non-Western dances, usually without regard to the original meaning or context. Even though many contemporary modern dancers and intercultural performers are of Asian or African descent, certain aspects of intercultural performance retain a Western perspective. Pavis declares “The notion of intercultural performance professes to be universal, applicable to any cultural context. In actual fact, it comprises a primarily Western vision of exchange that elides the reality of socio-economic and cultural relations in favour of a schematic model of symmetry and reversibility set

up between the two poles of exchange.”³⁶ Western artists and directors appear to be under the assumption that Eastern³⁷ artists will be just as interested in imitating us as we are them. “Indeed it is perhaps Eurocentrist to imagine that a Japanese perspective...also implies the imitation and borrowing of elements from outside its own culture in order to further affirm and stabilize it.”³⁸

Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins, in *Women's Intercultural Performance*, concur, saying “in its current form in the late twentieth century, intercultural performance has emerged principally from the practice of western artists...It is complicit with a postmodern license to borrow theatrical techniques from different cultures (both in the west and beyond) within a western defined global and theatre practice.”³⁹ Intercultural performance is, for Western European and North American artists, a way to expand their theatrical forms that is not necessarily paralleled in other countries. Articles by Snow (1986) and Grau (1992), which report on American and British artists respectively, add credence to the argument that intercultural performance has been the purview of *Westerners* studying *non-Western* traditions.

There are, however, exceptions to every rule. Snow cites the work of I Wayan Dibia and the collaboration between American artists and Balinese artists living and working in the United States as proof that intercultural exchange can be a two-way street. Erika Fischer-Lichte also discusses a 1920s Japanese theatrical development, saying, “Whilst the leading members of the European avant garde were discovering the theatrical traditions of the Far East as innovative potential for their own theatre, members of the Shingeki movement had turned towards the potential of renewal offered by realistic drama and theatre of Western origin.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Pavis, *Intercultural Performance Reader*, 25.

³⁷ For views on the “unified East” see Steve Tillis, “East, West, and World Theatre,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 20, no. 1 (2003), 71-87.

³⁸ Pavis, *Intercultural Performance Reader*, 2.

³⁹ Holledge and Tompkins, *Women's Intercultural Performance*, 2

⁴⁰ Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre,” in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. Patrice Pavis (London: Routledge, 1996), 27-40.

One of the main motivating factors in participating in intercultural performance has been the attraction to its “universality” and the appeal of creating something that rises above difference. With the founding of his International Center for Theatre Research in 1970, Peter Brook intended to discover “a new form of theater that could speak to people worldwide—theater which was truly universal...[he] sought a communication that transcends language, to find a common experience of all of us.”⁴¹ Later, after the 1981-82 New York and Arizona conferences on ritual and theater, Victor Turner concurred: “A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another’s performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies.”⁴² This statement reveals Turner’s “utopian vision of [a] world community based on mutual respect and enjoyment of cultural differences, exchanges of feelings as well as of ideas, and the increasing ability of people to experience and re-experience each other’s cultural identities.”⁴³

Fischer-Lichte traces the concept of the “universal humane” back to Goethe and presents several examples of performances that attempt to “transcend” culture and speak to a common humanity. One such performance is Robert Wilson’s *the CIVIL warS*. This production draws images from cultures all over the world but presents them as “objects that are not culturally bound to any specific meaning.”⁴⁴ This work is site specific, meaning that

any spectator from any culture can receive the objects presented in the context of their own culturally specified experience and deduce meaning. The refusal to implement a sign process on stage thus appears to be the precondition for allowing the process to be carried out inside the spectator’s head, regardless of the culture to which the spectator belongs.⁴⁵

⁴¹ <http://www.answers.com/topic/peter-brook>, accessed February 1, 2007.

⁴² Schechner and Appel, *By Means of Performance*, 1.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Fischer-Lichte, “Interculturalism,” 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Another artist who strives for the universal is Japanese director Suzuki Tadashi. “Since he believes the linguistic powers of expression to be the most highly developed in Western drama and the physical powers of expression most developed in Japanese culture, he sees the combination of both traditions as a highly effective method by which he can re-form language and body into universals of expression.”⁴⁶ It would not matter which culture Suzuki drew from, as long as they were the most expressive, the most developed. What he is working for is not the amalgamation of Japanese and Western culture but something much higher and more complete.

Yet another dramatist working interculturally for universality is Nigerian Wole Soyinka. Soyinka is

not only interested in providing African culture with an African theatre instead of a European one. Rather he addresses the question of what theatre might bring to a humanely driven culture, as indeed to the whole world. The conscious and productive mediation between European and African theatre traditions thus indicates the Utopia of a world culture based on humanist and humane traditions; a Utopia to which many different, national cultures can each, in their own specific ways, contribute.⁴⁷

Pavis explores the “transcultural,” a subcategory of intercultural, which “transcends particular cultures on behalf of a universality of the human condition.”⁴⁸ Brook’s work is cited again as trying to bridge the superficial differences between cultures and expose the true humanity that we all share. Whether or not universality is truly attainable through intercultural performance or any other performance medium, the artists who work with elements of many cultures seem to believe it is possible.

One aspect that all scholars tend to agree on is that intercultural performance gives the artist and the audience insight into the cultures from which it borrows. The insight and

⁴⁶Fischer-Lichte, “Interculturalism,” 34.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁸ Pavis, *Intercultural Performance Reader*, 6.

experience may differ depending on which side of the footlights one is on. For the performers, the awareness may be physical and emotional as well as intellectual. Steven Snow used the term “hybridization,” borrowed from sociolinguistics, to refer to “deep learning” done by Western artists who study for substantial periods of time with non-Western master teachers and performers. Hybridization is the process through which the Western artists absorb non-Western ideology into their own ideas of performance and teaching. These artists are then left, almost stranded, between two cultures: their own and those of their teachers. They will never be complete insiders to the cultures of their teachers, yet their “deep learning” has given them understanding and sensitivity that their Western students and peers may not fathom. John Emigh, an American who studied Balinese masked theater, “learned from the Balinese how to establish an intense psychological relationship with a mask.”⁴⁹ He had difficulty, however, translating that relationship to his students and other performers back in the U.S. Islene Pinder, another American artist who studied in Bali, also had difficulty making masked dancing accessible to American dancers.⁵⁰ When taking performance techniques out of their native culture, the process of transmission can become diluted; movements and gestures will not mean the same thing to the students as they will to the teacher. This does not, however, totally negate their meaning.

Victor Turner, writing in the 1980s, had a completely different take on what and how one learns from intercultural performance, one that falls more in line with his “display of behavior” definition. He did not necessarily have theatrical performances in mind when he said, “we will know one another better by entering one another’s performances and learning their grammars

⁴⁹ Steven Snow, “Intercultural Performance: The Balinese-American Model,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 3, no. 2 (1986): 218.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

and vocabularies.”⁵¹ As a professor of anthropology, Turner required his students, quite literally, to perform ethnographies. This was

to aid students’ understanding of how people in other cultures experience the richness of their social existence, what the moral pressures are upon them, what kinds of pleasures they expect to receive as a reward for following certain patterns of action, and how they express joy, grief, deference, and affection, in accordance with culture expectations.⁵²

Going through the physical motions puts the rituals and ceremonies in the body. Turner and his wife wrote about a staged Christian wedding their students performed. Each student was given a role to play, i.e. Drunken Uncle, Bride’s Grandfather, etc. Turner said of the experiment, “We were astonished at how well the students understood what phenomenological sociologists would call the ‘typifications’ of American culture, how almost ‘instinctively’ and ‘automatically’ they ‘knew what to do next’ and how to do it, in fact, how ‘natural’ many people find it to act ‘ritually’ given the proper stimuli, motivations, and excuse.”⁵³ This knowledge could then be applied to unfamiliar ritual performance; students understood that if they felt this way about their own culture, others must feel similarly about *their* own cultures. By performing the rituals of other cultures, students developed a more visceral understanding of another culture’s experience of life.

In order to perpetuate and facilitate his dream of cultural acceptance and understanding, Turner, and other scholars such as Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, planned a series of conferences on ritual and theater that took place in 1981 and 1982. Schechner and Appel later wrote about their ambitions for the conferences:

We wanted these people to interact not just ‘academically,’ on the basis of prepared papers and formal responses, but through ‘lived experience.’ We intended not only to see finished performances, and fragments thereof, but

⁵¹ Schechner and Appel, *By Means of Performance*, 1.

⁵² Victor and Edith Turner, “Performing Ethnography,” *The Drama Review* 26, no. 2 (1982), 33.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 38.

methods of training, and to explore the various ways performances were received in different cultures and contexts. We wanted to consider not only ‘pure’ performances – or idealized versions of traditional genres – but also tourist shows, hybrids, and genres in the midst of profound disturbance and/or transformation. We wanted contemporary Euro-American performances represented as well as genres from Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world. We attempted to include various kinds of performance – from sacred ritual to experimental theatre. And we wanted divergent scholarly approaches represented.⁵⁴

Turner wanted performers and academics from around the world to talk to each other and actively learn from each other. “We planned sessions where scholarly participants could try out training and performance techniques themselves, as a way of experiencing different genres in their bodies.”⁵⁵

The intent of intercultural performance is to overcome differences, to reach a universal expression, and for each artist to come away from the experience a richer, more complete human being. These goals can be met in many different ways and can serve to justify the fact that the artists are taking elements from different cultures out of context and using them for their own purposes. Turner, Schechner, and Appel saw no problem in presenting “not only ‘pure’ performances – or idealized versions of traditional genres – but also tourist shows, hybrids, and genres in the midst of profound disturbance and/or transformation” to Western scholars and teachers of dance. All these forms offer different truths expressed physically through dance. What happens, however, when many truths are contained and expressed by one specific production? How do modern dancers and intercultural performers deal with issues of authenticity, identity, and appropriation? How do they draw the fine line between creative license and cultural theft?

⁵⁴ Schechner and Appel, *By Means of Performance*, 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO: ISSUES OF CONTENTION

When dealing with the use of non-Western dance traditions in modern Western dance productions, questions arise regarding the authenticity of the production and the identity of the choreographer/performer(s). If the production is considered “authentic” and the identity of the performer(s) conforms to generally held beliefs about who should be performing, the work gains legitimacy. Modern dance productions however, built as they are on the basis of freedom of expression, challenge ideas of authenticity and identity.

“I am a thief and I am not ashamed. I steal from the best, wherever it happens to me. I am a thief and I glory in it.”⁵⁶ So wrote Martha Graham in the first half of the twentieth century. It would be very easy to take Graham at her word, call her a thief, denounce all the work she has done and the contributions she made to modern dance. As difficult as it may be, however, the issue of thievery, as it applies to living traditions, is not so straightforward. There are often multiple points of view and multiple “truths” to a single performance. One must examine the work from many angles and perspectives in order to deduce meaning; both insider and outsider views must be considered. This chapter will explore the many “truths” of authenticity, identity, and appropriation; how they exist along the continuum between essentialism and “Romantic individualism”;⁵⁷ and how they apply to dance in general. The following chapter will examine *Bird Belly Princess* in particular.

⁵⁶ “Asian/Asian-American Perspectives on Modern Dance,” DVD, Artworks Video, 1995.

⁵⁷ Rosemary J. Coombe, “The Properties of Culture and the Possession of Identity: Postcolonial Struggle and the Legal Imagination,” in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, ed. Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 74-96.

Opposite Ends of a Continuum

Rosemary J. Coombe posits two extreme viewpoints held by performers, scholars, and activists who work with non-Western cultural materials, that of the “Romantic individual” and that of the essentialist. The Romantic individual believes in the right of the artist to create freely, to draw from personal experience, and to take inspiration from any source. “For such an author, everything in the world must be made available and accessible as an ‘idea’ that can be transformed into his ‘expression,’ which thus becomes his ‘work.’”⁵⁸ Any suggestion of restriction is seen as a violation of freedom of expression. The individual’s voice is cherished above all and the resulting work—be it music, visual art, or dance—is seen as an expression of humanity rather than of a particular culture.

