ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: LOST PATTERNS:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO TRANSLATION

Rebecca Ann Marie Hill, Master of Fine Arts, 2022

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Lost Patterns was an evening length concert performed March 11–13, 2022, at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in partial fulfillment of the M.F.A. degree in Dance from the University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. *Lost Patterns* investigated the translation process inherent in Appalachian music and dance traditions to discover avenues of experimentation tethered to tradition. This percussive dance work highlighted the way the body, as an instrument, translates music. In collaboration with the cast, *Lost Patterns* excavated three different approaches to translation: melodic replication, improvisation, and sonic abstraction. These approaches invited multiple translations to occur simultaneously in the choreography and music, while acknowledging and honoring the dance lineages present within the performers. This paper is a written account of the creative process behind *Lost Patterns*, with ethnographic context and a historical framework for the dance traditions extrapolated within the work.

LOST PATTERNS: AN INVESTIGATION INTO TRANSLATION

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Advisory Committee:
Professor Sara Pearson, Chair
Sam Crawford, Lecturer
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Dedication

Lost Patterns is dedicated to all the percussive dancers out there who are keeping their dance traditions alive inside themselves and vibrant within their communities.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my cast and design team: Roxy King, Gerson Lanza, Ashton Frech, Paetyn Lewis, Tiffany Ospino, Daniel Coolik, Erik Spangler, Andrés Poch, Becca Janey, Heather Reynolds, and Kira Peck for showing up as their vibrant selves and contributing who they are into *Lost Patterns*. You trusted my creative process, even when I brought a banjo into the space, and you leaned into the journey of the performance of *Lost Patterns*. I especially want to thank Roxy King and Gerson Lanza for their feedback, camaraderie, and footwork, and Erik Spangler and Anna Roberts-Gevalt for the nudge towards experimentation. To my supportive committee members, Sara Pearson, Sam Crawford, Alvin Mayes, and Patrik Widrig, as well as my M.F.A. cohort, thank you all for encouraging me to boldly embrace this vision. To Kate Spanos and Brittany Hicks, thank you for the writing feedback, and to Maggie Laszewski, thanks for exploring the world of improvisation with me. To my mentors and friends within the old-time music community, thank you for being my people and the inspiration for this show. I especially want to thank my mentors, Sharon Leahy, Sandy Silva, Thomas Maupin, Eileen Carson, Lou Maiuri, Mack Samples, Ellen and Eugene Ratcliffe, and Gerry Milnes. Lastly to my parents and close friends, thanks for guiding me through this MFA process. I appreciate you all.

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Introduction

I grew up rural, about a fifteen-minute drive from Hastings, Michigan, a small town with a population of roughly seven thousand. Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young echoed throughout our old farmhouse on repeat.[1] My parents love music and were dedicated to sharing that passion with their children, which caused many family vacations to be scheduled around music festivals. We attended one festival in particular, the Wheatland Music Festival in Remus, Michigan, every September.

Wheatland focused their programming on preserving and promoting traditional music and dance from North America. They defined the traditional arts as those "learned person to person, passed down from each generation to the next, and influenced by culture, family, ethnicity, and era."[2] Attending Wheatland and numerous other small folk festivals caused me to grow up immersed in the Michigan folk music scene in the 1990s and early 2000s amidst a robust folk revival in the United States. The 1990s embraced multiculturalism and was an era where art nonprofits marketed the United States as a melting pot of cultures. The arts were significantly funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, and Wheatland, like other festivals, curated their arts programming with this melting pot ideology.

By attending Wheatland every year, I was exposed to clogging and bluegrass; flatfooting, square dance, and old-time music; Quebecois, Irish music, and step dance; blues, swing, tap, and lindy hop; zydeco, Cajun, two-step, and waltz. As a kid eager to dance, I would attend every dance workshop I could. Therefore, within my body, clogging steps merged with tap vocabulary,

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1. Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young were Americana singer songwriters from the 1970s.
2. "What Are Traditional Arts?," Wheatland Music Organization website, updated May 30, 2013, https://www.wheatlandmusic.org/traditional-arts-weekend/what-are-traditional-arts/.

