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Billie's Message: An original dance-drama in the modern dance idiom

Vicki Lynn Dale
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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idiom**

Dale, Vicki Lynn, M.E.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1989

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**BILLIE'S MESSAGE: AN ORIGINAL DANCE-DRAMA
IN THE MODERN DANCE IDIOM**

By

Vicki Lynn Dale

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of**

Master of Education

in

Physical Education

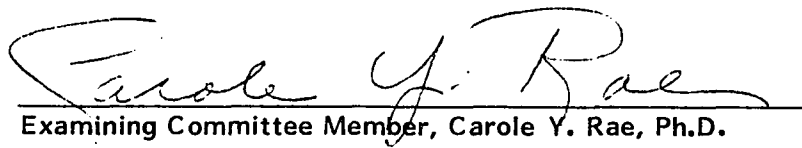
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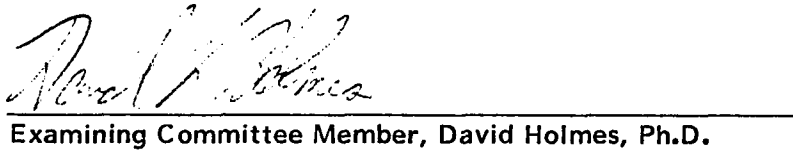
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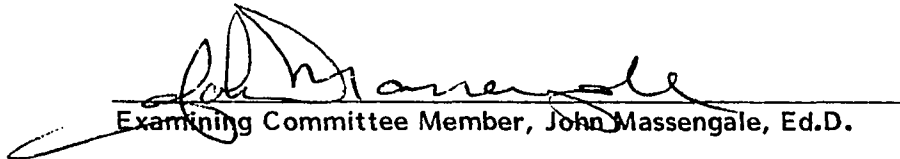
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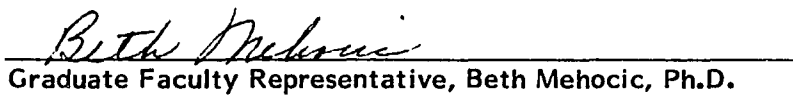
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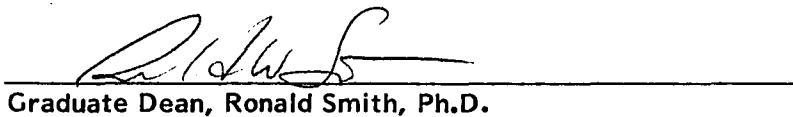

Chairperson, Lawrence A. Golding, Ph.D.


Examining Committee Member, Carole Y. Rae, Ph.D.


Examining Committee Member, David Holmes, Ph.D.


Examining Committee Member, John Massengale, Ed.D.


Graduate Faculty Representative, Beth Mehocic, Ph.D.


Graduate Dean, Ronald Smith, Ph.D.

University of Las Vegas, Nevada
May, 1989

ABSTRACT

Dale, Vicki L. M.Ed. 1989 Physical Education

Billie's Message: An Original Dance-Drama In the Modern Dance Idiom

Co-Directors of Thesis: Lawrence A. Golding, Ph.D.
Carole Rae, Ph.D.

Billie's Message is a forty-five minute dance drama expressing through dance and narrative the life of Billie Holiday and the consequences of drug abuse in Holiday's life. It was created in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education degree. The project was presented on October 31 and November 1, 1987, in a public concert at the Judy Bayley Theatre at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Focus was placed on the life of Billie Holiday and the anti-drug message found in the last chapter of her autobiography, **Lady Sings The Blues** (Holiday, 1956). The choreographer danced the role of Billie Holiday, wrote the script, was the recorded voice portraying Billie, selected the performers and directed all dramatic sequences.

The written account of this project includes an investigation of Billie Holiday's life, a review of related literature, a discussion of production elements, rehearsal photographs, the script, evaluation and future consideration.

A videotape of the performance has been placed on file in the Department of Dance Arts at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Carole Rae, for her encouragement to pursue the degree of Master of Education in Physical Education. Her input, guidance and support throughout the development of this project, and her dance expertise which added to the preparation of this report, is profoundly and genuinely appreciated.

This project could not have been completed without the talent, commitment and dedication of the dancers and the production staff. I, therefore, give special thanks to Cathy Allen, Debbie Ashenfelter, Brett Bunton, Tyler Colton, Traci Curry for her availability and support in developing the script, Tosha Netis Dale, Jamey Gallagher, Yvonne Harris, Winston DeWitt Hemsley, Ron Legg, Bernard Manners, Carol Sampson, Eddy Talton, Kyle Throwner, and Michael Vermy, and to the lighting designers, Douglas and Kristin Talley; technical director, Jerry Griebeling; stage manager Pam Moran, Andrews Rebmann, the assistance of Debra Stone, and all of the technical crew.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Lawrence A. Golding, for his sensitivity to artistic expression and his invaluable assistance in the preparation of this report; Dr. David Holmes, for his encouragement in my writing ability; Dr. John Massengale who graciously agreed to fill in for the late Charles Bucher, and Dr. Beth Mehocic, for her guidance in the area of research and expertise in the audio operation of this project.

The practical support of performing whatever tasks were needed, both physically and financially, came from my wonderful and most appreciated

husband, Ron. His photography added the visualization needed for the final manuscript and his fortitude gave me added strength. I give thanks to my family who were inexhaustable in patience and understanding. I thank Tosha, my daughter, for her performance, commitment, and professionalism. And I thank Ronnie, my son, who made himself available to move props, set pieces, or give help wherever needed. I also extend special thanks to my mother and and brother, Conswella and Gerald Baltimore who skillfully created the human dummy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dance can be used to touch an audience as an objective, or gratify the need of a dancer. The preference of the present author was to draw out of the viewer suppressed human responses and convey a message about life that may bring about positive changes in negative trends.

Even though dance is essentially a non-verbal art, it can be enhanced with the use of words, if needed for a desired response. Doris Humphrey, an American modern-dance pioneer and noted choreographer, states:

It seems to me that the function of word...is to supply the facts: place, time of day, era, identification of people and their purposes and like matters. The dance must be the area where feeling about these things exists...For the dance cannot speak of some of the realities at all, while words can and do. (Humphrey, 1959, p. 127)

Doris Humphrey also comments on dialogue in dance.

This is an almost untouched field, and might be a storehouse of treasure...I see no reason why, if the folk ballad can be used successfully, a sort of dialogue, a passage using straight exchanges of words, could not be used. (Humphrey, 1959, p. 128)

The present choreographer believes that words and movement in tandem are effective in subject areas that are designed to make an impact on a variety of age ranges and enhance the understanding of those who may not be patrons of the arts. Therefore, both mediums were selected to communicate the subject matter.

Selection of the Subject

Due to the curiosity created by accounts of her life, the story of Billie Holiday was selected as the subject for the creative thesis. Holiday's

story was complex, and provided enough thematic colors to extract interesting movement expressions. An added bonus emerged in reading her autobiography, *Lady Sings The Blues* (Holiday, 1956), with the discovery of Billie's anti-drug message which provided a viable overall theme. The project was entitled **Billie's Message**. It was divided into eight separate dances with eight titles: 1) **The Classroom**; (2) **The Audition**; 3) **Strange Fruit**; 4) **Kick Out of You**; 5) **Sophisticated Lady**; 6) **Cold Turkey**; 7) **You've Changed**; and, 8) **Lady Sings The Blues**.

Purpose of the Project

The initial requirements of the project were to: 1) choreograph a dance of at least twenty minutes on a selected group of dancers, professionals, and/or students; 2) present the original creation in a concern; 3) prepare a written report of the project in its entirety, including a description of the dance considering choreography, accomplishment, costuming, lighting, props, sets, and other aspects of its production; and 4) videotape the production as a permanent record of the choreography.

The impact of the research necessary to successfully portray the subject evoked a sense of mission. Additional goals ensued.

1. To present a dance-drama piece demonstrating to an audience the peril of indulging in drugs by portraying aspects of the life story of an addict and her personal message to the world, specifically the young.
2. To show through the modern, tap, and jazz idioms with the use of narrative, the possible experience that attributed to Billie Holiday's addiction.
3. To tell verbatim, through narrative, Billie's anti-drug message stated at the end of her autobiography, **Lady Sings The Blues**.
4. To accomplish with dance the impact the choreographer felt Billie

wanted to impart through her autobiography.

5. To uncover a message believed to had been lost in the recesses of a book.

CHAPTER II

RELATED LITERATURE

A data base computer search was conducted to find dissertations on the life of Billie Holiday. Theses were searched in the area of music, dance, and theatre. The results of both were negative. Books, film, and an interview were the only available sources of knowledge.

Books

Books provided a portion of the information needed. The three books that gave in-depth studies of Holiday's life were: 1) **Lady Sings The Blues**; 2) **Billie Holiday**; and 3) **Billie's Blues**.

Lady Sings The Blues

Lady Sings The Blues (1956), written by Billie Holiday and William Duffy, is an autobiography that gives Billie's version of life as a child, a prostitute, a singer, and a drug addict. She speaks of hurts through racial discrimination, the pain of disastrous relationships, her struggles through the indignities of poverty and reveals her insecurity of being illegitimate.

Billie's words used in their raw state reveal the bitterness, defensiveness, fear and frustration that were manifested in her harshness of speech.

Billie Holiday

Billie Holiday (1956) is a biographical study on Billie's life written by Burnett James. James received an abundance of his information from **Lady Sings The Blues** and **Billie's Blues** by John Chilton. The book gives a panorama of Billie's

life with an emphasis on her professional career and its effect on the music industry. Focus is placed on her uniqueness of style and a detailed discography is presented at the end of the book.

Billie's Blues

John Chilton extensively detailed and researched Billie Holiday's life in his book, **Billie's Blues**. The biography provides valuable particulars and interviews with many of Billie's associates and admirers. Chilton explores Billie's personal life and her professional career. Because it is an in-depth study, other books mentioning Billie's life have referred to **Billie's Blues** to confirm facts.

Film

The medium of film proved valuable in studying Billie's character. Two different films revealed the physical characteristics and mannerisms of Billie. One was a twenty-minute excerpt on Holiday in the PBS film **Brown Sugar**. This film is a tribute to black female artists of merit, based on the book with the same title written by Donald Bogle. The second film was an hour special done by PBS entitled **The Day of Lady Day**. (Lady Day was Billie's nickname).

The excerpt from **Brown Sugar** is an overview of Billie's life portraying her as a singer who had made an artistic statement to the world and had pioneered the way for other black woman in the arts and entertainment industry. Emphasis was placed on her musical and dress style as well as her contribution to the image of blacks.

In **The Day of Lady Day**, pictures, facts and actual interviews were documented along with rare footage of Holiday's singing. Comparisons were made of the changes in her singing and appearance as she struggled with her addiction.

Interview

An interview by the writer was conducted with Maurice Hines, Sr., an entertainment consultant and former drummer, who had worked with Billie during the 40's. His experiential knowledge of her as a woman and musician was an invaluable contribution to assessing Holiday's character and his insights were more candid than those read in books or seen on film. (See Appendix A)

Elements Chosen From Billie Holiday's Life

Due to the complexity of Billie Holiday's life, care was exercised to discern pertinent information and to condense that information into a workable formula for movement execution. The outcome was a division of her life experiences in five major categories: 1) Childhood; 2) Career; 3) Relationships; 4) Drug Addiction; and 5) Message. These categories did not appear in the above order and they were not individual dances. In support of statements about her life, quotes are used and are primarily taken from Billie's autobiography, **Lady Sings The Blues**. An approximate chronology of Billie's life is located in Appendix B.