The essentialist viewpoint resides at the other end of this continuum. This perspective maintains that only members of a particular culture can understand and/or speak for that culture. In some essentialists’ views, traditional, “authentic” cultural artifacts should never be taken out of their native contexts. They should never be subject to market value or considered commodities. Essentialism also posits that people can be reduced to, at best, archetypes and, at worst, to stereotypes. This view creates simple binaries that allow for very little grey area; one is man or woman, black or white, gay or straight, Western or Other.

These two extremes represent two ends of a continuum. As with any extreme viewpoint, they provide clear-cut definitions and guidelines and are almost never feasible. Most modern dance productions exist in between but tend to be closer to the Romantic individual “pole.” There remains, however, a tension within the productions themselves. As such, they require analysis on an individual basis and cannot be lumped into one category.

⁵⁸ Coombe, “The Properties of Culture and the Possession of Identity: Postcolonial Struggle and the Legal Imagination,” 77.

Authenticity

Claims of authenticity are very important to the essentialist viewpoint. The authenticity of a piece of music, a story, or a dance is often tied to ideas of truth or purity. Two questions that must be asked, however, are: 1) What constitutes “authenticity” and 2) How does one decide whether a dance is authentic? There are many different approaches to the question of authenticity, particularly in regards to dance.

If one takes a completely essentialist approach, then authenticity lies solely with the culture, who is in and who is out. The individual is only a factor when issues of authenticity and identity are called into question, and then his/her only role is being able to lay claim to the culture. Essentialism fixes a non-Western culture’s authentic traditions in the distant past, often before contact with the West. An authentic performance is one given only by members of the culture, dressed in clothing representative of ancient times, and performing (in this case) dances that are hundreds, if not thousands, of years old. The setting for authentic performances is usually envisioned to be either rural areas or the royal court; the intended audience being either commoners or the elite, but never the two together. Authentic traditions do not change, but remain untouched through the centuries.

There are, however, many differing viewpoints on the subject of authenticity. For example, a dance can change and remain authentic in the eyes of its people. Judy Van Zile, in her research on *Ch’oyongmu*, a Korean court dance which has remained alive for centuries and has undergone several changes, states that, “Claims of ‘authenticity’ regarding the dance performed today are based on the belief that it is essentially a continuation of the dance reconstructed in 1923, which, in turn, is considered ‘authentic’ and ‘accurate’ because it was

based on information in historical documents.”⁵⁹ She clarifies in an endnote that “Authenticity...in Korea is most often equated with age and an adherence to something assumed to be correct.”⁶⁰ Even though the dance has been changed, as is evidenced by written records, it is still considered authentic because it is a continuation of something “assumed to be correct.”

Another example of how authenticity can be maintained in the face of change is found in *Buchaechum*, Korean fan dance. This dance has become representative of Korean culture, yet it was conceived in the 1910s as part of *Shinmuyong*, or “New Dance.” “The substance of the New Dance was the traditional dance movements of Korea combined with the new concept of creativity.”⁶¹ While the roots of this dance can be traced back to ancient shamanistic and Buddhist practices, its new incarnation was influenced by Western dance and performance practice. *Buchaechum* is one of the dances featured at Seoul’s Chongdong Theater Korean Traditional Stage, which has had performances “everyday since 1997 to keep the passion of traditional Korean arts alive.”⁶² Even though the music and dance performed at the Chongdong Theater are billed as traditional, they, in actuality, include contemporary pieces written by living artists. The music and dances performed are seen as traditional and authentically Korean and, like *Ch’oyongmu*, a continuation of Korean theatrical culture, which, while rooted in the past, is influenced by the present.

The essentialist view of authenticity ignores the dynamic nature of societies, how they are influenced by other cultures, and how artistic traditions, like dance, grow and adapt to create meaning and relevance to modern audiences. Why, then, is this view appealing to some? One

⁵⁹ Judy Van Zile, “Interpreting the Historical Record: Using Images of Korean Dance for Understanding the Past,” in *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, ed. Theresa Jill Buckland (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 159.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶¹ Kim Malborg, *Korean Dance*, translated by Lee Jean Young (Seoul: Ewha Womens University Press, 2005), 131.

⁶² Chongdong Theater, http://www.chongdong.com/chongdong_english/m01_02_ideology.htm, accessed May 22, 2007.

possible reason is that it makes categorizing intangible art forms like dance much easier. If traditional dances are only performed by natives of the culture, one may look at any particular dance and say, “That is Korean. That is Balinese.” Another possible appeal of the essentialist view is reflected in “the persistent ethnological desire to maintain Paradise Lost in the face of inevitable change.”⁶³ This desire for cultural stasis runs counter to the modern dancer’s aspiration to create new works built on personal experience and past styles.

Modern dancers take a more Romantic individualist approach, striving not for static imitation but dynamic interpretation and, therefore, a different approach to authenticity. For example, while attending the American College Dance Festival in March 2007, I participated in a Chinese dance workshop lead by Mrs. Shih-Ming Li Chang, an Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance at Wittenberg University. Mrs. Chang studied folk dance in Taiwan and received her B.A. degree in Dance from the University of Chinese Culture in Taipei. During the course of the workshop, Mrs. Chang showed the dance students and me how to execute an intricate hand gesture; there is a certain way to hold the hands and fingers so as to make the shape of a flower. This hand gesture, we were told, was prominent in certain Chinese women’s dances and was considered a large part of the feminine aesthetic. As she described the correct way to hold one’s fingers, Mrs. Chang expressed the belief that rigorous training in one specific dance form stifles the individual’s creativity. She told us that because we had not been subjected to the meticulous training involved in learning Chinese dance, we would have no problem adapting this and other movements to suit our own performance needs. She indicated that if choreographers liked a certain movement, such as the position of the hands as a flower, they should feel free to use it in their own choreography; she condoned giving them the flavor of Chinese dance without any real

⁶³ Solis, *Performing Ethnomusicology*, 16.

context or history.⁶⁴ Mrs. Chang's concern was not for authenticity in the sense that the dance had to be learned in China and executed exactly like a traditional Chinese dancer. She cared more about artistic expression and the individual meaning each fledgling dancer would attribute to the gesture. In this way, a traditional, "authentic" Chinese dance movement could be used by non-Chinese dancers to communicate meaning in their own, unique ways.

Identity

Issues of authenticity and identity are closely related; there are multiple interpretations of how identity affects the authenticity of a performance. Often, the identity of the performer contributes to the perceived authenticity of the performance. The assumption is that if the performer is "visually authentic," that is, racially similar to the culture portrayed, then the portrayal is more genuine. "Trimillos...notes what we might call 'misplaced approval' of his right to perform and teach Japanese koto, based upon his 'Asian appearance' (although his is of non-Japanese ancestry)."⁶⁵ The assumption that someone is an expert in a certain culture and is capable of speaking for that culture based on physical appearance is, in itself, racist.

What complicates matters further is the temptation on the part of the non-Westerner to take advantage of that fear of racism. Some scholars seem to be of the opinion that any person from a disadvantaged culture is automatically more culturally honest than a person from a privileged country. The first impulse is to give those from colonialized nations the benefit of the doubt without considering each as a distinct individual with their own motives and drives. David Hesmondhalgh, for example, discusses Aki Nawaz, band leader and owner of Nation Records,

⁶⁴ She also encouraged us to attend the afternoon performance of "In the Garden," a piece she had choreographed. Mrs. Chang challenged us to look beyond the modern dance to see the Chinese influence. Quite honestly, I didn't see it. If she had not told me "In the Garden" was influenced by Chinese dance, I would not have known.

⁶⁵ Ted Solis, ed., *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 13.

and his “claim about his greater right to use Indian music than the white copyright holder.” This claim “rested on the grounds that he [Nawaz], like the musicians who originated the sample, came from Asia, and that he shared their history of victimization by racism and imperialism.”⁶⁶ Nawaz, however, did not write the music, he did not record the sample; his only connection was shared ancestry. Yet, he felt he had a greater right to the music than the white copyright holder. Hesmondhalgh later reveals that “Nawaz’s claim was presumably intended as a clever way of evading a demand for payment for a sample, by appealing perhaps to liberal guilt; but in his argument, he invokes a powerful, essentialist notion of cultural ownership.”⁶⁷

Who is correct in this situation: the white man who legally owns the copyright or the Indian man who lays claim to the culture? Assertions of authenticity on the basis of identity are never clear cut and, as Nawaz proves, are not always for the benefit of the original culture.

The essentialist view invoked by Nawaz holds that only those persons native to a given culture can speak for that culture. This simplification denies the myriad of individuals who live within a culture and their own personal expressions and impressions of what their culture is. Edward Said rejected the notion that “Only a black can write about blacks, a Muslim about muslims [sic], and so forth.”⁶⁸ It is perhaps telling that he did not include whites in his list but the application can be made to *all* groups. It is true that cultural insiders have access to certain knowledge and possess an intimate understanding of their own culture’s meanings. Cultural outsiders, however, have unique perspectives as well that should not be hastily written off because they do not belong to the culture in question.

Ziff and Rao concur with essentialist leanings, stating, “In a world permeated by social constructions of reality there is something to be said about controlling the process of creating the

⁶⁶ Hesmondhalgh, “International Times,” 292.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 292-93.

⁶⁸ Ziff and Rao, *Borrowed Power*, 17.

world, of imposing some control over who can or should hold the pen.”⁶⁹ Artistic freedom/freedom of expression and cultural appropriation have been at loggerheads for years. There is no denying that minority voices have been stifled and that in the past, Western scholars have spoken, and continue to speak, for the people of other cultures, often with their own ulterior motives in mind. Ziff and Rao’s essentialist viewpoint, however, seems to imply that there is one true, agreed-upon black experience, one Muslim experience, one Korean experience, one white experience, and so on. This ignores the fact that each individual constructs reality differently, and ultimately denies the individual voice in favor of a collective, “culture’s” voice.

One could extrapolate Ziff and Rao’s argument to say that Professor Starr has more right to teach Korean dance than Ms. Freshley because she [Professor Starr] is of Korean descent; she, like Nawaz, can lay claim to the culture. This, despite the fact that Professor Starr has never been to, let alone performed in, Korea; Professor Starr has also not spent a substantial amount of time studying Korean dance. Ms. Freshley has done all of these things. Professor Starr, herself, admitted that she questions her right to teach Korean dance because of her lack of specialty in that area. She felt capable of teaching the dances only after Ms. Freshley expressed confidence in her abilities. Ziff and Rao’s argument not only denies Ms. Freshley recognition and esteem for her hard work and dedication, it completely ignores Professor Starr’s feelings on the subject. In their attempt to clarify “who can or should hold the pen,” they completely alienated both parties involved. In a globally growing culture, where situations like this are numerous, it is not enough to lump people together on the basis of a perceived identity. Each instance, each person must be considered individually.

The issue of identity is important to many contemporary performers. Modern dancers’ Romantic individualist views also apply to issues of identity. Emphasis is placed on finding

⁶⁹ Ibid.

one's own voice, a unique vocabulary. Modern dancers want their art to be judged for what it is, not for who they are; even those from non-Western backgrounds hold to the individuality of expression advanced by Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham. Understanding their individual identity leads to an understanding of their work.

In 1995 the University of Wisconsin, Madison, hosted a dance festival that featured a panel of three prominent Asian-American dancers and choreographers. Each spoke passionately about how their identity affected their work. Kumiko Kimoto, Korean by birth, raised in Japan and currently working in the United States, was adamant: "I am not Korean. I am not Japanese. I am not American. I am just me."⁷⁰ At the time of the festival, Kimoto confessed that she was still searching for her identity and that the conflict, confusion, and dilemma caused by this search was reflected in her dances; she could not have created the works that she did without this pursuit of her own identity. "I am an individual working on art that has no race, no boundary." As such, she did not appreciate being labeled "Asian-American." Kimoto recognized the irony in this situation; one has to be easily categorized in order to receive funding for their work. She asked, however, that audiences and critics judge her art for its own sake, not because she is Asian.