and Quebecois and Irish step dance crossed over into my improvisation to old-time music. Within each step dance genre was an adherence to the tradition that aimed to keep each dance style pure and uninfluenced by the others. However, the more I learned, the more my archive of steps became a collection of percussive dance vocabulary, and my dancing style coalesced from this process.[3]

The Wheatland Music Festival is where I first saw the Fiddle Puppet Dancers and Rhythm in Shoes Dance Company clogging and flatfooting to live old-time music.[4] I instantly became entranced by the joy that emanated off the stage as conversations were shared between musicians, dancers, and the audience. Following my exposure to clogging, my parents signed me up for dance lessons. At the age of twelve, they sent me to West Virginia during the summer to study dance at the Augusta Heritage Center.[5] This trip initiated a yearly pilgrimage to study dance in West Virginia, where I eventually chose to live full-time. Following the training I received at the Augusta Heritage Center, I was invited to apprentice with Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble and Rhythm in Shoes Dance Company while in high school. However, post-graduation, due to the climate of the arts in 2007, both companies were not in a position to hire a full-time company member. But I kept dancing, and at the age of nineteen, drawn to Appalachian traditional arts, I moved to Elkins, West Virginia, to attend Davis & Elkins College. I ended up living in Elkins for roughly a decade where I worked for the Augusta Heritage Center, conducting dance ethnography and traditional arts programming.

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3. I define percussive dance as a dance form that makes sound intentionally through kinesthetic movement.
4. The Fiddle Puppet Dancers and Rhythm in Shoes were two professional clogging and flatfooting ensembles that toured nationally and internationally during the folk revival of the 1990s and 2000s.
5. Augusta Heritage Center, "About Us," accessed April 3, 2022, https://augustaartsandculture.org/about-us/. The Augusta Heritage Center is a traditional arts nonprofit located in Elkins, West Virginia, dedicated to preserving and promoting roots music, dance, and folklore from the United States.

Appalachian flatfooting captivated me with its dedication to accenting the melody and groove of fiddle music through intricate shifts of weight and complicated foot articulation. Flatfooting footwork is close to the floor, with a relaxed upper body that shifts cross laterally, with an effortless bounce through the knees and ankles. The footwork uses shuffles, slides, digs, brushes, and toe and heel patterns in time to accompany old-time music. Flatfooting occurs in spaces where traditional music is being played, and the dancing is part of the soundscape just as much as the fiddle tunes. Square dance figures, calling patter, flatfoot steps, and the tunes are all oral traditions passed down knee-to-knee and elbow-to-elbow.[6] They are shared in crowded, sweaty dance halls late at night with booze on the tongue, underneath the open sky at outdoor festivals, or after numerous cups of coffee in an inviting community hall. In these traditions there is no clear delineation between who is the teacher and who is the student. Steps are caught on the fly, and the transmission of these traditions is centered around an exchange between two people within a community. From those experiences, I learned to call square dances, play clawhammer banjo, and became part of the local music and dance community in Randolph County, West Virginia.

A vital part of my immersion into Appalachian music and dance is connected to my relationship with folklorist Gerald Milnes and his family. I assisted Milnes during his last two years as the Folk Arts Coordinator at the Augusta Heritage Center. Together, we developed a heritage tourism project, The Mountain Dance Trail, which revitalized square dances in rural communities throughout the state. When I would walk into those dance halls in West Virginia, I felt like I was walking into the Maple Leaf Grange Hall, a community hall in rural Michigan

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6. Patter is a colloquial term for the rhymes and rhythms of square dance calling.

about five miles from my childhood home.[7] Both dance halls share the same wooden floor weathered from generations of dancers, and the sounds of musicians strumming their instruments echo throughout the hall. The grange is where my neighbors, Norma and Bernard Weeks, taught me how to square dance and waltz, and where I learned how to translate my clogging and tap steps from the dance studio into improvisation to live music. Those Tuesday night weekly grange jam sessions were an intergenerational space to gather, a place where community came together to socialize, play music, and dance. Looking back at those memories, I see how my rural upbringing in Michigan laid the groundwork for my deep connection to Appalachian music and dance traditions. There is a humbleness to Appalachian cultural traditions that resonated with me in ways that studio dance practices never have. My understanding of these traditions developed through an immersive participation in Appalachian culture, but also through an understanding of what it was like to grow up in a rural community.