Childhood

Billie Holiday was reportedly born Eleanor Fagan on April 7, 1915 in Baltimore, Maryland. She was born the daughter of two teenagers, Clarence and Sadie. When Clarence deserted Billie and her mother, Sadie had to work. She became a maid and left Billie with relatives. The relatives were abusive toward her with the exception of her great-grandmother, who suffered from dropsy and under doctor's orders had to sleep sitting up at all times. While visiting her great-grandmother, and unaware of the specifics of dropsy, Billie laid her elder down as she was requested and also laid down with her under her arm. She awoke the next morning to find her great-grandmother dead

and her arm stiffened around Billie's neck so tightly that she could not get free. Billie was released only after the arm was broken. The shock, grief and eventual blame being placed upon her drove Billie to a hospital.

Big for her age and well developed, Billie, in 1925, at the age of ten, was raped by a middle-aged neighbor. Through a strange twist of justice Billie was punished for the offense and was sent to a Catholic institution for discipline. There she was locked up overnight with a dead girl as punishment for breaking a rule.

Another girl had died and they had her laid out in the front room, And for punishment they locked me in the room with her for the night...All I knew was I couldn't stand dead people ever since my great grandmother had died holding me in her arms. I couldn't stand it. I screamed and banged on the door so I kept the whole joint from sleeping. I hammered on the door until my hands were bloody. (Holiday, 1956. p. 18)

These aspects of Billie's life beginning with her father's separation from the family, to being locked in a room with a dead girl after experiencing rape and the trauma of the presence of death of her great-grandmother, illustrates the emotional upheaval that occurred in a young girl not yet in her teens.

Career

During the depression Billie went to seek work to help her mother with the household finances. She went to a club in New York called Pod's and Jerry's, where she auditioned as a dancer, a profession she had always desired. She was not hired in that capacity but she was asked by the piano player if she could sing. Her career progressed from that point on. She performed with such greats as Count Basie and Artie Shaw.

Billie was the first black female singer to travel through the south with an all-white band. She was no stranger to discrimination. Her confrontation with prejudice reached from the south to the north. She helped and encouraged

a white singer hired by Artie Shaw named Helen Forrest but due to color preferences in the industry, Helen ended up replacing Billie.

Holiday gained respect as an artist when she recorded the song **Strange Fruit**, a statement about southern lynchings. This song reminded her of the injustices done to blacks during that period and of her father who died because he was refused admittance into several white hospitals.

Relationships

All of Billie Holiday's relationships were stormy, including her marriages to Jimmy Monroe and Louis McKay. Jimmy was a handsome and colorful man who was once married to the black movie goddess, Nina Mae McKinney and had been known while in Europe to venture into associations with female members of the caucasian race. He also was the theme of two of Billie's songs. One was entitled **Jim** and the other **Don't Explain**. He typified the kind of man Billie was attracted to.

Billie had admired Louis from afar seeing him for the first time in a club as a young lady, and again much later in life. Research shows that their marriage was unstable.

Independent of her intimate relationships with men, Holiday had a business relationship with the pusherman who she frequently had in her presence.

Reasons For Taking Drugs

Billie's reasons for taking drugs may have been varied. She never cited specific causes, but her tendency to yield to drugs seemed apparent to others.

James Burnette in **Billie Holiday** states:

Billie had been a pot smoker since she was a girl. She took to reefer as a kid, and although it frightened the life out of her mother when she found out, it does not appear to have done her a lot of harm to begin with. But inevitably, the question raises its cobra head: how much bearing did her early "harmless" marijuana smoking have on her later nemesis, her tragic addiction to drugs? (James Burnett, 1984. p. 37)

Each addict's reason for taking their initial dose of hard drugs differ. John Chilton, in **Billie's Blues**, comments:

Billie said that the time of her first fix she felt that her marriage was breaking up. Her basic insecurity, coupled with these events, dimmed her reason enough to look for solace in narcotics. It was not as though she were suddenly thrown over the precipice of addiction. From her earliest days in New York, she had known many drug-takers, but despite seeing the tragedies that addiction brings, she gambled that the pleasure would mean more than the pain. But it was not simple hedonism, it was a decision for despair, the despair that she would never get the widespread appreciation that seemed to come easily to others: the domestic squabbles had only acted as a trigger. (John Chilton, 1973. p. 86)

After Jimmy Monroe and Billie broke up, her addiction problems became noticeable to her fellow musicians. She discontinued using opium because it was affecting her throat and the sickly taste characteristic of the smoke made her vomit.

Her eventual choice of poison was heroin - the number four variety, a white crystalline by-product of opium. This can be taken orally, or sniffed into the nostrils, but the most common method of usage is by injection from a hypodermic syringe. The effect is practically instantaneous, and while the addict is high, he or she feels that every problem, large or small, can be disregarded. When the effects wear off, the problems seem more overwhelming than ever, and then the treadmill of fixes start. (Chilton, 1973. p. 87)

Billie's Treatment For Addiction

For whatever reasons Billie became addicted. Pushers, police and/or Federal agents were her constant companions. Even so, Billie wanted to be cured and made attempts to do so to no avail.

In September, 1946, Billie performed in her first full-length film, **New Orleans**. After making the film, Billie decided to get help for her addiction.

Holiday entered a sanitarium costing her two-thousand dollars for three weeks. This trip was to be confidential. The news leaked out and brought Billie's addiction to the attention of the police and the public. The attitude of the courts and the police were hard, and because they constantly hounded Billie, she was pushed back into dependence.

On May 27, 1947, Billie appeared before a Federal judge in Philadelphia after having been arrested in a New York hotel room. She was charged with possession, transportation and concealment of drugs. Confused, she let some of her associates persuade her to plead guilty so she could receive help by having the government send her to a hospital. She entered the courtroom without a lawyer and offered no defense except to say that she used drugs because she had no control. Billie was sentenced to a year and a day in the Federal Reformatory for Women at Alderson, Virginia. At the Alderson facility Billie underwent a cold-turkey cure.

If I had known what kind of "cure" I was in for at Alderson, I could have taken it alone - just locking myself in a room and thrown away the key. There was no cure. They don't cut you down slow, weaning you off the stuff gradually. They just throw you in the hospital by yourself, take you off cold turkey and watch you suffer. (Holiday, 1956, p. 132)

The Message

It is Billie's drug-related message that makes the dance significant and fulfills its mission. In the twenty-third chapter of **Lady Sings The Blues**, Billie revealed the moral of her story. She writes:

All you have to do is look at the story of my life. If there's any moral at all in it, it's this:

If you think dope is for kicks and for thrills, you're out of your mind. There are more kicks to be had in a good case of paralytic polio or by living in an iron lung. If you think you need stuff to play music or sing, you're crazy. It can fix you so you can't play nothing or sing nothing.

The only thing that can happen to you is sooner or later you'll get busted, and once that happens, you'll never live it down. Just look at me.

I don't want to preach to nobody. I never have and I don't want to begin now. But I do hope some kids will read this book and not miss the point of it. Maybe because I have no kids of my own - not yet - I still think you can help kids by talking straight to them.

If nobody can learn from the past, then there's no point in raking it up. I've raked up my past so I could bury it. It's worth it if just one youngster can learn one thing from it. (Holiday, 1973, p. 181)

Because of the gripping impact of the above quote, it was felt that these words had to be spoken in order to evoke the response necessary to reach that one youngster to fulfill Billie's message.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY AND PRODUCTION

Introduction

After researching the life of Billie Holiday, eight dance sections were selected to reveal the essence of Billie's existence. Alone, these sections contained breaks in progression making it difficult for an audience to follow. The decision was made to link one section to another through the use of narrative which will be explained under the title of transitions. A script was created by the choreographer for three speaking characters; an instructor, a student, and a voice portraying Billie Holiday.

In order to create **Billie's Message** as a dance-drama, different aspects of production and choreography had to be considered. These aspects included: 1) Selection of cast members; 2) Rehearsal time; 3) Selection of music; 4) Selection of themes; and 5) The eight sections of **Billie's Message**. The following is a brief discussion of the decision-making process.

Selection of Cast Members

To depict Billie's life, a predominately black interracial cast was needed. Professional dancers from hotel shows were used due to the limited amount of black dance students at the University. Billie's character, which was vital to the dance-drama, required a dancer who would be committed and dependable. Because Las Vegas dancers are often transient, it was best felt that the choreographer portray that role.

Cast members were selected for their dancing and acting abilities and

their availability for rehearsal and performance dates.

Rehearsal Time

Rehearsals commenced months before the performance date to facilitate the growth of material for **Billie's Message**; including the narration, the large number of dance sections, and the addition of costuming, lighting, props and sets. Rehearsals started at the end of May and continued until the end of October. The dancers, which numbered fifteen, met with the choreographer according to which dance was being rehearsed. The schedule called for three days of rehearsal per week. Those days were Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 1:00 – 3:30 p.m. Because many of the dancers were professionals from hotel shows in Las Vegas, no rehearsals were scheduled for evenings or nights.

The rehearsals were conducted in the dance studio of the Department of Dance Arts. During the last two months before the production, rehearsals were limited to two a week, Friday and Saturday, due to scheduling of classes during the school semester term.

The costume designer, Dawn Lovett, a professional dancer and clothes designer, was able to attend eight rehearsals. The lighting designers, Douglas and Kristin Talley, were able to view the dancers in their finishing stages two weeks before technical apparatus were hung.

Selection of Music

Choreographers deal with music in three basic ways. One approach is without music and later add music to fit the movement qualities. Second is to find the music and allow the music to inspire the choreography. The third is to work with a composer and collaborate on an original work. In **Billie's Message**, the second approach was employed. If the music touched on an area of Billie's life that was pertinent to the total concept of the dance drama, it was used.

There were certain factors that were essential to evaluate even before connecting the music with a theme. The first was the quality of the music. Billie's original music was used because of the strong emotional content of her singing style. The music was of the 30's, 40's, and 50's era. It was necessary to find music that was clear in musical execution, enunciation and had few defects in recording.

Another factor to consider is the length of a piece of music. If the music is too long, the audience will become bored unless there is accompanying action. Two musical pieces were five minutes long, but the thematic content was such that it could facilitate that length of time.

Having weighed the above considerations, attention was given to musical variations and emotional response. The question was asked whether a musical selection had enough dynamic variety to provide choreographic interest.

The emotional response that a listener may receive while listening to a musical rendition can be complemented by the movements of dancers. Care was taken to evoke an emotion by using movements to counteract the music. For example, **Strange Fruit**, the dance titled the same as the music it utilized, is both musically and choreographically about southern lynchings. The music is sung slowly by Billie Holiday, yet it is very strong and touching. Movement expressions that were very sharp, abrupt, percussive and violent were used as contrast to avoid monotony.

Selection of Themes

The themes in **Billie's Message** were the same as the divisions of her life experiences listed in Chapter II. Music greatly influenced many of the thematic selections. While listening to musical numbers, aspects of Billie's life that could be expressed by the particular recordings were envisioned. Billie sang songs that reflected her life which made selections easy.

The words of **Sophisticated Lady** that speak of the life of a woman from childhood to adulthood capsulized the idea of a panorama of Billie's life involving different aspects of her personality that may have led to her drug abuse.

You've Changed sung by Billie in a mature and deteriorating voice was significant to personify her changed life from fame to humiliation while **Lady Sings The Blues** conveyed a farewell message which was perfect for the finale.

Kick Out Of You utilized solo instruments and a music quality exemplary of the club atmosphere of the period with an addition of Billie's easy singing style. It was useful in developing the career aspect of Billie's life.

Thematic decisions demonstrated in **The Audition** and **Cold Turkey** were not originally influenced by music. The idea was conceived first and music or voice supported the theme.

