

THE CHORUS: A LINE TO CROSS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis project will provide an in depth examination into the musical theater role of Paul, the male Puerto Rican dancer in *A Chorus Line*, as performed by Marco Antonio Santiago. The performance will take place at Cohoes Musical Theater in Albany, New York. This examination will reveal how the application of Stanislavski's methods on acting and his views in preparing a character can be used on musical theatre roles to achieve well rounded, fully developed and completely believable characters.

The thesis will contain a structural analysis of the script, scene and role analysis, a performance journal to log the growth/challenges of each role, and other vital information charting the application of Stanislavski's methods on acting. In addition to Stanislavski's methods other well known acting teachers and their methods such as Richard Boleslavski and Sanford Meisner, will be viewed and applied throughout the process. Furthermore, a performance critique/analysis will be provided by Lani Harris, Tan Huaixiang, and Nicholas Wuehrmann, who serve as the acting committee members for this thesis project.

The role of Paul helps propel the action of the play forward allowing the audience to truly realize the themes provided by the playwright, lyricist, and composer. This thesis project will reveal that an actor's training can be applied in almost any venue of theatre in some form or fashion and successfully make a well-rounded character.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The world of a performer. What is it that draws thousands of hopefuls to the streets of New York? Why are studios packed with hungry performers who have cried and sweated for years of training, filled with heartbreaking rejection? Behind the glamour and lights of Broadway lie countless stories of joy, pain, suffering, and triumph. The audience sees the spectacle but the real spectacle can be the audition itself. The *journey* not the destination is what often makes the view breathtaking. In *A Chorus Line*, the audience is given this rare opportunity to journey into the world of dancers, singers, and actors. Here they can catch a glimpse of why so many would sacrifice so much for what can prove to be so very little.

A Chorus Line was conceived and directed by Michael Bennett along with the invaluable help of Bob Avian. Through the collaborative efforts of James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante, endless hours of audio tapes were scoured, discarding needless segments of material from each dancers narrative to compose a final script. Under the supervision of Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Kleban, the music and lyrics came about. The show consists of seventeen key characters which are ultimately placed on the legendary white line. The Broadway show used up to thirty-two additional performers for the group numbers. From open to close there are twenty six musical numbers and no intermission. The play takes place in 1975 in a Broadway theatre, but the plays themes and characters surpass time and place.

Before *A Chorus Line* evolved into a show or a workshop, it was an idea, an idea that passionately yearned for birth from a livid dancer, known as Michon Peacock. Peacock was a

dancer and assistant in the very short-lived Broadway musical *Rachel Lily Rosenbloom And Don't You Forget It!*, music and lyrics by Paul Jabora and David Debin. The show closed during previews in the winter of 1973 and unaffectionately came to be called "*Rachel Lily Rosenbomb and Maybe We Better Forget It.*"¹ Producer Robert Stigwood who brought us *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita*, hired Robert Link to direct *Rachel*, whom he later fired, only to hire Tom Eyen, another director who had "never directed a Broadway musical either."² The choreographer, Tony Stevens says, "It became clear that most of us - the dancers in the show, the chorus people- knew more about how to put a show together than many of the producers we worked for."³

Stevens and Peacock pondered on a solution. In the end, it was decided that Peacock would contact Michael Bennett, a rising director-choreographer, with whom Peacock was oddly acquainted. Peacock was the dance captain for the Broadway musical *Seesaw*, which was on verge of becoming yet another musical flop. That is until Bennett was brought in to salvage the show. Leads were replaced, new numbers rehearsed during the day while the old ones were performed at night, and dancers were fired in the wings during performances as Grover Dale, Bennett's assistant, would tap them and say "Don't bother coming back tomorrow. You're fired."⁴

¹ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 5.

² Ibid

³ Ibid 6.

⁴ Ibid 13.

In these precarious conditions Peacock struggled to keep the dancers focused and together. Bennett kept Peacock because of her ability to lead and thus “They developed a guarded truce, which slowly blossomed into a satisfying working relationship.”⁵.

Now it was Stevens’ and Peacock’s intention to have a meeting of sorts with fellow dancers where they could voice their opinions and views on how dancers were being treated and what steps could be taken to remedy the situation. The result, they had hoped, was to form “a company, composed completely of dancers. Who would write, produce, direct, design, and choreograph their own shows.”⁶ Bennett agreed to their meeting, but as they would later find out, not their intent.

In January of 1974, Tony Stevens, Michon Peacock, Michael Bennett, Donna McKechnie, Sammy Williams, Nicholas Dante, Thommie Walsh, and a dozen or more dancers met together and took the first step on the journey that the world would later come to know as *A Chorus Line*. “...Michael provided the food, the booze, the joints, the drug of your choice, whatever. First we danced, then we talked.”⁷ “There were people who really didn’t like each other, and people who didn’t trust each other. Cliques within cliques.”⁸ Michael and Donna

⁵ Ibid 14.

⁶ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 8.

⁷ Kevin Kelly. One Singular Sensation. (New York: Doubleday, January 1990) 120.

⁸ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 15.

McKechnie came to the meeting late, heightening the already tense room. Some of the dancers present were associated with Bob Fosse, a very well established Broadway choreographer.

Each dancer answered general questions about his or her life, their training prior to moving to New York, and what they were presently doing. The dancers “would speak about the same subject, then they would go on to the next and go around again. Anyone in the circle could ask additional questions. The rules established...Michael turned on the tape recorder.”⁹ What followed that evening was truly profound.

One of the dancers, Steve Boockvor says “We all let it hang out that night. There was a lot of baring of souls... Nick Dante wiped me out with his story. I mean, your heart went out to these people. They were airing some very intimate details about themselves.”¹⁰ Concerning that evening Donna McKechnie said, “That night it was wonderful to be in that group finally and hear everyone open up. To be in a group of peers, men and women of different sexual persuasions; people you go to class with and you don’t really know; people that you’d known over the years in shows. When they started revealing a story, I went ‘Oh, it’s like me.’ It’s like showing pain a certain respect.”¹¹ Hours passed, tears fell, and hearts were warmed. Finally, it was time to leave this cathartic meeting, roughly twelve hours since their arrival. Before doing so they held hands in a circle, closed their eyes, and passed the “energy”.

⁹ Ibid 16

¹⁰ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 33.

¹¹ Ibid 35.

A second gathering was arranged. Some of the original dancers could not attend, new ones came, after hearing about the first gathering. Stevens and Peacock knew they had something powerful in their hands but were not sure what steps to take. Bennett was busy with other projects but he also felt the magnitude of what he had witnessed. He asked Nick Dante, who had attended the initial meeting, to continue interviewing and taping additional dancers. Bennett approached Stevens and Peacock and said, “I don’t know what it is, but it was too incredible and we all know that. If you give me the tapes I’ll do something. I think I can get Joe Papp interested in doing a workshop.”¹² Stevens, Peacock, and Dante all signed a contractual release with Bennett, granting him complete control over the audio tapes. Stevens stated, “...we all decided that it was better that it had life. He had the power and the resources, and we did not.”¹³

True to his word Bennett played selections of the audio tapes to Joseph Papp who agreed to fund the workshop. Because Dante’s story was so pivotal to the project, Bennett allowed Dante to continue as a writer with the workshop. With the green light from Papp, Bennett began to compose his creative team which consisted of Marvin Hamlisch, Edward Kleban, and Bennett’s assistant Bob Avian. Auditioning was next, but not before Bennett sent release forms to the original dancers whose stories were on the audio tapes. Although not exactly happy, all the dancers signed the release forms for the price of one dollar. The irony became evidently clear to each of them, they would have to audition for the very show they helped bring about.

¹² Ibid 42.

¹³ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 42.

Auditions were held at a rehearsal space provided by the Shakespeare Festival in New York City. Many of the original dancers whose stories were now on sides, auditioned alongside other hopeful dancers. Bennett was searching for a “chorus line that, when each of its participants was examined separately, could turn into a cast of principal actors. Each dancer had to exhibit some special personality trait that Bennett and his writers could fasten on. Not all of the dancers present at the original meetings were able to communicate that at an audition.”¹⁴ After weeks of dancing, singing, and further callbacks a group of twenty or so performers was selected. And on August 4, 1974, at Jerome Robbins’ American Theatre Laboratory, Bennett greeted the tentative cast with “Welcome to the cast of *A Chorus Line*”.

Bennett used “an avant-garde technique unknown to big time Broadway...”¹⁵ which the musical theatre world has come to call “workshop”. The establishment of musical workshops enabled potential shows to experiment with unknown actors and determine what material worked and what did not work. Writers were given the luxury of time without the weight of deadlines, and million dollar budgets looming over their heads. Directors could have challenges and remedy the problem. And most importantly “workshops offer new talent a place to learn their craft.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid 51.

¹⁵ Ken Mandelbaum. *A Chorus Line And The Musicals of Michael Bennett*. (New York: St. Martins Press. 1989) 192.

¹⁶ Ken Mandelbaum. *A Chorus Line And The Musicals of Michael Bennett*. (New York: St. Martins Press. 1989) 193.

Among the first songs written were “Sing”, “One”, and “Resume”. After six weeks of arduous experimentation the company had about four and half hours of formulated songs and text. “It was a disaster in that every single character, every single actor, decided to make himself the tragic character of the piece...”¹⁷ “Everyone still had a Paul monologue, a traumatic sob story and wound up crying.”¹⁸

On the last day of the workshop Bennett was dancing the “One” combination with the dancers and fell down. Unbeknownst to the dancers, Bennett had faked his fall. Believing that he was truly hurt some rushed to his aid, others ran to phones, and some stared in shock with tears welling up. When Bennett rose as if nothing had occurred, the cast knew that it was all staged, and that they had been manipulated. This was how Bennett worked sometimes. The cast would later see the re-creation of this fall with the character Paul, and it was the frantic desperation from Bennett’s “fall” that they would draw on. It was evident that much of the shows material needed to be cut, but even more evident was the shows potential to succeed. And so a second workshop was agreed to.

The second workshop was temporarily postponed because of Bennett’s commitment to Neil Simon’s play, *God’s Favorite Son*. When it did begin though, under the auspices of Joe Papp and the Shakespeare Festival, it was with fourteen of the original fifteen dancers and two additional dancers, Kay Cole and Jane Robertson. The pivotal role that still remained to be cast was that of Zach, the director. The role of Zach was crucial to the show because this role orchestrates the endeavors of each character. Christopher Walken was heavily considered for the

¹⁷ Ibid 139.

¹⁸ Ibid 138.

role, because of his good-looks and background in dance. In the end, Bennett went with Barry Bostwick.

Barry joined the cast but had a different take on the character than Bennett had envisioned. “Barry was let go because he was unable not to go for sympathy. He just couldn’t be the villain, he couldn’t be cold.”¹⁹ Bennett would say, “No, that’s totally wrong. Stay totally detached from their lives.”²⁰ With Barry Bostwick gone, the role of Zach was still vacant. Robert LuPone, who at the time was playing Al, decided to confront Bennett for a chance to play the role. Bennett agreed, but as LuPone would find out, that was when the heat would be turned up. “The minute I got Zach, was when my troubles started.”²¹ Bennett would permit the actors to experiment, but this was not the case with LuPone. “Once, during a preview, LuPone chose to play Zach gay...Avian had to restrain Bennett from physically attacking LuPone after the performance.”²² Reflecting on the rehearsals LuPone says “I drove Michael nuts and Michael drove me nuts. I wanted to walk over and punch him ...Nobody won and nobody lost and we both can’t stand each other. On the best day, we have respect for each other.”²³

¹⁹ Ken Mandelbaum. A Chorus Line And The Musicals of Michael Bennett. (New York: St. Martins Press. 1989) 138.

²⁰ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 77.

²¹ Ibid 81.

²² Ibid 82.

²³ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 83.

The second workshop was meant to sharpen the show and weed away the excess “fat”. A fight between Greg and Al, a scene with the dancers interviewing Zach, a long Cassie monologue, four male dancers to Cassie’s solo, notions of Zach having a solo number, all were cut. And most startling, was the almost definitive removal of “Nothing”. Priscilla Lopez was performing the number but as the work progressed, “Las Vegas plastic performing tricks”²⁴ were added, taking away from its poignant truthfulness. Kleban believed in the number and in spite of 39 people’s desire to cut it, he asked Bennett for “Priscilla alone for a half hour...”²⁵ She performed the number once again and it was put back in the show.

Bennett would eventually lose six key dancers - four to Fosse who was directing and choreographing *Chicago*, and two more to *A Matter of Time*. *Chicago* opened June 3, 1975 the same year as *A Chorus Line*. Although it had such stars as Gwen Verdon (Roxie), Chita Rivera (Velma), and Jerry Orbach (Billy), it was quickly overshadowed by the hype that later clouded *A Chorus Line*. However, during *A Chorus Line*’s workshop, *Chicago* seemed like a more reliable prospect to dancers in need of work. Replacements were found for the dancers who left, finally giving Bennett a complete cast. To be sure, he made the entire company sign a contract for the duration. The troubles did not end though, they just came from different angles.

Joseph Papp wanted the show to open at the Vivian Beaumont at the Lincoln Center. Bennett was strongly opposed to this decision. He felt *A Chorus Line* was the “ultimate

²⁴ Ken Mandelbaum. *A Chorus Line And The Musicals of Michael Bennett*. (New York: St. Martins Press. 1989) 131.

²⁵ Ibid.

proscenium show and it didn't belong in a barn."²⁶ Neither Papp nor Bennett would budge. Bennett's next move was to take Hamlisch, Kleban, and Bobby Thomas (the drummer) over to the Shuberts. In spite of running selections from the show on a piano with the leg falling off, they liked it. Word drifted back to Papp that Bennett was willing to walk and he acceded to the Newman Theatre.

Bennett would have liked to have interviewed each of the seventeen characters on the line, but time would not allow it. The "Montage", also known as "Hello Twelve, Hello Thirteen, Hello Love," allowed Bennett to give each character a chance in the spotlight. In its conception, Nick Dante placed a sheet of paper sideways in a typewriter. Having typed one of the character's lengthy monologues on one column of the paper, he then proceeded to scan the text and write related thoughts in another column parallel to the first column. While column B character spoke, the column A character would pantomime.²⁷ The key to making this unambiguous would be the lighting.

The puzzle was slowly becoming a cohesive plot. All the musical numbers - Mike's "I Can Do That" starting at age four, succeeded by "At The Ballet", and the "Montage" spanning ages twelve through seventeen - take the audience through an emblematic dancer's life. Yet, Cassie's solo was in meager condition, making it the weakest link.

²⁶ Kevin Kelly. One Singular Sensation. (New York: Doubleday, January 1990) 137.

²⁷ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 100.

“Inside the Music” was all the company had after five revisions, and months of work. Beautiful, but weak. “It didn’t reach out.”²⁸ The day they began to revisit the dance, McKechnie, Avian, and Thomas (the rehearsal drummer) were present but Bennett, for all his help, could have been elsewhere. He told her, “Okay, do something.”²⁹ McKechnie tried her best to come up with steps as Thomas played the drums and Avian followed. McKechnie: “On one hand I felt special about it. At the same time I wanted to say ‘Get your ass up here!’”³⁰

Although Avian was always one to support Bennett in all his actions, on this one occasion he confronted Bennett. He took the admonishing and came the following day primed to work. A necessary production meeting was called explicitly for the problem the number still posed. At Bennett’s apartment, McKechnie and the creative team assembled. Rhythm changes were positioned in integral parts, levels began to form, and ideas burst forth. Minor changes were made, but the weak link was strengthened allowing the next link to join - Paul’s monologue.

Sammy Williams was not a trained actor. However, he was entrusted with the only three page monologue that had endured the countless cuts/transformations from the original character monologues. The monologue, based on Dante’s experiences, remained the same in substance, and became one of the single most powerful monologues in theater literature, covering the subject of homosexuality with as little stereotyping and as much humanity as had ever been

²⁸ Ibid 110.

²⁹ Ibid 111.

³⁰ Denny Martin Flinn, What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 111.

presented.³¹ Promised a song that never came, Williams remained hurt for awhile, but the creative decision proved to be a was a wise one.

Bennett did not want Dante's parents to see the show during previews, for fear of a disapproving reaction. On the contrary, his parents were proud of him. Years later Dante would realize that his father did call him son, but it wasn't until the Jewel Box that he ever *heard* it. Meaning, it was not until the pivotal time in his life when he was searching for who he was as a person, that he heard his father call him son. It so happened that he came to this realization while he was dressed in drag at the Jewel Box. The cast continued to work unyieldingly with what they had and revisions continued to be made. Then came the preview.