Mel Wong, the second speaker on the panel, was fourth generation Chinese-American. He was raised in California and, he said, tried as a child to "be white." At the festival, Wong described himself as intuitively "Asian" in his thinking. He used rituals with elements of nature, color symbology, and abstract movement in his works. He saw his work as based on Asian philosophy and an awareness of spirituality and energies present in all things. Wong felt that "the purpose of art is to find new relationships in the universe." While Wong did not mind being

⁷⁰ This and all following quotes in this section, unless otherwise specified, were taken from a video footage of the "Asian/Asian-American Perspectives on Modern Dance" panel held in 1995 at the University of Wisconsin.

labeled “Asian-American,” he too wanted the focus of criticism to be on his work, not his cultural heritage. He expressed bitterness over the loss of a grant and the committee’s reasoning for denying it to him – he was not performing “Chinese” dances and there were no Asians in his company. Wong was penalized for failing to conform to what others thought he should do or be.

The third speaker, Sun Ock Lee, was trained as a master-dancer in Korea. At the time of the conference (1995), she had been studying and teaching in the United States for twenty-six years. Her goal was to create something totally unique, but for a kinesthetic foundation, Lee studied Tai Chi, Kung Fu, and other martial arts forms. Lee’s creation was a Zen dance form, which showed dancers how “to perform in a state of meditative awareness.” Lee related an anecdote that, while on tour in Asia, she was accused by a Japanese performer of stealing Zen from Japan. When she explained that Buddhism came to Japan from China by way of Korea, the performer became very upset; Lee confessed that she had not returned to Japan since the incident. This exchange alone proves the importance of identity and ideas of authenticity. The Japanese performer was suggesting that Lee had no right to use Zen because she was Korean. Lee was not trying to “perform” Zen Buddhism with her dance, but to harness the energy and the contemplative nature of Buddhism and express it physically. She was interested in what each individual had to give to, and say through, dance.

Even though she learned the traditional dances of Korea and was offered the chance to become a national treasure, Sun Ock Lee chose to come to the United States in search of something more, something greater, more powerful, and more intimate than the Korean dances alone could give. She said “America gave me one good thing: anything goes.” In Lee’s eyes, any performer has the right to do whatever they want. It gives her pleasure to perform and to

make audiences happy. She did not mind being labeled and, chuckling, said “Let the academics say whatever they want.”⁷¹

The identity of the choreographer plays an important role in the creation and execution of their dances. Sun Ock Lee’s training in Korean dance shaped the way she moved even after coming to the United States. Mel Wong’s Chinese and American background affected the kinds of work that he created, for example his yoyo dance and his use of Asian philosophies to search for a way to be “one with the universe.”⁷² Kumiko Kimoto made her dances part of the search for her own identity. Professor Starr’s experience with Korean and Balinese dance, music, and culture in general also affects the way she moves and the way she thinks about moving. Her identity is informed by her own experiences with Asian dance and culture.

Appropriation

Questions of authenticity and identity lead to accusations of appropriation. Appropriation has been defined as “The taking—from a culture that is not one’s own—of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge.”⁷³ The term has a very negative connotation, associated as it is with colonialism and imperialism. Appropriation is political in that, in its most drastic forms, it constitutes a power struggle seen in the dichotomy between the strong and the weak: the strong taking from the weak or the strong imposing upon the weak. Seen in this light, questions on the use of different cultural forms in intercultural performance can be linked to issues of appropriation. “The implications of interculturalism are very different

⁷¹ In this way, Lee seems to be in agreement with St. Denis’ comment that the artist “just plain does what he wants to do.”

⁷² SantaCruzSentinel.com, <http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2004/February/13/local/stories/04local.htm>, accessed 29 May 2007.

⁷³ Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao, ed., *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 1.

for people in impoverished, ‘developing’ countries like India, and for their counterparts in technologically advanced, capitalist societies like America, where interculturalism has been more strongly promoted as a philosophy and a business.”⁷⁴ This can be seen in the attitudes of some Western performers who, “[t]rained to value the uniqueness of their artistic voice above other aesthetic considerations, [viewed] all the artefacts [sic] available in the intersecting flows of the new global culture as accessible building blocks for their original performance texts.”⁷⁵ Often these artists benefited financially from their appropriated works without paying restitution to the original culture bearers.

With growing cultural awareness and sensitivity, however, performers’ attitudes toward appropriation have changed. It is a fact that many non-Western dancers come to the United States in pursuit of just that new global culture. The American “anything goes” attitude was just what Sun Ock Lee was searching for. This question of reparation becomes complicated when applied to dance. It is telling that very few sources link dance to matters of cultural appropriation; subjects associated with dance, such as art, music, ritual, and religion, are often scrutinized, but dance itself is not. Ziff and Rao not only fail to reference dance in the index, they do not include it as a “site of contestation and mediation” in their Structural Representation of Cultural Transmission chart.⁷⁶ Other sources, such as Dils and Albright’s *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, a book for students and teachers of dance, includes essays on the history of non-Western dances without addressing how those dances are used or taught in the United States. This begs the question: Are these issues being totally ignored or are they not considered as dangerous or harmful as other forms of cultural appropriation?

⁷⁴ Bharucha, quoted in Holledge and Tompkins, *Women’s Intercultural Performance*, 10.

⁷⁵ Holledge and Tompkins, *Women’s Intercultural Performance*, 11.

⁷⁶ Ziff and Rao, *Borrowed Power*, 6.

Ziff and Rao state, “Today’s issues are about minority groups and subjects (the disempowered, colonized, peripheral, or subordinate) who are seeking to claim and protect rights to a cultural heritage.”⁷⁷ This does not always directly apply to what modern dancers do nor to what Professor Starr did in *Bird Belly Princess*; does this mean that her use of non-Western dance forms does not constitute appropriation or that its not important enough to be considered a problem? As we have seen, some teachers of Asian dance forms condone their use by foreigners. And, as Dils and Albright stipulate,

The fact that many important master teachers of these forms [classical Indian dance, Korean dance, West African dance] have immigrated to or have grown up in the United States disturbs any simplistic distinctions between Western and non-Western dance. Many dance students today, regardless of their ethnic or racial backgrounds, have more physical affinity with African diasporic dance than with European ballet.⁷⁸

If so many culture bearers are allowing the use of their native dances by cultural outsiders, to whom does one pay restitution? Could it be, perhaps, that this blurring of cultural dance forms is truly leading toward the utopian vision of so many intercultural performers?

Are there, in fact, acceptable levels and occasions of appropriation? Swaroop, in his analysis of Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata* and Julie Taymor’s *The Lion King*, feels that Taymor’s use of African-influenced art and Kabuki-style puppetry were more appropriate than Brook’s retelling of the Indian epic. He does not deny—as Taymor herself admitted—that cultural appropriation took place. His reasoning for its acceptance, however, was that with *The Lion King* Taymor attempted to create a dialogical theater, one that views all cultures equally. Because of this equality, true borrowing, rather than “cultural theft,” could occur. Brook, on the other hand, simply took images that were aesthetically pleasing to his Western-trained eye, and

⁷⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁷⁸ Dils and Cooper Albright eds., *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, 93.

apparently did not bother to question whether his choices were culturally appropriate for an Indian classic.

Dwight Conquergood believed that the performance of ethnographies by cultural outsiders to be perfectly legitimate as long as the performers recognized the ethical obligations associated with their performance of another culture's stories. He agreed with Said's rejection of the essentialist viewpoint, calling those who would deny themselves the knowledge gained by "struggling with the ethical tensions and moral ambiguities of performing culturally sensitive materials"⁷⁹ cowards and cynics. Quoting Wallace Bacon, Conquergood asked,

What, then, do we do? Do we give up performing ethnic materials? Do we say...that to the Hispanics belong Hispanic treasures? Surely not, because our world has never before cried out so needfully for understanding among us all. Never has a sense of the other seemed more crucial for our own humanity. The embodiment of texts of all kinds is...one real path to the understanding of others.⁸⁰

In this way, one can see a close relationship between appropriation and universalism. It is only by understanding all of humanity that one can hope to express what it means to be human, not, perhaps, by suggesting that we are all the same, but by celebrating and gaining knowledge of our differences by the bodily performance of other cultures.

Romantic individualism should not overshadow the history of exploitation perpetrated by the West. Some Western performers are aware of their roots and are trying to honor and respect the countries and cultures they borrow from by acknowledging the borrowing, studying with masters in the traditions, and becoming part of the perpetuation of those traditions. Western performers, and many non-Western performers who come to the United States, have to balance this with the desire to create new, individual works, to make sure those works do not come at the

⁷⁹ Dwight Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance," in *Literature in Performance* (EBSCO Publishing, 2003), 8.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

expense of another culture's tradition. It is imperative to recognize the existence of this balance and to consider each modern performance individually.

This examination concerning issues of authenticity and identity was not made to excuse or condone instances of exploitation, exoticization, or trivialization of non-Western dance forms. The purpose here was to highlight the extremely complex nature of these issues. It is not enough to view something from the outside and label it according to what it looks like; it is not enough to say "that is not authentic" or "that is cultural appropriation" without examining all the facts, and it is not enough to say an artist should be free to do anything she wants or to limit the artist's creative output. The essentialist's viewpoint, while trying to protect minority and colonized voices, in fact hinders their growth in some instances. It limits their growth by insisting upon an authentic rendering that precludes any outside cultural influences and it denies the variety of experience found within a single culture. There is no overarching theory or rule that applies to cultural appropriation; each instance must be considered individually and the choreographer's intent must be taken into account.

CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPMENT OF *BIRD BELLY PRINCESS*

Understanding intensity of performance is finding out how performances build, how they draw spectators in (or intentionally keep them out), how space, scripts, sounds, movements – the whole *mise-en-scene* – are managed. In this regard, the work of the performers is only part of the story. The scope of the inquiry broadens to include directors, visual artists, scene designers, costumers, mask-makers, and musicians.⁸¹

Bird Belly Princess is not just a dance piece or even a sequence of dances; it is an amalgamation of dance, music, costumes, and props. The show itself is more than just the sum of its parts. Too often scholars search for meaning by analyzing details without considering the worth of the whole. In analyzing *Bird Belly Princess*, however, failure to consider all the details would obfuscate comprehension of the whole and the result would be a simplified conclusion instead of a careful consideration of this one production. An analysis of the non-Western elements utilized in *Bird Belly Princess* is vitally important, as is discovering how and why these elements were used. This exploration is crucial to ascertain if Professor Starr's actions and choices constitute cultural theft. As the whole meaning becomes clear, this show emerges as a perfect example of how issues of authenticity, identity, and appropriation are not black and white but must be considered on a case-by-case basis. This chapter examines the details of *Bird Belly Princess* – characters, costumes, props, music, and dance. It also looks at how these elements are used to realize Professor Starr's vision.

Tammyan Starr: Director and Choreographer

"I teach by moving."⁸² This statement certainly identifies Professor Starr's philosophy of education. During our interviews, in personal discussions, or when in front of a class, Professor

⁸¹ Schechner and Appel, *By Means of Performance*, 4.

⁸² All statements made by Professor Starr and Dr. O'Malley were taken from interviews, discussions, and email communications conducted between January and May 2007.

Starr is constantly in motion. When discussing a specific movement or technique, she uses her own body to demonstrate her meaning. More often than not, when trying to express something she cannot find the words for, Professor Starr uses gesture and body language to communicate her intent. As such, dance, movement, and meaning are closely allied in Starr's mind. In order to better understand the motivation and objectives of *Bird Belly Princess*, I will explore Professor Starr's background and teaching philosophies.