The Eight Sections of Billie's Message

Billie's Message was divided into eight different sections or dances: **the Classroom; the Audition; Strange Fruit; Kick Out of You; Sophisticated Lady; Cold Turkey; You've Changed; and Lady Sings The Blues**. Each dance was designed with various factors in mind. The first element of consideration was the form of dance used or dance idiom, i.e., jazz, modern, etc. The second was the basic movement themes or quality of movement. This established the energy of the dance. The number of dancers used was a third element of consideration. Accompaniment was the fourth. Costuming was an important element that helped to characterize the movements. Lighting made the dancing visible to the audience. Props and sets were the last considerations as an extension of the dance theme.

Each of the above will be discussed briefly for seven of the eight sections. The last section, **Lady Sings The Blues**, was the finale and curtain call and did

not require the same type of consideration.

The Classroom

The opening scene is entitled **The Classroom**. This scene was developed to establish Traci as a potential drug addict. The role of Traci was performed by Traci Curry (Plate 1), a professional dancer from the Bally's Grand Hotel who received a degree in theatre.

The curtain rises on a group of dancers stretching during a classroom break. The instructor enters upstage right and crosses downstage left. He has the class review a dance combination several times. Traci continuously fumbles the movements. She is off rhythm, gets in the way of others, and falls.

The instructor gets angry, dismisses class, and confronts her about her problem that he has some previous awareness of. He strongly advises her to give up her pill indulgence and then exits. Traci, in turn, pulls out a bottle of pills and begins taking them when she is interrupted by the voice of Billie Holiday, which is the choreographer's pre-recorded voice. The abruptness of Holiday causes Traci to drop her pills, and in the midst of retrieving them, she enters into a conversation with Billie. Billie explains to Traci that she is foolish to take drugs as a crutch and explains her intention of revealing the drug addicted life she led in order to convince Traci of the perils of tampering with drugs. Traci's confusion in her realization that she is speaking to a voice with no body causes her to exit in order to make some sense of the whole situation.

The Classroom used jazz as the dance form of expression. The movement theme was commercialized jazz dance with sharp percussive movements. Seven dancers filled the stage and used the instructor's counts as accompaniment. Because of the classroom setting, the dancers wore rehearsal attire of saturated coloring. The lighting was general lighting to show the stage and the dance

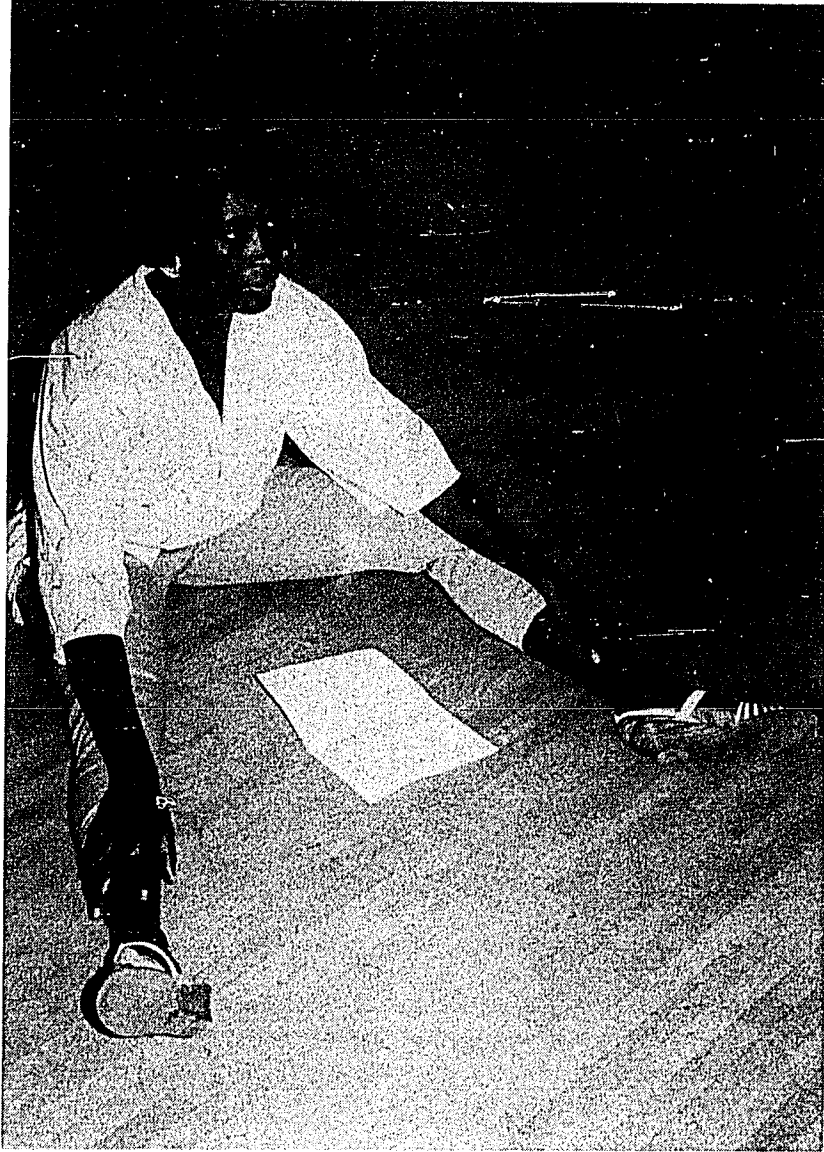


Plate 1
Traci studies script

movements without elaborate colors or special effects. Except for dance bags as props, there was no set. Traci, the student, had a bottle of pills to establish her character.

The Audition

As Traci attempts to exit stage right she is met with the entrance of a chorus line led by the character of Billie, performed by the choreographer. The dance demonstrated the awkwardness that was assumed Billie had during her audition at Pod's and Jerry's having been an untrained dancer.

After many overt mistakes by Billie, and the ultimate blunder of knocking down the dancers in their final pose, the lead performer points to the exit indicating that Billie could no longer be tolerated.

A professional tap dancer, Bernard Manners, was chosen to represent the hiring employer. This dancer would be the lead performer and employer of the chorus line which consisted of four girls: two professional dancers, Cathy Allen and Yvonne Harris; one university dance student, Debbie Ashfelter, and Billie.

Tap was chosen as the dance idiom. The decision was relative to the time period of Billie's audition; a time when ballroom and tap dancing in chorus-line form were instituted.

The movement themes were lively and aerobic with a "Cotton Club" flair. They were chosen because of the era and the energy needed to add dynamic to Billie's life.

The Audition used the accompaniment of **Shout and Feel It** by Count Basie. This musical arrangement was selected because Billie had sung with the Count Basie band and the music had an up-tempo rhythm lending itself to the chorus line style of dancing of the period.

Due to the fact that **Billie's Message** is a period piece, the costumes had

to coincide with the era of the late 20's when she auditioned. The girls were dressed in low waisted chorus outfits which were made of grey, black and silver sequins with long 8" black fringe. The female dancers wore beaded tight-fitted skull-cap type head dresses, nude colored fishnet stockings with black character shoes. The male lead tap dancer wore a black tuxedo with tails and black and white tap shoes.

The lighting was relatively bright to portray a stage performance. There were no props or set used in this scene.

Transition A

Traci has viewed **The Audition** from a stool on the stage-left apron. She enters onto the stage laughing at Holiday's awful performance. Billie's voice explains that the piano player took pity on her and asked her to sing, which was the beginning of her fame.

Strange Fruit

Strange Fruit was chosen to depict lynchings Billie had possibly seen through her travels in the south and to acknowledge the song that gave her recognition as an artist.

It opens to a scene of four dancers mourning a lynched victim, while downstage left a character enters moving on his belly with caterpillar-type movements. He represented "the spirit of discrimination". This spirit manipulated all activities on stage and was performed by Eddy Talton, a dance major at UNLV.

After the spirit enters, it laughs at the lamentation of the mourners. It moves downstage left to introduce the friendship of a young white man, performed by Jamie Gallagher, a lead dancer at the Tropicana Hotel, and a young black man, performed by dancer/choreographer, Winston DeWitt Hemsley. The two

are given movement themes involving jumps, leaps and unison motifs. These movements show the joy of their togetherness.

While the friends are dancing, a white female passes by, spots the friends, and then proceeds to the mourners. In the midst of her movements to exit the stage, she drops her purse. The white friend downstage left is shown the wallet by the spirit of discrimination. He goes to see if there is money in the purse intending to steal it. He looks inside and pulls out money. The black man tries to prevent the theft by snatching the purse and the money from his friend's hands. The female enters the stage with a mob of men finding the black man with the purse and money in hand. He is mistakenly believed to be the culprit. When his friend assesses the situation and tries to overtake the violence, he is struck on the head and falls. The mob uses rope to subdue the black man. He is beaten, strangled and dragged off stage (Plates 2-7). The white friend again tries a rescue attempt but is struck. As he regains his equilibrium, he sees the silhouette of his friend being hung. He cries out a painful "No" as the spirit laughs at the whole scenario. The light dims to engulf the remaining two figures, the friend in mourning and the spirit.

This dance was performed in the modern dance idiom. To establish friendship between two dancers, the movement themes involved jumps, leaps and unison motifs. To exhibit conflict, strife and tension with the hanging mob during the lynchings, lifts and strong percussive, bursting and restrained movements were employed. The mob attack was executed by Brett Bunton, Michael Vermy, Tyler Colton and Ron Legg.

Strange Fruit was performed by seven dancers of varying characters to the music **Strange Fruit** sung by Billie Holiday. The costumes were comprised of farmer clothing such as blue jeans, T-shirts, straw hats, and character or