On April 23, 1975 the cast performed before a live audience, in the 299 seat Estelle R. Newman Theatre. Regardless of its lengthiness, *A Chorus Line* touched the audience. And the rest is history as they say. By the end of the week, the show was the talk of New York. Tommy Tune, a well known dancer at the time, said, "I saw *A Chorus Line* during previews over and over and over. It was the story of our lives, and I was brokenhearted that I wasn't in it."³² A movie offer was made after only the second preview. The offer was declined, for the moment. Of the eagerness, which the show received, McKechnie says, "The word was out that it was hot, and people were flying in from the west coast and London." It was the audience that made *A Chorus Line* into a must-see hit before it opened anywhere, and that was unprecedented.³³ Four

³¹ Ibid 115.

³² Ken Mandelbaum. *A Chorus Line And The Musicals of Michael Bennett*. (New York: St. Martins Press. 1989) 143.

³³ Ibid.

more weeks of previews followed and by now the cast knew that Bennett plus time equals more changes.

Cassie's solo had male dancers backing her up. The male dancers were cut. "Tits and Ass" was receiving a weak reaction. On peril of the song being jettisoned, Hamlisch intervened. It wasn't until he picked up the program that he realized the mistake. He changed the title from "Tits and Ass" to "Dance Ten Looks Three". The number was out of peril. Neil Simon was surreptitiously brought in to add more humor to the show. The lines he added for Val and Bobby's monologues were definite winners. Sheila's added lines were not. They made the audience strongly dislike her. Kelly Bishop, playing Sheila, walked off at the end of the performance and said that if the lines stayed, she would walk out on the show. Bennett agreed with her and the new additions were cut.

The critics loved *A Chorus Line*. Jack Kroll, *Newsweek*: "What seals things tight is the heart-gripping sincerity of the performers and the rare intensity of the entire show, which builds to an overpowering emotional climax." Walter Kerr, *The New York Times*: "... The accomplishment is brilliant." Clive Barnes, *The New York Times*: "The conservative word for *A Chorus Line* might be tremendous, or perhaps terrific...the reception was so shattering that it is surprising if, by the time you read this, the New York Shakespeare Festival has got a Newman Theater still standing. ... It is a show that must dance, jog and whirl its way into the history of musical theater." Martin Gottfried, *New York Post*: "...With this show, Bennett steps out on his own as a star director-choreographer. At a time when producers are taking choruses out of their musicals for the sake of economy, director Michael Bennett has taken everything else out.³⁴...He

³⁴ Denny Martin Flinn, *What They Did for Love: The Untold Story Behind the Making of A*

is now a major creative force and *A Chorus Line* is purely magnificent, capturing the very soul of our musical theater.”³⁵

Celebrities such as Diana Ross, Katharine Hepburn, Henry Fonda, Jacqueline Onassis, Al Pacino, Baryshnikov, Edward Albee, Lucille Ball, Gower Champion, and Elia Kazan, came from all over to see *A Chorus Line*. The show would later leave the Newman Theater and move uptown. On July 2, 1975 *A Chorus Line* opened at the Shubert Theater and made musical theater history. Fifteen years later at its closing, on April 28, 1990, it would be hailed as the longest running musical on Broadway - outperforming such shows as *Fiddler On The Roof*, *Shenandoah*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *The Pajama Game*, *The Sound of Music*, *3 Penny Opera*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Gypsy* to name a few.

Other directors saw Bennett's phenomenal success with *A Chorus Line* and in an effort to reproduce his glory, hastily put together poorly composed workshops. Due to excess abuse, workshops became as costly as small-scale productions. Producers would often come to workshops in their trial and error process, not like what they saw, and impulsively withdraw their much needed financial support. When Bennett used the workshop method, it was to refine *A Chorus Line* which was still in its premature stages. He needed time to polish the show's material and the workshop allowed him to do just that. He experimented, refined, and changed accordingly. Although not as prominent as before “most new musicals employ some form of

CHORUS LINE. (New York: Bantam Books, July 1989) 138.

³⁵ Ken Mandelbaum. *A Chorus Line And The Musicals of Michael Bennett*. (New York: St. Martins Press. 1989) 149.

workshop in their development...”³⁶ The show grossed \$149,277,754.00 in its fifteen year run.³⁷ In 1975 *A Chorus Line* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. A year later it would sweep the Tonys with 9 awards, winning: best musical, best musical book, best musical score, best actress/musical (Donna McKenchie), best featured actor (Sammy Williams), best featured actress/musical (Carole Bishop), best director, best choreography (Bennett/Avian), best lighting design (Tharon Musser), also an Obie Award, and Drama Desk Awards for many of the same Tony categories³⁸.

On many levels *A Chorus Line* “revolutionized the development of musicals.”³⁹ And it heralded the unbelievable potential that the dominating presence of a director-choreographer can have upon a show. Under the guidance of Bob Fosse and Michael Bennett, Broadway has flourished with hit musical shows. Although criticized as extreme perfectionists, Fosse and Bennett helped pioneer the way for modern day director-choreographers.

Rob Marshall, whose movie version of *Chicago* won six Oscars, has given us a glimpse of what a director-choreographer can do in the field of cinema. *Dreamgirls* and *Rent* are two fairly recent musicals being made into movies. Hopefully, they will help pave the way for future director-choreographers to accomplish with cinema what Bennett has done for musical theater.

³⁶ Ken Mandelbaum. *A Chorus Line And The Musicals of Michael Bennett*. (New York: St. Martins Press. 1989) 193.

³⁷ Gary Stevens and Alan George. *The Longest Line*. (New York: Applause Books.1995) 253.

³⁸ Ibid 234,236.

³⁹ Ken Mandelbaum. *A Chorus Line And The Musicals of Michael Bennett*. (New York: St. Martins Press. 1989) 192.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Scene Analysis

The following scene analysis contains a description of the play as performed by Cohoes. This production of *A Chorus Line* was different because it did not adhere strictly to the “original” choreography and staging elements of the Broadway performance. Hence, some sections of the analysis contain differing descriptive fine points recounting the distinctions in Cohoes’ production as opposed to the widely accepted and most often performed version of *A Chorus Line*.

Opening: “I Hope I Get It”

The stage is filled with dancers at a Broadway audition. On a raked stage dancers are facing upstage towards the mirrors and executing the choreography as the director, Zach, calls out the steps. His assistant Larry is at the front of the dancers showing the additional steps as the audition progresses. Eventually, the dancers turn downstage and face the audience in an exhilarating rush of silhouettes, angles, and lights.

Zach divides the dancers in groups of boys and girls and further divides them into sub-groups with specific formations. With the aid of detailed light cues, the inner thoughts of the dancers are revealed to the audience as they sing “*I Hope I Get It*”. A ballet combination is danced followed by a jazz combination. Girls lead both dance sections. Zach makes another cut, leaving only seventeen dancers on the stage. The remaining dancers go to their bags for their resumes and sing their thoughts concerning the audition. Each dancer walks upstage and

gradually falls into place. They proceed downstage and stop on the famous white chorus line, each raising their headshots over their faces in unison. Larry proceeds down the line and collects their resumes.

“Who Am I Anyway”

As Larry collects the resumes, Paul sings. This is Paul’s only song throughout the show.

He sings:

WHO AM I ANYWAY?
AM I MY RESUME?
THAT IS A PICTURE OF SOMEONE I DON’T KNOW.

WHAT DOES HE WANT FROM ME?
WHAT SHOULD I TRY TO BE?
SO MANY FACES ALL AROUND AND HERE WE GO.
I NEED THIS JOB, OH GOD I NEED THIS SHOW.

Following the song, the line is introduced beginning with stage right. The sequence goes: Don, Maggie, Mike, Connie, Greg, Cassie, Sheila, Bobby, Bebe, Judy, Richie, Al, Kristine, Val, Mark, Paul, and Diana. Once the line is fully introduced, Zach tells the dancers that he would like to know more about each of them, at least more than what is on their resumes. He begins stage right with Mike.

“I Can Do That”

Mike sings *“I Can Do That”*. Here he explains how he began dancing at the age of four. His sister would not go to class so he stuffed her shoes and went in her stead. The musical tap number is playful and full of high energy steps ending with a back flip posing down on one knee with arms outstretched. Mike finishes his number and dismissed by Zach with an “Okay, Mike-- back in line.”

Bobby is the next dancer Zach calls forth. He begins with corny jokes, but quickly moves along with pressure from Zach and the line. As Bobby tells about his childhood, the rest of the line is pensive in thought considering what they should talk about when called, “..*And..*” is the song that follows.

“... *And...*”

This number is sung by various company members spotlighting Val, Richie, and Judy. The company is not sure what they should tell Zach. Does he want stories from the past? Does he want made up stories, funny stories, the truth? All these thoughts enter their minds as Bobby tells about his rather estranged childhood. When Bobby returns to the line, Sheila is called forth. Sheila is a rather aggressive aging “chorus cutie”. She frustrates Zach somewhat with her forthcoming manner. He tells her to let down her hair at which point there is a change in her character and she relaxes somewhat. The memory that she unfolds for the audience is how her father mistreated her mother. Although home was not perfect, everything was beautiful “*At The Ballet*”.

“*At The Ballet*”

In this song Sheila, Bebe, and Maggie recount the hardships they endured at home as little girls. For each of them, ballet was a haven of sorts and though “it wasn’t paradise. It was home.” The company fades upstage and hold their formation with backs facing the audience. As the song progresses, the company turns and walks down recreating the beauty of the ballet world each girl is captivated by. After dancing, the company reforms the line upstage with backs to the audience. In unison they travel downstage and turn at the same time to finish back on the line facing Zach.

Kristine is the next dancer called forth from the line. Her nervousness causes her to fidget and ramble on about how she began dancing. Unfortunately, she has a small problem. She can't "Sing!", preventing her from becoming like her idol, Doris Day.

"Sing!"

In this humorous number her husband, Al, finishes the ends of her sentences as he encourages her to continue. Her pitches and notes are off any defined scale as she tries to sing, to no avail. The company forms a makeshift piano stage right which Al mimes playing during the "do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do" chorus section. As the song nears an end the chorus proceeds back to their places and end singing the final word "sing", with hands raised in an opera like *Evita* salute.

Al and Kristine fall back in the line and Zach calls Mark beginning the long awaited Montage sequence(s). The Montage is divided into four parts, "*Hello Twelve*"-Mark, Connie, and Company, "*Nothing*" -Diana, "*Mother*"- Don, Judy, and Company, and part 4 with Richie's song "*Gimme The Ball/Shit Richie*".

"Montage 1: *Hello Twelve*"

In this section, Mark begins to disclose his memories. He pantomimes down stage left as the lights change and specials appear over specific dancers on the line. Each dancer begins to remember when they were young and going through the changes of puberty and all the awkwardness that was characterized by those stages. A ripple effect permeates through the line and with Mark still pantomiming, the company sings "Hello Twelve". The lights change and in mid-sentence the lights leave Mark and spotlight Connie who is stage right. Connie tells how her size was a hindrance to the realization of her dream of becoming a prima- ballerina, like

Maria Tallchief. The chorus melody “Hello Twelve” is sung again, only this time the company sings “Goodbye Twelve ...”. This represents the company growing on in years and moving through adolescence. After dancing, the dancers resume their places once again on the line.

Montage 2: “Nothing”

In this song, Diana takes center stage and as she recounts her memories. The company gently trots upstage in two lines and exit stage right at the sounds of ringing sleigh bells. She then sings the tragically beautiful song “*Nothing*”. In it, she recalls a teacher who hurt her with his words and belittled her acting ability. He died and she cried because she felt nothing for him.

Montage 3: “Mother”

At the end of Diana’s song, the company enters back on stage in cue with the top hat drum. Diana falls in place and the focus is on Don, downstage right. He tells of his experience with a stripper and “her twin 44s”. Don continues and the line snakes around him upstage and form a circle as they sing and dance another verse of “Goodbye Twelve, Goodbye Thirteen, Hello Love.” Throughout the song different dancers interject lines of their childhood crushes, wishes, and parental admonishes. The line forms downstage upon which Don finishes, passing the focus to Judy. She humorously tells of how she shaved her little sister’s hair and made her dad smile when she would dance around the living room.

Judy goes into a pantomime downstage left and Maggie begins singing stage right as the lights change and focus on her. While Maggie sings “*Mother*” the line walks back and regroups in threes throughout the stage. Each group maintains the ballet theme, but characterizes their movements according to the lines each interjects during Maggie’s song. As each group dances in place, Connie lyrically weaves her way around each stationary group. Maggie finishes the last

lines of the song while the line reforms in a dreamlike manner. Judy finishes her memory and Greg begins his teenage memory as she rejoins the line.

Montage 4- Judy, Greg, Richie & Company

The company walks upstage in three waves and begin a reprise of the melody “Goodbye Twelve...”. Throughout the song there are counterpoints from the chorus. When each member sings their lines, they detach themselves temporarily from the rest of the chorus but quickly rejoin the chorus upon finishing their lines. With the music underscoring the chorus turns and walks upstage when Paul sings, “What am I gonna say when he calls on me?” The momentum continues to build, Paul turns and completes the line, at which point Judy struts towards the audience, leading the chorus in a ripple of three waves inundating the audience with sense of excitement. In unison, they build their energy with dance and song, meet in the middle, and literally explode from the center, scattering to various parts of the stage. After venting in an animated montage of individual stories, they turn upstage and begin rapidly running in place. Richie is the only one facing the audience and he begins his section of the closing Montage “Gimme The Ball/Shit Richie”. The chorus turns around and frames him temporarily, heads upstage, and forms a diagonal which ingeniously snakes its way back to the white line. The whole number becomes a celebration of adolescence, rebellion, love, anger, and many more emotions characterized with growing up. Finally, to the words “And Now Life Really Begins” the chorus makes its way to the line and with the lyric “Go To It.” they fill the theatre with one last incomparable note of energy.

“Dance: Ten; Looks: Three”

Val takes center stage at this point and explains her hardships with coming to the city, the rejection she received because of her looks, and the ultimate decision which caused her to have augmentation for “Tits and Ass”. *“Dance: Ten; Looks: Three”* becomes a musical number where the chorus frames Val and even lifts her up like Queen Cleopatra. At the end of the number the chorus resumes their places on the line, and Zach calls Paul forward.

There is no musical number that follows, no light change, no pantomime. On the contrary, nothing in the area of spectacle happens when Paul steps forward. Zach asks some personal questions and Paul is clearly reluctant to answer them. The questioning is interrupted when Connie asks Larry if the line can sit down. Sheila seizes the opportunity to ask “...Can the adults please smoke?”. Zach allows the line to take a break and tells Paul “...we’ll try this again later.” Before she leaves with the group, Zach tells Cassie to stay on stage.

“The Music And The Mirror”

Zach and Cassie have a long awaited confrontation. He asks her what she is doing at the audition, she replies that she needs a job. He says “In the chorus?” and refuses her because she is “...too good for the chorus...”. She feels differently. She is at the end of her rope. She has already tried the film route in California but to no fruition. She is back in New York because she needs a job. He offers to give her money, but she protests that she does not need a handout, what she needs is a job. She steps on the white chorus line and says “So--I’m putting myself on the line. Yes, I’m putting myself on your line.” She then sings *“The Music And The Mirror”*. This is her last plea to show that she still has something to offer. All she needs is the chance to dance.

An intense dance section follows with artistic light changes. The mirrors upstage are unveiled and she lets her soul dance for one more chance to soar on stage. Her final movement finds her with feet planted precariously on the white chorus line and arms outstretched in a final supplication for support. Their confrontation continues until Larry enters, interrupting asking if the kids should come back in. Zach tells him no, and to take the kids down to the basement to learn the lyric to the rest of a number. And he also tells him to send Paul in. He turns to Cassie and says “Alright, go with Larry and learn the lyric.” She thanks him and exits stage right.

Paul's Scene

Paul enters tentatively upstage right and stops center stage on the white line. The stage is completely void of anyone except him. Even the mirrors upstage are covered. The chorus is gone and he is the sole member left under the glare of the stage lights. Zach attempts to question Paul again but he is still reluctant to answer. Finally, Zach is about to give up and says “Look, Paul, if this is too rough for you, I have your picture and resume...” Paul realizes that this is his last chance and summons up the courage to open his long sealed memories.

Paul tells of his childhood molestation by older men, his confusion of what he was in a society where strong male figures were far and few, and his experiences with drag. He was pressured to quit school by his Catholic school so he had to fend for himself without a proper education. He ended up in a drag show, which he kept secret from his parents. They found out though and it was an emotionally trying time for him when they did. Paul breaks down and is unable to go on.

Zach comes down the aisle and walks onstage to Paul and comforts him with an embrace. Larry enters and asks if Zach would like the “kids” now. Initially, Zach motions no, but shortly after lets the company back in as Paul quickly regains his composure.

“One”

The company begins to sing and perform the “*One*” combination. After two full company runs, the chorus is divided into four groups, and then further divided into boys and girls. Zach focuses most of his attention on Cassie and yells corrections at her. After she dances with the girls he makes her dance with the boys. He pulls her out of the line and questions her downstage. The chorus fades upstage and interjects counterpoints while executing the choreography. Zach points at the chorus and asks “... Is this really what you want to do?” Cassie answers yes, because she would be proud to a part of the line, the chorus line.

