PREFACE: The following information has been written as a reference and education for the crafting of choreography based on professional and educational dance concepts. These elements of choreography for dance can directly relate to the compositional components of successful skating choreography. The principals of basic choreography technique have proven universal over hundreds of years.

Though the information may seem complex and overwhelming at first, you will soon realize that the crafting of choreography is an art form full of both knowledge and expression. It is the accomplished artists who have learned the ‘technique’ of their art form and have made specific informed choices about the work that they are creating. This approach to TOI and the choreographic exercise will bring the sport to a new level of art. It is my hope that you will learn from this material, work with it, and grow to become the great ice artists of our time.

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Identifying the Quality of a Piece/Work (Program or Number)

Literal or Abstract? There are many ways of creating a successful piece either based on pure movement and abstraction, or literal Storylines such as Ballet’s The Nutcracker, Giselle, or Swan Lake. Each provides notable and substantial ways of presenting a successful Theatre on Ice piece.

Abstraction: A dance (on ice) piece without a storyline or plot. A dance based composition of pure (skating) movement. Movement pieces are successful when the composition elements are clearly presented.

Literal Storyline: A clear story is presented by the use of movement, mime, spatial relationships between skaters, and development of character supported by the environment. i.e.: costumes, sets and props.

COMPOSITION: The arrangement of choreography. Composition is comprised of mindfulness to four key elements TIME, SPACE, ENERGY, and FORM.

TIME: Rhythm, tempo, phrasing, accent and duration. How is time used in the piece? Does the choreography show variations to create interest, or is most movement happening at the same pace? Has the piece displayed contrast by presenting slow and fast movement simultaneously (juxtaposition)? Is the choice of tempo clear? Do the skaters use syncopation or other variation to the rhythm that add to the piece? In relationship to other skaters, is the movement happening in UNISON, or are there variations such as CANNON, or COUNTERPOINTE? Is unison being used most of the time, therefore contributing to a lack of interest?
**Accent:** An emphasis placed on a particular note or movement.

**Canon:** A repetition of the movement, either a short “motif” or longer phrase/sequence, through the performers. The movement of individual skaters or groups of skaters can accomplish this. The length of the cannon can vary. Ex: Beginning a canon phrase after 1 count or multiple counts.

**Cascade:** Action, to fall—sequential movement in which the larger pattern is dependent on the individual movement connecting one to another. Cascade is one of the descriptive uses of the broader term cannon.

**Counterpoint:** Opposing tempos of movement happening at the same time between two or more skaters. Ex: Slow sustained movement juxtaposed with quick sharp movement. Usually used to show contrast.

**Duration:** The length of time of a work, piece, phrase, movement, or gesture.

**Musicality:** The ability of the skating artist(s) to appropriately move in time to the music or specified choreography. Being in-tune with the music melody, rhythm and or nuances.

**Rhythm:** Structure of the measurement of time in music, usually identified by a downbeat. The downbeat is usually the first note in each measure.

**Slow:** Using slow sustained body movement. Pace of traveling the ice surface.

**Syncopation:** Placing accents with movement in places that are not succinct with the metric rhythm.

**Tempo:** The slow and fast of music or movement. (Adagio to Allegro)

**Unison:** All movement is happening simultaneously.

**SPACE:**

**STAGE Space**—How is the ice space utilized? Do the patterns and formations use the full ice space and compliment the movement and intended focus? Does too much happening at once distract you? Are you losing your focus because groups of skaters are spread too far apart? Are the skaters facing a direction that accentuates the movement? Are the spacing and patterns symmetrical or asymmetrical – linear or rounded? Do you see clarity in the spacing; is it interesting, and visually pleasing? To add interest, skaters should use variations of level changes: high-level movement (air moments-jumps, leaps, hops), medium-level movement (spirals, spins), and low-level movement (lunges, sit-spins, slides and body shapes). Level changes can create interest both in stillness as a shape or moving through space. Where is the intended audience; do the facings of the skaters reflect how the movement should be viewed? (Proscenium Stage, Stage in the Round, Audience on three sides)
**Counterpoint**: Opposing use of space happening at the same time: Ex: High-level movement (air-moments, lifts) happening with low-level movements (lunges, sit-spins). Used to show contrast between multiple skaters.

**Flocking**: A formation of ensemble movement that changes in space and shape depending on the direction that the ensemble is travelling. Origin: often resembles a flock of birds flying with a lead point.

**Spatial Design (Pathway)**: The literal pattern of the piece on ice. The design of the artist’s movement on the ice from one sequence to the other or from beginning to end. The choreographer to ensure adequate use of ice space sometimes draws out the spatial design.

**Travelling through Space**: Locomotor movement in the space. Ex: gliding, turning (three-turns, brackets, rockers, mohawks, twizzles etc.) spinning, sliding, toe-work, curved edging, straight footwork, and air-moments (jumping, hopping, running, skipping, galloping (bunny hops)).