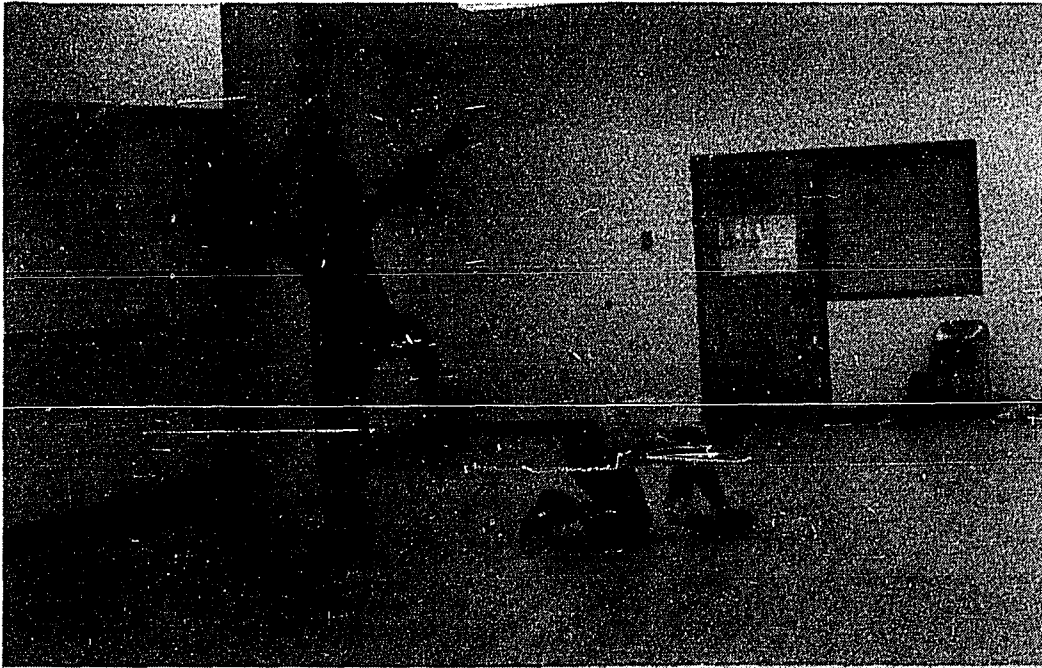


Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6

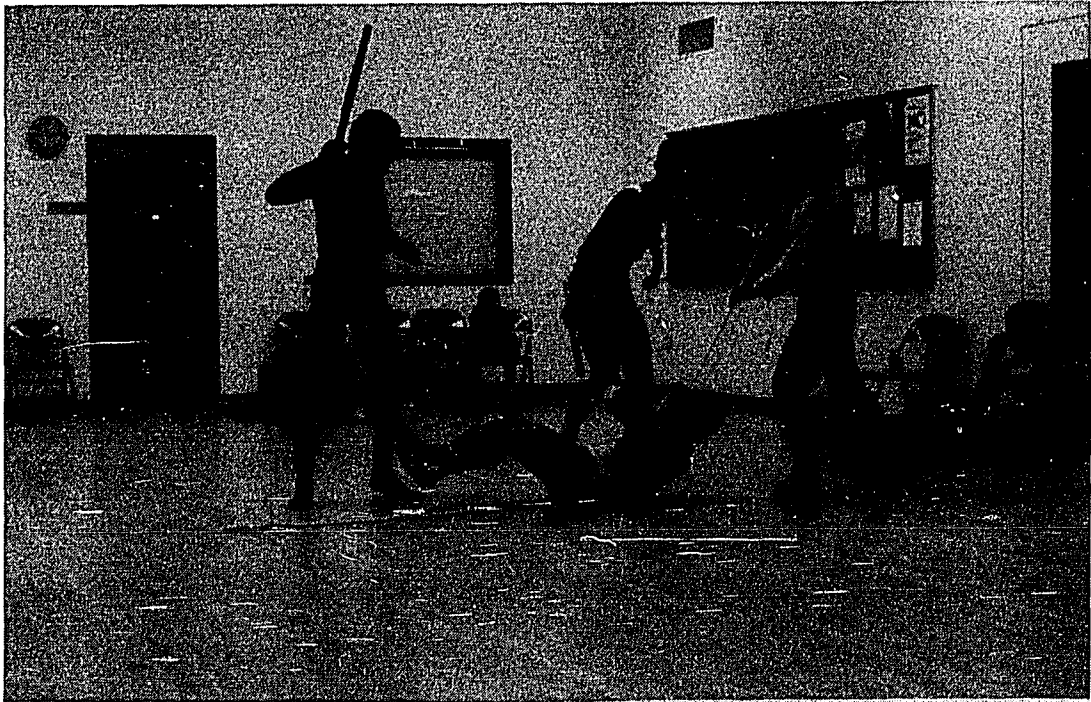


Plate 7

tennis shoes. The male dancers in the mob scene wore white masks.

The set consisted of one dummy hanging upstage right. At the end of the number another dummy gets hung off stage. His silhouette reflects onto the scrim through a red light, giving the effect of an actual hanging.

The beginning of the number is lit to lessen the reality of a hanging body. The mob scene required a visible light across the center of the stage where the confrontation occurred and dimmed to one spotlight downstage center where one friend is left to mourn his hanging buddy represented by the second dummy whose body form is reflected on the stage at the end of the dance.

The props required in **Strange Fruit** were four black nightsticks, two dummies, rope and a purse.

Kick Out Of You

After the heaviness of **Strange Fruit**, it was felt that an element of comedy was needed to release tension. **Kick Out Of You** was used to attain that end. It was a five-minute piece that included a comic note and focused on the instruments typical of the small bands of the 30's.

Two characters, a male and female, are the focus of **Kick Out Of You**. The female, performed by Cathy Allen, a dance instructor and professional dancer at the Lido Hotel, is a flirtatious, pompous, frisky individual who wants to have a good time and is disturbed by her shy, clumsy and nervous husband performed by Jamey Gallagher. She tries to get him to respond to her in a more attentive manner, but he doesn't until the end when she takes her flirtations to the extreme and, fed up, he becomes the macho man she always wanted.

Kick Out Of You was a club scene involving a lot of pantomime and gestures for the main characters and modern and tap dance forms for the musicians. The movement theme for the main characters varied according to their individual

character traits.

To establish the female as flirtatious, bold movements were utilized that were broad, flippant and loose, along with gestures that gave her character mannerisms. The husband was given quick, jerky and taut movements and gestures showing his inhibitions. He wore black-framed glasses and a bow tie which were both used to show his clumsiness. The two perform a scenario which establishes the wife in the beginning as spoiled and disgusted with her misfit husband. In the end the extreme flirtations cause the husband to change his character and become a macho man. He has established himself as the man, and she becomes the submissive woman as they dance cheek-to-cheek as the lights dim.

The musicians used were two saxophone players performed by two student dancers, Eddy Talton and Kyle Thrower, and a piano player performed by Bernard Manners dressed in black and white symbolizing a keyboard. The three are seen sitting on stools of varying heights along with Billie.

As the instrumental section of the number begins, one saxophone player moves forward into the light, hunched over his saxophone in a typical jazz musician stance as his knees move in and out rhythmically. He does a series of movements that visualize the music and include abstract positions and a leap. As the second saxophone solo begins musically, the second dancer moves forward in the same manner as the first to do a series of dance movements involving leg extensions and an aerial turn. The two finish facing each other with room for the piano player to move forward.

The piano player was chosen to be a tapper who could keep the rhythmic patterns of the music. His movements moved him between the two saxophone players and to the front where he dances from one side to the other. He moves

back through the two dancers to his stool before they dance together with a series of leg extensions and turns (Plate 8). They then move forward and back to their stools as Billie sings and pulls the audience's attention back to the couple.

There were eleven dancers consisting predominately of students participating in the scene. Not all of the dancers performed. Some were used for environmental effect.

Due to the clarity and quality of the music and because the title and song content lends itself to use the word "kick" as a comedic theme, **Kick Out Of You** sung by Billie Holiday was chosen as the accompaniment. The dance uses the movement of a kick to demonstrate the frustrations of the couple toward one another.

The ladies wore dresses of red or blue print with matching hats. The guys wore black baggy zoot-suit looking pants with suspenders; white shirts with blue or red print ties. The lead male wore a dark grey tweed suit, a hat, a white shirt with a bow tie and black-brimmed glasses. The lead female wore a blue-print dress with one sleeveless arm and in her hair a white gardenia.

The lighting was festive and bright with yellow and orange tones. A gobo with musical notes was used on the scrim to reflect a club environment.

The set included three tables, six chairs, and three stools of varying heights for the musicians. There were red and white checkered tablecloths placed on the table. The props included plastic champagne glasses, one serving tray, and two saxophones.

Transition B

During the action on stage, Traci works her way to the stage right apron and sits on the stool. When **Kick Out Of You** ends she dances to center stage in the same style of the husband and wife's end movements.

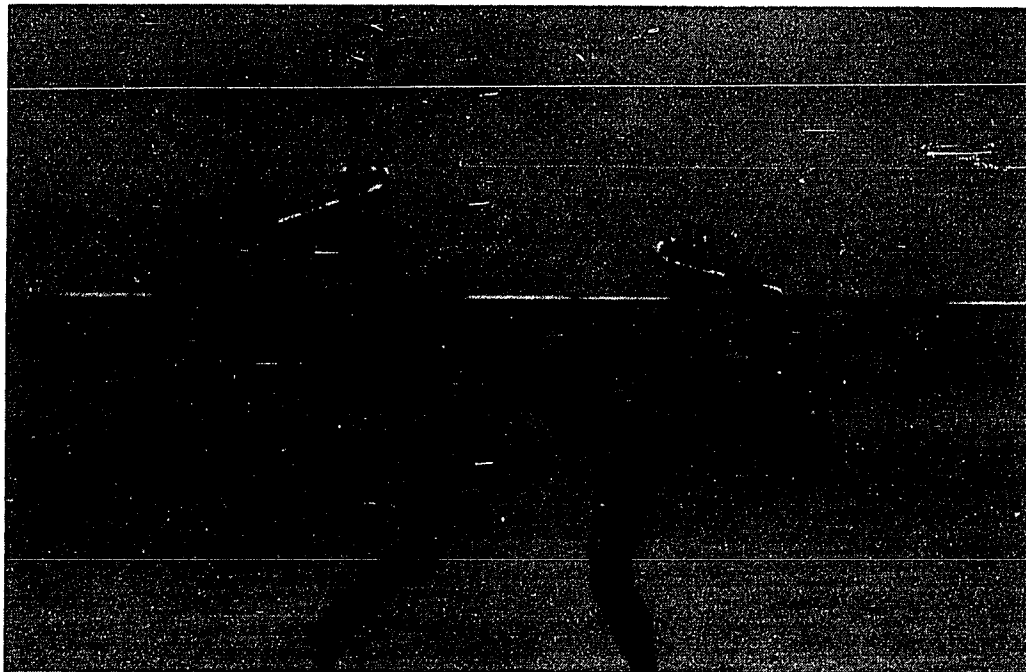


Plate 8
Rehearsal for two saxophone players in "Kick Out Of You"

The dancers on stage exit carrying parts of the set except for one chair left center stage for the next dance. After Traci dances she sits on the chair while listening to Billie explain the possible life experiences that led her to drugs. This was the introduction to **Sophisticated Lady**.

Sophisticated Lady

Sophisticated Lady was a panorama of Billie's life. Modern dance with a jazz flavor was the dance style used in uncovering areas which may have attributed to Billie's addiction. The movement themes were predominately sustained, lyrical and romantic movements. There were twelve dancers of varying characters used in this number.

The accompaniment was **Sophisticated Lady** sung by Billie Holiday. It was chosen because of its lyrics and title. Billie Holiday was given the nickname "Lady Day" by her friend and fellow musician, Lester Young. She became recognized by her friends, co-workers and the public as "Lady Day" because of her cool and easy style of singing. The public saw that image, not knowing that there existed a sad side as the lyrics to **Sophisticated Lady** state "when no one is nigh, you cry".

In the first section of the panorama, Billie is seen as a child who dances with her parents. Sadie, Billie's mother, performed by Carol Sampson, a professional dancer at the Bally's Grand Hotel, is seen in a black and white polka-dotted skirt with a black blouse. She is dressed in youthful apparel showing that Sadie was a teenager when she conceived Billie. Billie's father, Clarence, danced by Eddy Talton, is dressed in black pants and a white shirt. Little Billie, Tosha Netis Dale, the choreographer's nine-year old daughter, wore a long-waisted blue dress with a white collar. She had blue ribbons in her hair and wore white tights with small blue polka-dots.

This section acknowledges Little Billie's relationship with each parent individually. When she tries to bring the father and mother together, she is disappointed when Clarence turns and leaves. She is left on stage with her mother as the two hug and walk off together.

The second section shows Billie as an older woman. Billie wears a black dress with small rhinestones. She has one white gardenia in her hair. She is shown in relationships with men in general, and Jimmy Monroe specifically.

Brett Bunton, a professional dancer from the Bally's Grand Hotel, performs the role of Jimmy Monroe. Billie dances with the character of Jimmy Monroe in the fourth section. His costume consists of black baggy pants with no shirt. The absence of the shirt gave a rugged and coarse appearance characterizing Billie's taste in men. In the remaining sections the dancers used the same outfits work in **Kick Out Of You**.

Billie and Jimmy's dance is performed to a blues saxophone solo. The dance involves turns, two lifting sequences, and leg extensions (Plate 9). At the end of the duet Jimmy is drawn to another woman, performed by Debbie Ashenfelter, a dance student at UNLV.

Billie tries to break up the relationship but is thrown to the floor by Jimmy. The scene was inspired by a short film entitled **Black Symphony** that Billie made with Duke Ellington, in which she is thrown to the floor after the same kind of confrontation, prior to her singing.