Tap Dance

The time has come for the company to do the tap combination. They assemble and perform the combination as a whole, with select dancers amusingly singing their inner thoughts. Larry divides them into groups of four, two girls and two boys, and they dance again. Paul is with the third group to go and it is here when he falls and badly injures his knee which was recently operated on. He is taken to the hospital leaving the remaining dancers visibly shaken.

Alternatives

Zach asks the company “What do you do when you can’t dance anymore?” Each of them gives their own personal response to this question. Some are angered by it, scared of the

alternative, and others blatantly honest with their answers. Diana has quite a bit to say on the matter and it is she who begins “*What I Did For Love*”.

“*What I Did For Love*”

Here the company expresses their fervent emotions of having no regrets for giving their all for dance and what they did for love. The song ends and the company comes back one last time on the famous white line. This time, it is for the Zach’s final decision on who gets the part and who doesn’t. He picks his dancers. The manner in which Zach calls the dancers forward gives the audience the impression that these are the dancers he has selected. This is not the case. The dancers slowly come to the realization that they are the ones being cut not selected. Saddened, they walk away. The kept dancers rejoice in this bitter sweet victory from a grueling audition that has allowed them to become part of *A Chorus Line*.

Bows

The full company graces the stage and sing, “*One*”. In flashy bronze and gold costumes the men come out followed by the girls, each looking dazzling in their suit and hat. The famous line is formed and the entire chorus executes the combination as a complete unit. They are the chorus singing about an imaginary man and lady who are never seen. This is because the star of the show is the actual chorus line, they are the only ones that matter on the stage. The lights fade as the line kicks in a spectacle of unity.

Script Analysis

Plays can be divided into various components and analyzed for their dramatic themes, structures, and value. *A Chorus Line* is an atypical musical play which focuses not on leading

characters but on the chorus. However novel the play may be, it still adheres to established dramatic rules that have characterized well-made plays. The following section examines the script of *A Chorus Line* and distinguishes the portions that help classify it as a well made play according to Aristotle's dramatic elements. Also there are further breakdowns of the script's dramatic structure with an application to O.G. Brockett's established form and style.

In establishing the structure of *A Chorus Line*, the script will be analyzed for those elements that prove the play has plot-beginning/middle/end , character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle.⁴⁰

Plot- The Beginning

In the opening scene, the audience sees a stage full of dancers at a Broadway audition. The dancers are sweating and have been at this audition for some time. They continue to dance for the director who is walking among them calling out counts and numbers as he assesses whom he will keep. Here we find the exposition-*the setting forth of information- about earlier events, the identity of the characters, and the present situation.*⁴¹

The audience knows nothing about these dancers except that they are all auditioning for this show and are fervently praying that they get the job. As the play progresses, we discover more about these characters from their songs and monologues, but at the beginning of the plot, the point of attack is the dance audition, and the exposition is somewhat slighted. This

⁴⁰ Oscar G. Brockett. *The Theatre: An Introduction*. Third Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1974) 34.

⁴¹ Oscar G. Brockett. *The Theatre: An Introduction*. Third Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1974) 35.

completely works for *A Chorus Line* because the audience is competent enough to follow. The audience must pick up the clues from their body language and dress before the line is assembled. Although this play is about the chorus line, there is no Greek messenger needed to give prior information or antecedents. The initial amount given is sufficient.

The inciting incident which often leads to the unifying principle can debatably originate after the opening dance combinations when the first line is formed. Completely assembled, the line introduces itself. Morales ends the brief introductions and the real questions begin. Zach tells her “Go, Diana.” With the other dancers all they had to disclose were their names, and where and when they were born. Nervously, Diana returns to the line and it is here that Zach expresses his unifying principle and goal of the audition. He says:

“I’m looking for a strong dancing chorus. I need people that look terrific together-- and that can work together as a group. But there are some small parts that have to be played by the dancers I hire. Now, I have your pictures and resumes, I know what shows you’ve been in-- but that’s not gonna help me... I think it would be better if I knew something about you-- about your personalities. So, I’m going to ask you some questions. I want to hear you talk. Treat it like an interview. I don’t want you to think you have to perform. I just want to hear you talk and be yourselves.”

He is looking for a strong chorus and the best way he can accomplish this is by interviewing each of them. This introduces a new obstacle for each character. Seemingly prepared, they came with headshots, resumes, and dance attire. Now they have an unforeseen obstacle. Each will have to talk now. It is a dance audition for a Broadway show, but events have unexpectedly turned on them. Hence, the inciting incident is when Zach introduces the new element of “the interviews” to the audition. The question of who will make the cut still remains, but dancing ability is no longer the sole determining factor. Personality is now an issue. From

this point on, any actions from the characters on the line will aid or hinder their chances of getting the job.

Plot-The Middle

The middle of the plot is usually characterized by complications and the arrival of new obstacles. In *A Chorus Line* the middle happens with Zach's questioning of Paul. Until this point, each character summoned from the line has answered his questions and shared their memories spanning childhood through adolescence. Song and dance have accompanied these narrative accounts. However, there is no musical underscore when Paul steps forward and most definitely there is no song or dance. It is the calm before the storm - an obvious indicator that a focal shift is occurring. This is evidence of what Brockett calls a complication- *a new element which serves to alter the direction of the action.*⁴²

Minor complications have existed already in the play. The significance of this incident is that Paul is the first character who blatantly refuses to answer Zach's questions. He does not plea or ask like Diana who said "Look, I really don't mind talking...but, I just can't be the first...please." When Zach asks about the death of Paul's sister he replies "I, ah... I really don't want to talk about that. I mean...Why do I have to talk about that?" An interruption by Connie, asking for the line to rest, prevents knowing what Zach would have said or done at that moment. Zach lets the entire line leave, but not before asking Cassie to stay and telling Paul "...we'll try this again later."

⁴² Oscar G. Brockett. The Theatre: An Introduction. Third Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1974) 36

Cassie stays on and an anticipated confrontation between she and Zach develops. She needs to start over and is willing to take a job in the chorus. He does not think she is able to fade into the chorus having done well in her career with a few show stopping moments. Their unresolved issues boil at the surface and threaten to obliterate the professional line separating work from pleasure. Complications lead to discoveries. Cassie realizes that Zach has not fully recovered from their breaking up. Cassie sings, dances, and is allowed to stay, even though matters between she and Zach are not completely resolved.

Paul enters upon Cassie's exit. As before there are no flashy lights, unveiling of mirrors, or musical underscoring with his stepping forth. Zach begins his personal questions again, and due to Paul's reluctance, is about to dismiss him. Paul finally opens up his Pandora's box of memories. A lengthy monologue of nearly three pages follows, ending with him breaking down in tears. Zach comes on stage and comforts him. Here we discover the price some are willing to pay to remain in the audition. With Zach's comforting of Paul past the white line, we see that some lines are meant to be crossed.

The End

Complications lead to a *crisis* or *climax*. In *A Chorus Line* this crisis occurs during the tap combination when Paul badly injures his knee. The sole reason each character is at the audition is for the job. But when Paul falls and is rushed to the hospital, each dancer is shaken and realizes that this audition could seriously hurt them and prevent them from working. All dancing stops and each dancer is forced to face the cold truth of what they would do if they could not dance anymore. What follows is the obligatory scene of the play -a scene which the

dramatist must show if the play is to be satisfying to an audience.⁴³ The long awaited moment finally arrives. Zach lines them up and makes his decision. The denouement of the play continues on through the bows. Here we see all the primary line dancers; even Paul dancing in one last musical number.

Other Elements

Now that the plot of *A Chorus Line* has been established the remaining evidence of character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle will be observed. On the line there are seventeen *characters*: Don, Maggie, Mike, Connie, Greg, Cassie, Sheila, Bobby, Bebe, Judy, Richie, Al, Kristine, Val, Mark, Paul, and Diana. Each has their own point of view, specific memories, and is unmistakably necessary to the play. In their own rites they are narrators who take us back in time through the emotional experiences that have molded them.

The montage is a keen indicator of the complexity of *thought* involved within the play. Numerous inner monologues are vocalized in this intricate assortment of reflection. One character initiates a monologue and quickly begins pantomiming their anecdote as the lights alter transferring focus to another character conveying their inner thoughts. This occurs repeatedly throughout the play.

Diction is vital to the understanding of these thoughts. Even with Richie's song "Gimme The Ball" the words must be enunciated while singing or the audience will get a hodgepodge of distorted consonants. *A Chorus Line* helps diminish the tendency for poor diction by supplying the musical director with specific counts for spoken or sung text. Being a musical, Aristotle's

⁴³ Oscar G. Brockett. The Theatre: An Introduction. Third Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1974) 38.

element of *music* is undoubtedly evident. There are twenty three musical numbers in the entire show. Mike has the only male solo. Val, Cassie and Diana have the female solos. The rest of the numbers are duets-“Sing!”, trios- “At The Ballet”, company numbers with leads- “Gimme The Ball”, or company numbers with vocal counterpoints- “Hello Twelve”, “One”.

In closing, *A Chorus Line* has the final element of *spectacle*. In the ultimate scene of the show, the company comes out in a full exhibition of Broadway at its sparkling best. The company is attired in gold and bronze chorus suits. The men wear jump suits, a jacket and top hat detailed with eye catching rhinestones. The ladies likewise come out in their own complimentary version- a flashy leotard covered with light catching gems and a matching top hat. The play ends with the full company kicking as one chorus line while the lights fade giving the impression of a never ending kicking chorus line.

Analysis of Role

“Analysis dissects, discovers, examines, studies, weighs, recognizes, rejects, confirms...”⁴⁴ The role I played as Paul in Cohoes Music Hall’s production of *A Chorus Line*, is an extremely difficult role to portray. For an actor to honestly depict this role, a prudent examination of the character’s past, point of view, religious beliefs, and motivating factors must be taken into account. The following is the preparatory analysis work I established and discovered from various sources which helped me create the groundwork for my portrayal of Paul.

I relied heavily, but not solely, upon the teachings of Constantin Stanislavski, the renown director and co-founder of the Moscow Art Theater in Russia. His teachings and views on acting have revolutionized the theatrical world and spawned other approaches to preparing and creating roles for the stage. I also resorted to the teachings of one of his acting students, Richard Boleslavsky, who later became an accomplished director and producer. He produced plays and musical comedies on Broadway. His book Acting: The First Six Lessons was a great asset in my training as an undergraduate and thus, in preparing for this role. In addition to these two great teachers I applied a small amount of another well-known master’s teachings, Sanford Meisner. Meisner was exposed to the teachings of Stanislavski in the nineteen thirties. He helped introduce what has been labeled as “Method Acting” among American actors. He saw technique “as a means to an end, never as an end to itself”.⁴⁵ What he calls the “pinch” and his views on instinct I found very helpful.

⁴⁴ Stanislavski, Constantin. Creating A Role (New York: Routledge, 1961) 170.

⁴⁵ Meisner, Sanford. Sanford Meisner On Acting. (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1987)

The following section contains dramatic philosophies from each of these master teachers and the principles I used in preparing this role. Sonia Moore whose published book entitled “The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of An Actor” was another key aid in analyzing my approach. Having studied in Kiev, Moscow, and attained degrees from conservatories in Rome and the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theater, I deemed her comments would be a great asset.

While reading this next section, it is important to bear in mind that I did not create my role for Paul using “The Method”. In acting, there are generally two types of actors, technical and method. The technical actor tends to work from the outward in. And the method actor tends to work from the inside and work outward. The method actor can often submerge himself into his character so heavily that he believes he *is* the character. This was not the case for me. With Stanislavski’s methods I created my role, I did not however eat, sleep, and breathe my character. I do not wish, anyone reading this thesis to walk away with the impression that these are the exact steps that one must follow in preparing a role according to the “method school of acting”. On the contrary, these are the *select* methods that I used and still use. These methods come from Stanislavski, his students and others that have been affected by his teachings. I have found them extremely helpful with my creative process. This thesis is the culmination (not the replication) of *all* the teaching methods I have learned at the University of Central Florida. The department’s goal is to have the performer think for himself and apply that which he has learned in his creative process. This is what I have done and here are the select methods that aided me.

The Magic If

According to Moore “Stanislavski did not think that an actor could honestly believe in the truth and reality of the events on stage...”⁴⁶ He can believe in the *possibility* of the events and it is by the actor *trying* to answer the question of “What would I do *If* I were...” that this goal could be achieved. This technique in preparing a role has been known throughout the world as the “Magic If”. *If* serves as a stimuli allowing the actor to present himself with obstacles and solve them. Once the actor establishes the who, what, where, when, and why of his character he can apply the element of *if* and create not only the outer world of the character but the inner life.

In creating this role, I asked myself, “What I would do *if* I were auditioning for a Broadway musical? What would I do *if* I were molested as a young boy? What would I do *if* someone I recently met were asking some very personal questions?” And most importantly “How far would I go *if* I had a chance to be in a Broadway show?”

Paul was molested as a child. Using Stanislavski’s “Magic If”, I addressed this portion of Paul’s character. Having never been molested, I do not know what it would feel like to live with the memory of such experiences. What I did though, was ask myself if I have ever felt ashamed at having let myself be used contrary to my will? With this question in mind, I went through my memories and found any instances where I was weak. Instances where I felt walked upon or mistreated and did nothing about, where I later wished I had the opportunity to go back in time

⁴⁶ Moore, Sonia. The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of An Actor Digested From The Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski Second Revised Ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 25.

and change events. Having accumulated some key moments in my life, I used the emotions of these memories to help portray the complexity of Paul's experiences at having been molested and ridiculed by his peers at Cardinal Hayes High School.

In finding the answers to the numerous questions the "*Magic If*" posed, I applied the same process and I relied heavily upon my *imagination*. I imagined how I would dance if my leg were hurting and was within reach of becoming part of a Broadway show. I relied on my imagination to take me places I have never physically been before. Meisner was asked by Rose Marie, one of his students, "Do you think that if you're playing in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* it's necessary to go to an insane asylum to see how people behave?" To which Meisner replies "No."⁴⁷ Meisner does definitely encourage his students to do the necessary research such as observation and particularization. Particularization meaning that which makes the "*if*" personal to the actor while still suitable to the role. But in the end, Meisner says, "If I make it personal to me, the rest will follow."⁴⁸ And so I made my "*ifs*" personal to me with each particularization and as Meisner said the rest did follow. Doler felt my preparation for Paul was more than adequate and he guided me according to his concept .

Emotional Memory

In creating a role, the actor must fashion a truly believable character, complete with opinions, attitudes, and *emotions*. Often the actor comes upon an emotionally demanding role, the character of Paul being one of them. Roles where the actor draws the necessary emotions

⁴⁷ Meisner, Sanford. Sanford Meisner On Acting. (New York: Vintage/Random House ,1987)143.

⁴⁸ Ibid 144.

needed and manages them while maintaining a healthy psyche that will allow him to continue with however many performances the run of the play demands.

The emotions experienced on stage differ from those experienced on stage, they must. That which is created on stage is a *fictional* world conceived by a playwright re-enacted by an ensemble of performers. So how does the actor portray emotions, *real* emotions and from whence do they come? Stanislavski said that these emotions are drawn from the actor's inner life and from his observations of the real world. According to Moore, "Every experience in life leaves a trace on our central nervous system, and thus the nerves which participate in a given experience become more sensitive to such a stimulus."⁴⁹ The stimuli for the actor comes from the arduous preparation he has used with the application of Stanislavski's principles in conjunction with other instinctual methods.

The stimuli invokes an emotion taken from the actor's wealth of memories. If the actor were to play a murderer, having never killed anyone, he draws on a equivalent emotion within his own memories. For instance, he has probably killed an insect before, intentionally or unintentionally. Once the memory is found that holds the "parallel" emotion, it is filtered through the actor's imagination and it undergoes the rehearsal process. But the emotion should not be a primary emotion, meaning one experienced in real life.

The stage provides certain protective boundaries that allow re-created emotions to thrive. Primary emotions are volatile because the actor can get caught up in the emotion and possibly

⁴⁹ Moore, Sonia. The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of An Actor Digested From The Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski Second Revised Ed. (New York: Penguin Books 1984) 42.

endanger himself and other performers. Because of overpowering emotions, people go into shock, commit crimes, and lose control. By using *emotional memory*, emotions can be safely portrayed and believed by the audience. The artist paints life and infuses his paintings with what we perceive as emotions of love, happiness, and even hatred. As actors, our canvas is the stage and we paint it with our experiences and developed characters.