Tammyan Starr received her bachelor's degree from Kent State and M.F.A. in dance performance and choreography from the University of Hawai'i-Manoa. She participated in a Tai Kwan Do class as an undergraduate but did not develop serious interest in Asian movement forms until graduate school. While in Hawai'i, Starr studied Korean Dance with Mary Jo Freshley and Wan Hee Meyer. Starr also studied Tai Chi and Butoh, the latter an experimental form of Japanese performing art. After graduating, she performed with numerous dance companies, some of which utilized Asian movement forms, and taught in many places around the United States and in Singapore. She has taught at Bowling Green State University in the School of Human Movement, Sport, and Leisure Studies for seven years and has directed the University Performing Dancers for a total of four years, 2000-03 and 2006-07. In the summer of 2001, Professor Starr traveled to Bali to participate in a three-week workshop on Balinese music and dance.⁸³

The combination of Asian movement and modern dance seems quite natural for Starr. Her approach to dance is consistent. Be it modern, Korean, Balinese or a combination of the three, she believes that personal examination of motives is essential. The dancer must acknowledge her strengths and weaknesses and understand *why* she is doing something; be it the

⁸³ Since then, Professor Starr has also participated in intensive Balinese dance workshops in California and Holland. She is currently (summer 2007) spending a month-long intensive with Mary Jo Freshley at the Halla Pia Huhm Dance Studio in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

motivation for an entire piece or single gesture, each movement must have a purpose. Professor Starr stresses the fact that the life of the individual is complicated. That complexity and personal experience are reflected in her work. Joe Goode, one of Professor Starr's favorite choreographers, put forth the concept of "our messy selves," the idea that nothing is or can be boiled down, neatly categorized, or easily dismissed. Professor Starr takes this to heart, as everything she is and everything she has experienced effects the works she creates.

The Story

To create the script for *Bird Belly Princess*, Professor Starr contacted Sean O'Malley. Dr. O'Malley is a playwright, musician, and medical chemist who currently works in Hawai'i. He had collaborated previously with Professor Starr on her Master's thesis, providing poetry and a short narrative. For *Bird Belly Princess*, Starr sent him a videotape of dances she was interested in using and conferred with him about the overall shape of the piece. O'Malley's description of his story was a

[s]parse 'legendary magical' narrative that would inspire dance pieces using many different asian [sic] styles to either carry a narrative element or reflect a situation or visual or movement aspect of the narrative. After viewing the sample videos, I was particularly interested in the masked Balinese dance and some of the Korean dances (one with drums, one with fans), and Tammy was keen on involving the stilt dances as an element. I also have always loved kecak and wanted to tie chanting in somewhere.

Professor Starr took inspiration from many Asian children's stories and myths and was eager to share them with Dr. O'Malley. Dr. O'Malley, however, wanted only the movement to inform his creative writing. The one story that Starr shared with him was a culturally ubiquitous tale about a little boy whose grandfather tells stories. The stories are kept in a sack, and the little boy is supposed to share them with the community. He does not want to share them and instead keeps

them packed tightly in the sack. The stories, which are anthropomorphous, are frustrated at being so confined and start getting angry at each other. Eventually, the sack gets too full, and the stories can no longer be contained; they burst out and escape into the world. Dr. O'Malley liked the possibilities presented by the sack and this idea is featured prominently in *Bird Belly Princess*: the "black silk sack of the night sky" is the Princess's prison; the "belly" of the Crane is in fact a large sack that the Princess is trapped in. Professor Starr originally wanted the story to begin inside a sack, but that idea was changed for logistical reasons.

Another component taken from the story of the little boy was that of being silenced, of keeping stories bottled up.

Once it was clear the issue was the power of speech, voice, and narrative, several things fell into place. To emphasize the importance of the voice element, the princess was made to be the best storyteller ever; speaking her name was made powerful; and the dramatic elements of the story were then about her fight to be heard, and the Spider King's desire first to own her voice, then to silence it.

Dr. O'Malley did not credit this idea to the aforementioned tale but it is entirely possible that he took that idea and expanded upon it. This is evidence of how an aspect of culture, such as a story or a dance, can be used as inspiration without being quoted verbatim. The happy ending of *Bird Belly Princess* comes when the Princess, along with her story, is set free to be told to the audience.

Characters

The characters in *Bird Belly Princess* may be archetypes, but they are not stereotyped Balinese or Korean figures "reduced to cultural fodder for the Romantic imagination."⁸⁴ The Princess may be any princess from any culture; the same may be said of the Spider King. He is a

⁸⁴ ⁸⁴ Coombe, "The Properties of Culture and the Possession of Identity: Postcolonial Struggle and the Legal Imagination," 78.

demon, but a ubiquitous demon, not bound to any specific time or place. The inspiration for the Spider King actually came from Dr. O'Malley's twin daughters; he overheard them talking about spiders the day he was trying to come up with a villain. The characters themselves are empty vessels, waiting to be covered and filled with Professor Starr's vision. They, themselves, do not represent anything more than what they are. It is when the dancers garb themselves in Korean or Balinese costumes and begin to evoke the essence of Asian dance that confusion of identity begins; these characters are not specifically Balinese or Korean, but they may be interpreted as such.

Costumes and Props

The costuming and props were drawn from Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Balinese theatrical traditions. In almost every instance, the choices were made based upon 1) a visual aesthetic intended to sustain the narrative and 2) what was readily available to the dancers. Professor Starr personally owned the two Balinese costumes and one Korean dress used by the two Princess characters. The Dance Department had made Korean *hanboks* for previous Drum Dance performances, which were then worn by the Lightning Dancers and the Fish. UPD had also received donations from the Halla Huhm Foundation in the form of Fan Dance crowns and yellow and blue vests. The Bowling Green State University Asian Studies program contributed funding for costumes as well; this was used to purchase fabric for more vests and the *paji* pants worn by the Star dancers. The red hair ribbons worn by all the dancers were a gift from Mary Jo Freshley.

Meghan Gillette, the Dancing Princess, had the most extensive wardrobe. It consisted of a Balinese *legong condong* costume (see Figures 1 and 2) and a Korean *hanbok*. Each costume

came complete with accessories: a girdle, headdress, armbands, and belts for the Balinese costume, and a crown, vest, hair ribbon, and shoes for the Korean costume.



Figure 1: *Legong* dancer⁸⁵



Figure 2: Meghan Gillette in *legong* costume⁸⁶

The most nerve-wracking costuming issue came with the Dancing Princess's quick-change between Star Dance and Thunderstorm, in which Gillette had to change from the *condong* dress to the *hanbok*. Professor Starr made sure that Gillette wore every piece of *each* costume, down to the Balinese girdle, arm bands, headdress and the Korean hair ribbon and pointed shoes. Gillette had other dancers help set her costumes before the show and dressers to help her change during the show.

⁸⁵ Photo from <http://www.balilife.com/arts/dance/ldancer.html>, accessed 4 March 2007.

⁸⁶ All *Bird Belly Princess* photos are used courtesy of Everlasting Images of Toledo, Ohio.



Figure 3: Narrator Princess in *Puspanjali* costume

Sarah Yachanin, the Narrator Princess, wore select pieces of Professor Starr's *Puspanjali* costume (see Figure 3). It was important for the audience to sense a connection between the Dancing Princess and the Narrating Princess, so Professor Starr coordinated their color schemes. The pink of Gillette's *legong condong* costume matched Yachanin's pink shoulder wrap. To facilitate this matching color scheme even after Gillette's costume change, Professor Starr provided her a pink *chima* (see Figure 4). These colors are natural in the "traditional" costumes found in Bali and Korea; Professor Starr used this fact to create the desired subtle connection between the two characters.



Figure 4: Pictured here are Meghan Gillette in the bottom, right-hand corner, and Sarah Yachanin, standing in the back.

In addition to the other characters, the four Spiders are shown in Figure 4. Their costumes were recycled from another production. The main feature was a short, gold *kimono* jacket with the sleeves pulled up and turned inside-out. Their makeup (see Figure 5 and 6) was influenced by Kabuki stage makeup.



Figure 5: Elise Hanson, one of the Spiders



Figure 6: *Dannosuke, Kabuki Kumadori* stage makeup⁸⁷

The Star and Cloud dancers were dressed in Korean male *Sogochum* costumes; these had also been used previously, when UPD members performed the Korean Farmer's Dance. These costumes were also worn by various dancers during the final scene's Celebration Dance. The costumes were modified slightly to give the desired visual effect. In Korea, *Sogochum* dancers wear decorative hats, often with long white ribbons on them, and red, yellow, and blue sashes tied around their waists and across their chests. The Star and Cloud dancers in *Bird Belly Princess* wore instead red hair ribbons and dark, shiny blue sashes tied in the same way. The Celebration dancers wore pink vests with yellow sashes (see Figures 7 and 8).

⁸⁷ Photo from Kabuki Kumadori Make-Up, <http://www.glopac.org/Jparc/CosMask/kumadori.html>, accessed 4 March 2007.



Figure 7: Star Dancers in modified *Sogochum* costumes.

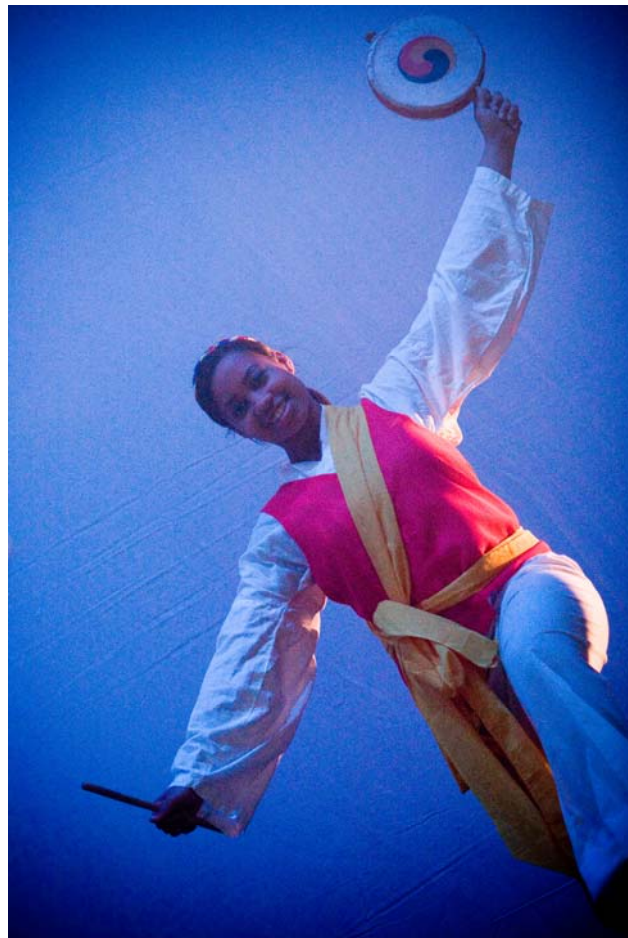


Figure 8: Celebration Dancer in modified *Sogochum* costume.

As previously mentioned, the Lightning and Fish dancers wore *hanboks*. These had been made by members of UPD in 2003 for the first major performance of Drum Dance. The *hanboks* were red and blue, either red jackets with blue *chimas* or vice versa. For *Bird Belly Princess*, Professor Starr used only the blue jackets and *chimas*. In Thunderstorm, the blue costumes represented the night sky; in Water Fan, the softly billowing *chimas* reflected the undulating waves (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: Gillette and Fish Dancers

The props chosen for *Bird Belly Princess* were just as diverse and visually appealing as the costumes. Pictured above are the Chinese fans used for Water Fan. Professor Starr chose Chinese fans because the silk of the fan fluttered more freely than the stiffer silk used in Korean fans. The goal was to represent a fish on stage, with graceful, rippling fins.

During Water Fan, Gillette wore one of the Korean crowns donated by the Halla Huhm Foundation. The crown was part of the original costumes used for *Buchaechum* so it was appropriate to Water Fan, but it also represented the Princess' royalty as she was the only character who wore one (see Figures 10 and 11).



Figure 10: Gillette in Water Fan



Figure 11: Traditional performance of *Buchaechum*. Note the crowns worn by all the dancers.