Billie recovers from the floor and begins to dance with the character of Helen Forrest, performed by Cathy Allen. Dance movements consisting of rondejams and turns are used. There appears in the background a group of dancers representing an audience. They travel in shuffling fashion from stage left to center stage wedged together as a group. Some are drinking or smoking, others



Plate 9
Rehearsal of duet from "**Sophisticated Lady**"
Billie Holiday and Jimmy Monroe

are chatting. They move toward Billie and then toward Helen Forrest. They stop at Helen and applaud. Billie is emotionally hurt and falls to her knees in distress. She responds to her hurt by turning to the pusherman who is wearing black baggy pants, shirt, tie, and a beige hat. He teases Billie and pulls her gently to himself and injects her with heroine as she sinks in the chair.

The lighting for Sadie and Little Billie is a soft amber. It fades up as Billie's father enters onto the stage. The lighting stays fairly full throughout the dance, but does end with a pool of light on Billie and the pusher as he is giving Billie the injection.

There is no set. Props helped to establish the environment and the activities of the characters. They included a plastic champagne glass, a cigarette, a chair, and a lighter.

Transition C

Traci is seated stage right. After witnessing Billie's injections, she justifies her need for drugs by trying to convince Billie that she is not hooked, that she could stop if she wanted to, but she just didn't want to. Traci asks Billie if she really got hooked. Billie replies that she did and that she had to go through a "cold turkey" cure to kick the habit.

Cold Turkey

Cold Turkey was choreographed to demonstrate the agony and torture of a "cold turkey" form of treatment frequently used in the era in which Billie lived.

Billie is seen running backwards from stage right to stage left and stops, she runs upstage and stops, turns to face the audience and runs downstage and stops. These directions were used to establish a confined stage representative of prison. When Billie stops downstage center, she does a sequence of spastic

stretched-out movements giving the illusion of torment and confusion. These movements progress above her head as she is in rhythm with the forceful beat of Spyro Gyro's **Pygmy Funk**. As she is executing these movements, birdlike creatures of pterodactyl influence, symbolizing her personal demons, descend on her from stage left. Their movements are ethnic and earthbound making use of flexed feet, elevated-arm movements, and torso isolations. The dance employed contrasts, canon and unison movements. When Billie is fighting her illusions, she contrasts her demons, but when she loses her battles or becomes confused, she dances with her demons in unison.

Within the framework of the dance there is a section where the musical arrangement fades into a slow nostalgic musical sequence. In this section the demons represent aspects of Billie's personality (Plate 10). One demon was suicidal and choked itself with one arm as it extended its leg from the opposite side. The effect is not only of choking, but of being yanked where it didn't want to go. Another demon represented paranoia. It moved about on the floor as a centipede and sits to pluck nonexistent bugs off of itself. A demon laughs and cries demonstrating the anguish and confusion in Billie's life. One is seen boxing, demonstrating the physical confrontations into which Billie frequently entered. The last demon was the feminine, flamboyant, "Lady Day". During this section, an orderly comes to Billie, who is on her knees completely in torment by the presence of these many manifestations of her personality. The orderly manages to put Billie in a straitjacket after experiencing resistance from her. Billie, realizing that she is now confined, becomes delirious and laughs until she is joined through unison dancing with two demons. As the others gradually join in the movement, they turn and attack her with the use of flips, lifts and spins to the floor and on the floor. Billie tries to recover but is weak from

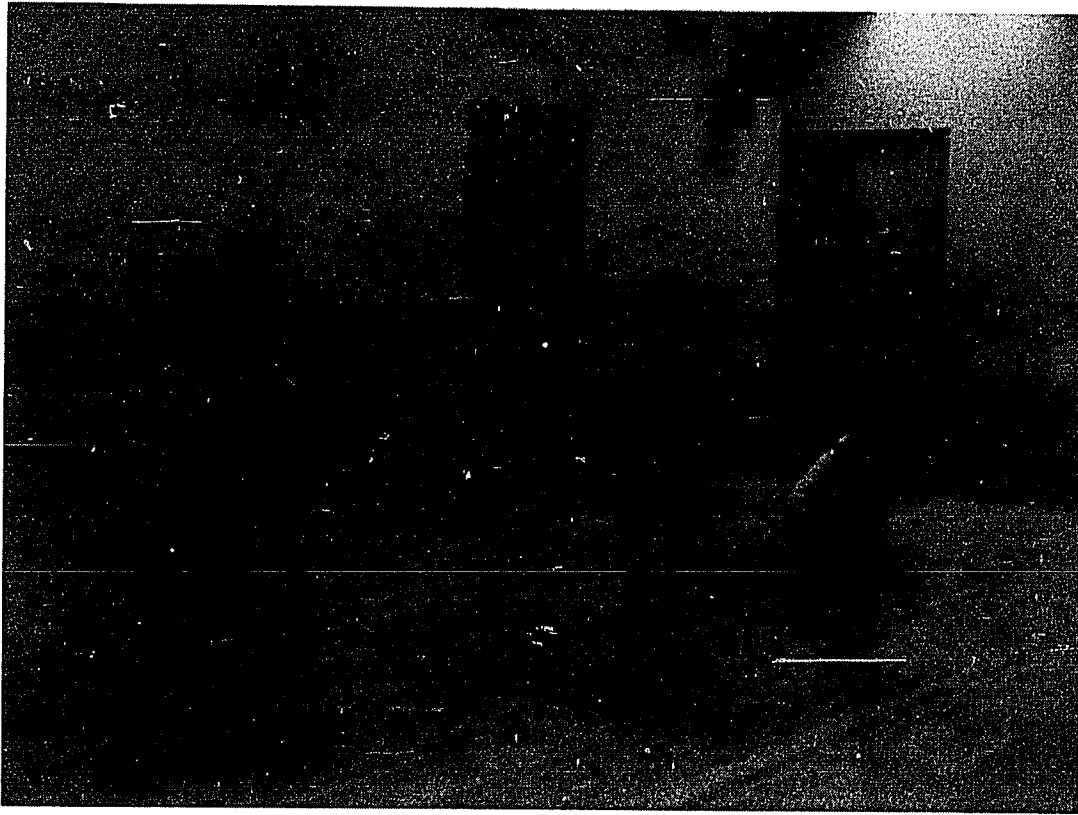


Plate 10
Billie with her personal demons in "Cold Turkey"

the whole ordeal. She gets off the floor only to fall again on an abrupt musical cue that finishes the dance in a pool of light with Billie on one knee and the demons hovering over her.

There were six dancers involved in **Cold Turkey** including the character of Billie Holiday. The accompaniment was that of Spyro Gyro titled **Pygmy Funk**. This musical arrangement was chosen because of its unpredictability and variety of musical moods.

The costumes were unitards of vibrant colors and headpieces similar to skull caps. Both the unitards and the headpieces were covered with streamers of material of varying colors. The full headpieces did pose a problem in that they hid the movement. To eliminate the problem, the streamers from the hats were braided and positioned on the caps in varying architectural shapes. The shapes were then sewn so that they would not unravel. Then birdlike masks with actual feathers were worn on the faces so that physical features could not be seen. The character of Billie danced in a straitjacket.

The lighting consisted of light-blue tones. There were no light changes until the end when Billie collapses. This dance had no set and made use of one prop which was a straitjacket.

You've Changed

You've Changed is a dramatic piece. The dance movements used are executed in the modern dance idiom. The movement themes are lyrical, limp and weak with a lot of gesture. Its purpose is to show Billie's incomplete transition from an addict back to a singer. The dance consists of one person, Billie Holiday.

In the last scene Billie remains on her knees in a pool of light while the demons move off stage slowly with their focus on her. The orderly returns

and tries to lift her to her feet as the music **You've Changed** sung by Billie is heard. She is too weak. Her legs give way and she slumps to the floor. The orderly tries to lift her with the use of strong and forceful movements. He gets the straitjacket off (Plate 11) and hands her the blue dress she wore previously. This all takes place center stage. She reaches to him for help as he turns his back and exits. Billie puts on her dress. The orderly then returns with a chair and a large bag, that was assumed Billie had when she was incarcerated. The bag contained a large hair pin, a tube of lipstick, a gardenia and a rubber fish tank tubing which were props selected to dramatically demonstrate acts of frustration.

As Billie finishes dressing, she looks into the mirror which is the audience and realizes that she has changed. She is not the beautiful "Lady Day" that she had been in the beginning of her career. She makes a feeble attempt to adjust what she sees by first putting on lipstick, rearranging her hair and placing a gardenia in it. When the gardenia falls from her hair, she realizes she is unsuccessful and she will never regain what she has lost. Her attempts to dance, representing her singing, are futile (Plate 12). Her balance is off and her leap results in a fall to the floor. In her frustration she returns to her bag where she pulls out a rubber tubing. She sits in the chair while she wraps the tubing around her arm and with the use of mime she gives herself an injection. (Plates 13 & 14).

The accompaniment **You've Changed** was recorded by Billie Holiday February 20, 1958, in New York, a little over a year before she died. This musical rendition was chosen because of the lyrics, the audible deterioration of Billie's voice and the emotion integrated in the song. It was felt that the song exhibited Billie's feeling of inadequacy in trying to lick her addiction and make a comeback