Application:

There were several instances where I had to rely heavily upon the application of emotional memory. Paul's days as a drag queen being a key one. As Stanislavski mentions, I sought a memory that would provide sufficient stimuli to help portray this aspect of Paul's life truthfully. While I was studying for my BFA at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama, our ensemble performed an abridged version of *On The Verge*. In it, Eric Overmeyer tells of the adventures three Victorian lady explorers encounter as they travel from the highest peaks of the Himalayas to the imaginary lands of Terra Incognita. This play normally consists of one man and three women, with the man playing several characters throughout the play. At the time, I was one of two boys in our performing class. I received the second half of the male characters to portray. One of the characters was a Chinese Dragonlady by the name of Madame Nu. Madame Nu is an eccentric mystic who speaks in riddles and paradoxes. She spreads more confusion than understanding with her "fortune cookie" answers. It is not completely certain whether Madame Nu is a woman or a man, her androgynous nature leaves one to speculate.

I was having great difficulty with finding Madame Nu within myself. During our rehearsals, I would rush through Madame Nu's lines hoping speed would compensate for my lack of characterization. I honestly did not know how to portray this character. Professor

LaRocque, one of the head acting professors at Auburn University, gave each of us a rather sharp and truthful evaluation of our performances right before the final dress rehearsal. When I received his comments, I knew that I was in dire need of help if I were to pass this performance. I went to the only place I had not been, the mirror.

That evening, I went inside my bathroom and stared at myself in the mirror. I repeated the text and played with the delivery. I sped sections up, slowed other sections down. I experimented with the timbre of my voice. Some actors like to find the actors movement first but on certain occasions I like to find the voice first and build from there. While I was experimenting, I grabbed a towel and wrapped it around my head as I have seen numerous girls do after washing their hair. The manner in which I tied the towel caused my eyes to slant at an upward angle. This physical change brought about a spark of inspiration. With the towel still on, I repeated the text and the voice took on a totally different nature. I then proceeded to play with a blanket and used it as a robe. One realization led to another and slowly before my eyes, Madame Nu appeared. I continued to play with the text and gestures came about. The next day I brought in my props for the dress rehearsal and re-created what I did the night before, with the aid of the mirror. The other actresses could not stop laughing as I walked among them as my newly found Madame Nu. I recalled on this experience and laid it down as a parallel memory in place of Paul's memories of dressing in drag at the Jewel Box.

Observation

An actor must hone his physical senses to examine all events that occur around him. When he portrays a character it is the distinct details of his performance that separates his character from your average "John Doe". These specific details are the result of deliberate

exercises of observation. According to Boleslavsky, observation "...helps a student in the theatre to notice everything unusual and out of the ordinary in every-day life. It builds his memory, his storage memory, with all visible manifestations of the human spirit... It develops his sensory and muscular memory and facilitates his adjustment to any business he may be required to do in a part."⁵⁰ With the knowledge an actor attains from his observations he is able to characterize his role according to the specifications placed by the playwright and suggested by the director.

Application 1:

Living in New York City prior to the rehearsal period in Cohoes, New York, allowed me to observe the ambiance that Paul grew up in. The city never sleeps. It is full of the nicest, rudest, most diligent, laziest, cut-throat people you will ever meet. As a performer, there is a sense of being in the heart of musical theater history. The city has been home to so many celebrities and is home to so many more. There is a driving need be part of the next big musical milestone. On the flipside, I observed that the city is also a pit of quick sand for performers. Many starving performers come to New York with aspirations of making it big. They sell everything they have to reach the city. Once they reach the city though, they find expensive tiny apartments and quickly seek out jobs. After a few months they are no longer going to dance class or taking voice lessons. They are barely getting by with their monthly rent payments. The dreams they came with are no longer a priority as another reality displaces the former.

⁵⁰ Boleslavsky, Richard. *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (New York: Theatre Arts Books 1962) 97.

I observed all this while I was in the city, rushing from one audition to the next, hurrying from one dance class to another at Broadway Dance Center on 8th and 57th, and Steps On Broadway by The Lincoln Center. I saw *Movin' Out*, *Wicked*, *Brooklyn*, *Hairspray*. The theaters and dancers varied but the magic of Broadway was present at every performance. As I watched the shows, I knew that Paul felt exactly what I was feeling. He felt that feeling that he could be on that stage too. I was able to observe the people of New York, the dancers on Broadway, and the “competition” at the auditions.

Application 2:

While I was in Manhattan, I took voice lessons. One of those lessons was with a coach who lived in Washington Heights off the Dyckman subway station. I arrived an hour early for the lesson to find the building and give myself ample time for the lesson. After finding the building, I decided to find some friends who lived in the Washington Heights section of New York. As I searched for their building complex, I became very guarded and alert. It was the cold of winter, and although it was broad daylight I did not know exactly where I was going. I tried my best to look like I was not a tourist. On my walk, I passed scores of people loitering on the sidewalks. Many of them were youths with different colored bandanas. It felt like I was in a bad area of Spanish Harlem. I looked like them but I did not belong.

I passed a restaurant that was blocked off with yellow “no trespassing” tape. The police, firemen, and medics were on the scene. Apparently, a driver had lost control of an SUV and swerved off the road. Somehow, the vehicle flipped upside down and crashed into the main entrance of one of the local restaurants. I paused for a brief moment and quickly hurried by. I began looking around my surroundings and looking often three times before I crossed an

intersection. I met my friends, went to my lesson, and returned to my part of Manhattan. It was not until much later I realized that this was probably an everyday occurrence for Paul, having to live with that sense of guardedness. I could only imagine that the area of the Bronx Paul grew up in had very strong similarities to what I had seen that afternoon. Unlike Paul, I did not have to stay. I could leave and go home to a safer place.

Emotional Preparation

Emotional Preparation consists of the steps the actor engages in to emotionally attain the state necessary to portray the various elements of his character. The preparation can be taken only when the actor finds the emotional essence of the text he is performing. Through an assortment of improvisation exercises with the text, the actor finds this essence, this spirit of the text. The preparation is personal and distinct according to the actor who knows fully the store of emotions and memories he has with in. Meisner mentions that imagination is key to this preparation. While helping one of his students experiencing some difficulty with a text he says, “Don’t look for a real experience: I doubt whether you’ll find it. Go to your imagination...”⁵¹

With the use of the imagination, the actor can alter the emotional preparation needed. Much in the same way the dancer warms up their physical apparatus according to the physical demands of the choreography. A runner about to run a ten mile race is not going to stretch for five seconds and then begin running. The runner stretches accordingly, and warms up his muscles to prepare for the race ahead of him. Knowing the demands of my role, I sorted through my memories and emotions to help create the necessary believable characterization. Having

⁵¹ Meisner, Sanford. *Sanford Meisner On Acting*. (New York: Vintage/Random House 1987)

found the emotional essence of Paul's monologue I was able to proceed accordingly with the rest of the text.

Concentration of Attention

This step in the creative process requires the actor to concentrate so fully on that which is on the stage that distractions from the audience remain merely in the peripheral. In using this step, the actor must not forget about the audience for the audience is a "co-creator of the performance."⁵² When the actor achieves this state of freedom that Stanislavski calls *public solitude*, he can allow creativity to flow and dispense with initial fears and worries.

Application:

There were many nights I had to use this approach in my performances. Often the sounds of fire trucks, police cars, and of course the ever-persistent cell phone ring tones would attempt to divert my concentration. The other complication for me was that during Paul's monologue I look directly out into the audience. I did not break the fourth wall, the imaginary wall that separates the audience from the actors, but I had to stare right at the audience because Zach is "supposedly" sitting in the house. I could see the audience fidget in their seat, rise to leave, or raise their fans to cool themselves. The other scenes in the play lend themselves to less difficult opportunities for the application of this step, but I found this dramatic step key in all my performances.

⁵² Moore, Sonia. *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of An Actor Digested From The Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski* Second Revised Ed. (New York: Penguin Books 1984) 30.

Tempo-Rhythm

The Tempo-Rhythm is integral in sustaining the believability of the play's world and in determining the amount of imaginary puissance the audience invests in the play. Every scene and song has its own energy. It is the dispensation of this energy that must be regulated. This is done by assessing the correct tempo-rhythm required for the spoken text. Each character within the play has its own tempo-rhythm and this is shown by their physical actions, speech patterns, and delivery of songs. The tempo-rhythm of each character helps compose that of the scene and ultimately helps define the tempo and energy needed for the play itself.

Concerning tempo-rhythm, Boleslavski's view on tempo-rhythm is what I found extremely helpful in my character development. He says that if Shakespeare had cast these two he would have written: "Rhythm- The Prince of Arts. Tempo-his bastard Brother."⁵³ At first, I was rather confused. I have generally associated tempo and rhythm to be the same. Per Boleslavski, tempo is the speed- slow, medium, fast- that events occur in. Rhythm is the smooth transition of each event. These transitions may appear rational or irrational but there is an order to even the most seemingly chaotic events.

He mentions that novice thespians resort to speeding up text or hurriedly rushing past key, yet awkward moments in the play. Because they do not understand the moment and have not spent time with it, they reason that by adjusting the speed in the delivery the audience will not perceive the lack of preparation. Hopefully crediting it to genius from the actor's part. Rhythm is the microscope that allows the actor to study these awkward moments and know

⁵³ Boleslavsky, Richard. *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (New York: Theatre Arts Books 1962) 112.

“how” they transition from one to the next. When a dancer knows the rhythm of a song they can “breathe” in between the counts. Speed up here and slow down there, allowing their inspiration to come forth. When an actor knows the rhythm of his character and how it fits within the play’s rhythm he can live “in the moment”.

Finding Paul’s tempo-rhythm was slightly difficult. Once I realized what Doler’s vision and perception of Paul was, I could begin to solidify what tempo-rhythm was necessary. Here is another key instance where I utilized the aforementioned method of *observation*. I studied pictures of various Paul’s in other productions, gleaning what I could from the script and the play’s conception. But most importantly, I studied my colleagues. I noticed their characters and sought to find how my character fell en suite with the world we were creating. I felt my character was very different from everyone in the line except for the character of Kristine.

Application:

I say this because she is an extremely shy, nervous wreck who fumbles with the ends of her sentences. She is clearly dependent on her husband, Al, for any coherent flow of conversation. Although shy, Zach sees something in her that has allowed her to make it this far into the audition. Paul likewise is shy and rather reluctant at times. I noticed the moments her energy would change, especially when she altered her personal tempo-rhythm. In the opening number, I observed Katie, the actress who plays Kristine, and noted her behavior. Initially, she danced as a sensuous panther batting her eyelashes coyly here, pouting her lips there, and strutting like a Vegas show girl all over. As soon as she stopped dancing, she became the scatterbrained Kristine that the audience recognizes as the girl who sings “Sing!”. She put a mask on and took it right off, she added depth to her character and made it believable.

Her tempo-rhythm changed dramatically from those moments when she danced as opposed to those moments when she would speak or simply stand, as did mine. I also would put on a mask when I danced. When I was on the line I wore Paul's mask of shyness. However, when the lights changed and I danced, I let Paul "breathe" and move without any inhibitions. I let his passion for life burn and shine. Katie and I both were doing similar things with our characters. The tempo-rhythms we had established justified our characters losing their inhibitions when they danced.

Given Circumstances

"Given circumstances include the plot of the play, the epoch, the time and place of the action, the conditions of life, the director's and the actors interpretation, the setting, the properties, lighting sound effects- all that an actor encounters while he creates a role."⁵⁴ By knowing the given circumstances the actor can plan his character's journey. As the runner must study his course and know every bend so the actor must know the given circumstances to achieve his destination.

Application:

The play takes place in 1975, at a New York theater. A performer's life is hard. Always auditioning and striving to land that role, hoping it will be the one role to launch a career into stardom, or in the least keep a steady paycheck. The given circumstances that the script provides

⁵⁴ Moore, Sonia. The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of An Actor Digested From The Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski Second Revised Ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 26.

is that Paul San Marco is Paul's stage name. His real name is Ephrain Ramirez. He was born in Spanish Harlem on October 22, 1947. He has two sisters. One died when he was fourteen. His father worked the night shift and would take his sisters and him to 42nd Street to watch movies. He loved musicals. He was molested by older men in the movie houses. He attended an all boy Catholic school, Cardinal Hayes High School. Here he was bullied and urged to drop out by the administration because of his homosexuality.

He enjoyed school but the pressure was too much. In a search to find out who he was, he became friends with people who loitered on 72nd Street. An audition at the Jewel Box Revue introduced him to the world of drag (individuals dressing in the opposite gender's clothing). His parents knew nothing of his secret life and it remained that way until they accidentally discovered him performing in drag at the Apollo Theater. Under peculiar circumstances, he discovered how much his parents really loved him when he was about to embark on the road with the drag show. Paul has had surgery on the cartilage of his left knee. He wears contact lenses and feels that his life is one big secret.

According to Moore the *given circumstances* as defined by Stanislavski's system consist of other factors including the "...the director's and the actor's interpretation..."⁵⁵

In establishing my interpretation of the events within the play in conjunction with Doler's own interpretation, I relied heavily upon my imagination. In doing so, I had to fill certain missing pieces of information necessary to move along in my character development. Moore mentions,

⁵⁵ Moore, Sonia. The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of An Actor Digested From The Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski Second Revised Ed. (New York: Penguin Books 1984) 26.

“If an actor does not fill in these missing events and movement, the life he portrays will not be complete.”⁵⁶ The following is my “filling in the blanks”.

Imagination

Stanislavski stresses the importance of cultivating a vivid and powerful imagination. The actor’s imagination is one of the most powerful tools he has at his disposal. His imagination can take him to the uncharted regions that the playwright hinted at in the script but did not go into detail. The actor’s imagination is what allows him to fully apply Stanislavski’s “Magic If”. “Spectators come to the theater to hear the subtext,” said Stanislavski. “They can read the text at home.”⁵⁷

The given circumstances mentioned prior were without the application of my imagination or interpretation. The following is what I established along with Doler’s interpretation and the information in the script such as: setting, lights, and sound effects. All factors I encountered having an impact on my creative process.

Application:

The character of Paul is honestly drawn because it is based upon one of the book’s primary writers, Nicholas Dante. Dante was present with the initial group of dancers that met at midnight when the impetus for *A Chorus Line* was first set into motion. It is his life experiences as a young boy in Cardinal Hayes and self discovery at the Jewel Box Revue that are the foundation for the character of Paul. Changes were made to tailor the text to Sammy Williams,

⁵⁶ Ibid 27.

⁵⁷ Ibid 28.

the actor who first played Paul and won a Tony for his performance. However, the script generally remained the same. In fact, of all the preliminary monologues, Paul's is the only one that remained intact from the beginning to end of the process.

It is this truthful depiction of Paul that allows the audience to sympathize with him. He may not be as aggressive as Sheila, corny as Connie, or stand-up as Bobby, but his character helps complete the line. Life is full of talented introverts, get them doing what they love and they light up. He is a highly talented dancer because he has made it this far into the audition, a Broadway audition. There is a passion within him. The complicated task for the actor portraying him is when and how to show this passion.

Paul is attending a Broadway audition in New York City. The audition takes place on the stage of the theatre. The stage is bare except for a white line running across downstage. Ordinarily, the stage would seem spacious but with all the dancers on stage, it is rather crowded. The audition takes place in the spring of 1975. The weather outside is slightly overcast with a cool breeze. The sign-in for the audition started at 9:00 am but has continued until mid-day with several cuts.

Education

Paul went through many adversities as an adolescent in New York. He states that he went to Cardinal Hayes High School. In my research, I discovered that Cardinal Hayes High School is still educating. The all boy school was founded in May 23, 1939 by Bishop Francis Spellman who named the school in honor of his predecessor Patrick Cardinal Hayes. The school currently has the lowest annual tuition in the New York area for Catholic high schools. 1/3 of their students receive some form of financial aid or partial scholarship.

Paul is not the most educated person on the line because he dropped out of school, but he is not stupid either. He has worked other jobs “Oh, I muddled around for awhile. I worked as an office boy and waiter--” Not the most prestigious of jobs but many college degree holding performers are working similar jobs in the grand city of New York. Also, Paul is a dancer. If anyone has ever taken a complete basic level ballet class one would know that dancers are multi-talented thinkers. The dance steps are in French, the positions vary depending on school of training, factors such as turnout, balance, and center must be taken into consideration while keeping in time with the music and lastly you must not injure yourself or others while executing these steps.

Relationships

Paul is friends with Diana Morales. During the audition he stands next to her. She comforts him when Zach dismisses the company for a short break. She and he are the only noted Hispanics who have made it this far into the audition. Paul is gay and ethnic, a double minority so to speak. He has known Diana prior to this audition. This is known because concerning Paul’s knee, Diana tells Zach “Yeah, he just had it operated on last year. It’s his cartilage.” The relationship between Paul and Diana is loosely based on Nicholas Dante and Michon Peacock’s friendship. Paul is acquainted with several of the individual’s at the audition. Although he is not friends with them like Morales, he has seen them at other auditions around town and at class.