**SHAPE - Space of the Body**: Curved and rounded (3-D) / straight and angular (2-D) Variations of body shape can be constructed by level changes, making shapes small or large, using the same shape but with different parts of the body, or changing the artist’s facings to create a different view of the shape.

**Asymmetrical Movement**: Visually different on each side of the body.

**Gesture**: Short movement or idea usually made with the hands or body part. Gestures generally have meanings either literal or abstract Ex: Pointing toward your watch on your wrist. (i.e. literal reference to time)

**Pedestrian Movement**: Everyday movements such as standing, walking, eating etc. used as choreography.

**Spatial Design (body)**: A pattern of movement made in space with the whole body, or part of the body. (Writing a word with your elbow)

**Symmetrical Movement**: Visually identical on both sides of the body.

**Three-Dimensional Movement**: Rounded movement that uses the body in three planes. Ex: Modern Dance, rounded use of the back found in a ‘contraction.’ (vertical, horizontal, sagittal)

**Two-Dimensional Movement**: Linear movements that use space in two planes (vertical, horizontal).

**ENERGY**: Qualities of movement energy include, light, flowing, bound, sharp… Skaters can create feeling, visual aesthetic and meaning with HOW they are dancing a movement. Example:
- Skaters have light fluid arms tossing into the air like grass blowing in the wind.
- Skaters are heavily dragging their toe-picks while hands are fisted punching down toward the ice.
Basic Movement Energy Terms:

Collapsing: Releasing into the weight of gravity.

Contrast: Using different energy qualities at the same time.

Counterpoint: Using energy qualities that are in direct opposition to each other.

Dynamics: Creating variation of movement through the use of energy and time.

Percussive: Sharp, fast explosive movements. Can also include vocal or body initiated sounds
Ex: clapping

Staccato: Based on a musical term relating to quick usually uneven rhythm. Percussive movement.

Suspend: A hovering in space before a drop of movement caused by gravity. Ex: rollercoaster

Sustained: Slow, continuous movement.

Swinging: A suspension followed by a drop of movement, the actions of suspend and release.
Ex: pendulum

Tour de force: A highlighted movement usually involving great athletic effort. Ex: Butterfly, or difficult skating jump.

Vibratory: Shaking, fast repetitive percussive movement.

Action/Description Words (tools to create new qualities of movement):
Pop, juicy, slither, jittery, bubble, bounce, poke, float, freeze, toss, open, close, bobble, cuddle, gloat, hop, jump, heavy, happy, jolly, loose, limp, luscious, moping, messy, melt, shake, push, stretch, catch, give, twist, carry, fold, stack, peel, fly, paint, write, push, pull, wiggle, turn, lift, roll, wave, bang, crawl, creep, waddle, stamp, stride, scurry, whirl, dash, cradle, pounce, flick, tense, drip, fold, chop, saw, relax, dangle, bend, curl, swing, crumble, collapse, sink, drop, flop, shrink, inflate, explode, grow, rise.

FORM: Ways of organizing movement sequences/phrases into larger concepts within a complete work. Methods to establishing a clear beginning, middle and end. The following are examples of dance ‘forms’—some are closely tied to musical form and composition.

AB Binary: Establishing a main theme (A) and then a contrasting theme (B)

ABA Ternary: Binary form, but returning to the basic elements of (A) or exact repetition.
Ex: A—slow sustained movement traveling in large curves (edges) B—Percussive movements in straight lines with air-moments. A—slow movement brings a group together to form a circle.

ABCA: Establishing an idea, introducing two separate new ideas and then repeating the first one ‘A’.

Accumulation: A form of development that a ‘movement’ is followed by a second movement and then followed by the next etc. Ex: I; I went; I went to; I went to the store....

Amplification: A body movement, shape or idea that is created by a sequence of small to large, slow to fast and/or soft to loud. An individual(s) or group can demonstrate this.

Climax: Building of choreography and energy that predominately stands out from the rest of the work. Usually happens at the end or towards the end of a piece.

Mirroring: Imitating the movement of another when facing that individual or group.
Motifs: A small phrase that can be identified. Usually motifs are repeated throughout the work, such as in Beethoven’s 5th Symphony.

Movement: A single body action.

Narrative: A story or dance (skating) drama.

Phrase: Several movements and/or motifs linked together. Similar to a grammatical sentence.

Repetition: To repeat one given choreographic motif, movement, phrase, or sequence. Repetition can happen consecutively or throughout a piece.

Rondo: ABACADA.... A verse and chorus structure that repeats the ‘chorus’ and allows for distinction in the ‘verses’. Choruses need not be identical; variations can be created with Time/Space/Energy.

Retrograde: A choreographic sequence is performed backward. (order and/or movement)

Sequence: A reference to multiple connected phrases of movement.