Plate 11
Orderly takes the straitjacket off of an exhausted Billie

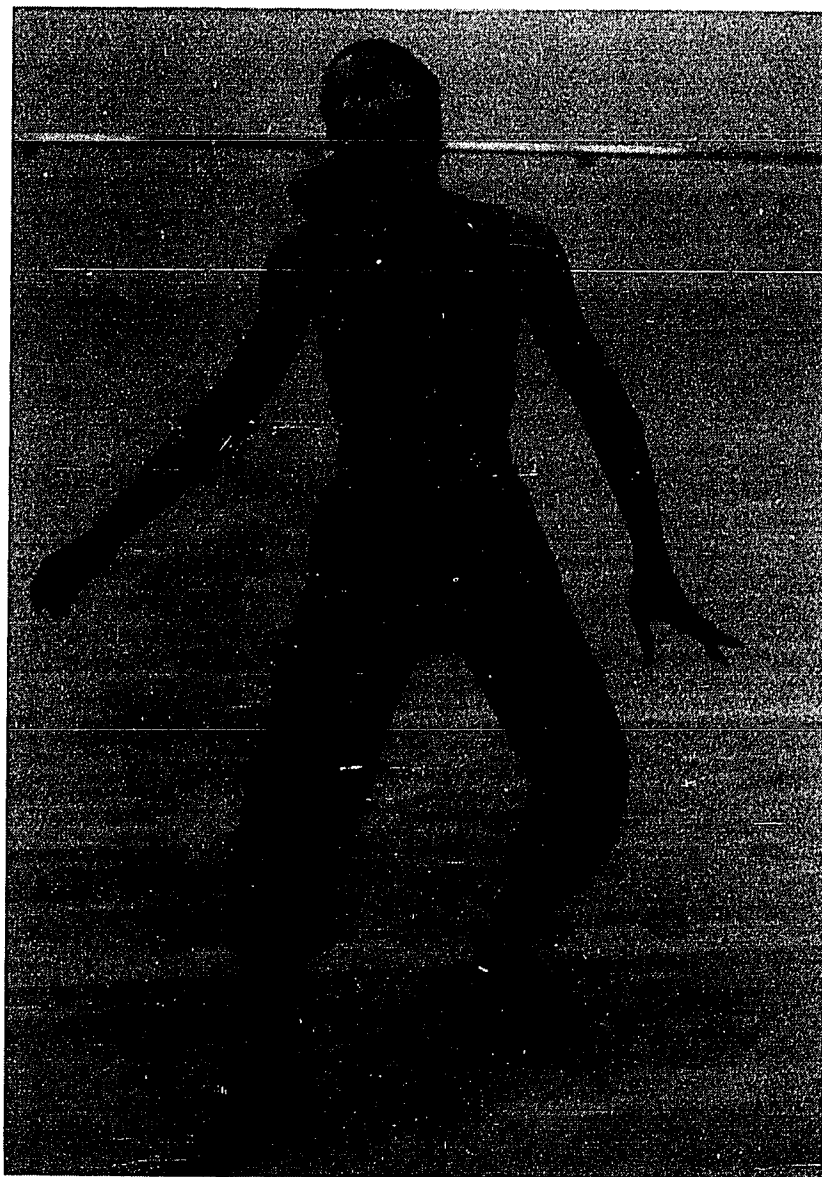


Plate 12
Billie's attempts to make a comeback are futile

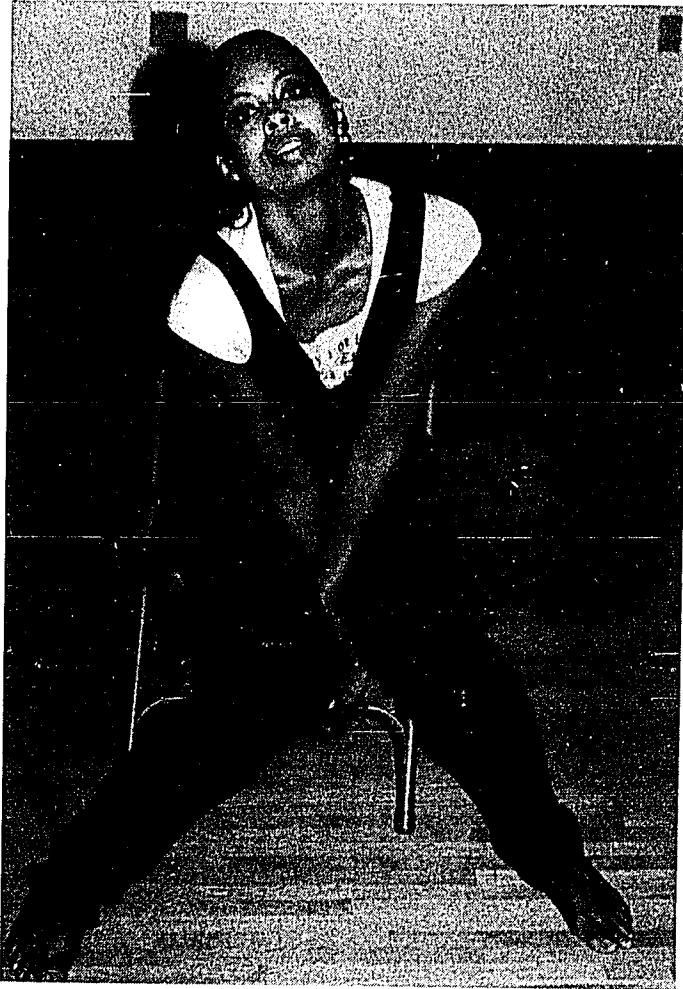


Plate 13
Frustrated

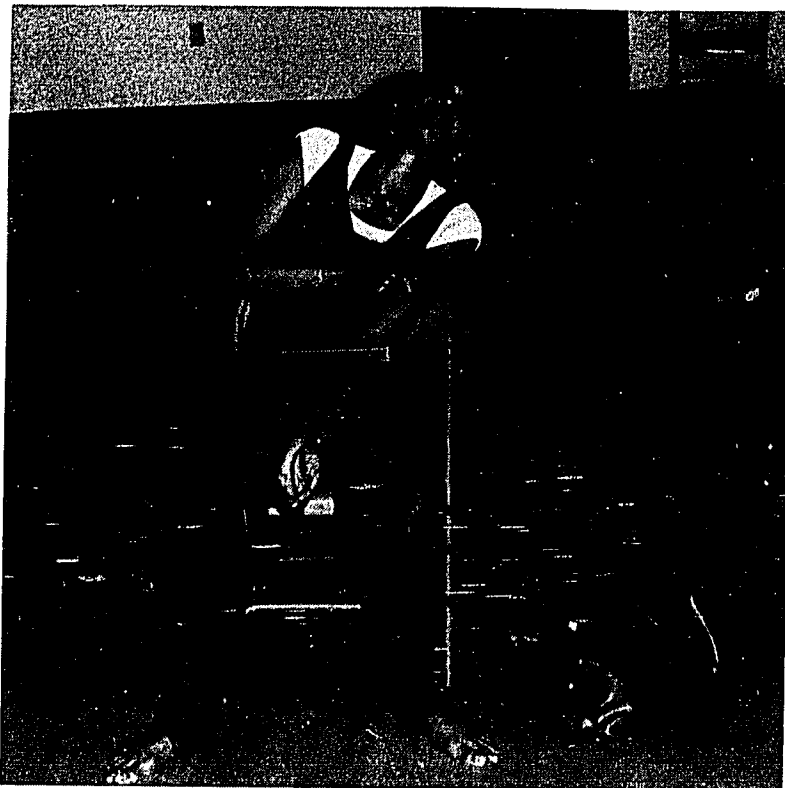


Plate 14
Back on drugs

Rehearsal scenes from
"You've Changed" .

in her career.

The dance contained a few costume changes. The first scene shows an orderly removing the straitjacket to reveal the black dress from **Sophisticated Lady**. He then hands her the blue dress from **Kick Out Of You**, which remains on until the end of the whole production.

A chair was the only set piece. A large handbag was used as a prop containing a tube of red lipstick, two large hairpins, one plastic fish-pump tubing and one white gardenia.

Transition D

As Billie "shoots up", Traci, drawn completely into the fantasy, starts to relate to the character of Billie on stage as well as with Billie's voice. Traci views the whole scene as real and pleads with her not to inject herself. Her pleadings evolve into anger as she turns to the voice of Billie and asks her why did she let herself stoop so low? Her anger and the sight of a person nodding from an injection makes Traci throw her pills away as she falls at Billie's feet and weeps. (Plate 15).

The position of Billie in the chair deep in a drug stupor and Traci on the floor at her feet is held in a pool of light while the voice of Billie expresses its relief and joy that Traci has finally understood her message. The words from the autobiography **Lady Sings The Blues** (See Chapter IV) are then spoken.

Lady Sings The Blues

Lady Sings The Blues consisted of nineteen picture slides of Billie and a curtain call, done to the song by the same title sung by Holiday. There were no sets, props, special costuming or movement themes. The lighting was dark for the slides, but faded up to orange tones for the curtain call. A gobo with a cross was also used. The dancers wore previous costumes depending on the

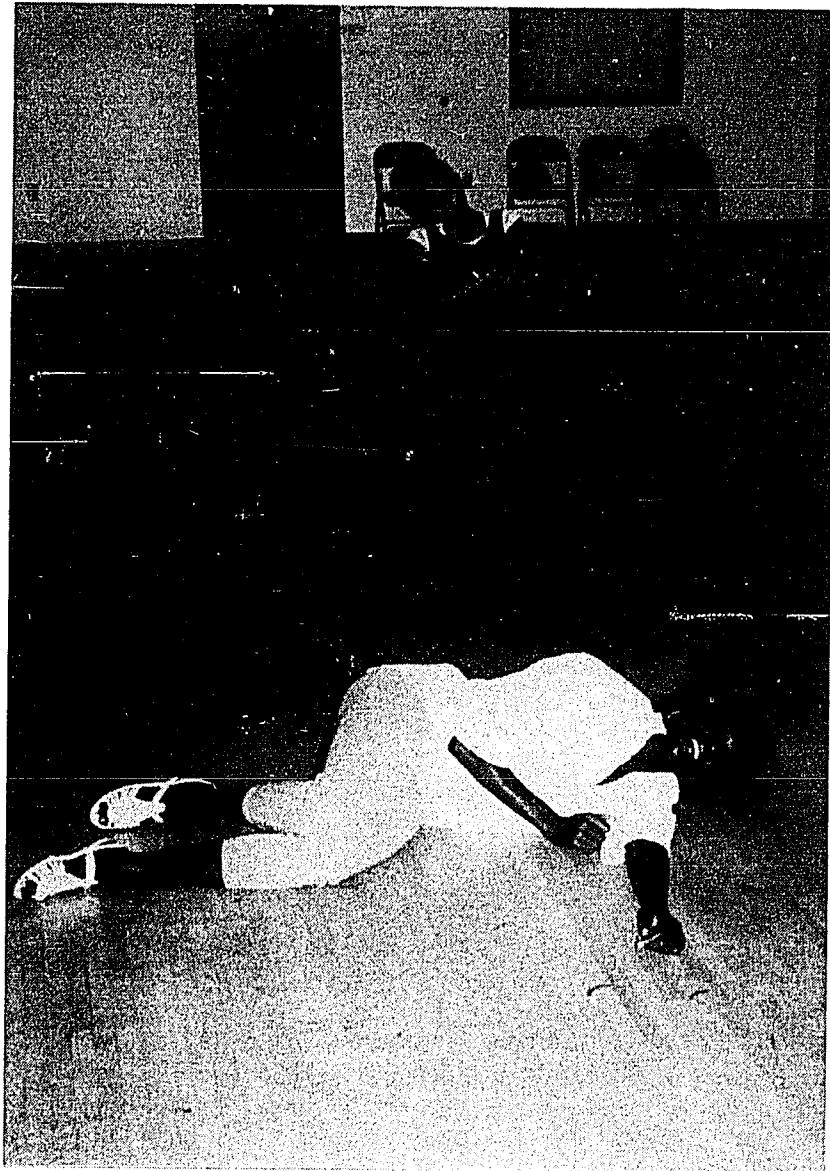


Plate 15
Final pose

character they chose to portray at the end.

The song, **Lady Sings The Blues**, was chosen because it was the title of Billie's book and it summarized her emotional life. The orchestration of the song was conducive to a finale atmosphere and to the visual aids used.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This Chapter is designed to present the script: to review the resulting comments and critiques of others; and direct the reader to a copy of the finished work.

The Script

A script was created by the choreographer for three speaking characters: an instructor; a student; and the voice of Billie Holiday. The text of the script revealed a drama within a drama.

Traci, the student, is a potential drug addict. She appears in the first scene taking pills whenever she gets nervous or frustrated. The script indicates through the words of the instructor that she has taken them before. Our first encounter with her is in a classroom setting while she is trying to execute the steps of a dance combination. She fumbles and makes her classmates falter. Her instructor is tired of her behavior and confronts her with his disgust. He dismisses the class and leaves. Traci then enters into an adventure with the voice of Billie Holiday, who is trying to convince her of the mistake she is making. Billie shows Traci her experiences as an addict and finally convinces her that taking drugs is not worth the risk.

Originally, a singer was considered to guide the student through Billie's life. Unfortunately, none of the candidates were available for the performance dates. Adjustments were made to enable Billie's voice to direct the student.

BILLIE'S MESSAGE

The following is a copy of the script in its entirety.

Written by: Vicki Dale

Choreography and direction by: Vicki Dale

Theme: A dance-drama theatre piece based on the life and anti-drug message of Billie Holiday.

Opening: Students warming up.

Instructor: [Enters upstage left and crosses diagonally downstage right.] Okay, let's take it from the top.

Member of the class: I thought you said we had a break.

Instructor: That was your break. Traci get off the wall and get down here. Let's take it from the top. Traci, get those eyedrops out of your eyes and get down here.

[Students dance. Traci messes up each time the combination is done. Instructor becomes angry. Traci is frustrated, nervous and a little drugged].

Instructor: [counts] Traci, do you know this routine...Then act like it. [counts] Stop. I want to see it from the top, Traci. Now, not tomorrow. [Traci messes up and gets in everyone's way] Move, Traci! Move out of the way, there are people around you...Let's take it from the top.

Instructor: [Instructor counts. Traci falls down] Stop! Dismissed everybody.

[Students break, get their bags and leave. Instructor goes over to Traci and helps her up. She pulls away].