Figure 1: Wheatland Music Festival, 1992.
Becky Hill, age four, dancing on the dance boards in front
of the mainstage. Photo by Dorothy Hill.

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7. The Maple Leaf Grange is a community hall in Barry County, Michigan, that served as meeting place for farmers in the area, but also as a place for dances, music sessions, and maple syrup processing.

Figure 2: Maple Leaf Grange, Nashville, Michigan.
Photo by Michael Barrows.

Figure 3: Helvetia Star Band Dance Hall, Helvetia, West Virginia, 2015.
This photo was captured during the Helvetia Hoot, an old-time festival that I organize annually with Tyler Crawford. Photo by Andrew Carroll.

Chapter 1: Connection to Rurality

The role of improvisation within Appalachia is one of invention and is an engrained aspect of living in rural mountain communities. "Improvisation does not imply 'anything goes,' or an unstructured approach. Structure is what makes improvisation possible," stated scholar Michael Corbett in the *Journal of Research in Rural Education*.[8] Through this lens, I conceive of the mountains as a structure that impacts daily decision-making and incites improvisation. As an example, while living in Elkins, West Virginia, the nearest garden center was a forty-minute drive away. Instead of driving that distance to purchase tomato cages for my garden, I repurposed materials I already had. That creativity is a practice in innovation that emerges when resources are limited. For generations, rural communities have relied on improvisational traditions as a tool used to problem solve, share the workload with others, and to imagine new possibilities.[9]

Today Appalachians still employ multiple livelihood strategies to diversify their income sources.[10] With the world's demand for coal fluctuating during the Depression and World War II, "coal mining families regularly fell back on kin, neighborhood labor and resource pooling to make ends meet through combining gardening and animal husbandry, hunting and fishing, and

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8. Michael Corbett, "Improvisation as a Curricular Metaphor: Imagining Education for a Rural Creative Class," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 28, no. 10 (2013): 8–9, https://sites.psu.edu/jrre/wp-content/uploads/sites/6347/2014/02/28-15.pdf.

9. US Census, "Rural America," accessed April 14, 2022, https://mtgisportal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=49cd4bc9c8eb444ab51218c1d5001ef6. The US Census defines rural as all people, housing, and territory that is not urban.

10. Jefferson C. Boyer, "Reinventing the Appalachian Commons," *Social Analysis* 50, no. 3 (2006): 217–232, https://doi.org/10.3167/015597706780459377.220. Multiple livelihood strategies are where people diversify their income generating and resource gathering to manage risk arising from personal financial crisis. This includes activities that bring in income, as well as unpaid work such as hunting, fishing, foraging, and sharing resources with family and neighbors.

bartering and petty marketing," stated Appalachian scholar Jefferson Boyer.[11] Pooling resources and relying on neighborhood labor is still common within working-class communities, and as a result, these ideologies are prevalent within Appalachian cultural traditions and are echoed within flatfooting.

On Friday nights at the Floyd Country Store in Floyd, Virginia, there are usually more than fifty dancers crowded in front of a live Appalachian string band. The dancers bob up and down, pulsating a groove that mimics the "boom-chuck" rhythm of the guitar and upright bass. From a distance, the dancers all appear to be doing the same step; however, as you navigate the dance floor, you witness how each dancer's footwork embodies their own variations while remaining interlocked with each other. The dancing bodies share a unified sensation while they engage in a soloistic improvisational practice. The labor of holding the rhythm is shared among all the people dancing, while they simultaneously validate each individual's choice making. At the Floyd Country Store, it is less about the virtuosity of each dancer and more about sharing the workload of rhythm. Each individual's improvisations contribute to the collective experience on the dance floor, mirroring a common community structure in Appalachia.

While sharing the same space and dancing to the same tune, dancers catch embellishments and variations from each other and the musicians. The repetitive structure of the tune invites improvisation to occur. In this process, variations are inevitable as the form is passed down from one person to another through oral and kinesthetic transmission.[12] In this way, variation is both part of the "oral tradition," as well as a springboard for improvisation. You can identify variations in the bowing of the fiddle, the rhythm of the clawhammer banjo, and in the

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11. Boyer, "Reinventing the Appalachian Commons," 220.
12. I define variation as a modification or ornamentation added to or subtracted from the tradition as it is transmitted.

ways each individual flatfoot dancer negotiates weightedness and tonality in the sounds of their steps.