During Thunderstorm, the Dancing Princess and the Lightning dancers held long, sequined scarves in their hands that flicked and flashed as they moved. The use of the scarves can be understood on many levels. In a purely aesthetic sense, Professor Starr felt the scarves represented lightning; she “put the scarf in the drummers’ hands [just] because it looked good.”

A scarf is a very important tool used by *salp'uri* dancers.⁸⁸ When asked if there was a connection in her mind between *salp'uri* and the Lightning dancers, Professor Starr responded, “The solo dancer is just so powerful in *salp'uri*. I would like Thunderstorm to have that feeling, that power I experience in a really good *salp'uri* dancer. It’s just huge, and it’s transformative.” The use of scarves in Thunderstorm could also be read in terms of modern dance as Professor Starr sees possibilities in movement from a modern dancer’s perspective. She said,

If the arm is flying up, as it does in Drum Dance, wouldn’t it be nice to accentuate that [with the scarf], high into the space? And that’s the modern dancer in me because I’m looking at the space. I’m looking at what’s above the dancer and trying to bring that into the composition. It’s a way to make that dancer larger.

The drums used in Thunderstorm and the Celebration dance were also seen more as props than instruments. There were two sets of Korean drums used by the dancers, *puks* and *sogo* drums. The *puks* represented the sonic power of thunder while the *sogo* drums were used as a sensory expression of happiness.

One truly stunning visual effect was the use of Japanese lanterns in Star Dance (see Figure 7). Each lantern had a small, battery-powered light in it that could be turned on or off during the dance. This was used to full effect when all the stage lights were turned off and all the audience could see were the flashing “stars” manipulated by the dancers.

Professor Starr admitted to her apprehension at the incorporation of so many distinct cultural elements. One issue that she brought up many times was Water Fan: “Girls in Korean dance costumes and then they come out with Chinese fans!” I doubt that anyone in the audience recognized the difference between a Korean fan and a Chinese fan, but for Professor Starr, it was a problem. She did not want anyone to be offended or angered by her combination of Chinese

⁸⁸ *Salp'uri*, described as a derived Korean dance by Judy Van Zile, is a solo dance usually performed by women. The dance’s roots lie in shamanism and in most performances, the dancer holds and manipulates a long white silk scarf as part of the visual aesthetic of the dance.

fans and Korean costumes. This did not stop Professor Starr from using the fans, however. As she said, it served the purpose. The goal was to create a fish on stage. It was not Chinese nor Korean but an abstract inspired by both.

Another aspect of costuming that worried Professor Starr was Gillette's removal of parts of the Balinese costume on stage during Star Dance. This part of the dance was supposed to reveal the Princess to the audience (as her face was slightly obscured by the headdress), as well as facilitate the aforementioned quick-change. Gillette stripped off wrist cuffs, a large belt, and her headdress in full view of the audience. Professor Starr did not know if this onstage removal of parts of the costume would be acceptable to a Balinese audience.

None of the costumes or props were chosen for their native cultural meaning but rather to serve the aesthetic of the story. In so doing, they imbued *Bird Belly Princess* with a certain pan-Asian quality. This, however, was a side-effect of Professor Starr's goal, namely to create something new that drew upon her personal experiences with different dance cultures.

Music

The music used in *Bird Belly Princess* is further proof of the eclectic, culturally diverse nature of the show. Professor Starr drew on prerecorded, contemporary Korean, Balinese, and Japanese music. In addition, the soundscape featured synthesized gamelan music written by an American, ambient sound and general Balinese *gilak* patterns taken from an educational CD on Bali, and live music performed on Korean, Japanese, and Cuban percussion instruments. The live music was created and performed by two Caucasian women and a Korean-American man.

In her search for recorded music, Professor Starr originally used keywords like "rain," trying to associate the music with the action of the dancers. Ultimately, she said, a lot of the

musical selections were based on what she had readily available. She knew that she needed Balinese music for the Princess' initial scene because of the Balinese costuming and movement vocabulary. Professor Starr used the beginning section of "Perbawa" – a contemporary *gamelan gong kebyar* piece by I Madé Arnawa – because, she said, it sounded like the opening of a story. Starr would have preferred to work with live gamelan musicians who could react to the dancers, but she did not have a gamelan at her disposal for such a lengthy rehearsal process.

The musical accompaniment to the Spider Dance and Fan Dance, "Pomegranate House" and "Forest" respectively, was contemporary music for *kayagum* zither written by Korean composer Hwang Byungki. The music for the last section, the Celebration Dance, was "Akabanah," a piece by the Japanese Taiko group KODO. In general, Professor Starr stated that she did not have specific sounds that she heard or associated with the dances in *Bird Belly Princess*. She said she did not "hear" anything when she was first choreographing the dances. Music, for her, is a more visceral experience; it is relating sound to movement. Professor Starr knows and understands how the sound "makes her *feel*." She drew from music she was already familiar with and had at her disposal.

Professor Starr enlisted my help as long-time accompanist of the Korean dances performed by UPD to provide live music for certain sections. I, in turn, requested Dr. Paul Yoon's help when it became clear that this would not just be a simple matter of traditional accompaniment. We created music for three sections of the show: Thunderstorm, the Sticky Bargain, and the Chase Scene.

Thunderstorm was the one dance that most closely resembled traditional Korean drum dance, with three groups of dancers playing *puks* on stage. One group played *puks* suspended in drum stands. The other two groups consisted of partners; one of the pair held the *puk* while the

other played it. Professor Starr had adapted this idea from a dance she had seen performed by Mary Jo Freshley's students.

This section was difficult to put together for many reasons. Several of the dancers had learned Drum Dance and so had a basic feel for the rhythmic patterns. Professor Starr modified the patterns, however, and did not have all the dancers playing the same rhythms.⁸⁹ The group on standing *puks* played one set of rhythms while the paired dancers played a different set. The patterns fit together well but the dancers were used to all playing in unison. When Dr. Yoon and I began attending rehearsals, it was difficult to know what to listen for. Because the groups were playing different patterns, the *changdan*⁹⁰ Ms. Freshley had taught me did not always match. In the end, Dr. Yoon and I settled on a simplified version of the dancers' rhythms that accented certain moments of the dance and tried to hold the piece together.

The next challenge was providing an aural background for the Sticky Bargain. This section consisted of a dialog between the Princess and the Spider King; the movement in this scene was choreographed, but it was more stylized movement, not dancing. Professor Starr did not want music *per se* but some kind of sonic space for the characters to move in. Someone suggested the *p'ansori*⁹¹ technique of a drummer accentuating the singer's narrative. Dr. Yoon, who knew more about *p'ansori* rhythms than I did, took over at the *puk*, accompanying the dialog with deep thuds and sharp raps on the wooden frame. I improvised on the *jing*, punctuating the narrative with ringing, metallic gong sounds. It took several rehearsals before

⁸⁹ This is different from more traditional drum dance pieces, during which the dancers all drum in unison. Professor Starr adapted this rule for Thunderstorm because she liked the way the two sets of rhythms sounded together.

⁹⁰ Rhythmic patterns played on *changgo* to accompany other instruments.

⁹¹ *P'ansori* is a "narrative-dramatic vocal form of folk music sung by a single performer accompanied by a drummer." Traditional Dance and Music, http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/resources/korea_slides/dance_and_music/7-1.htm, accessed 23 May 2007.

Dr. Yoon and I got our rhythm down, deciding when and how often to play. We developed a “musical” dialog with the narrative during rehearsals that was slightly different each time.

Our final task was to accompany the Chase Scene. Professor Starr originally wanted to use KODO’s music to emphasize the high-energy, nearly frantic pace of this dance. She did not, however, have the budget to pay for use of copyrighted materials. Conveniently, Dr. Yoon had been studying *taiko* for many years and offered his own *taiko* drum for the performance. In order to add to the frenetic atmosphere, Dr. Yoon and I added bongos and Korean *kwanggeri* gong. The bongos, played by Colleen Murphy, a dance instructor at BGSU, kept a steady beat (quarter note equals 120) while the *kwanggeri* and *taiko* improvised. After some deliberation and elimination of different rhythmic patterns, Dr. Yoon and I decided that I would start on *taiko*, playing slowly and erratically; he would start on *kwanggeri*, matching the bongos for speed and playing more intricate patterns. Halfway-through the chase, we would switch; he would take the *taiko*, playing more traditional patterns, and gradually speeding up, while I took the *kwanggeri* and gradually slowed down.

While the instruments themselves were representative of specific cultures, the music was not. Dr. Yoon drew from his many years of *taiko* training and I from my experience learning and playing *changgo*, but the music we created was not really Japanese or Korean. It existed for a certain purpose, to enhance and support the movement of the dancers and the mood of this particular story.

Dance

Professor Starr’s own focus was on the dance; she had Dr. O’Malley to write the story and Dr. Yoon and me to take care of certain aspects of the music. With every dance, Professor

Starr pulled from either Balinese or Korean dance (and occasionally Butoh and Asian martial arts) vocabulary and adapted the movements to fit the action of the narrative.

The opening sequence involved the Narrator Princess Yachanin moving through a series of Balinese dance movements. While these movements evoked a certain Balinese aesthetic, according to Professor Starr, they did not constitute a Balinese dance. Similarly, she said that for Gillette's movement during Star Dance she drew inspiration from *Legong* and *Telek*, Balinese dances she had performed previously. Certain motions, such as hand position, might have been altered. Professor Starr admitted that she probably imposed some idiosyncrasies upon the dance because 1) it was not a traditional Balinese dance and 2) she had not spent a substantial amount of time with a Balinese teacher. Professor Starr utilized the movements but also drew upon her own creativity and aesthetic sense to choreograph the dance.

For the Star Dancers, Professor Starr was looking for a certain smoothness of motion. While the specific movements of the dancers were not taken from any identifiable tradition, Professor Starr wanted them to achieve "some of that quality I feel in Tai Chi and Korean dance." Also, Professor Starr highlighted one particular movement: the slow, deliberate raising and lowering of the lanterns (or "stars," see photo 12). In that gesture, she attempted to find the "isolation of a gesture I've seen in Butoh or [that] I feel when I've studied Tai Chi." It is the essence of Asian movement forms, their strength, intensity, and purpose that Professor Starr had experienced when performing or witnessing them that she tried to instill in her dancers, without quoting particular dances verbatim.



Photo 12: Star dancers

Thunderstorm followed the Star Dance. For this scene, Professor Starr utilized movement from *Kibon*, a series of general movements taken from Korean dance, originally taught by Ms. Freshley, and rhythms and movement from Drum Dance. Because of the nature of this dance, it is difficult to know where to place it; is it music or dance? The Dancing Princess and the Lightning dancers remained at the *puk* drum stands, moving gently up and down; the Spiders and their partners, the Clouds, moved freely around the stage, turning and lifting their legs and bouncing more rapidly up and down. All the while, every dancer was playing rhythmic patterns on their *puks*.

Professor Starr explained that the energy inherent in the Spiders' movements during Thunderstorm should be related to the energy found in Balinese dance. While all of the Spider movement was technically drawn from modern dance, the experience some of the Spider dancers had previously with Balinese dance brought them closer to the kind of realization that Professor Starr was looking for. She commented that the one dancer who had no experience with Balinese dance did not understand how to embody that energy, and she did not feel qualified to explain how to achieve that energy. All of Professor Starr's instruction in Balinese and Korean dance

was learned by observation and mimicry. Professor Starr explained that she could not *tell* her students what to do; she could only show them what it should look like. The essence, the embodiment, the energy that Professor Starr learned while in Bali was often diluted or even lost in translation.

Water Fan utilized elements from *Buchaechum*, the Fan Dance that Ms. Freshley taught UPD during the summer of 2005. Again, Professor Starr took a modern dancer's approach. "It's supposed to be a fish," so she asked herself how elements of *Buchaechum* could be utilized to represent a fish. The emphasis was on using movements that facilitated the underwater imagery. Certain movements were reminiscent of a clam or a sea anemone. The fans could not remain stationary as they are in Korean fan dance because the silk would be "dead." The dancers had to keep fluttering the fans, which visually lent itself well to the overall fishy aesthetic. Other movements, such as stretching and leaning back, Professor Starr described as "what a modern dancer might do if you put a fan in her hand."