Instructor: [Hollering at her] Traci, what is the matter with you? Do you hear me talking to you? Get up! If you quit taking some of those pills, maybe you'd be able to dance...Now, the next time we have rehearsal, I want to see this from the top and if you don't have it, you're out and I mean it!

[Lights dim around Traci. She reaches into her bag and gets a bottle of pills. She is about to take some when she is interrupted by a voice].

Billie: Hey, put those pills down.

Traci: Who's there? See what you've made me do.

Billie: Leave them there.

Traci: Who are you? Who...Oh, never mind. Where are my pills? Where are my pills?

- Billie:** Hey, come on, you don't need any pills.
- Billie:** What business is it of yours? I dance better when I am not so uptight.
- Billie:** Huh...You didn't look like you were dancing so good to me. Dope don't make you do nothing better...dance better or sing better.
- Traci:** Listen, whoever you are? Wherever you are? Leave me alone. Keep your nose out of my business. You don't know what I'm going through.
- Billie:** Going through...going through! You cats think that you have had hard times. My great-grandmother died with me in her arm. They had to break her arm to get me loose. Then I was raped at the age of ten and locked in a room overnight with a dead girl? Girl, ain't nobody seen hard times like Lady Day.
- Traci:** Lady Day? You mean Billie Holiday? I know a little bit about her. Wasn't she a singer? What's she got to do with this? Ain't she dead? What is this, I don't have time for games...Listen to me talking to the air. I'm buggin' out.
- Billie:** Yeah, girl. You sure are cause dope don't do nothing for you. Don't do nothing but make things worst. Take it form Lady Day.
- Traci:** Oh, man! You're Lady Day? You're not Lady Day? I've gotta go.
- Billie:** Wait, wait. listen...at the end of my book **Lady Sings The Blues**, I wrote a message but no one seems to recognize it. Well, I'm gonna tell it now. And you have to see different part of my life to understand what I'm gonna say. I want the message told. He wants the message told.
- Traci:** Who is He?
- Billie:** God! You see your body is the temple of God and He don't like what you and people like you are doing to yourselves...Anyway, I'm gonna show you all this through dance since you like dance and I wanted to be a dancer myself.

[Traci tries to leave before the music starts. She tries to exit upstage right but runs into the dancers as they enter. She turns and runs downstage left and sits on a stool].

Dance: **The Audition**

Traci: Ha! Ha! You were awful. Kinda like the way I looked. I'm surprised they didn't throw you out of there.

Traci: So what did you say?

- Billie:** I said, "sure, I could sing". Well, that started my singing career. When I sang that night you could hear a pin drop.
- Traci:** Yeah, I heard you sang with Artie Shaw and Count Basie. Did you travel a lot? [Traci stretches].
- Billie:** Yeah, I traveled with a lot of bands. Shoot, I was the first Negro woman to travel with an all-white band throughout the south. I saw a lot of discrimination, though.
- Traci:** So what did you do? I mean, there's not much you could have done.
- Billie:** I did sing a song that made folks recognize me as an artist. It was about southern lynchings. It was called **Strange Fruit**. Why don't you move over and let me show you something. [Moves stage right]
- Dance:** **Strange Fruit.**
- Traci:** Wow, I've heard about those lynchings but never thought it was like that. I mean, I never thought about them at all. That was depressing. [Moves center stage]. And what was that creature manipulating everything?
- Billie:** Your enemy and mine, that devil called the spirit of discrimination...Anyway, let me tell you about these clubs I used to sing in. Man, there were some strange happenings. Those cats were wild.
- Dance:** **Kick Out Of You.** [Traci sits in the club]
- Traci:** Boy, you saw some crazy things, didn't you?...By the way, what made you turn to drugs? [Traci sits center stage and listens]
- Billie:** Well, you know there is always a pusherman somewhere close. There are a lot reasons I tried drugs. Like I told you about my childhood and then growing up without a father, I became a tomboy. I could shoot crap better than any man and I was quite a puncher, too. During that time I got started on a little reefer. It was hard for me being a Negro woman under attack by whites in the south and north and I became bitter. For example, I traveled with a white singer at one time named Helen Forrest. I taught Helen the ropes. Well, when I came off the road, Helen was given a job with Artie doing radio work instead of me. He got a lot of pressure about having a Negro singer. That, along with bad relationships, made me turn to drugs instead of God. [Traci moves stage right. Billie's mother comes on stage right and sits in Traci's chair]

Dance: Sophisticated Lady

Traci: You know, Billie, you're right. There is a pusherman in every corner. I should know. He found me, didn't he? I used to smoke pot. Now I'm taking pills. It doesn't matter. I still dance very well. [Moves center stage] But they don't think I can handle it. They just don't think I can handle it. But, let me tell you, I can handle it. I know when to stop. I know I can quit, just like that [snap], if I wanted to. But, you know Billie, I just don't want to...So, tell me did you really get hooked?

Billie: Hooked? Yeah...I was arrested several times for possession of narcotics. I wanted to be cured and thought the system would help me. But, the treatment I received I could have done myself. I had to lick it cold turkey, which was not easy or pretty.

Dance: You've Changed

Traci: No, Billie...What are you doing? [Traci goes to Billie on the state. She tries to keep Billie from shooting up] Are you crazy? What are you doing that for? Stop that! Why would you let yourself get so low that you would submit to drugs? Did you care so little about life that you had to throw your own away? Sure, everyone has problems. But, it's really stupid for anyone to cover up their sorrows by using drugs...If this is what taking drugs is all about, then I don't want to use them anymore.

Billie: Thank God. You finally understand. I'm not raking all this up for fun. I've raked up my past, so I can bury it. It's worth it if just one youngster can learn one thing from it.

IF YOU THINK DOPE IS FOR KICKS AND FOR THRILLS,
YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND. IF YOU THINK YOU NEED
STUFF TO PLAY MUSIC OR SING, YOU'RE CRAZY. IT
CAN FIX YOU SO YOU CAN'T PLAY NOTHING OR SING
NOTHING. JUST LOOK AT ME. ALL DOPE CAN DO FOR
YOU IS KILL YOU - AND KILL YOU THE LONG, SLOW,
HARD WAY. AND IT CAN KILL THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE
RIGHT ALONG WITH YOU. AND THAT'S THE TRUTH,
THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT.

Finale: Lady Sings The Blues. [Slides and curtain call]

Critiques

The University Dance Theatre performances are reviewed by the students and are mandatory for dance classes. The students are given a critique sheet which they fill out and return to the instructor. The dance appreciation classes are required to be detailed in their critiques. Below are some comments about

Billie's Message:

- Through various scenes it [Billie's Message] showed the rise and fall of a career, when involved in drugs.
- It had a combination of tap, jazz and ballet. I liked the variation of dance forms.
- It had some comedy in it that made you laugh and a good statement about the perils of drugs.
- Besides being a great dance and story, it was very educational.
- It was touching.
- It was powerful.
- It was forceful.
- Shocking!
- Funny in spots.
- Sad.
- Very dramatic.
- Made you think.
- I felt like I was there with Billie, even in the cafe scene. I felt a part of the whole thing.
- The use of the cross was subtle but effective. It gave people another alternative.

Esther H. Weinstein, a Las Vegas area writer, wrote a critique in the Review Journal's *Nevadan* on the University Dance Theatre Concert. She included her opinion of **Billie's Message** (See Appendix C). It should be noted that dance reviews are rare in Las Vegas and it is an honor to be mentioned. Secondly, Ester Weinstein's expertise is in music, not drama or dance. Consequently, she is not familiar with the trend of using words to supplement movement.

Billie's Message was successful in accomplishing its purpose, however, the choreographer held the opinion of Maurice Hines, Sr. valuable because of the involvement and knowledge he had of Billie. Hines comments were, "You did it! You did it! You almost made me cry. You did it". Mr. Hines was not in the beginning encouraging when he was told of the choreographer's intent. He felt no one had accurately portrayed Billie Holiday and felt she was difficult to capture. He also felt that dance would not be an effective art form to use to portray her. Mr. Hines' approval was important in monitoring the goal of being true to Billie and her life.

Both Maurice Hines, Sr. and Ester H. Weinstein felt that **Billie's Message** could be used as a tool in the fight against drug abuse. Maurice Hines, Sr. felt that if it were filmed it could reach many.

Videotape

Billie's Message can be seen in its entirety on the videotape of the October 31 and November 1, 1987 concert performed by the University Dance Theatre. The tape is available in the Department of Dance Arts of the Alta Ham Fine Arts Building on the UNLV campus.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of a creative work is its actual production. The written report explains the purpose, background and methodology in producing a creative work. This written conclusion will express the learning experience in creating a dance of this proportion.

The Experience

Billie's Message taught the value of starting a production early. Problems that arose during rehearsals could have been disastrous if there was not adequate time to remedy them. Changes in lead cast members of important dances occurred, vacations of dancers had to be worked around, and costume adjustments were made. Composure, flexibility and the establishment of a rapport with the temperaments of fifteen dancers were imperative.

The need for a large cast of dancers who had acting ability created a concern. Not many dancers who are technically strong can also act. Imagery was utilized to create certain effects in the mind of dancers. Methods were used to stimulate thought and action. The ability to convey concepts gave new insights in communication. It developed a sense of confidence in the area of directing.

Another area of development was discovered in a latent talent. That area was the use of art to supplement publicity. Because **Billie's Message** was designed to reach the public with an anti-drug message, and due to the awareness that many may not relate to Billie as Billie Holiday but rather a man, it was decided to utilize the author's artistic ability to further promote the curiosity of the

public. A drawing of a woman wearing a gardenia in her hair singing with dancers in the background (See Appendix D) was designed, made into posters and fliers, and distributed within the community. The positive results encouraged future artistic endeavors in the area of publicity.

Billie's Message was an ambitious effort which developed confidence in creating a script and choreographing and directing a large cast in a theatrical, multi-act production.

Future Considerations

Given adequate funding, performers and time, this project could be presented on film for distribution in schools, churches or other organizations that involve people who may benefit from **Billie's Message**.

In terms of concert work, the dances could be performed by a touring black or interracial modern dance company. The challenge of restaging **Billie's Message** in the ballet idiom might also be considered. An ultimate desire would be to adapt **Billie's Message** for the Broadway stage. An addition of a singer was originally considered with a script to accommodate such a performer.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW WITH MAURICE HINES, SR.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH MAURICE "PAPA" HINES

Maurice "Papa" Hines, Sr., was a professional drummer who played with Billie Holiday on many occasions. The writer had an interview with Mr. Hines Sunday, February 22, 1987.

Q: What was Billie Holiday like as a person?

A: She was a very strong woman. There was no doubt about that. You had to be strong to survive in those days. Everybody loved her. Nobody sounded like her. Nobody has ever sounded like her. She loved good-looking men. All her men were very good looking; every man she went with. One was Freddie Greene, a guitar player for Basie, and Tut, her accompanist. You can't get Freddie to talk about Billie to this day. When Billie really got popular, Basie used her. She played with Basie for awhile, then Artie Shaw gave her a break. When she came back to New York, she worked at the Lincoln and had to go through the kitchen. She didn't like that, so she quit. I don't know how she got hooked, because during that time no black people knew what dope was. Dope was for the rick folk. Someone rich had to give it to her. She was a nice person, a giving person. Everybody liked her. She didn't have too many women friends. Most of her friends were men. One was Lester Young. Lester named her "Lady Day". Lester gave everybody a name. Everybody in those days had their own personality. When Billie sang "**Strange Fruit**", she disturbed the whole continent of the United States. The words were written by Georgia Whitehorn.

Q: Was there a point in her life when Billie was ecstatically happy?

A: No...No. She was a woman with a difficult life.

Q: What about her physical characteristics? Height? Weight?

