

***Grim* – A Choreographic Mentorship Project**

Student: Sevanna Kisko

Faculty Mentor: Yoav Kaddar

Statement of Mentorship -

Embarking on a choreographic journey is an involved and most often lengthy process. As a movement artist the choreographer begins by finding inspiration for their new work. Once focused on a theme, a concept, they set on a journey of investigation and research, very similar to that of any other research project. A complete and effective choreographic work (dance) includes not only telling the story through movement and the physical, but it encompasses a collaborative work of costume and lighting elements and when possible, that includes designers and finding the right music score to accompany the movement. All these production elements come together to support, elevate, and enhance the vision of the choreographer.

The process for *Grim* began at the start of this current academic year when we met at the choreographer's interest meeting. Sevanna's vision of converting the classic fairy tales of Grimm into a story through movement, sound and light was in line with her previous choreographic works. Sevanna does well when it comes to narrating through dance. Her previous work was also theatrical and different from most student works. Her idea for the sentient, coming-to-life like forest was at the center of *Grim*. For choreographers and dancers alike, it is challenging to find the fine line between mimicking and truly embodying something in nature like a tree. To be able to give a tree-like shape, form, and character is challenging when trying not to be literal. On one hand you do not want to be too illustrative in your movement and shapes and on the other you do not want to be so abstract that the viewer cannot follow or grasp your concept. During the initial creative process of her own movement exploration in the studio, diligent research both in reading and viewing images from the actual fairy tales, Sevanna moved into the rehearsal process with her cast of 12 dancers. The cast was selected by Sevanna out of an audition. She had to carefully pick dancers that would be able to bring her work to life through their ability to be both versatile movers and strong dramatic performers. Sevanna continued to research and explore movement with her cast that would best fit her dance. I met with Sevanna during her creative process. These meetings included live viewing of rehearsals and showings as well as viewing of video recordings of recent rehearsals. The ongoing process of evaluating and reevaluating the clarity of the story, was given to Sevanna through my oral and written notes. It was imperative that together we found just the right balance of movements to depict the tree-like shapes and energy that would bring her vision of *Grim* to life.

The piece was first performed in front of a live audience as part of the Celebration of Dance fall concert. The venue was the Falbo theatre, which is small and intimate with the audience being very up close to the dancers. The piece came across clearly as each intricate move of the dancer's wrist and fingers as well as facial expression was very visible to the audience. The work was very well received and after an adjudicated process was selected to move on and be presented in the annual mainstage production of

Dance Now!. Pieces in *Dance Now!* are fully produced, allowing the choreographer to work and collaborate with a lighting designer and a costume designer to further their vision for their dance. Production meetings were scheduled, and preliminary discussions took place. Visions and ideas were presented by the designers. Sevanna, in consultation with me thought through these ideas. As the director of the entire concert and as one who had a clearer view of the whole production, I could also mentor Sevanna on best practices in making her piece unique but still a part of the overall program of the dance concert. We had to consider where it would fall in the program to accommodate costume changes for her cast who might have been performing in other pieces before or after *Grim*. Consideration was also given to the place of *Grim* on the program, making sure it would stand out and not be overwhelmed by the piece that came before or after it.

Over the next 2 months, between the fall concert and *Dance Now!* Sevanna continued to work and communicate with the costume and lighting designers. The color schemes and palette for both the costumes and lights were finalized. Also, at this stage attention had to be given to make sure that none of those elements were too overwhelming or too narrative. Lights and costumes need to support the choreographer's vision and help bring it to life. The movement should be the center of the work. One does not want the lights and/or costume to overwhelm and take over the dance and in so doing, changing, or altering the initial vision of the choreographer. Another element that we added was fog. Having the hazy misty look that is added to the stage by a fog machine not only gives that sense of mystery but gives the lighting a third dimension and created for a three-dimensional space.

I continued to mentor Sevanna throughout these stages, always being present in the production meetings to ensure that everyone was on the same page as far as the design was concerned. At the end of the day, it is also imperative that the choreographer makes sure that the dancers are safe on stage, can move freely in their costumes and that the costumes not only fit well but that they complement the choreography.

Once in the Clay theatre for technical rehearsals, the lighting came to play. Overall, our previous meetings and preparations made for a smooth transition onto the stage phase. During technical rehearsals, lighting cues, and special lighting instruments and designs were added. As the Clay stage and house are much larger than the Falbo, it was also imperative that the dancers dance "larger" and project further. Some lighting cues were added too. As we went through section by section, moment by moment of the dance, building the right lighting cue for each the piece became clearer and tighter. A small sound glitch brought to life a twist to the ending of the piece. The opening cord from the original score was looped back to close the piece, which added an eerie feeling as the curtain came down on the dance.

I invited Sevanna to also present *Grim* to our School audiences. Several middle school groups from the surrounding Morgantown area and beyond came to a special Friday morning matinee performance for school children. *Grim* was part of an abbreviated program specifically for that age group. Prior to the performance of *Grim*, Sevanna came out to talk to the kids about her work. She gave a short background for the inspiration, some specific movements to watch for and the overall fear factor that she hoped

would come across during the dance. The young audience was very excited to watch the dance. By the conclusion of the performance, they were captivated and followed with loud applause.

Overall, Grim came out to be a very effective theatrical dance. It will now be representing the WVU Dance Program at the Mid-Atlantic American College Dance Conference at Meredith College in Raleigh NC, where it will be one of two WVU dances to be adjudicated and receive feedback from professional choreographers and experts in the field.

It has been and continues to be an exploratory and learning experience for me as Sevanna's choreographic mentor. She is truly talented and unique in her exploration of movement storytelling. She continues to grow and develop her skills and craft and find her own creative voice as a choreographer. She's highly respected by her peers as she is by her faculty for her talents and creativity as a choreographer.



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Yoav Kaddar