Speech

Paul is not very eloquent using grand adjectives superfluously as he speaks. He does not have a heavy New York accent partly because of the influence of his Spanish upbringing. His

parents wanted him to sound as American as he could so that he could make the most of his life, and go farther in life than they did. (see journal for specific speech notes)

Physical Apparatus

Paul is wearing brown/gold corduroy pants held with a brown belt, and a white tank top, covered with a gray hooded zip up. The previous year, Paul had surgery on the cartilage of his left knee. The pants serve two purposes, they are stylish and help keep his legs warm. The zip up Paul wears is a “safety blanket” of sorts. It has pockets on both sides where he can put his hands in. Nothing about Paul’s clothes are very revealing. He does not wear form fitting clothes, but he is comfortable in them and able to move around. And he always resumes to his signature pose: hands in pockets, feet together, body slightly angled, and elbows retracted.

In finding Paul’s signature pose I wanted to stay as far away from imitating the classic Paul stance that appears on countless *A Chorus Line* merchandise. I remember seeing the Sammy Williams with the hooded zip up and I thought, no way am I going to wear that much less dance in that. He wore parachute pants, a tee, and an orange sweat jacket. Doler, the director/choreographer, gave us permission to experiment with poses and so we did. Since we were doing our own original choreography he wanted us to come up with our own poses, and attire.

From the beginning, I always wore a muscle tank top. I liked it but was told that it showed too much of my arms. I like my arms but the showing of muscle was not characteristic of Paul. The stance I grew fond of was staying slightly angled with my left shoulder downstage, right arm wrapped around my back holding my left elbow, and resting in my right hip. This stance grew on me and I liked it a lot. I had no success with the clothes as of yet. For one,

seeing Williams with his hands in his pockets made me wonder how I was going to go from those lightning quick dance sequences to the line with my hands in my pockets. No one else on the line has their hands in their pockets. They can easily strike their pose.

To experiment, I came in wearing sweat pants with pockets. It was very difficult to put my hands in my pockets with sweat running on them. Also, I am in the habit of wrapping a shirt around my waist. I found that this would get in my way. Peripherally I would see the rest of the line frozen and me unobtrusively trying to place my hands in my pockets. I gave up on the idea of pockets. At least so I thought.

I still had no idea of what to wear. Most of us were hoping that we would one day come in wearing some dance outfit and Doler or the artistic director would say “That’s The Outfit!”, as they said to the girls. Doler went down the line one day to solidify poses, and he said something truly profound, that I strongly used for Paul’s characterization. He told me feet together and hands in “Paul wants to take up as little space as possible”. Church bells and angels might as well have been sounding.

I thought of the classic image of Sammy Williams and everything made sense. I went with the corduroy pants because of the era in which the play takes place. Only instead of placing my hands in the pants I would use the pockets of the hooded zip up. Instead of turning one foot in I would place them both together and gradually shift weight. I still kept the slight angle with the left shoulder though, and maintained the retracted elbows. A happy merger was agreed to between the character and I. I did not want to duplicate Sammy Williams’ character but I found his and Bennett’s work extremely helpful and used it to further my process.

Continuing with physical description, I portray Paul as an agile passionate dancer. He is of Puerto Rican descent. We know this because Zach asks “--what made you start dancing, your

parents?” to which Paul replies, “No, what do Puerto Ricans know about theatre?” Paul does not feel he looks Puerto Rican which is why he changed his name to Paul San Marco, an Italian one. Though we find out that it was not necessarily his not looking Puerto Rican that made him change his name so much as his need to be somebody new. Paul: “No, I, ah--just wanted to be somebody new. So, I became Paul San Marco.” Paul is of muscular slender build because he has done drag. A stocky heavy set man cannot dress up and pass off as a woman, so Paul must be slim but not skinny. He is a dancer with some technical training. Dante took two years off from auditioning so that he could submerge himself into the foundations of dance and improve on his technique which enabled him to dance on Broadway. So it is clearly reasonable to say that Paul is a dancer with a proficient level of technique.

If this were not the case then Zach would have yelled at Paul not to dance during the ballet sequence as he did Vicki. Or Zach would have asked Paul “How many years of ballet?” and told him, “The arms are second, down, fourth. I wanna see it.”, as he did to Roy during the men’s ballet section. Paul is a well built, muscular dancer and Zach really likes the way he dances, enough to consider him for a chorus role in a Broadway show.

He has been emotionally wounded and has a secret, but I could not dance Paul like an introverted recluse. He is a performer after all, so he would know how to put on a mask. The mask I decided to put on was hunger. Hunger is the word that Doler used when he was describing the feel he wanted to emanate from us all during the opening scene. We each have to have a raw primal in your face hunger when we dance. The air has to be charged with it from the moment our backs are facing the audience. During the jazz combination I found Paul’s hunger and connected with it. When Paul dances he is alive and hungry for life. By discovering his spirit I was able to find his body.

Super Objective and Through Line of Actions

The *super objective* is the ultimate aspiration that the creative ensemble desires to attain by the completion of the performance. The *through line of actions* is the path the performer takes in his journey to achieve the super objective. Although present from the beginning of the play the super objective of *A Chorus Line* can be pin pointed in the second to the last scene of the show. In it, the remaining company sings, “*What I Did For Love*”. Throughout the whole play each character has relayed memories filled with joy, anger, and hurt. All in hopes of getting closer and closer to being cast for the roles Zach is auditioning them for. The audience sees what each character is willing to do and what they have done to get this far. This objective is what drives each of them.

For different reasons each of them desires this goal, but all are on the same train headed to the same destination. Granted they do not all make it, but they all start off together. Paul wishes to get the role and pass the audition and hopefully have some semblance of stability with a steady job.

Religion

Paul grew up in a Catholic church and he went to a Catholic school, Cardinal Hayes High School. Like most Latin families he believes in God and prays to the Virgin Mary for protection and guidance. He realizes the Bible says one thing about his sexual preference, but he feels another. He is torn because he wants to be a good Christian but he has dressed up in drag, which no honest Christian would do. This is why he kept it from his parents, hiding the makeup and

high heels from them. When they did find out though, he realized that their love for him, like God's, was greater than his secret.

Motivating Forces

There is a hidden courage that drives Paul. Courage to make his parents proud of the career he has chosen. He found out that they loved him no matter what when they unexpectedly came to early to the Apollo Theatre. It was the first time they discovered him in drag and rather than turning their backs on him they told him "please write, make sure you eat and take care of yourself." This may not seem like much but at this critical time in his life it meant so much to him. And before his parents left the theater his father turned to the producer and said "Take care of my son..." This being the first time his father ever called him that. In the play, Paul breaks down and cannot continue.

His dad's approval means a lot to him. Paul begins his monologue with his father "But my father loved movies. And he'd take us all the time...we'd come out of one movie and go to another and another movie--" and he closes his monologue with his father. It is the age old story of a lonely son seeking the love and approval of his father.

In addition to succeeding for his parents, I feel that his deceased sister is a driving force for Paul. As always observe what is not said rather than what is said. There is no mention of her during the monologue the only bit of information we have on Paul's deceased sister is that she died when he was fourteen. He mentions nothing else of her throughout the play. This piqued my interest and so I created a sister for Paul. I named her Arianna, Ari for short. They were extremely close with only a few years difference. I gave him memories that he had with her and discovered what he went through because of her death. She was taken away at a young age and

Paul had no one to really relate to. He now dances in honor of her. She also loved musicals and they would both dream about becoming famous movie stars. Even though she is gone a part of her is still with him and he dances in memory of her and her lost dreams (see journal for further application).

Although Paul is not to blame for being sexually molested by older men, he feels the shame and guilt of it. It has emotionally scarred him, but he overlooks that part of his life in hopes that it will one day fade away. He tells Zach: "I never told anyone, because--well, I guess it didn't matter..." Zach asks "Why didn't it matter?" to which Paul cannot reply, proving that it did matter.

Despite the hardships Paul has endured he still finds the ability to make the most of life and balances the pain with humor. A huge pit fall for an actor portraying Paul is to play nothing but his pain. One critic said this of an experience with *A Chorus Line*, "I have seen Paul performed as a miserable, miserable person, and listening to someone whine for ten minutes is probably one of the worst things that can happen to a play." There is more to Paul than his pain. As I mentioned earlier, his courage, passion for dance, and his humor. It does not shine forth as bright in some characters on the line but it is there.

When Paul is talking to Zach he mentions, "I had no protection anymore. No homeroom where I could be charming and funny with the tough guys so they'd fight my battles for me. Like when I went to small schools." This is such an essential key to Paul's character. Here we see that Paul can be charming and funny. And *can be* is a clear indicator that he *is*.

Paul's monologue has hidden gems of humor, wonderful opportunities to show his charming and funny side. It is these moments, portraying courage, passion, pain, and humor that help establish Paul as a well rounded believable character.

Approach and Style of The Play

A Chorus Line is an inspiring musical drama filled with comedic elements. The central meaning of the play is found within the last scene prior to the bows, in the song “*What I Did For Love*”. Each character is present at the audition because they want the job, but as we see in the Alternatives scene there are diverse driving forces for many of them. Some would like to be a star, others dance because they enjoy it but the common thread which unites them is that they all love it. In the song “*What I Did For Love*”, each says: “POINT ME TOWARD TOMORROW. WE DID WHAT WE HAD TO DO. WON’T FORGET, CAN’T REGRET WHAT I DID FOR LOVE WHAT I DID FOR LOVE”. The play revolves around what and how far these characters are willing to go for their dreams. Though their bodies age, the love they have for dancing will never grow old.

Paul helps contribute to this theme because he bears his soul on stage to Zach. He does not want to do this, but summons up the courage to walk down corridors he had shut long ago. He needs this job and dancing is his whole life. When he falls and is taken away to the hospital, each dancer is faced with the fact that this audition could cost them more than a little sweat and fatigue.

After Paul’s monologue, the audience sympathizes with him and feels for him when he is taken away to the hospital. During the previews of *A Chorus Line*, Bennett experimented with other characters falling and being rushed to the hospital. The Alternatives scene did not work though, nor did the song have an emotional effect upon the audience. Only when Paul was the injured dancer, did the latter scene truly impact the audience. Paul helps lay the foundation for

the theme of the play and his presence/absence is duly needed for the acceptance of the central theme.

Director's Concept

From the first moment I saw Tralen Doler at Ripley Grier Studios for the audition, I noticed a youthful talent with a very charismatic aura. The passion with which he taught the dance combination was evident that his production of *A Chorus Line* was going to be contemporary and fresh. In his zeal to express his fervor for the dance combination he ripped a hole in his inner pant leg. That day during the audition he inspired me to dance and do my best. And as I found out later in the rehearsal process, he continued to challenge me.

From the beginning, he stressed the point that this production was not going to have the “original choreography” that so many other productions attempt to re-create. Several of my colleagues were a bit taken back by his novel approach to *A Chorus Line*. Not performing “original” choreography seemed to place him on the same lines as one who has been excommunicated. Having never performed in a full production of *A Chorus Line*, I appreciated the equality that this placed all present at the audition. No one would know the choreography because they have been part of a previous production of *A Chorus Line*.

Doler's approach to the show was completely respectful and well researched. In the university environment we are taught not break the rules until you understand them. Doler researched the conception of *A Chorus Line* and his research supported the very concept he had for the show. *A Chorus Line* is a show about dancers. It was conceived by dancers and through a collaborative effort the text and choreography came about. Anyone who knows anything about

the show would know this. In fact, there was some tension among Bennett and those involved with the show's workshops. They felt Bennett received the fruits of their labor.

Gratefully, we did not have to start from the same initial foundation as the shows founders did. Who sorted through seventeen plus hours of audio tapes. Doler allowed the production to be a reciprocated effort. If an individual executed a certain piece of the choreography in a manner that caught his eye, he would adapt the choreography accordingly. He modified the show according to our ability and made the show *our* show. The new choreography did not make the show different. On the contrary it made it the best product.

I reiterate his use of the word "hunger" because I believe that was his underlying concept. He wanted the show to be alive with a *passionate* hunger. This hunger was raw and in the audience's face, there was no holding back. The dance numbers he choreographed yearn for focused abandonment.

Finding Paul and placing him in Doler's concept was quite enjoyable and ever so challenging. Falling in his line as a performer has been quite stimulating. His character concept for Paul though, was a little more different.

He wanted Paul to be alive and in control for as long as he could be. A big issue for me was reaching that critical point, emotionally, where the tears flow uncontrollably. Doler said that crying should not be my goal, because setting this goal would act as a hindrance. I was constantly seeking what he *wanted* from Paul and the challenging monologue. He definitely wanted me to find the humor in Paul and he wanted Paul to take up as little space as possible.

One day he asked me if I had seen the movie "The Hours". I replied "no". He mentioned that there is a scene when Meryl Streep is in the bathroom crying. Her husband does not realize the state she is in and is talking to her from the bedroom. She struggles to maintain her voice

calmly while the tears pour from her face revealing the emotional turmoil she is truly experiencing. He said it is better to sit on the emotion than let it all hang out. These two things, hunger and control (until control loses), stood out in my creative mind when I was discovering and applying his directorial concept for Paul.

CHAPTER THREE: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE JOURNAL

The following section gives an account of the experiences I encountered while preparing for the role of Paul in *A Chorus Line* performed at Cohoes Music Hall. The journal recounts the obstacles and discoveries I experienced while applying the teachings of Stanislavski, Meisner, and Boleslavsky.

The Audition

I auditioned at Ripley Grier Studios for *A Chorus Line* with Cohoes Theater today. Kelly Briggs called me to come to the audition. Kelly is their casting director and he is the one who also called me for The Sharon Playhouse's audition, where I worked this summer. There were quite a few people there and it seemed that it was the callback for many of them. We were split into two groups, those of us there for the first time stayed and the callback people went outside. The dance had a good level of difficulty which helped show off technique and passion.

Now the choreographer stated in the beginning that the "original" choreography from the show would not be recreated. Cohoes was planning on putting a new face to the show. While the choreographer was teaching us the combination he tore his pants on a battement, it made us

laugh, helping to relax the room a little. A cut was made from our group and then the group outside was brought in.

Those of us that remained were then taught a totally different combination, it was from Cassie's solo. It did seem a little odd having the guys do the Cassie combination, but the choreographer said that this would be for all the guys whoever dreamed of doing it. It was the fire and passion that he was looking for in the dance. We just added that touch of masculinity to it. The sequences of the steps finally stuck in my head and I had fun with the dance.

After we danced another cut was made and then we were asked to stay and sing. There were three shows being auditioned for so the other actors from the other shows' callbacks were waiting outside. We sang for them and then a cut was made. Those of us who remained were given sides to look at and read. I was given Paul's monologue and went outside to read it over. I worked out some quick beats and pauses in the monologue so that I could build up to the climax. But when I went in to read the side they asked me to read the last paragraph. All the beats and moments I planned on working to build up to the "tear jerk" moment went out the window. I did the monologue, but no tears came. I thanked them and left the audition. I was a little unsure as to what they thought or if I would get the part, but hey it was another chance to work on my auditioning skills.

The Call Back

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

I had to take the train from Sharon, CT, leaving TriArts to head back to the city at Ripley Grier for a call back for the role of Paul in *A Chorus Line*. I was going to use the role of Tommy Keeler in *Annie Get Your Gun* but if I get this role than I can use this and have it done. It is a bit

erie having this opportunity especially since my first attempt at completing my thesis was writing and performing a one man show on the character Paul. I know that I didn't walk away from the initial audition feeling great and glowing but I didn't feel bad. To have received the e-mail to come back for a second chance was great. I still don't know if I got the part. In the email they sent they wanted me to look at the monologue and have it memorized. I read it again just to be sure. It seemed that they wanted me to know the monologue so I have been memorizing it on and off for about a week. I took a copy with me just in case.

Funny though, since I didn't hear from them I thought they already cast the role and then when I saw the audition notice posted again in Answers4Dancers.com I was disheartened. I was sad because I wasn't offered the role and they were still looking, which meant I couldn't audition for them because I have already auditioned for them and apparently I was not what they wanted. The uncanny thing is that I was talking about this with the director of *Kiss Me Kate* and one of the leads. They urged me to call the casting director and ask if I could re-audition. No sooner had I made up my mind to do so, I receive an e-mail from Cohoes. I felt that Cohoes wanted me to come with the monologue memorized, so I set to memorizing it. You can never be too prepared.

I arrived at Ripley's and there was Kelly Briggs, the casting director, accepting the headshots and resumes. He asked how *Kiss Me Kate* was running and we talked briefly. Then I noticed that Jennifer Greenman, a singer on my last cruise contract was there. She was auditioning for the role of Sheila. Tralen, the choreographer, came in and taught the combination. It was the same combination from the first time I auditioned, Cassie's solo. I re-learned it and danced after we had been paired together with other dancers. I gave it my all of course.