The final dance, Celebration Dance, was inspired by circle dances and Ms. Freshley's "doll dance." Professor Starr was not sure how "Korean" the doll dance was but it had been choreographed by Halla Hum, Ms. Freshley's teacher. The exaggerated shoulder movement was drawn from *Sogochum*, a Korean Farmer's dance, and some of the dancers, including the Spider King, used sequences taken directly from *Sogo*. Again, Professor Starr was looking for an energy found in Balinese dance. One of her ideas that was not realized was to have two of the Spiders come out in a *barong* costume. Even this would not have been strictly Balinese, however, as the only *barong* at her disposal was actually a cross between a *barong* and a Chinese dragon.



Photo 13: Celebration Dance

The consistent attention given to details of costuming, makeup, music, dance, and narrative combined to create a show visually stunning and sonically expressive. *Bird Belly Princess* does not, however, belong to any of the cultures from which it drew inspiration. Professor Starr reiterated the fact that while the dances may have been inspired by specific Korean or Balinese forms, none of them were exact renditions of any of the dances Ms. Freshley had taught or that Starr had learned while in Bali.

Bird Belly Princess: Modern Dance or Intercultural Performance?

Now that the individual parts have been examined, several questions remain. How does *Bird Belly Princess* as a whole fit within the general genre of dance? Does it qualify as intercultural performance? Is it a continuation of modern dance as begun by Duncan, St. Denis, and Graham? Is it in fact something totally new? The answer depends on several variables. In searching for the answer, the difficulty of trying to categorize contemporary performances becomes clear. In this section, I will analyze elements of *Bird Belly Princess* in reference to the

previous chapter's definitions of intercultural performance and modern dance. Professor Starr's objectives and motivations will be considered in the following chapters.

Bird Belly Princess did have aspects in common with intercultural performance, but even these similarities did not hold exactly to the definitions and general trends of the genre. For example, it could be argued that the dances choreographed for *Bird Belly Princess* came about as a result of interaction between two or more cultures: Korean, Balinese, and American. Professor Starr, however, has never been to Korea and her main teacher of Korean dance is Caucasian. She experienced something of Korean culture, being Korean-American herself and having spent time in Halla Huhm's Dance Studio in Hawai'i. The element of exchange, so important to Holledge and Tompkins, did not take place. There were no Korean or Balinese artists collaborating with Professor Starr on *Bird Belly Princess*. The finished product was a totally unique creation, but it might not be possible to say it belongs to no culture. It certainly does not belong to Korean or Balinese culture; that was not its intent. The argument could be made that *Bird Belly Princess* belongs to American culture, as it was the brainchild of an American, performed by American dancers, and intended for an American audience. It reflects the eclecticism of the American melting pot. One could also argue that it belongs to a kind of pan-Asian culture reflected by Professor Starr's own background and experiences with different Asian dance forms.

On the surface, *Bird Belly Princess* has aspects that may be recognized as belonging to specific cultures, such as the costumes and props. When one looks deeper, however, one discovers that neither the costumes nor props were used for their intended, culture-specific purposes, but were assigned new meanings to fit the action of the story. While iconically still

belonging to their native cultures, these material items were not used to represent those cultures. As such, they became, like the production itself, something new, belonging to no culture.

Finally, *Bird Belly Princess* and the dancers' experiences with Korean and Balinese dance were temporary. With the graduation of certain members of University Performing Dancers and Professor Starr's retirement from Bowling Green State University, it is quite possible that *Bird Belly Princess* will never be performed again. As the performers related to me, they were glad for the experience but are moving on to other things; they were touched by the encounter but were not initiated into another culture. The cultures they were performing were not entirely their own. In the physical performance of Balinese and Korean dance, they were moving their bodies in ways that were not culturally familiar. North American dancers simply do not move the way Balinese or Korean dancers do. Modern dance may have freed the body to move any way the dancer/choreographer chooses, but I would argue that the high-held elbows, the stretched separated fingers, the sharply flexed feet, and the deeply bent, shifted weight stance of Balinese dance would not be the first thing that comes to a bodily-freed mind. In this way, we were all cultural outsiders of the performance we created.

All in all, *Bird Belly Princess* did not exhibit enough of the criteria to be considered intercultural performance; its similarities to the ideology of modern dance are stronger. The concept of bodily freedom is seen in many of the dances in *Bird Belly Princess*. There was no strict adherence to lines or form; each dancer's body moved differently, which was part of the aesthetic. The incorporation of non-Western movement without the emphasis on exchange was clearly present. Professor Starr keenly felt the dichotomy of authenticity and creative license; she did not want to present an authentic representation of Korean or Balinese dance, yet she was conscious of criticism she might draw from a traditional Korean or Balinese artist. Although

Bird Belly Princess was not a “familiar” story, the use of non-Western forms to tell the story was certainly in line with modern dance principles.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE “TRUTHS” OF *BIRD BELLY PRINCESS*

What does the previous analysis of *Bird Belly Princess* reveal? By looking at the details, the whole often becomes clear. Deep meaning is only gained after prolonged exposure to a culture, multiple viewings of a dance, and input from many sources. In the past several years, I spent a great deal of time with the University Performing Dancers. During the months leading up to the performance of *Bird Belly Princess*, I spent even more time than usual in the dance department. I witnessed and participated in five months of rehearsals, five full-length performances, and two excerpted performances; I even helped create parts of the show. Yet, even I did not fully understand the production, what it meant and what it was trying to say, until I started talking with Professor Starr and the dancers away from the rehearsal hall. *Bird Belly Princess* is not just one simple thing that fits neatly into one category; this production is everything that it seems to be from multiple viewpoints. It is contradictory. It is complicated. It is both a simple children’s show and the result of cultural appropriation. Both concepts of Romantic individualism and essentialism played a part in its construction and its reception. It is representative of the multiple identities that went into its physical creation and of those who inspired it. This chapter examines in more detail the intentions and perspectives of those involved with the creation and execution of *Bird Belly Princess*. It also explores some unique conundrums suggested by those intentions and perspectives.

Motivations, Inspirations, and Perspectives

Professor Starr’s intentions with *Bird Belly Princess* were twofold. One was what she wanted to give to her audience, and one was what she wanted to give to her students. *Bird Belly*

Princess began from a basic desire to create something in the realm of fantasy. The Asian dances, costumes, music, and essence facilitated the telling of this story but they were not the driving force behind it. Professor Starr's purpose for *Bird Belly Princess* was to create a realm of magic and whimsy for children while exposing them to the music and dance of different cultures. During our interviews, she recounted visceral memories from her own childhood that remained fresh and close during her childhood. Professor Starr wanted to provide such memories for the children in her community. If just one of the dances or a selection of music sparked a child's interest in the arts, Professor Starr would feel her goal was achieved. Her intent was not to give her audience deep instruction on Asian culture but to engage them, especially the children, in a fantastical story that also introduced them to the music and dance of other cultures.

Professor Starr had something slightly different in mind for her students. For them, it was not so much the end product but participation in the process that mattered. University Performing Dancers creates a unique position for dance students; the students must audition to be part of the company but once members, they receive college credit for participation. Because UPD is a pre-professional dance company, Professor Starr wanted her students to practice professional skills and learn professional responsibilities, to experience the effort involved in creating and performing a long show. In this way, learning Korean and Balinese dances were secondary to the primary goal. She said that at the beginning of the semester, she taught them fundamental Korean and Balinese movements but left it to the students to make creative "leaps" and contributions to realize the final production. Her objective was not to teach them about the diversity of Asian movement forms, the history or Korean or Balinese dance traditions, or specific techniques but rather to give them just enough to spark their own creative interest so

they, in turn, would be able to add their own individual stamp to the finished project. She felt it was not her responsibility to have them say, “Now I know Korean and Balinese dance.” Her responsibility was to teach them how to handle the pressures of a professional dance company, which may include being asked to perform dances with which they have had no prior experience.

Professor Starr’s obligations to the university also factored into the creation of *Bird Belly Princess*. UPD is responsible for producing one major show every year. There was a limited amount of time and money allotted for the show. The students of UPD may be learning how to act and dance professionally, but they are still college undergraduates with responsibilities other than dance; their schedules, previous experiences, and learning abilities must be taken into account before planning a major production. While *Bird Belly Princess* was a totally new creation, it was not created out of thin air. Professor Starr explained that, logistically, major shows take a long time to put together and cannot be done without at least some prior experience with the dance forms and the availability of costumes, props, instruments, and musicians. Many of the dancers had already learned at least one of the Korean or Balinese dances that inspired the movement for *Bird Belly Princess*. These factors, along with costumes donated from the Halla Huhm Korean Dance Studio and musicians familiar with Asian music genres, shaped Professor Starr’s choices and decisions for *Bird Belly Princess*.

“So much is dictated by creative and tangible resources,” Professor Starr explained. As the director of UPD, she had a responsibility to teach her students how to deal with the practicalities of a professional dancer’s career and, at the same time, widen their movement worlds by introducing them to Asian dance forms. She had to juggle all of this while negotiating fifteen people’s schedules and keeping the show under budget. Art is often just as much a result of practical limitations as it is creative vision.

It was never Professor Starr's intention to present authentic performances of Korean and Balinese dances. It was not her goal to teach her students specific Korean and Balinese dances. She felt, however, that if her students could learn certain aspects of Korean and Balinese dance along with modern dance, the influence of the Asian movements would inform and inspire their physicality. Their understanding and execution of modern dance would be enriched by their knowledge of these Asian dance forms. The students could then take this knowledge and apply it to their personal dance vocabulary and have it inform their future choreographic choices. This, for Professor Starr, was where authenticity lay: in the Romantic individual's view of being true to one's personal history and creating something true to one's self.

This would not have been obvious from one viewing of *Bird Belly Princess*, but the picture is still not complete. One thing the discussants on the "Asian/Asian-American Perspectives on Modern Dance" panel held at the University of Wisconsin did not address was the identity of their students/dancers⁹² or how their students internalized and interpreted the movements they were given. The University Performing Dancers had fourteen members at the time of the performance of *Bird Belly Princess*; twelve of the members were white and two were African-American. None of these students have studied dance outside the U.S., let alone in Korea or Bali. Their only connection to these cultures is through Professor Starr. Does this diminish their right to perform Korean or Balinese dances? The population of Bowling Green is not as ethnically diverse as larger cities, situated as it is in rural northwest Ohio. The university has an influx of African-American students from Cleveland and Detroit, but the Asian-American population is small. Does this mean that Korean and/or Balinese dances should not be performed because there are no Korean or Balinese dancers to perform them? Are the dancers in UPD or

⁹² It was not clear from the discussion when the panelists were talking about students they were teaching and dancers they were working with in a company. The important difference is often students are younger and less experienced than professional company members.

other rural American cities to be denied access to different cultures? Are they incapable of understanding or appreciating other cultures' traditions and beliefs? Or, given the chance, can Western student dancers learn about other people's material and social cultures and incorporate them into their own worldviews? By providing them the opportunity to perform non-Western dances, Professor Starr paved the way for a "dialog" between the dancers' own worldviews and that of the cultures that they danced.