Theme – Establishing an over-all idea through movement phrases/sequences and developing it with smaller variations of the theme. There should be clarity in identifying the theme-based body movement « language » within a piece.

- Ex: Joy—Joy; Movement Phrase—tossing arms up, traveling three-turns to lunge reaching up (16 counts); Motif—tossing up with one arm and lowering it to the hand outstretched over heart (2 counts); Variation—Embracing another person while skating waltz-turns, then traveling to side by side sit-spins with arm action of Motif (24 counts).

Transition: Essential compositional element that connects all the parts to create a whole.

Unity: Established through the cohesiveness of the piece as a whole.

Variation: Using the original movement theme as a base, then changing it by use of choreographic tools through development such as: changing the time, space, energy, shape or formation of movement.

OTHER TERMS

Aesthetics: Critical standards of the art of dance (skating). Beauty and appreciation found in the movement of the body as a work of art through perception and judgment.

Dance Movement Technique: Based on Ballet, the proper use of body alignment (skeletal and muscle alignment supported by a strong core), extension of the legs (turn-out from the hip, lengthening the leg, stretched knees and pointed toes to create proper line), Port de bras (carriage of the arms: shoulders down, elbows lifted, rotation happening properly in the shoulder joint), movement initiated from the center core (abdominals).

Expression: The outward interpretation and manifestation of the intent of the work.
Emoting: The dancer’s ability to feel and convey emotion to the audience.

Group Skills: Skills in cooperation, continuity, coordination and dependence.

Genre: A style of dance such as ballet, jazz, modern, etc.

Projection: Confident presentation of one’s body and energy that clearly communicates to the audience.

Skating Technique (Quality): Proper use of edges, flow, power, and body movement such as knee-bend, extension, alignment and position to accomplish all skating elements: i.e. stroking, connecting steps, footwork, spins, jumps, spirals, etc.

Styles of Dance Movement (Genres):
Classical Ballet: 17th Century movement vocabulary that incorporates traditional body carriage, steps and positions that originated in France.

Ballroom: Social dance performed with a partner such as Waltz, Tango, Fox Trot, Polka, etc.

Broadway Dance: Theatrical dance where emphasis is placed on the character and theatrical staging to support the larger play or musical.

Jazz: 20th Century American dance form that uses percussive movements, movement isolations, parallel position, and usually performed to percussive/rhythmic music. Other variations include: Hip-hop and Lyrical

Modern / Contemporary Dance: 20th Century dance form that includes certain style characteristics such as: Use of contraction, parallel position, floor work, movement tension and release, and movement in three planes. Modern dance is usually performed in bare feet.

Post-Modern: Use of everyday “pedestrian” movement as choreography.

World Dance: Ethnic or culturally based dance such as Folk Dance, African Dance, Native American Indian Dance, etc.

Work: A piece of choreography.

REFERENCES


OTHER READING RECOMMENDATIONS


BIOGRAPHY

**Jodi Porter** holds a BFA degree in Modern Dance from a nationally recognized program at the University of Utah that gave her extensive technical experience in dance choreography, performance, and teaching. Ms. Porter's dance background includes master classes and training with the Paul Taylor School, Alvin Ailey dancers, Trisha Brown Company, Sean Curran, and Murray Louis. She has danced professionally with Shipp Dance Theatre, and appeared as a guest artist with Repertory Dance Theatre. From 2002-2007 she was Ballet San Jose’s Associate School Director, managing a program of over 450 students. She has choreographed successful dance projects with the school including a 1st Prize trophy for the piece *Sunset Tango* at the International Grand Prix in Cesena, Italy 2005. Other dance credits include directing the Spy Girls, dancers for the San Jose Stealth Professional Lacrosse Team, and choreographing for the community musical Fiddler on the Roof. Ms. Porter served as a founding member of the Board of Directors for sjDANCEco 2003. In 2007 she was selected as one of the choreographers to debut a new contemporary dance piece for sjDANCEco’s “CHOREO-Project” She is currently a member of the Performing Arts Committee for the city of Mountain View.

In figure skating Ms. Porter is a USFS freestyle gold medalist. After competing from 1980-1990 she traveled in numerous international ice shows with Disney on Ice and other production companies until 1997. From that point her passion for choreography in dance/skating spurred her to direct and choreograph several skating projects including: SLC Children’s Theatre on Ice 1997, Grizz Girlzz Hockey Cheerleaders 1999, SLC Contemporary Ice Theatre 2000, and Jodi Porter’s Urban Ice Project 2002.

In 2002 Ms. Porter was an Assistant Cast Coordinator and performed in the XIX Winter Olympic Opening Ceremonies as well as choreographed the opening for the figure skating Exhibition of Champions. She is currently Founder, Artistic Director of American Ice Theatre (AIT), a non-profit performance company that fuses dance with figure skating. Performing throughout the Bay Area, Silicon Valley Arts Council has consecutively supported AIT since 2004.

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