A cut was made and the remaining dancers were told to go to the holding room while they discussed. I met some of the dancers and for most of them it was their first time auditioning. I asked if anyone knew any information on the theatre or the season, because I was looking in the wrong area on the net. I then pulled out the copy of the monologue and looked it over. We were placed in the order that they wanted to hear us sing. I then realized that I had left my music notebook in the audition room, and on top of that, I was the first to go. I got a little nervous because I wanted to look prepared and not seem like an unprofessional actor who leaves things everywhere. We were lined up and I asked if I could get my notebook. They let me in and I told them that I accidentally left my music notebook on the floor. However, they told me don't worry about the song. They wanted me to go right into the monologue. That took me by surprise.

I recovered quickly and shifted into gear for the monologue. The guy reading Zach offered me a copy of the monologue, but I told him that I had to leave the "security blanket" some time and if I had it in my hand I would only be tempted to look at it. Before I started though, I asked them who I should look at. They told me I could look at the actor playing Zach sitting on the stool, who was in the room. He wasn't too close but he was a little closer than I would have like. Thinking I was going to sing first, and now having the guy in front of me was causing me to go into overdrive. When he asked me if I wanted a copy of the monologue I felt like it was a trick question of final jeopardy. Well, because we are taught not to come in fully memorized because the director will see that you already have a preconceived notion of the character and will think that you are not malleable. I did the monologue though and then a guy at the table of people (there were about five or so) told me to do it again. Keep the emotion but imagine that I was doing it in a big house and make it much louder. I did it again but I felt my

voice wanting to go soft during the end of the piece. I added my Spanish accent for the Jewel Box Revue part and all. No tears though. I thanked them, grabbed my music, and left. Oh, I felt like Keanu Reeves. I could have been a silent film and done better. I mean there was no crying or anything. I was frustrated with myself for not knowing what I could have done better, but I know it could have been better.

When I left the others were outside waiting. I am sure they were perplexed because there was not a single note that came out of the room, and I took so long. I mean I did the monologue twice. Oh, well if it is meant to be then it is meant to be.

The Call

Yes sirreee!! GOD IS GOOD!! Oh wow! An answer to prayer. Cohoes called me and offered me the role of Paul in their production of *A Chorus Line*. I am floored, ecstatic, and relieved. I have a thesis role. More than two years in the waiting but it is finally here. Oh, I have so much to do, and people to call. God is so good! My phone was off so they left a message and of course I called them back and accepted wholeheartedly.

Rehearsal

Tuesday, September 7, 2005

Rehearsal today was “fun” for lack of a better word. I don’t think I’ve had this much fun while working so hard. We are rehearsing at a nearby dance studio. Tralen Doler, the director-choreographer, warmed us up and taught us a combination. The interesting thing about the combination is that it had nothing to do with the show, he just wanted us to have fun and learn a combination, which we did. And boy did we sweat. We were later paired in groups of four -

two boys and two girls- and we did the combination. After a small break we reconvened in another room and sat in a circle. Tralen gave us some history on the show and talked about the gathering Bennett had with the dancers when the impetus for *A Chorus Line* was conceived. In a sense we were having our own gathering.

We went around and said our name, where we were from, and age. The next time around we stated what made us start dancing. We listened and laughed quite a bit. We then took another break and had a read through of the script, skipping the songs.

Tralen told us not to act when we read because he wanted us start from the ground up. But for some who have played the roles prior, this was a little hard. Gradually, we became more relaxed and the juices started flowing. When I got to Paul's monologue I read it, though I already had it memorized. I wasn't sure where to take it for the group. I wondered if I was suppose to cry, or speed through because of time. I was over-thinking and this was only the read through. Finally, I began to just read and let happen what happened.

The evening rehearsal gave us one hour with the musical director. The keyboard was not working. So we went over the opening number and he used a pitch pipe to teach us our parts. Many of us have heard the cd hence, we knew what to do. Gradually, the locals playing the "cut dancers" came in. Once the musical session was over Tralen came back in and taught the opening number. He was not lying when he mentioned the difficulty it would have. We are doing tour en lairs to tour jetes, cabrioles, and that is just the ballet section. The jazz section is unbelievably quick. The counts are in sixes, reminds of me when I did Bojangles. In the last part of the combination he has us doing a double pirouette facing the stage right corner but we have to spot the back wall to land for a super quick jump in second landing with the right foot in coupe in the back. It looks great when we all do it, but when don't get it, it is a funny site. Doler

said that if we don't get it he will change it where we can spot front. We told him no, that we would get it.

I like Doler a lot. He is the same age as me but there is something special about his personae and it shines through his choreography. I am extremely humbled by the faith he has in me and I won't let him or Cohoes down. God is amazing for bringing me here. In Stanislavski's *Creating A Role* the students had to sit and have a read through of Othello. Some of the students said that they did not need to read the play because they knew it already. In fact they did not know the play only the roles they wished to play. I knew my character's obstacles and was acquainted with Paul's monologue. But having the read through helped place my character in a more realistic perspective alongside every other character in the play. Now the chess game against time itself begins as we come together to perform this play.

Wednesday, September 8, 2005

Rehearsal didn't start until five today. During the day the musical director scheduled each of us to have fifteen minute sessions to work on songs. Paul sings at the end of the opening number. Tom, the musical director, explained that "Who Am I Anyway" is a change from the energetic vamps that are in the opening number. He didn't want me to sing the song as a "choir boy" aria. He wanted me to bring it to life and give it substance. When I began I was a little pulled back, to get the correct pitches. My pulling back is what hurt me though. I was pitchy.

He noticed this and said that in opera they are taught to be true to the voice. By this he meant that I was holding back, he sensed I had a fuller voice. I did what he said and made the song mine. I had been listening to the recording and was trying to imitate the recording. This was hurting me because no two voices are the same. When I sang it the way I wanted I had no

pitch problems and Tom said that that is what he wanted. I was very relieved. Another reason I was having problems is because I didn't know when to come in. A lot of my timidity came from not knowing which down beat to follow. The cd helped me but it hurt me when it came to style. He had a microphone and I don't. I can be soft and gentle. I have to be loud and understood.

Rehearsal at the studio was good. We reviewed what was taught yesterday and were given blocking for the opening sequence until the formation of THE LINE. Tralen wanted us to pick our own poses, not necessarily the stereotypical ones we see on the t-shirts and book covers. We learned "At The Ballet" and then it was time to go. We meet tomorrow for ballet class at eleven and then rehearse from 12 until 8.

Thursday, September 9, 2005

The local Fox 23 station came by the studio today. Tralen plugged in the “cut” dancers with all of us. Each of us have different variations to the combination, but because it is an audition this actually works in our favor.

Thay is beside me and I found myself laughing at comments he would say here and there about the tv crew. Minami, playing Connie, is to my left and she has let me know that I am covering her face. She is so small that when I stretch my hands out in second I cover her face. I will have to take the upstage or the down stage depending on our spacing in the theatre.

Friday, September 10, 2005

My brain is not exactly fried but yes, it is very, very stretched. As a company we met today at 11:00 and had ballet class. The class helped get the blood flowing through our already sore muscles. When class was over, we sat and learned the montage section. Tom wanted to teach us our vocal sections for when started learning choreography. So much is happening in this section that it is best to know our vocal parts. I appreciate this because we can memorize the steps with the words. Timing as we learned is crucial to the montage. Since we are not doing original choreography, the knowledge that others know which helped them before, does them no good. But the manner in which we are all working and progressing, one would think that we have all done the show before. Tom even commented that we were the best group of dancers he has ever worked with. Praise God.

Tralen began teaching us the montage after we learned our vocal sections. Now we worked on them but did not have them completely memorized. The montage has sections that are very similar to each other but each is different than the one preceding it, as I found out. There is

so much choreography, that I felt overloaded with too much data. Others were feeling this way also. But we helped each other during breaks, and continued to go over the steps until we had a working knowledge of the montage. We are not finished yet, tomorrow is when we are going to plug in Richie's song.

One of the highlights for me was Maggie's song. When Maggie is singing we are interjecting lines. Tralen grouped us in threes. In my group was Darcy (Diana Morales) and Joey (Mark). Tralen let each group come up with their own choreography for the song. This is what Bennett did in his workshop, and well, we are doing it too. Nothing is set in stone for us as a company. This is becoming *our* show and we all feel it. It is a very amazing feeling for me. I have read about how Bennett developed *A Chorus Line*, but now I am catching a glimpse of it in application. Tomorrow Tom wants to work with us individually with our songs and different parts in the montage. I am tired but I love this feeling. I am doing what I was made to do.

Saturday, September 10, 2005

Worked on Paul's monologue with Tralen today. It was a very rough day. The company went into another room and worked on the dance combinations while I was working with Tralen. I came back and they were already sharper and cleaner. I felt like I had missed a whole day of work. I tried to jump in the mix with everyone but my brain could not shift into gear. Working with Tralen had knocked the wind out of my spirit. I hadn't realize how much it had affected me until I left Tralen and attempted to go over the choreography with the company. I couldn't do it, I had to leave the room. I asked Sarah, the stage manager, if I could have a couple minutes to myself and she let me go. I went outside in the shade by a small tree and wept. After I composed myself I went back in.

We came back in the studio and discussed what we would do if we couldn't dance. Everyone had different things to say. It was moving and touching to hear what everyone had to say. This cast feels like family. A family I am honored to be a part of. We then sang "What I Did For Love". Initially, I didn't move in with the group because Paul doesn't sing this song, he has already left the stage. Tralen saw me hanging back and told me to sing it with the group this time. It was a small gesture that meant much. I enjoyed blending my voice with everyone's for a song that means a lot.

When Tralen was working with me one of the things he had me do was speak as Paul. He did not want me to retell events as Marco the actor, but as Paul. He then told me to summarize the monologue in my own words. This was helpful because I had to find out what it was that I was truly saying in my monologue. Meisner did this exercise with one of his students in class one day. He told Rose Marie to improvise, then read the text, and then improvise. She was having some difficulty with the emotional essence of her text. Meisner wanted her to have a "secure emotional grasp of the material".⁵⁸

Sunday, September 11, 2005

Tap combination was taught today. It is extremely hard. Tralen asked if anyone in the group was not a tapper. Now I was not about to lie and call myself a tapper just because I have had two semesters of basic tap. I have been to Broadway Dance Center and seen the tap classes they give. They would sweep the floor with everyone in the department. They do not play, at all.

⁵⁸ Meisner, Sanford. *Sanford Meisner On Acting*. (New York: Vintage/Random House 1987)

Brent and I were the only ones who raised our hands. And yes sir, I grabbed the middle back of the studio, because I was not going to pretend like my vocabulary consists of double pull backs or even turning cramp rolls (?). To say that I walked out of the studio with the combination in my head is a lovely wish. I remember the pattern the combinations travels and that is not saying much. Oh, and I remember that there are two ball changes at the beginning, everything else is a complete blur. Truthfully it is not that bad but this is going to take some serious work. I did so much smiling today because my brain wanted to explode. Every time I thought he was going to say “that is it“, he kept going. We have to finish the combination tomorrow. Huh? There is more?

The locals came to rehearsal today to help stage the opening. There is one guy in my group who takes his cue a little late when he leads the group out. I wait for the guy to lead us out but by the time he does it is almost time for our group to go the other side with the girls, so the other oncoming group of guys almost runs over us. He will get it by opening.

Tuesday, September 13, 2005

We also went over the tap combination again. Tralen put the last two eights on it. I feel stronger with the combination but there are still parts I need to work on. We did the actual fall also. It happens during the tap combination. Worked with Tom a lot on my music. Joey said that I sounded really good. The group went over choreography while I worked with Tralen on my monologue. We discussed levels, courage, not bringing a lilt on the end of my sentences. He didn't want to give me line readings. We talked about technique. The stronger the technique, the stronger the emotion. He mentioned the soft palate and other things that can help when tears don't come. I was not happy with my progress. In the end he said that I need to find Paul and do

it as he would. Put the mask on. He said go to a safe place and see Paul. Walk around him and step behind him and then step into his skin.

I have created memories for him tonight. I literally have typed up memories for Paul that can help give me substance to his character and how he feels about his family, the death of his sister, and the relationship he has with his parents. The imagination is a powerful tool. Dr. Seay did an exercise with imagery in class one day, so I am experimenting with this for the monologue. In class Doc would whisper an image of sort with a specific color. The person he whispered this to, had to go about some business as if they were that object. We had to guess what the object was that Doc had whispered. However, rather than imagining an object and becoming the object, I am imagining a contrived memory triggered on by the object. I typed an elaborate memory of Paul and the impact of his sister's dying, it was very moving and I plan on bringing my laptop to the theatre. Using Stanislavski's "Magic If" I applied my imagination and created an imaginary emotional memory. I will go and read the memory before going on stage as my preparation for the scene.

Makes me think of Harry Potter and the sifting of memories that is done in the books. The head school master contains certain memories outside of his brain where they are preserved. This allows him to have more room in his brain for other things. I have created these new memories for Paul that are triggered by an image. Only I have the memories stored on the computer and pull up the file when I need to. Tonight's exercise has been truly deep and profound. I am meeting Joey tomorrow at 9:30 to go over choreography at the studio. The following is the memory I created for Paul concerning his sister:

Paul's Memories:

Some of my earliest memories are of my mother. I remember the way her long black hair would gently caress her face. She would sweep me into her arms and nuzzle me in the crook of her neck. I loved the way I use to giggle when she tickled me. It was like nothing could hurt me when she was around, and nothing would ever hurt her. My little sister and I were her two little shadows. Wherever my mom was there we were. We would sit in a corner in the kitchen while she cooked sometimes, and just play games. Even though it wasn't time for dinner she would always give us little pieces of whatever meal she was cooking. My older sister was ten years older than us, she got married and left home early. So, my little sister and I were like two peas in a pod, and the best place for us to be was at home, around mom. My dad would come home from the night shift and rest but when he got up he would take us to the movies and we would watch Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire dance on the big screen. I was especially partial to Cyd Charisse. Wow was she amazing. If my mother was a dancer I would want her to be Cyd Charrisse.

My mother taught me how to cook. I remember the first time I was suppose to cook the family dinner. I laid out the recipes nice and carefully. I was so determined to cook the best meal ever. I cooked arroz con pollo, and had buttered bread rolls, with fried green bananas. The family came and sat at the table. My father said grace and then they began to eat the meal I made. Everyone took the their first bite and I heard my sister go "mmmm". I thought she was saying this because she like the way it tasted, she wasn't. She stopped and looked around the table with the food still in her mouth. My mother and father were looking at each other with the same look. Then they all made this weird face and grabbed their napkins. The whole table erupted into laughter as they spat the food out. My sister didn't even reach for a napkin she just

spat it out right there. I felt embarrassed and thought I was going to cry, my mother looked at me and gave me a big hug and she said “Ay, papi don’t worry about it, it’s the thought that counts” then she leaned into my ear and whispered “besides I have some flan in the refrigerator”. She then kissed me on my forehead the way she always did when she let me know it was all going to be ok.

My father kept on working the night shift and would sleep during the daytime. I never really got a chance to hang around him. My mother was my sun, moon, and stars. I really tried to make my father proud of me with school though. I wanted him to be so proud of me.

One day me and my sister came home. She didn’t look so well. My mother put her hand on her forehead and told her to go lay down for awhile. My mother went into the kitchen to prepare her some soup and cook dinner for us. A little while later my mother went to go bring her the soup. I heard my mother let out a scream and I heard the sound of glass shattering. I rushed to the room and there was mother hugging my sister who wouldn’t get up, I froze. She yelled for me to call 911 with tears in her eyes. My sister would not wake up and she looked so deathly pale. I rushed to the phone and it seemed as if the world moved in slow motion. The ambulance came and rushed my mother and sister to the hospital. I had to call my father’s work and tell him what happened. He met my mother at the hospital. I was left at home with nobody there at all. The house seemed like a tomb. I didn’t know what to do. I waited up for a while but my mother and father were still at the hospital. I ended up falling asleep. I was awakened by the sound of the door creaking open. I went to the door and there was my mother, only she didn’t look like my mother. She had aged somehow, and she was clutching something in her hand. I said her name but she didn’t answer me. I said it again but my father held up his hand,

and then I saw his eyes. They were the eyes of someone who has just lost everything. I was getting really scared. I looked at the door for my sister but I didn't see her. My father stopped and he stared at the open door and then he gently closed it. My mother stayed motionless in the living room. He came back to her and placed his arms around her and led her down the hallway. My mother stopped and was about to hang the thing she was clutching. As she did I saw that it was my sisters light pink hood sweater. My mother grabbed it and clutched it to her chest so fiercely and let out a cry that pierced my heart. She started crying and my father grabbed her and hugged her in a tight embrace. I remember seeing them clinging onto each other with my sisters sweater in the middle. I just stared as they walked down the hall to their room. My sister's door was still open and I saw my mother glance into her bedroom. This time she let out a yell that made my very soul ache. They walked back to their room and shut the door. I heard my mother completely break down. I was left there in the hallway just staring at their door. I walked slowly in shock towards my sister's room. I saw the shattered bowl on the floor. And the imprint that her body had left on the bed. I slowly walked towards the bed and sat down. I looked at the doorway half expecting to see her. But she wasn't there. I realized then that I would never see her. I would never see her smile or the twinkle she would have when she had an idea in her head. Her favorite stuffed bunny was on the floor. I leaned over to pick it up. I brought it close to me and caught a faint smell of her scent. I placed it on the bed where she would always place it before she went to school or out to play. I stared at it and then at her pillow where she would lay her head and say her prayers at night. Then my world came crashing down. I felt so lost and alone. How could she be have been talking with me and joking with me just earlier today. How could she be gone? Why? It's not suppose to happen like this? Why God? Please bring her back, I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye. I couldn't stop, it was a like an enormous dam

had broken and was sweeping me away. All I wanted was to see her again and her smile. I looked at her bunny again and snatched it up so fiercely. I could smell her as if she was in the room, but she wasn't. I gently lay my head on her pillow and cried like I never cried before. I cried for me, for my mother, for my father, and mostly for my sister who would never cry tears of joy in this life ever.