The dancers were able to interact with movements and costuming elements quite different from their usual faire. It was interesting to note the ways in which the dancers responded to the foreign costuming elements. The Balinese headdress that Meghan Gillette wore, for example, was blessed before it left Bali and consequently should never touch the ground. All the dancers took great pains to make sure this remained true. There was an extra dancer backstage during Gillette's quick-change; that dancer's only job was to take the headpiece from her and put it in a safe place, off the ground. At the Saturday evening performance, Gillette forgot to put the headdress on and made her entrance without it; dancers commented afterwards, only partially joking, that it was this oversight that caused all the problems during that show.⁹³

Another interesting example was the dancers' response to the *hanbok*, or specifically the *chima*. *Hanbok* is the name for the entire Korean costume; *chima* is only the skirt. When Mary Jo Freshley taught Drum Dance and *Kibon* to UPD, she often referenced the *chima*, warning dancers not to step on it or explaining how to lift it during a certain movement. Ms. Freshley talked about the *chima* more often than the *hanbok*. Accordingly, the dancers then referred to the entire costume as the *chima*. Several of the dancers even made up songs about the *chima*, one to the tune of the Spice Girls' song, "Wannabe." Dancers milled around backstage during breaks

⁹³ Gillette forgot part of the Thunderstorm dance; the recorded music for Water Fan didn't turn on; one of the Crane's headpieces fell in front of her face and consequently she almost dropped Gillette during a lift; and the Large Crane almost fell over on stage.

singing to themselves, “Yo, I’ll tell you what I want, what I really really want. So tell me what you want, what you really really want. I wanna, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna really really really really put my *chima* on!” Each dancer had her own *hanbok* and was very protective of it. Each dancer knew which one was theirs even though they were all the same color, and they also knew to whom it had belonged previously. In a way, the *hanboks* became a rite of passage, passed down among generations of dancers.

The dancers perceived the show differently than Professor Starr. Having had less experience with specific Korean and Balinese dances, some of them commented that they felt *Bird Belly Princess* was representative of traditional Asian movement, although they recognized the combination of the Asian-influenced movement and modern dance aesthetics. One of the Spiders remarked that she appreciated

the process of ‘becoming’ a spider. Developing the movement palette was difficult, but it also helped me realize new ways I could move and manipulate my body. I also enjoyed dancing the role of a spider because I could still perform some modern dance material, which was my focus of study at the university.⁹⁴

In this specific case, the dancer was using the dances as Professor Starr hoped she would, to expand her personal movement vocabulary. She was also aware of the process of creation. Another dancer mentioned what she interpreted to be Professor Starr’s “process of trial and error.” She recognized how the dances changed as Professor Starr searched for a way to best communicate the story physically to the audience. She said, “The learning process was frustrating at times, but as soon as we got to a place where she [Professor Starr] was satisfied, it was fun.”⁹⁵

Meghan Gillette played the Dancing Princess and as such had the most to learn in terms of movement. She was almost constantly onstage, the only exceptions being during the Spider

⁹⁴ Email communication between author and Jessica Priehs, 29 May 2007

⁹⁵ Email communication between the author and Ashley Hunker, 29 May 2007.

Dance and the Crane Reenactment. During our discussion, Gillette focused on the physical aspects of the dances and how the Balinese sections were more physically demanding and intricate than anything she had done before; the movements made her aware of different parts of her body, for example her eyes, and their addition to the dance. Gillette also shared her perception of Professor Starr's choreography choices for *Bird Belly Princess*, saying that instead of choreographing a piece and then adding music later, it seemed to Gillette that the music was more present earlier in the process and, in fact, became part of the process. From my discussions with Professor Starr, I would say that this was true. She wanted to match the sound to the movement in instances of both the live and recorded music.

Gillette had great insights about learning non-Western dances. She told me that the purpose of attending college is to gain a broader perspective, to learn about other cultures, and one way to do this is through dance. Learning the dances of other cultures is a way to experience those cultures bodily. Gillette felt that exposure to non-Western dances broadens the definition of dance in her mind; one can gain a broader perspective of what one's body is able to do and can add to one's movement vocabulary. "You want to have as much to work with as possible as a dancer," she said. Gillette felt this aspect of learning non-Western dances was important, both to add new elements to her own dancing and to make herself more marketable for employment after graduation.

Ryan Zarecki played the Spider King and, not being a dancer, was much more interested in the development of his character which, nonetheless, did incorporate some non-Western elements. He worked mostly with Balinese-influenced movement but instead of perfecting specific movements, his focus was on bringing the Spider King to life and what the Balinese-inspired movement could add to the character. Like the other dancers, Zarecki was aware of the

creative process involved with *Bird Belly Princess*; during our discussion, he described his own process for developing the voice, costume, and mask of the Spider King. He commented on how Professor Starr gave him some initial suggestions but then left him on his own to develop them into the final product. His remarks are in line with Professor Starr's focus on the story and the use of Balinese or Korean elements to support the script. For example, in describing the development of the Spider King's movement vocabulary, Zarecki said it was initially based on Spiderman. Then Professor Starr asked him to put "weight" to the movement and to incorporate some particulars of Balinese dance, such as the flexed foot and certain hand gestures. The desired result, like that of the fish in *Water Fan*, was a spider, not a particular Balinese dance. Zarecki also revealed his love for Noh and Kabuki-style theater and how his perception of their "over-the-top affects" influenced his creation of the Spider King's antics. He commented on his experience at the American College Theater Festival and the increasing use of Asian-style shows in college theater departments in the United States. Zarecki was pleased with this branching out from more "classical Western drama."

All in all, the dancers enjoyed the creative process and the production as a whole. They felt it was very important to expose members of the Bowling Green community to the dances of non-Western cultures. Some of them have also have taken the initiative of experiencing other cultures first hand. One former member of UPD is currently living and studying in South Korea and another member will be traveling to China this summer (2007).

(Mis)Interpretations

As Meghan Gillette so succinctly stated, "Not everyone will always see the same thing in a particular piece." This fact can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Sometimes

it is not necessary for everyone involved to know all the minutia of a performance. Gillette, for example, did not know of any meaning associated with the name Tien-savi-tsuru-chak. She did not know how Dr. O'Malley conceived it or why he chose those particular syllables; it may or may not have had any affect on her interpretation of that character. One cannot guide how someone else views things. It is entirely possible that Professor Starr's intentions were misconstrued by audience members and even by some of the dancers. One runs the risk of misinterpretation in all public creative endeavors. One must either accept this risk or stop creating.

It is an idealistic goal to want to expose children to the music and dance of other cultures, in the hopes that they may grow up to become musicians or dancers or at the very least show appreciation for cultures other than their own. Because *Bird Belly Princess* was not a performance of traditional, "authentic" Korean or Balinese dances however, the argument could be made that she was showing children an exoticized, unrealistic version of these countries, that *Bird Belly Princess* only furthered the stereotypes of the alien Other. In our interviews, Professor Starr stated firmly that she felt it was not acceptable to appropriate or stereotype a culture just because it is for a young audience, but this feeling may not have come across to a first-time observer. On the other hand, because the show was for children, it had an aura of spectacle to it; the colors of the costumes and lights, the dancers on stilts, the music, and the stylized movements were all used to create "something like a pop-up book, fantastical, and in the realm of fairytale."⁹⁶ Because of this, Professor Starr said, "If something's going to be pretty, than make it *very* pretty. If something's going to be silly, make it *very* silly."⁹⁷ This over-the-

⁹⁶ Tammy Starr, interview.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

top approach may have been construed as stereotyping the exotic East even though that was not Professor Starr's intention.

"BGSU show transports audience to distant corners of the globe" read the headline of the Arts and Entertainment page of Bowling Green, Ohio's *Sentinel-Tribune*.⁹⁸ Audiences were invited to a "pan-Asian fairy tale...inspired by Asian music and dance." An earlier press-release had stated "inspired by original folktales." As Professor Starr did not feel that *Bird Belly Princess* was inspired by original folktales, she tried to get them to take that statement out of the release; it was left in, however, so many audience members may have watched the show believing they were seeing a rendition of a Korean or Balinese folktale. There is a problem with the word "inspired." From a certain perspective, the production *was* inspired by folktales. Professor Starr combed through many children's books and fairy stories for inspiration for the show; the tone of the production was one of fantasy, epic, and magic. Professor Starr may have felt that the statement was untrue because Dr. O'Malley only wanted to take inspiration from the movement and dances she sent him. In this way, the story was inspired more by the dances than by another particular story.⁹⁹ An audience member would have not known this and through the press release, newspaper review, and only a single viewing of the show, might walk away from the production believing that *Bird Belly Princess* was a traditional folktale.

Not all misinterpretations are created equal. It is possible that some misinterpretations may even add unintentional depth to a character. An example of this was found in the separation of the Dancing Princess and the Narrating Princess. The main reason they were portrayed by two separate people was purely logistical; it was too difficult to have a dancer dance *and* speak at

⁹⁸ *Bird Belly Princess* was double-billed with another performance called *The Ice Wolf* under the title *Shifting Skins: Tales of Transformation*. For my purposes, I will include only sections of the newspaper review dealing with *Bird Belly Princess*.

⁹⁹ With the possible exception of the fairytale about the young boy and the sack of stories.

the same time. Until learning this fact from Professor Starr, I viewed the separation as a possible physical representation of the separation of the Princess from her voice; I thought perhaps that Professor Starr was anthropomorphizing the Voice to make it a character in its own right. Meghan Gillette, the Dancing Princess, had a similar opinion. She expressed pleasure that she did not have to learn all the dances *and* all the lines, but she also saw the Dancing Princess as a representation of the character's physical being and the Narrator Princess as the character's consciousness. "She dictates what I do physically," Gillette explained. Together, the two Princesses created one character. In speaking about this issue with an audience member after the show, he admitted that this interpretation was feasible; even if it was not what Professor Starr had intended, it did not take anything away from the story. In this simple instance, the idea of multiple truths comes alive because even if it was not true in the beginning, it could become true—did in fact become true for at least one of the dancers and myself—but did not have to be true for everyone in order for the story to be meaningful.

Bird Belly Princess was also almost completely misinterpreted at the 2007 American College Dance Festival (ACDF). Professor Starr and the University Performing Dancers took an eleven-minute, excerpted version of the show to perform at ACDF. The performance was adjudicated by three prominent modern dancers and choreographers: Joanna Mendl Shaw, Cornelius Carter, and Kevin Wynn. These adjudicators shared their comments with the dancers at feedback sessions following the performance. It was thanks to these feedback sessions that I was able to see how other, professional dancers saw *Bird Belly Princess*. Shaw interpreted the performance as a ritual; she thanked the dancers for letting "us watch you." This emphasized a difference between "Us" and "Them" that Professor Starr never intended. Carter said he "loved the traditional work," which leads one to believe that he viewed *Bird Belly Princess* more as a

presentation of “authentic” traditional dances. They applauded Professor Starr’s efforts to expose her students to a “new world” of dance. None of the adjudicators commented on how the Asian dances informed or enriched the modern dance aesthetic, which was one of Professor Starr’s main intentions. This could have been for several reasons: 1) they did not notice; 2) the dancers were not able to express it; or 3) Asian movement does not really add anything to modern dance. After talking it over with them, it is clear that Professor Starr and many UPD members disagree with the last reason, but it is entirely possible that from the Romantic individualist’s perspective that most modern dancers adhere to, there are no individual cultural movements, just human movement.

In this way, Romantic individualism is not without its difficulties. If the essentialist view threatens to keep cultural traditions isolated and unchanging, Romantic individualism runs the risk of obliterating specific cultural characteristics. The modern dancer may ascribe new meaning to the Chinese hand gesture or the Korean fan dance, but it has lost some, if not all, of its original cultural meaning. Professor Starr is in a unique position in regard to these issues. As a Western trained modern dancer, she believes in the power and legitimacy of an individual’s voice; she believes that personal experiences shape and inform the individual’s worldview and that that worldview is inseparable from how that person conceives dance. As she says, “How can I deny who I am? These dances and ways of moving—Korean, Balinese, Butoh, and Tai Chi—are in my body. I move in certain ways because of the way I have been trained.” The life that Professor Starr has lived is encapsulated in every movement of her dances. She does admit, however, that she could know more about the specific traditions, and at the present time, she plans to keep learning about them.

Bird Belly Princess was balanced precariously between Romantic individualism and essentialism. It showed its Romantic individualism in the way Professor Starr approached the project, the way she used non-Western dance forms as a palette with which to paint a story. It is in the way she teaches her students, her focus on individual knowledge of their bodies and letting their personal experiences inform their movement. Sarah Yachanin, the Narrator Princess, for example, had not had any prior experience with Balinese dance. Instead of subjecting her to a rigorous training regimen, Professor Starr attempted to find something more “in her range than to try and replicate a specific culture’s dramatic theater.”

