

In my final semester at Missouri State, I will be completing a senior project for both of my majors (BS in Theatre and a BS in Dance). My project for both majors will consist of me improving my paper written for my Dance Research Methods class in Spring of 2021. I had explored a statement from Brenda Dixon Gottschilds book “Digging The Africanist Presence In American Performance” where Gottschild briefly compares Harlequin, a character from Commedia Dell’Arte, to 19th and 20th century American Blackface minstrel characters. I will further explore the paper and come to a stronger, more consolidated conclusion by looking at the influence that Commedia had in America as it pertains to the pioneers of the American Blackface minstrel show. I shall also be looking at what kind of influence that Africans had on Italian culture during the renaissance that would have caused Italian dramatists to want to create a character that represents a whole culture.

In addition to improving my paper, I will also be submitting it to two conferences where I would be presenting in spring of 2022 should I be selected. The first conference is the Mid American Theatre Conference and submissions are due by November 1st. The second conference is the Popular Culture Association Conference and submissions are due by November 15th.

Since the deadlines are both in early to mid November, my timeline should be as follows (let me know if this is unrealistic since the feedback part especially is out of my control:

- September 13th- Submit project proposal
- September 30th- Submit first draft to writing center for feedback
- October 11th- Submit first draft to professors for feedback (Kyle, Ruth, Sarah Wilcoxon, and Azaria)
- Week of October 18th- Receive feedback from professors and start work on second draft

- Week of October 25th- Get final feedback, make final tweaks and submit papers to both conferences by their respective deadline.
- Week of November 22nd- Submit second draft and professional resume to Ruth
- Date TBA: Oral presentation of dance project in dance lab
- Date TBA: Meet with dance faculty for final feedback
- December 6th- Initial draft of theatre presentation due to blackboard
- December 10th- All theatre project materials due to blackboard

The presentation portion of my senior projects will consist of me briefly discussing my paper and talking about the process of me working on my paper (starting with my very very first draft in dance history a year and a half ago) and talking about the process that I have gone through as far as editing and refining exactly what the heck my paper is about and trying to prove. I will also talk about the process of getting my paper submitted to the conferences and maybe discuss what the next step will be should I be selected to present.

This project has been of interest to me since my third year in college. I have always been interested in improv and in Theatre History, when I learned about how Commedia Dell' Arte very well might have been the first form of improv, my interest peaked. My final project for that course was a set of masks that I made to accompany a paper about the characters that the masks represented. It was then that I had first noticed that many of the reference photos I had looked at for my Harlequin mask tended to have features that were traditionally thought of as African facial features: a large, pug shaped nose, a scruffy beard made of wires, and the mask historically being colored brown or black. It was not until Azaria's Dance History class the next semester

that my suspicion started to seem more like a fact. In Brenda Dixon Gottschields book, there was only a sentence that mentioned the possible African ancestry to the Commedia character of Harlequin and its possible relation to Blackface minstrelsy. From there I have written two papers comparing and contrasting Commedia and minstrelsy and one paper on just minstrelsy. I have always been interested in the butterfly effect and how things in the past can greatly affect the future and now I get to explore that within two subjects that I am absolutely in love with.

Post college, I want to submit this to conferences and eventually to journals. If and when I decide to go to graduate school, this would be a very neat credit to have to my name. This will also add to my goal of helping the performing arts community become more inclusive and recognizing the power that we have as a community to make a difference politically and socially. As it pertains to the subject matter of the paper, this will be vital in furthering the point that context is key when looking at things that have come from something that is frowned upon today. Tap dancing comes from African slaves not having access to drums or instruments so they turned themselves into the percussion, jazz dance branches from that, and musical theatre dance, and hip hop, and break dance all come from jazz. This can all be used in the bigger picture of helping people recognize their privilege and continuing the fight to stop the whitewashing and sugar coating of history. That also might be the point of my paper and it has only taken me a year and a half to be able to finally put it into words. It looks like my post college career as of now will be me working at Springfield Little Theatre and it is no secret that they have made some very insensitive choices revolving around race over the years. As someone that works in the costume department especially, I have the power to be able to apply the context to things in order to help people not be super insensitive just because they do not know the effect that their actions will have on people that are not them.