Wednesday, September 14, 2005

I met with Joey this morning and covered some much needed choreography. Bless him because he was willing to come in early and help me out. Today we went over One. What a long and productive day. I am in the first group of guys with Don, Larry, and Zach. Tralen had an idea of what he wanted, but he saw it in his head and today was the day to bring it about. Frankie, my roommate, was in the city for an audition for "Dora The Explorer Live". Jessica, the dance captain filled in for his spot until she had to leave and learn the girls part. The number is very specific and very detailed. We are not doing the original choreography which is thrilling and little scary at the same time.

We are however, doing the original choreography towards the end of the number. There are so many lines moving back and forth, and spacing that must be held. Frankie came in later and he was jumping up and down with joy. He got the part and joined the rehearsal. The choreography is amazing. We all love it, even when it gets mind boggling. After spending a good while at the dance studio, we then reconvened at the theatre to stage the number and finish it. We didn't complete it totally, the number itself is a mountain of a challenge. But it is going to look great and it feels like it is *our* number in *our* show. Tralen had an interview at a radio

station or newspaper this morning, and Donna McKechnie was also doing an interview with the station. She wished us all the best with our show. So we have Donna McKechnie's blessing.

Before we left the theatre, we went out in the house, sat, and discussed the relationships our characters have with each other. Who knows who? How they feel about certain people? Are any a threat? etc. It was extremely helpful and filled in the gaps some of us were having throughout the show. Tomorrow we are going to have a full run through of the show and I will do my monologue. It is exciting and scary, like standing at the edge of a cliff. Tonight after we came home I ran the monologue with my roommate.

In Chapter 10, when Mesiner speaks on "Making The Part Your Own", he mentions using the same emotional essence from the last couple of lines of one's text at the very beginning words. I know that Meisner doesn't intend for me to play the end of my piece at the beginning but I have to hint that my monologue is going somewhere. My monologue is the roller coaster even when it is going slowly I have to keep the audiences attention with the same energy I would use at the end.

Thursday, September 15, 2005

Well I did it! What a rush. It is not where it will be but it has come so far from where it was. I don't think I could have gone this far with the monologue were it not for Tralen. I can trust him and with that trust I can delve within myself. Tralen mentioned going to a spot where I am safe and observing the character. After studying the character in my safe place then I slowly go behind him and merge with him. What also helped me was the power of the mask. People wear masks to conceal things or to become things. I was reminded how to put on a mask and enjoy the liberty of being anything and doing anything. I haven't had to do this for so long that I

forgot about it completely. Many of the cast members came to me and gave me a hug after the monologue, and said how it moved them. I didn't cry but that is not the goal. If I make crying the sole goal of the monologue then I do it an injustice.

Observation Application:

One of our male dancers in *A Chorus Line* was a drag queen in New York City. We all went out to a club and out of habit I observed him. His dancing was very light in nature, not heavy footed. He tipped across the floor like a Vegas Showgirl and initiated much of his movement from his hips and shoulders. I have known other friends who dressed in drag. It is an art that only a few can do well. I inserted these memories for Paul's memories of the Jewel Box dancers.

Friday, September 16, 2005

We learned the other "One", not the ending but the chanting one when Cassie and Zach have their fight. My brain is being stretched beyond its limits and I can feel it every second we are in the studio. Tralen has been allowing Michelle to teach us the combination because she has done the show for a long time. Michelle is playing Cassie, which is oddly fitting. Even though she had a baby last year her body is in great condition and many of us can only hope that at her age we can be as fit as she.

"One" is so detailed and intricate that both sections feel like shows within themselves. The close proximity that we have to be for the choreography to work is mind boggling. We had to clean up the number in small sections. Tralen grouped us in fours, and we went off to work on it and then we were paired with other groups of four until the whole line was formed. There are still more things to work on but that is for tomorrow or another day. We have come so far.

The tap number is on my list of things to work on as are the montages. This show is like nothing I have been a part of. I truly do love it and am grateful for the way it is changing me. When it comes to my monologue Tralen wants me to sit on the emotion a little more. I am not exactly sure how to do this and to what degree but that is what rehearsals are for. He'll let me know. Tom, the musical director, came to me during break and said that the monologue really touched him and he felt bad playing after the monologue. Like he was intruding on a moment of sorts. I appreciated his sincerity and truthfulness.

Saturday, September 17, 2005

And what a long day it has been. We had cue to cue today and I believe that locking a cast of talented triple threats is not exactly a wise thing to do especially when it is for twelve hours. It wasn't that bad, but wow, were there some interesting moments. There is so much standing already in the show that doing more standing became a test of strength and will. The complete cast met this morning which meant that the cut dancers came also. In total we got through about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the show. Tomorrow we have to finish the tap section, "What I Did For Love", and of course "One". I am late on a deadline, that I have to send Tan. It looks like Monday will be the most likely day that I will be able to send it off, at the library's computer.

The newspaper photographer came this morning and took photos of the cast and Cassie doing her dance. The lights that we have for Cassie's solo are amazing; simple but so powerful. They accentuate her lines and really stop the audience in their tracks. We have our mirrors up. Tony, who is playing Zach, stayed up late last night and put them up. He looked so tired today that I felt pity for him. When it came time for Zach to comfort me, I joked around and said that I would comfort him because he looked really rough.

None of the cast members have any microphones so projection is essential to all of us and whole show. Tralen mentioned that although we can hear ourselves, with the sound bouncing back, this is an illusion of sorts because once the seats are filled, the sound will be absorbed the audience will not be able to hear us.

Our energy went up and down. There were moments we were doing the choreography and working up a great sweat and then there were other moments that we would stand for ten minutes at a time. Tralen let us mark most things because of the danger it would have placed on our bodies. Tom even let us mark some of our songs. I marked my song, but then realized that I could use this as a great moment to work on my tempo. Tom held me down and let me know that I had more time. I am very partial to consonants especially bilabial ones. He reminded me to bounce off the consonants and go straight to the vowels. God bless him for his advice. I am not a trained musical theatre major, hence, all my training has been “on the job training”. Is it hard? Yes. Impossible? No.

I just ran the end of my monologue a couple times around the apartment, for memory and too see if I can come across any new discoveries. I am using imagery to help me connect emotionally. Specifically, the images of my parents, before they were divorced. With Stanislavski’s Magic If I ask myself how I would feel “if” I were in Paul’s shoes and had an encounter with my parents much like his.

And I am also playing with Michael Chekhov’s psychological gesture. I love what he has to say about the power of the body to help with emotional connection. The body can be a great resource when it comes to emotions. I remember one day during acting class, Dr. Seay alluded that the body did not store any emotional memory. I though how odd for I find the opposite. As a dancer, I find that my mind can go on “auto pilot” while my body continues the choreography.

It is as if the body has another set memory apart from my conscious mind. I'll make some gesture and be reminded of another time when I did the exact gesture and experienced a strong emotion. While I was reading Chekhov's words, I came to understand he was implying that the body can access emotions in the same manner that imagery can. I am now playing with certain gestures to see if I feel any notion of emotion.

Tuesday, September 20, 2005

We are boosting the show up five notches. At least, that is what Tralen says. I like him a lot; his work ethic is one that many directors twice his age should adopt and apply. He says that we could probably open the show on Wednesday and have a great show on our hands. But he wants us to be on the ball and AMAZING, so from now until we open on Friday he is going to take the show song by song, number by number, and polish it all. We were able to do the opening number and barely got into the montage. The progress we made really made a difference for us all. I found that I wasn't dancing to my fullest because of the rake and pit downstage. I had stop being super cautious and trust myself and my peripheral vision. I look down on a key jump and Tralen noticed it and told me to look up which changed my whole stature.

The word he used for the opening number is "HUNGER". He wants us all to have a fierce hunger throughout the number. After our dinner break, we came back to have our sit probe with the orchestra. We didn't have the whole orchestra but we had more than the usual keyboard and drums. The hour flew by and then it was time to do a full run through in costume, which meant the "One" costumes.

The run-through went fairly well. There were highlights and still other points that we as a cast need to work on outside on our own. Tralen wanted me to take the monologue and let it flow, let the text “be“. He says, Paul pauses and is hesitant at first but there comes a point when he begins to let the words flow as the images come back to him. Tralen liked the first part of the monologue and said that there were nice moments of humor. There were occasional moments of commotion here and there but I tried to focus on the monologue all the more. There is one part about 2/3 into the monologue where I call line. Now that I know where it is, it won't happen again, kind of like knowing where the pothole in the road is. I still need to solidify what images I will use during the monologue. I haven't been specific which is screwing up my technique. That also will not happen again. I am going to work on it tonight and tomorrow before our call at 1:00 tomorrow. Come Friday everything will be fantastic praise God.

Wednesday, September 21, 2005

Honestly, there are some mistakes that you would think I would have learned from by now. Acting, dancing, singing, and life in general is remembering the basics that you learned way back in the day. The choreography is not exactly a walk in the park but it is possible. I had a mentor say its okay to make mistakes, only make new ones, don't repeat the same ones. I really am repeating the same ones. If we opened tonight, I would be in shambles. I am tired of this plateau I seem to be resting on. I need to go the next step.

The monologue has revealed itself. I did the monologue during the run tonight and I lost some of the momentum I had last night. Many ACL fans know the monologue and what happens but I have to make the journey the thing they remember. I often ask myself why people return to the same amusement park and ride the same ride over and over. And I remember that

it's because of the journey. The beginning and end are the same but it's the journey that can continue to captivate. I believe that this is what *A Chorus Line* does, it captivates. To say that this show has changed my life would be an understatement. I am using tools long hidden away, and am finally doing what I was trained to do, and I am getting paid for it. Hah!

When I say that the monologue has revealed itself I mean that I see it in a whole new light. I have found my voice. I remember in class the teachers would say that you must find the body of the character or the voice of the character or his thought process, etc. For me it is the voice. I was in the kitchen and doing the first part of the monologue and it came alive. There were images that appeared and a voice which fit like a glove. Obviously it is still my voice but a different energy and drive is behind it.

Thursday, September 22, 2005

We open tomorrow but we worked today. These runs have been such a blessing. To simplify some choreography changes have been made, the hardest part is remembering the new choreography. "One" feels so much better, not to the point of perfection but definitely up to working mode. Tralen is super patient and very willing to walk us through the choreography until we all get it. We are at the point where he is not teaching choreography but cleaning it. It is our job to go over the steps we don't get.

I did the monologue very differently tonight. Not drastically different but it had more push, I felt. There is a line that I say "I had no homeroom where I could be charming and funny with the tough guys so they would fight my battles for me like when I went to small schools." The two key words being "charming" and "funny". I felt that Paul is not a complete introverted recluse of a person. After all Zach says "I like the way you dance". There has to be some

passion and fire that shows when he dances. Based on what Tralen told me last night I went home and worked on the monologue and put in that passion that Paul has when he dances. And I put in more of the funny and charming personality. I didn't ham it up but I tried to color it differently. I found new realizations and I brought them out tonight. During notes, Tralen mentioned the general company notes. And then Michelle, who plays Cassie, had to talk to him. It took a really long time and it was getting late so I left. I wanted to ask him if he noticed and liked the way I did the monologue. And if he had any notes for me so that I could sleep on them tonight. In the end the line to talk to Tralen was gradually growing so I figured I had best wait for later because he already had a long day.

Joey who plays Mark, came up to me and said that there was a moment in the monologue that really touched him. He played Paul in another production so hearing him say this means a lot because he is very good triple threat. Part of me likes to know what others think of the work and the other part doesn't want to become too interested for fear of letting it affect my own work. The only opinion I really care about is Tralen's. We are meeting tomorrow as a company at 4 to go over some steps and then WE OPEN! Yeah!

Performance

Friday, September 23, 2005

Cell phones, and fire trucks or police cars (I couldn't really tell which one because I was busy acting!). Opening night crowd was great, very receptive to everything. They loved Ritchie's number! And laughed at the very beginning while "The Line" was being introduced. They erupted with applause at the end of the montage. Two critics were in the house, one of the toughest. We will see what he has to say. The audience was not quite sure when the show was

over. Even though there is no intermission, after we finished our twenty plus kicks they looked at each other with that quizzical look. One person even said “Is that the end?”. The show really flew by. You would think that two hours plus of a show would have an audience ready to up and leave but it was the opposite. They thoroughly enjoyed it so much that time seemed to stand still.

The monologue was a good start. Nothing awful happened but I know I can do it better. The crowd laughed in some really great places. Especially in the beginning, when I am talking about Cardinal Hayes High School. The cut dancers have a chance to go back in the house and see the remainder of the show. One of the girls was offended that a lady would laugh during my monologue. I stood there and nodded but inside I was happy.

This was my goal. To make the people laugh. If I can make them laugh then I can make them cry. One man left his cell phone on and it went off during my monologue. Tony who plays Zach, was in the house and was about to tap him so he could turn it off. He was so caught up with what I was saying that he didn’t realize it was his phone going off. When his wife nudged him he shrugged her off because he thought she was distracting him from my monologue. By the second nudge he realized it was his phone and quickly turned it off. Then a police siren went off outside. I felt like I was battling against technology.

I raised my voice to surround the audience even more, but made sure I was not yelling. The million dollar question that was everyone’s mind is was I was really crying. One girl asked if I was, and said that I had to have been crying or “you are just a *really* good actor”. I told her I was teary eyed, and that seemed to please her as if she had won a twenty-dollar bet against her best friend. Like I said the monologue was a good start. .

Saturday, September 24, 2005

This was not a great show in the least. I messed up in the montage, quite noticeably, at least it seemed that way to me. Tonight instead of cell phones and police cars, there were fireworks during my monologue. I know, it's not even July, but sure enough there were fireworks competing with me during my monologue. One lady thought that it was the ghost of the theatre. I laughed to myself as I and others told her that it was fireworks. Some of the audience members could actually see them from the balcony as the big fireworks went off during the end when I have my breakdown.

My roommate's boyfriend attended the show tonight. He traveled six hours by train, changing in New York at Port Authority, but finally made it. He had seen A Chorus Line before but this performance is the one that made everything click. In the show he had seen before, he felt nothing for the actor playing Paul. So when the alternative scene came and "What I Did For Love" he was a little confused. But tonight, when he saw the show the scenes after Paul's monologue, the fall, and the alternatives all made sense. I was reading that Bennett played with having other dancers falling and being taken away. The alternative scene didn't work because the audience didn't feel as strongly for them as they did for Paul. Hearing Frankie comment on how Joel felt about Paul's fall and the following scenes made me grateful that Bennett kept Paul as the character who gets hurt.

I used my emotional prep before I went on tonight and I started getting teary eyed before I even got on stage. Cassie was still on, so I had time to stop crying and free up my nasal cavity. I was afraid that the audience would see that I had been crying even before the monologue started. What I wanted was to have the emotion there and ready for when I needed it. The emotion was there but the tears weren't. I realize Tralen said that crying is not the goal but tears

are an indication of what is happening on the inside. The emotion is there but I don't know how to connect deeply with it in so little time. People came up to me and said how moved they were. One gentleman said how surprised he was to find himself getting teary eyed. I appreciated his comments, but I walked away feeling the same way as before. I know what it feels like when I am completely connected and as of yet I have not felt that on stage. It is rather frustrating because I know what I am capable of.