Her purpose with *Bird Belly Princess* was also to introduce her students and community to the music and dance of Korea and Bali; this view, while not essentialism in the extreme, acknowledged the value of the cultures instead of just the Romantic individualist’s right to use them. She wanted to spark an interest that would lead people to learn more about these specific cultures on their own. Professor Starr encouraged her students to study with masters in those cultures, in order to receive a more “authentic” learning experience. She was desirous of feedback from native Korean or Balinese dancers on *Bird Belly Princess* because, as she said, even if she did not agree with criticisms or suggestions they might offer, she would still have learned something about their own creative process, just as they would have learned something about her creative process. The exchange of equals, so prominent in intercultural performance ideology, could then take place.

Complexities of Appropriation

Bird Belly Princess’ position along the Romantic individualist/essentialist continuum also raises some interesting questions about cultural appropriation. The costumes, for example, were

all purchased in Korea or Bali, donated to UPD by a Korean dance studio, or made by the dancers themselves. The argument could be made that since not *all* the costumes were acquired in their respective countries of origin, that cultural appropriation, based on compromise, did take place and that Professor Starr was robbing those countries of cultural icons. If the dress and costume makers of Korea and Bali were not so essentialist as to deny their purchase by Westerners, it is possible that they would not object to their creation in another country so long as they would not be re-sold for profit. The question of cultural appropriation, while never straightforward, becomes all the more complex with *Bird Belly Princess*.

Professor Starr admits that being a modern dancer informed her choice of repertoire, how she used the Korean and Balinese movements in *Bird Belly Princess*, and her goals for University Performing Dancers. For her, the creative goal was more important than cultural accuracy. Referencing Water Fan, she said, “I wanted a fish, not a Korean or Chinese fan dance.” As seen in the last chapter, in many cases it was the essence or power that she experienced in Korean dance, Balinese dance, Butoh or Tai Chi that Professor Starr wanted from her dancers. This brings up an interesting conundrum: how does one borrow an essence? Would a traditional Korean or Balinese dancer recognize the same power that Professor Starr did? Is the transformative power Professor Starr found in *salp’uri* actually there for the *salp’uri* dancers?

Before one can borrow an essence, one has to define it. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines “essence” as “1) The intrinsic or indispensable properties that serve to characterize or identify something; 2) The most important ingredient; the crucial element; and 3) The inherent, unchanging nature of a thing or class of things.”¹⁰⁰ Michelle Kisliuk and Kelly Gross discussed the idea of essence in “What’s the ‘It’ That We Learn to Perform?: Teaching

¹⁰⁰ essence. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/essence> (accessed: May 29, 2007).

BaAka Music and Dance.” The “it” was the ineffable power or quality in dance, the thing that was not a physical movement or a feeling, but both, “a third thing, the result of a melding of [movements] (and experiences) of both ‘here’ and ‘there.’”¹⁰¹ In a sense, Professor Starr was trying to teach her students how to tap into the very thing that makes Korean or Balinese dances what they are.

Dorinne Kondo discusses the “self” as representative of the inner truth of a person’s identity. She states, “‘The self’ takes on the character of irreducible essence, the Transcendental Signified, a substance which can be distilled out from the specificities of the situation in which people enact themselves.”¹⁰² People enact themselves through dance; as Judith Lynne Hanna stated, “Dance is a form through which people represent themselves to themselves and each other.”¹⁰³ It was this essence, “distilled” from the specificities of Korean and Balinese dance, that Professor Starr was interested in obtaining. Kondo also states that the “self” is constituted culturally; one’s knowledge of one’s self, of what the self is, is dependant upon one’s culture. If this is true, was Professor Starr appropriating the cultural essence of Korean and Balinese dancers? Was she “borrowing” not universally human characteristics but culturally specific ones?

Yes and no. Public performances are both what they are intended to be by the insiders and what they are interpreted as being by the outsiders. In her own mind, Professor Starr was teaching her students dances from Korea and Bali in the hopes that these movements would inspire them to find their own “selves,” their own inner power, and allow them to express that power on stage. The “essence” she wanted for them was not to be confined only to *Bird Belly*

¹⁰¹ Kisliuk and Gross, “What’s the ‘It,’” 253.

¹⁰² Dorinne Kondo, “M. Butterfly: Orientalism, Gender, and a Critique of Essentialist Identity,” in *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 37.

¹⁰³ Myers, *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, 317

Princess; she wanted them to be able to call upon that power for every dance they perform. The movements used for *Bird Belly Princess* were not superficial veneer, used without thought or care for the original cultures. It was not Professor Starr's intention to—nor did she—steal the cultural essence from Korea or Bali.

The audience, on the other hand, may have come away with a different interpretation. They may have seen the culture-specific costumes, the Balinese- and Korean-esque dances, and the over-the-top fairytale as a faithful rendering of a Korean or Balinese folktale. Or they may have construed the production as a stereotype of Asian performance techniques intended to bedazzle and overwhelm, all in the name of entertainment.

The University Performing Dancers, to take a third view, also had their own ideas about what was happening with *Bird Belly Princess*. Having had no previous experience with Butoh, for example, it would have been impossible for them to harness and/or portray the “isolation of gesture” Professor Starr wanted. Their thoughts were not of channeling the “essence” of specific Asian movement forms but of finding the correct placement, speed, and alignment in their own bodies. Consideration of grades, other classes, social life, and other imperatives to undergraduate life must be factored in as well; UPD members were also college students with other obligations to fill besides the performance of *Bird Belly Princess*.

All of these interpretations are correct because they reveal different constructions of reality. As everyone interprets reality differently, it is necessary to understand these contradictory explanations of what was seen. That way, a clearer picture can be painted.

CHAPTER FIVE: “APOLOGY IS FUTILE:” PERSONAL INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Just as multiple truths and contradictory interpretations can exist within a single production, they can also exist within a single person. My involvement with UPD and *Bird Belly Princess* presented me with some peculiar problems as both a musician and an ethnomusicologist. I had never before found myself in a situation where the two stances came into conflict. Was my position as performer and co-writer legitimate for that of an ethnomusicologist? While it is understood that an ethnomusicologist must be proficient in the musical traditions he/she studies, not much is usually said about contributing to or creating within those traditions. The music Dr. Yoon and I wrote for *Bird Belly Princess* was not Korean or Balinese compositions. Instead, it was specific to the time and place, and dependent upon, the dances for which it was written. What, then, was my responsibility to Korean and Balinese music? Professor Starr spoke of performing and creating dances with integrity. Did I create music with integrity or did I choose instruments based solely on their sonic properties?

One answer was that of practicality: we used what we had. My knowledge of *changgo* and Dr. Yoon’s experience with *taiko* was fortuitous; it meant that we had available for use instruments, and therefore sounds, that would fit easily into the pan-Asian nature of *Bird Belly Princess*. It has been noted that other musicians, when faced with a limited choice of instruments, use what they have to create a desired sound. These musicians were not ethnomusicologists however, who generally try to disturb the culture as little as possible.

I found myself in the midst of a double standard. On the one hand, I was a musician, fascinated by the different instruments and eager to explore their sonic possibilities.¹⁰⁴ On the

¹⁰⁴ Dr. Yoon and I played with several of the instruments, using them to create new sounds. At one point, he took my *changgo*, tucked it under his arm, and started playing it like a Ghanaian *luna*.

other hand, I was an ethnomusicologist trying to affect an objective stance. In the end, the musician in me won out; the desire to create was stronger than the desire to sit back and maintain the status quo. It was then that I truly began to understand how Professor Starr could hold such great respect and admiration for Asian cultures and traditional dancers and, at the same time, take elements of their culture and redirect them into something new. I began to understand the desire to know things in my body, such as the physicality of playing *changgo*, which already held deep meaning for me, and to use that knowledge to create new things; things that may go on to inspire others to look at the world differently.

My own views of creativity, inspiration, and change had been affected as well. The extreme essentialists' views I had read on the subject of cultural appropriation said that what Professor Starr had done was wrong. If it *was* wrong, what are the implications? In order to remain safe, each culture, and each individual should live in a box, never read anything, listen to any kind of music, or watch any kind of dance or theatrical performance; they should never interact with anyone, never try to learn anything outside their own cultural sphere. In fact, it would probably be better if they did not think critically at all. This way, no one could ever be accused of cultural appropriation.

This situation is untenable and unthinkable. Perhaps for fear of appearing racist or ethnocentric, many scholars have withdrawn to the relative safety of essentialism, ignoring or condemning the work that has been done to educate students and community members on different cultures, different ways of viewing the world. This fear of cultural "theft" chills the possibility for change. Artists like Kimoto, Wong, Lee, and Starr are not advocating for the exploitation of other cultures; they are championing them by looking to them for inspiration. As Professor Starr said, "It's more like finding than taking." What these dancers have found are

deeper, more meaningful means of expression that can be shared with students and peers. This would never have been possible if cultures never interacted with each other.

This is easy for me to say, sitting as I do in a position of power. My American citizenship guarantees me privileges not afforded to members of other countries. Should I be ashamed of my ancestry? Should I spend my life in guilt and service to those whom my forebears wronged? Should I not be the first to speak out against cultural appropriation and use my position to support those whose cultures are being ravaged? The painless answer is “yes.” Yet, I cannot bring myself to say it. I do not believe that music, dance, visual art, or ritual should ever be exploited by those in power at the expense and denigration of another culture. I would not, however, be the person I am without exposure to different cultures, peoples, music, and dance. As Professor Starr said, how can I deny who I am?

In the midst of these thoughts, I happened upon a comment made by Ted Solis in *Performing Ethnomusicology* who declared, “Apology is futile; should one apologize for not being what one can never be?”¹⁰⁵ I will never be Korean or Balinese. This does not mean I am going to stop playing *changgo* or gamelan just because I cannot claim the culture. As Conquergood stated, the more one risks, the more one learns.¹⁰⁶ By risking accusations of cultural appropriation, by risking criticism by native performers, Professor Starr paved the way for open dialog between and deeper understanding of different cultures. The chances she took inspired me to not apologize for my identity; but instead to seek it out and the multifaceted truths that accompany it.

Thoughts on cultural appropriation have changed since the innovators of modern dance began using non-Western movement forms for inspiration. Dance ethnographers and other

¹⁰⁵ Solis, *Performing Ethnomusicology*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act.”

scholars have become more politically correct in their writing; they no longer refer to the “profound themes of the Orient”¹⁰⁷ or the “naïve Indian.”¹⁰⁸ Non-Western dances are recognized and celebrated as possessing deep meaning and value rather than mere exotic spectacle. Scholars in related arts—music, visual art, religion, and ritual—are working to preserve traditional cultures and to make sure that the voices of minorities, the disempowered, and subjugated are heard. Modern dancers no longer try to “dance Egypt,” but they still look to non-Western movement forms for inspiration. They study with master dancers in Asia, Africa, Native America, and elsewhere to make these dances a part of themselves. They do this to portray, not a stereotyped, exoticized Other, but their own identities; to share with their students, fellow dancers, and audience members the joy they found in knowledge of other cultures.

Does *Bird Belly Princess* constitute cultural appropriation? The answer to that question is both yes and no; it is indicative of the multiple truths inherent in every modern dance production and intercultural performance. Professor Starr *did* use costumes and movements from Korean and Balinese dances; she *did* try to evoke a certain quality she felt was intrinsic to Asian movement forms. And in so doing, she remained true to herself. She created a performance that expanded her students’ breadth of physical knowledge and inspired some of them to experience the cultures for themselves, exposed members of her community to non-Western cultures, and was inspired herself to keep studying non-Western dance forms and striving for her own unique expression of the world.

¹⁰⁷ Terry, *The Dance in America*, 49.

¹⁰⁸ Siegel, “The Harsh and Splendid Heroines of Martha Graham,” 309.

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