A: She was about five foot six. Gorgeous in her youth. She wasn't that tall, but she was a pretty woman. A little heavy sometimes. Everybody loved this woman. She was a rare talent. You never heard anyone who could sing like that since and never will. Her phrasing was wrong. Her breathing was wrong. But she did it her way. That was typical, doing it "my" way. But that's how they did it in those days. You didn't have a vocal coach. Billy Eckstein never had a vocal coach in his life. Sarah. Ella. You just started singing with the band. She [Billie] was with Basie, not because she needed to, but because that was the way to get your name out there. You know. And John Hammon started recording her. When she sang you

could hear her suffering. You can hear the pain. She was a strange lady. Every song she sang was about her life. She sang the same tunes on most of her records. It was not that much difference. No matter what she sang, you felt misery. She was always looking for somebody. If you read her book, she didn't get love from her mother. Every man she had she looked for love from.

Q: Did she have any religious beliefs?

A: No. Men were her religion. She always had a man with her....good-looking man. Louis McKay was the last one. He also was really in love with the woman. He loved the woman. Do you hear? He did everything to keep her off of that stuff.

Q: I know she had only a fifth-grade education, but was she smart? Willing to learn?

A: Oh, yeah! She was very astute. Very willing to learn. Excellent crap shooter, too. She could shoot some crap. She shot crap better than any man.

Q: How did Billie get the trademark of the gardenia in her hair?

A: Billie was preparing for a performance at a 52nd Street night club. She used one of those curling irons and burned a chunk of hair. Sylvia Syms, the singer, ran downstairs and got a gardenia from a cigarette girl for Billie to use to cover up the spot. Billie liked the effect and made it a permanent part of the look. She even had a gardenia in her hair at her funeral.

APPENDIX B
CHRONOLOGY OF APPROXIMATE DATES

APPENDIX B
CHRONOLOGY

- April 7, 1915 Reported birth date of Billie Holiday. Born Eleanora, daughter of two teenagers, Clarence and Sadie Fagan. There is some discrepancy about this date. It may have been later.
- 1920's Clarence left Eleanora and Sadie. Sadie left Eleanora with relatives. Great-grandmother died with Eleanora under her arm. Aunt emotionally abused Eleanora.
- 1925 Eleanora was raped at the age of ten by a middle-aged neighbor. She was sent to a home for wayward girls. As punishment for being disobedient inside the institution, Eleanora was locked in a room overnight with a dead girl.
- Eleanora changed her name to Billie Holiday.
- 1928 Billie became a prostitute.
- 1930 Billie's audition at Pod's and Jerry's.
- 1933 First recording session.
- Dated Benny Goodman.
- April 19, 1935 Frank Schiffman books Billie at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem.
- 1935 Made the short film, "**Black Symphony**", with Duke Ellington.
- Sung with Teddy Wilson.
- 1936 Lost a singing position in a revue to Bessie Smith due to an illness of ptomaine poisoning.
- 1937 Traveled with Count Basie.
- January 25, 1937 Billie teamed up with Lester Young, who gave her the nickname of "Lady Day".

March 1, 1937	Death of Clarence Holiday.
1938	Billie left Basie. Worked with Artie Shaw.
December 28, 1938	Barney Josephson opened up the Cafe Society, an integrated night club. Billie was the main singer. Introduced to poem providing the lyrics for " Strange Fruit ".
June, 1938	Evidences by co-workers of extreme melancholy.
August 25, 1941	Wrote "Don't Explain", inspired by her experiences with Monroe.
1941	Recorded "God Bless The Child".
1945	Sadie died.
1945-1946	Billie lost weight during this period due to her heavy involvement with drugs.
February 16, 1946	First solo performance in New York.
1947	Billie made her only full length movie, New Orleans .
May 27, 1947	Arrested and charged with possession, transportation and concealment of drugs.
1947	Billie was sentenced to one year at Alderson Reformatory where she underwent a "cold turkey" cure.
1951	Billie married Louis McKay.
1953	Cancelled appearances at the Apollo due to a black eye.
February 8, 1954	First trip to Europe.
1957	Left Louis McKay. Billie and Lester's last performance together.
March 15, 1959	Lester Young died.
May 25, 1959	Billie's last appearance at Phoenix Theatre.
May 31, 1959	Billie went into a coma, suffering from cirrhosis of the liver and cardiac failure.

July 11, 1959

Billie's heart failed.

July 15, 1959

Billie died.

APPENDIX C
NEWS ARTICLE BY ESTHER WEINSTEIN

ESTHER WEINSTEIN

UNLV's dance company puts spotlight on jazz

The emphasis was clearly on jazz in the University Dance Theatre's first concert of the season, presented Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 at UNLV's Judy Bayley Theatre. But jazz music and dance made up only part of the program.

A world unto itself was modern dance artist L. Martins Young's "Anatomy of a Fallen Angel," set to the music of Ennio Morricone. Young has been the recipient of three National Endowment for the Arts choreographers fellowships and is currently on the dance faculty of UNR. She came to Las Vegas specifically to prepare this 25-minute piece, made possible by grants from the California Community Foundation and Southwest Gas.

The nine-part work began with Young standing off to the right on her toes, back to the audience, in an uncomfortable-looking, bent-knee stance. Quasi-religious music that combined the sounds of acoustic and synthesizer instruments bathed our ears, while an amber diagonal of light and amber background silhouetted Young's body, clad in bronze-colored pants and a beige camisole. After remaining immo-

ble for what felt like a long time, considering the difficulty of the pose, Young lowered herself, or rather stepped down, one foot at a time (in "descent," as Young titled the first section of the work).

Her ensuing floor-based movements, advancing ever so slowly, suggested a difficulty in dealing with a new situation and state ("refusal"); and "ground level" reconfirmed a pulling to earth against her will. In "monologue," Young's persona had clearly won the struggle to break free of the pull from below, but a pointed absence of music, coupled with gestures of self flagellation and arms held across the face, indicated conflicts had not yet been resolved.

Only after "anger" flowed forth in faster-paced arm circling, only after an "awakening" and "past-life regression" did Young's persona begin to accept and even revel in the beauty that was hers, indicated by a deliberate focusing on parts of her body ("dialogue"). In "homecoming," she was finally free to participate in a new life, with exhilaration, with abandon and with a joyful smile.

Young explained briefly to me that she sees "Anatomy" as a culmination of what she has done before. In the past, she has worked with identifiable characters and specifically narrative situations. But here, she wants her angel to speak more abstractly as the spirit of everyone or everywoman. She has tried to create a dynamic structure that has its own inner logic, that gives a sense of the battles and successes we all experience in our lives. From where I sat, she realized her goal splendidly, with great strength and communicative beauty.

Young has used actual narration in some of her earlier works and has commented, "You can't say everything in choreography. If a statement needs to be made, you have to find the right form for it." UNLV graduate student Victoria Dale appears to second that belief, as evidenced by her ambitious, half-hour-long work entitled "Billie's Message," set to the music of Billie Holiday.

During the six scenes of the piece, a dance student unable to perform and in the process of getting booked on drugs, engages in a dialogue

with the disembodied voice of Holiday. Words scream at us outright, in no uncertain terms, how bad drugs are, how we ought to avoid them even though our lives may seem rotten.

Much of the work struck me as illustrated message — dances used in the service of words to bring a point home. As such, it might prove an extremely potent tool to reach at-risk groups. But I'd prefer Dale make me feel the tragedy of Holiday's mistake without spelling it out quite so specifically.

The lynching scene was emotionally gripping, "Cold Turkey," kinetically vibrant, and the concluding deterioration left a strong impression. As a whole, though, the dance would have worked better for me without the verbal barrage that left little to the imagination.

On the first half of the program were a series of jazz numbers by guest choreographers Minnie Madden, Rich Rizzo and Winston DeWitt Hensley — an ensemble ("Sing Sing Sing"), a solo ("High Times") and a quartet ("Remembrance"). Inevitably, some dancers stood out. Eddy Talton was one, with his

clear definition of movement and forcefulness of gesture, to say nothing of his extensive participation in the program. Carol Sampson is another who catches the eye. Her delicacy, nonchalant fluency and dramatic effectiveness made special her "Hush-A-Bye" solo in "Remembrance" and even her bit part in Scene 4 of "Billie's Message."

A reprise of "Sing Sing Sing" closed, presumably to end on an upbeat note. But the gaiety seemed forced and artificial after the seriousness of "Billie's Message." It might have been a more effective conclusion to let the force of Dale's work linger.

The University Dance Theatre is the performing organization of the UNLV dance department. It's basically a student company, supplemented with professional dancers, sometimes faculty and independent guest choreographers. For information about future concerts, phone 739-3827.

Esther H. Weinstein is a Las Vegas area writer specializing in the arts. She teaches piano at UNLV Clark County Community College and Nevada School of the Arts.

APPENDIX D
PUBLICITY DESIGN



BILLIE'S MESSAGE

Choreographed by: VICTORIA DALE

Featured in : THE UNIVERSITY DANCE THEATRE CONCERT

October 31, 1987 - 2pm
November 1, 1987 - 2pm

JUDY BAYLEY THEATRE - UNLV

Student, Seniors, Children	\$4.00
General Admission	\$6.00

Tickets available at the door.
For more information call 739-3827

APPENDIX E
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

APPENDIX E

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Cold turkey - Term used to describe the physical effects of an abrupt withdrawal of narcotics. The skin resembles that of a plucked turkey.

Dance drama - "Dance drama is not so much a form of dance as it is a story action that uses any of the appropriate dance forms. The dramatic expression is resolved by dancers who perform a choreographed story which may rely on libretto, pantomime or abstraction of a natural happening". (Eilfeldt, Lois, Dance: From Magic to Art, Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, Co. 1976)

Drug abuse - The illegal self-administration of drugs, narcotics, chemicals, and other substances to the possible detriment of the individual, of society, or of both. (Wallace, Bill C. Education and The Drug Scene, Nebraska: Professional Educators Publication, 1974, p. 114)

Drug addiction - "...is a state of periodic intoxication, detrimental to the individual and society, produced by the repeated consumption of a drug (natural or synthetic). (Goode, Erich, Drugs in American Society. New York: Alfred A. Knorpf, 1984, p. 19)

Ethnic - "...dance created over the centuries or millennia by a race, by a people". (Terry, Walter, The Dance In America. New York: Harper & Row, 1971, p. 207)

Heroin - "A white, odorless, crystalline derivative of morphine... a powerful, habit-forming narcotic, the manufacture of which is prohibited in the United States. *(The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary, New York: Pleasantville, 1966)

High - A state of euphoria, as an effect of drugs. A slang term.

Jazz - "Jazz dance is a mirror of the social history of the American people, reflecting historical events, cultural changes, ethnic influences, and especially the music and social dances of its eras...jazz dance, like jazz music, comes in many guises-the Broadway show, the concert stage, musical theatre; film and television, Las Vegas and Hollywood choruses, and even discotheques". (Kraines, Minda Goodman and Esther Kan Jump Into Jazz, California: Mayfield Publishing Co., p. 4, 1983)

Modern dance - "... an art form serving to project the choreographers intent through the medium of bodily movement, with no arbitrary restrictions on the choice of movement available to the choreographer. (Eilfeldt. Dance: From Magic to Art, 1976)

Narcotic - "a milky exudation from the unripe capsules of the opium poppy, containing a mixture of alkaloids, including morphine. It is a powerful narcotic, having a bitter taste and heavy odor". (The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary, New York: Pleasantville, 1966)

Pot smoker - One who smokes marijuana. Marijuana is a plant whose dried leaves and flower tops yield a psychic-dependent narcotic smoked in cigarettes.

Pusherman - A drug peddler.

Scrim - A lightweight curtain used in the theatre for special effects.

Shooting up - The act of intravenous injection. A slang term.

Tap - A dance form that combines sight and sound. It involves the use of the feet to articulately stomp out rhythmic variations.

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