Sunday, September 25, 2005

This afternoon's show was and went so much better. We did a shorter version of our bow from last night. From opening night the audience was confused that the show had ended so Tralen made bows for us. The bow was a little confusing and we all made a glorious attempt at it but Tralen had to restage it today at 2 before the 3 o'clock run. This bow stayed in our heads a lot better. I found myself smiling and talking between my teeth to keep the counts. The audience was clapping so loudly that only those of us on the line could hear each other.

I still need to work on my counts for the opening jazz combination. I am still early on the jete and find myself waiting about two counts before I hit the last jump that lands with the right foot in coupe. Today when I lifted Darcy, who plays Morales, for "T & A", I remembered not to get her so high as I did last night. It was a funny moment to see how big her eyes went last night when she went so far up. Today we both made eye contact and up she went. As usual the crowd went ecstatic after the montage with Thay's song "*Give Me The Ball*". Jess gave a little more time before she started her monologue. It's crazy how you are dancing hard one moment and then quick as a whip with a musical cue and light change your back on the line staring at the person talking as if nothing happened. I love it.

The monologue was good today. People laughed once during the beginning of it. I felt a couple of smiles as I said “Anna May Wong” and “Makeup”. I have been watching the cast during their own monologues and I love watching them keep their pieces “fresh”. Kate, who plays Kristine, was playing and trying new things with her monologue. And of course Bill, who plays Bobby, always keeps a smile on me during his monologue. Watching them inspires me to keep my piece “fresh”. Sometimes I feel like my monologue is quick sand. I can easily fall into a rut and go on auto pilot, but I am trying to find new realizations. I found a couple more today but the whole monologue is full of them, I have to keep on finding them. I want to reach that moment when the monologue is alive and on fire. I want to reach that point where Tralen wants it. I will get it, I have to keep on working on it. My mentor at Auburn University, Dan LaRocque, said that there is a piece he has been working on for twenty years. This monologue is definitely one of those lifetime pieces.

Friday, September 30, 2005

Tonight I messed up the bows. I know in *A Chorus Line* there is not suppose to be a bow but ours does, and quite frankly I am happy that it does. You would think that I could remember a simple bow sequence though, but I did not. And in those shiny bronze/gold costumes any wrong movement catches the eye whether you want it to or not. We had our brush up rehearsal at 6:00. Jess stayed in the house and watched the group numbers she felt needed looking at, then we cleaned up the bows. They seem simple enough.

Katie’s parents were in the house, and so was Frankie’s family. He did his back hand spring and went into his turn to land on one knee only he lost his balance and fell sideways. He saved it though by landing in one of those “I am lying on a sofa” poses. Tom gave him two

musical buttons. My voice was acting up during the show. I have to control my breath before I start “Who Am I Anyway”. It is difficult doing the opening number and jumping into the slow-controlled song.

The crowd laughed so much during the monologue. I loved them for it. That is one of my actor goals for the piece and it happened tonight. No cell phones or fireworks, just the audience and me.

Saturday, October 1, 2005

A really good show tonight. You know when you have had a good show and tonight was definitely a good show. And yes, I did get the bows right. Tralen watched the show and unlike Bennett who would stand in the wings and watch the show instilling fear in the cast, Tralen stayed up in the balcony. It was a different energy tonight. The cast had loved ones, friends, or family in the house. When I danced I thought of being sharp and crisp, and I wanted to return to the line and with sweat dripping down my face from dancing so hard. Before the cold weather hit it, was easier to sweat and stay warm in the theater with no air condition. Now that the weather has changed it is a little harder to stay warm while standing on the line.

After the fourth of the montage the audience went ecstatic again. I thought they were going to clap and clap and simply not stop. It is a great feeling to bask in the applause of an audience that is so appreciative of all the hard work you are doing. Darcy went up high on the lift during T&A, Frankie landed his back hand spring, and oh yeah I hit the light tree stage left.

During “At The Ballet” we dance behind the three primary leads. I am stage left. I moved down with my trio and started dancing, only I got off my mark during the single pirouette en dedan. My left hand hit the light right on its side. I grunted to myself, more because of my

carelessness than from the impact. The song is such a moving ballad that I felt my disturbance ruined the moment a little. Nobody said anything afterwards though. Besides we each had our own share of mishaps tonight.

I used a different emotional prep tonight. I feel frustrated because I have not reached that “utopia”. I did the monologue but I was so in and out during the last paragraph that I felt cheap. I know it sounds weird but I did feel cheap, like I was manipulating the audience. The stage manager said that I got a little quiet last night during the monologue. So, when I did it tonight I made sure I really projected. The piece obviously wants to be small and contained, very movie like, but without a microphone, this would kill the monologue before I even started.

Thinking about Michael Chekhov and the significance he places on the body I decided to exhaust my body in hopes that by releasing some physical tension I would be able to release some emotional tension. Or whatever it was that blocks my emotions at times. So, during Cassie’s solo I did push-ups and abdominal exercises. Nothing remarkable happened though, it was kind of the same performance on stage. If the body holds memories and is wealth of stored emotions then I want to tap into this source. I did the physical exercises in the wing hoping to exhaust myself. My goal was to be momentarily physically tired to the point where I focus not so much on me or blocking but on the emotional essence of the piece. I still listened to my song on the cd player but I added this element to my preparation in hopes that a breakthrough would occur.

At the end of the show Frankie’s sister came to me during the cabaret we have and said she was crying. She then pointed at the people she was with and said they were also crying. His friends just left the apartment about fifteen minutes ago and they said the same thing. One of the guys said that he was at the point of crying. I was of course humbled. So many years of not

doing roles which require so much emotional commitment on my personal part has really thrown me for a loop.

Sunday, October 2, 2005

Different energy this afternoon. You know when you first begin running and those three miles really kick your butt, but as you continue to run, with time your stamina builds. I had that feeling for an instant during the show. But wouldn't you know I also almost fell into the curtain, and on my back from my switch leap. I guess what I am trying to say is that with today's performance I realized I need to raise my personal bar several more notches. I am strictly talking about singing and dancing here because the monologue still kicks my butt in its own special way.

During the opening, Zach was a little off on counting our group in for the jazz combination and we were a "hot mess" for about three sixes. I have never been so fumed on that raked stage as I was this afternoon. I had no control over it, I tried to peripherally look at the group so we could get back on our counts. I ended up locking onto Thay's counts and the rest of us got back on track. On the inside I was a volcano. I kept on telling myself "Channel it! Use It!" I sang really loudly, and I felt sorry for Jen's ears but I had to let the energy out. It wasn't until the line was formed, that I felt like "Paul" again.

There is a rhythm and energy to the play. These two factors help establish the boundaries of our world. Now, when that rhythm or energy is disturbed it does something to the world each of us is trying to create. This afternoon I noticed those boundaries being tampered with. I am not saying if this is a good or bad thing but it caught my attention and others on the stage. It messed with the equilibrium we have, and stirred with in me a sense to give a little extra to

reinforce those pillars of the play. I believe it did for the rest of the cast because in spite of our obstacles today, the show had a “flare” to it. But the show can have the same “flare” and then some without all the obstacles we experienced today. Tralen helped make our world and it is our job to maintain it, grow within it, and bring it to dazzling life.

For a couple of performances now I have been experimenting with the timing of when I begin my emotional preparation. Meisner talks about the necessity of emotional preparation but the time to begin it is left to the actor. During dress rehearsal, I tried reading the memories I created for Paul about his deceased sister and using that as a springboard into the emotional state needed. I would read the memories before going on for monologue. This helped, but proved too tedious. Tedious because I had to go upstairs to the changing room and read the file on my computer and rush downstairs for the scene. I was so worried that I would miss my entrance. The floors also creaks loudly whenever you leave the wings. Out of respect, I tried to stay still so that Michelle could focus on her dance and scene with Zach. As of late, I now listen to a song that I connect strongly to. While Cassie is singing her song, I listen to my cd player off in the wings and prepare for the upcoming scene.

Friday, October 7, 2005

Feels good to be back and do the show. The city can take a lot out of you, and coming back here to Cohoes is pretty peaceful change. The show was filmed, so this helps me with having a recording to show my committee members. Due to the hectic schedules of each member, none are able to attend any performances here in Cohoes. I focused more on sections that I know I “share a brain”. One of my old dance teachers use to tell us not to share brains, by this she meant think for yourself; don’t rely on someone else who knows the choreography.

And I finally learned how to pop my legs out in the split on the tour jete. Obviously, I am not able to reach the full split in the air at the moment but I found the moment when they can pop out. The key for me is keeping my right leg lower than 90 degrees on the take off and then stretch both legs in opposite direction. It is easier to demonstrate than describe. Joey and Brent do it really well. I would watch them during rehearsal and of course when we got on the stage, and I kept asking myself how they do it. Then today I did it. I was so happy. I went to Carla, who plays Bebe, and I told her to watch me. She was almost as happy as me. During our pick up rehearsal the dance captain had us run certain numbers and the ballet sequence was one of them. Unfortunately, when I went to do the split I hesitated for a second and I didn't even do the tour jete. It was funny because Carla had told some of the other members to look at me right before the jump and I just stood there for those counts. Not a superstar moment in the least. To play it safe I didn't attempt the pop. I figured I should work on it and engrain it in my body before I tried to do it again. Overall the show was good, no unexpected surprises.

After the show, we met the audience and some of the cast members greeted their friends and family that came to the show. We went to eat and Carla's friends came along. One of them had played before and he asked me about the monologue. He asked if I felt naked and vulnerable the very first time I did the monologue. I told him yes I did have that feeling. And I told him that originally the director had me doing the monologue past the white line on the very edge of the stage right where it meets the pit. I am not there any more but being that close to the audience was a true point of vulnerability. The other friend told me that he didn't mean to sound cliché but right at the end of my monologue, twin tear drops fell from his eyes as I mentioned the part about my father. This happened even though he was acquainted with the piece and knew it

was coming. It made me think about the roller coaster again. You know the end is coming around the corner but it doesn't lessen the journey.

It is rather odd knowing that this is the last weekend we will be doing the show together as a cast. In many ways we are so close. I have learned so much from this cast, they are my family.

I have been playing with the timing of my emotional preparation again. I began it during the montage this time. As the girls sing "At The Ballet" the rest of us are upstage with our backs toward the audience. My mind tends to drift off until I here my cue to turn around with the rest of the cast. So, rather than allow my mind to drift off, I decided to focus on my father. Paul talks so much about his father and his significance in his life that I decided to think on my father. Also, the girls singing "At The Ballet" are singing about their fathers. This naturally, made me think about mine. I started to get a little teary eyed and had a fraction of a panic moment because the line was going to turn around and face the audience soon. I didn't want anyone to see "Paul" crying and start wondering why. I thought about something else, but still held on to the emotional memory. I figured that I could still be aware of the memory just not stay as connected to it. I found that my emotional preparation can begin way before the first couple of minutes right before the big monologue. It's kind of like riding around on your bike a little before you build the momentum for a big jump. You can keep pedaling your bike around just don't go near the jump until it is time.

Saturday, October 8, 2005

Two shows today. The first one was at 3 and the second at 8. We had no pick up rehearsal or serious notes. But I did do the pop in the tour jete. I think I was looking down

though. I wanted to make sure that my leg popped forward so I looked down. I have to keep my head up to complete the picture or else it looks like I am barely jumping. In the opening combination, I didn't develop my legs because I was worried about the prep for the double, speaking of the double. On the raked stage, I am having a hard time doing a triple and Tralen said that if we can squeeze it in and do the jump in time to go ahead. I haven't tried the triple during the show so there is a count or two that I am holding before I jump and land in coupe.

On the flip side, I feel much stronger with my voice. Tom mentioned a way of breathing that I have been applying. I know it is scary trying new things during a run of a show but it helps the show get stronger, at least for me it does. As dancers we are told to hold in our lower abdomen, and usually breathe from the upper ribcage expanding the intercostals. I am so use to this that it is almost second nature. So, when he told me to breathe from my "gut" I heard him but that was it. I was thinking it but not doing it. And then I was afraid that if I started changing my breath now, it would effect my voice in a negative way and make me sound like I had no control over my voice. Wrong. It has done wonders for me.

You see, I sing at the end of the opening number which is filled with the ballet and jazz sequences which are no walks in the park. Rather than waiting to catch my breath the eight counts before I start singing, Tom said to start from the very beginning of the number. I guess you could call this a *physical* preparation as opposed to an *emotional* preparation. Makes sense, but sometimes the simplest things are hardest to grasp. Well, I have been breathing as he mentioned. And as he said, I take one big exhale and then inhale from my "gut". The sound and power are there now in full force. It is really great.

Oh, and after the 8 o'clock show I met a gentleman who touched my heart. I had already finished changing from the finale costume and was on the way out our door to wait for the

cabaret. A lady was passing by and she looked at me and smiled and then motioned for her husband to come. He was in his mid-late fifties. He wore glasses and they were a little smudged from what appeared to be tears. I looked in his eyes and they were slightly red and glistening. He said my name and shook my hand with his trembling hand. He told me that he wanted to thank me for the piece. He said that he never had a father who called him son or anything like that. He didn't know what to say and I thought he was going to tear up again. I hugged him and thanked him for his heartfelt gratitude. It was really nice to see someone not only that the monologue had touched but who had lived out a portion of the monologue in real life.

Sunday, October 9, 2005

Saying goodbye is so bitter sweet. So many tears and on and off stage, oh it broke my heart. Every song seemed to take on a new meaning. Every time any of us opened our mouths it was with the awareness that this was the last time we would be performing this show as a cast. I was so humbled tonight that I didn't know what to do. During Cassie's song and dance I like to prep for my monologue and do all that I need to go on stage for the scene with Zach. Today though, I stopped and watched Cassie from the wings with the rest of the cast. She danced her heart out there and it was great to see all of us supporting her in our own way, from off stage. After she finished dancing, the wing cleared of dancers, but some remained. Cassie came off and I waited slightly and then walked on stage. I tried to block the audience out as best I could, since it was a Sun. 3 o'clock performance, some outside light filtered in the house making this a bit of a challenge. The monologue went well and I told myself to make sure I hit every moment since it was my last time doing it on this stage. The audience laughed in some great places and I had to hold and ride out their laughter before going on with lines, more so than usual.

It was a special performance in so many ways because of the audience. To say that a cell phone didn't go off would have been nice, but one did. The highlight though, came when Zach walked on stage to hug me and guess who else did. The audience. They started clapping. The whole audience clapped and it was one of the best feelings I have experienced on stage. I wanted to stop, freeze time and soak in the moment. Gradually, the cast members trickled on stage and we went on with the show.

During my change into finale costume, I had moment in the dressing room. I started getting teary eyed looking at everyone's station with the lights on and their stuff all around. In the wing while they sang "What I Did For Love" I was "boo hooing". I was still crying when Dave came off stage and I had to help him into finale costume. I couldn't hide the tears from the audience when we came out for "One". Oh, the beauty of theatre! We were all a beautiful "mess" with tears christening the stage. At the end, the audience stood and clapped, to be honest it was a fairy-tale ending to a great journey. A journey that I am forever grateful to have experienced with this great cast.

I know it doesn't end here. Even now I am thinking about the future, and what I can take from this role and apply to others. Binder Casting, called me during the week. They are casting *A Chorus Line* on Broadway which will hit in the Fall of 2006. I sent my headshot and resume because I won't be able to attend their audition for Paul and Diana this month. I told them I wasn't able to attend because of my cruise ship contract. Rachel, with the casting office, said that they will probably hold another audition in June. I told her that this was phenomenal because I will be back in April.

I have already made arrangements to meet up with a friend of mine who is doing the Hawaii tour of *A Chorus Line*. I am going to soak up all the information I can from him. He

says that Wayne Cilento is cutting a lot of people during the ballet combination. In light of everything, I have learned with this run of *A Chorus Line* at Cohoes, I have learned that I still have much to learn with my craft, but I am closer than I was. I will take what I have learned here and apply it so that I can get stronger on and offstage. This show has breathed life into my soul, and I know that without God's help none of this would have been possible. Thank you God for always casting me.

Now that the role and performance is over I look back and I breathe slightly easier. Not too easy because I still have hours of editing and more research to do, but I have accomplished that which I have been trained to do. I remember the day I asked John Bell if I could switch tracks from acting to musical theatre because that is where my heart was and is. He said no, but I knew that I was suppose to do musical theatre. So God showed me other teachers, who could train me. If a window closes a door is bound to open. I didn't know how I was going to get my thesis done and graduate, but I knew that there had to be a way. This is my second endeavor at completing my thesis and after not succeeding with my one-man show based on Paul from *A Chorus Line*, I was ready to let it all go. And I honestly did. I wanted nothing to do with UCF or the program. But with encouragement from God, my family, Julia Listengarten, and in a weird way Dr. Seay, I am halfway there. I began this role with an attitude of "I'll show them" and now I realize that the only one who truly stood in my way, was me. Does the climber say to the mountain "Why are you so steep and dangerous?" No. He climbs and discovers new heights, new levels. And for me there is no turning back.

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