Many dancers in a community like the one at the Floyd Country Store share a similar footwork vocabulary, but this vocabulary is not prescribed. Many dancers improvise and "do their own thing."[13] As an improvising percussive dancer myself, the joy of sharing space and collecting steps on the fly is what brings me to the dance floor. When the string band plays a fast fiddle tune between square dances, dancers pack the floor and improvise their own freestyle footwork. The transmission of steps passes between dancers as they sidle up next to each other, mimic each other's steps, and then move onto someone else, repeating this process throughout the duration of the tune. Often practitioners describe this transmission within flatfooting as being "caught, not taught." This process is about catching the weight, musicality, and timbre of the steps and less about perfecting the footwork exactly. Lou Maiuri, a master square caller and clogger from Summersville, West Virginia, describes flatfooting as a "sensation that comes from within in connection to the music."[14]

The invitation to freely express oneself within the structure of the tune, or within the structure of a rural community, holds the potential for people to problem solve and create something new with whatever tools are available. Dance scholar Gail Matthews-DeNatale stated,

> In this stylistic fusion of freedom and group cooperation, traditional mountain dance celebrates the possibility of community members working together to achieve a goal while allowing each person to maintain and develop their unique identity. This ability to operate well as an independent person within a larger group effort was undoubtedly crucial to the collaborative barn raising, farming, and harvesting of agrarian life.[15]

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13. Phil Jamison, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 149.

14. Gerald Milnes and Rebecca Hill, prods, *Reel 'Em Boys, Reel 'Em* (Elkins, WV: Augusta Heritage Productions, 2012), DVD.

15. Gail Matthew-DeNatale, "Wild and Yet Really Subdued: Cultural Change, Stylistic Diversification, and Personal Choice in Traditional Appalachian Dance," in *Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition*

Improvisational traditions in Appalachia are rooted in agrarian work practices, although today the most prevalent industries in West Virginia are healthcare, education, retail, and the food industry.[16] Many of these jobs involve repetitive tasks that depend on the individual contributing to a larger collective. The rhythm prevalent in shared labor practices is embodied in these careers, and in maintaining cultural practices, including the dancing at the Floyd Country Store and other dance halls throughout the Appalachian region.

Therefore, if I define improvisation as the freedom to live within a structure, then flatfooting can be conceptualized as mirroring the rurality of Appalachian living. Structure welcomes improvisation into the process, leaving space for interpretation, individuality, and questions. The "improvising human body is a vessel that allows for imagining, creating, receiving, and interpreting," and reflects an ability to pivot in reaction to present circumstances.[17] This invites each dancer to improvise with the steps they have and innovate or expand upon the tradition to evolve the dance form further. Old-time musicians often speak of getting entranced by the repetitive structure of a fiddle tune, causing them to slip into a meditative state interlocked with others within a jam session.[18] This meditative state is where musicians and dancers season the fiddle tune with their own variations. What if I linger on this note just a little longer? What if I try on someone else's dance steps; can I catch what they're doing? Why not add footwork as I navigate through this square dance? Why not ask my neighbor for help changing my oil as opposed to paying for it? What if I reuse this metal frame as a trellis in my garden instead of

in America's Southeast and Beyond, ed. Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995), 123.

16. I use West Virginia as an example of Appalachia because it is the only state completely within the Appalachian Mountain region, and is where I lived for almost ten years.

17. Rebecca Dirksen, *After the Dance, the Drums Are Heavy: Carnival, Politics, and Musical Engagement in Haiti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 16.

18. Ben Nelson, Emily Schaad, and Hannah Johnson (old-time musicians), conversation with author, November 23, 2021. Meditative experiences in jam sessions are common within the old-time music community.

buying something new? There is space in these questions to evolve, and to create something new that offers possibilities that might not otherwise be considered. Each individual's choice and expressivity reflect the question of what it means to be Appalachian and serves as a source of identity. As I compare the improvisation found in the economy and culture of Appalachia to the music and dance traditions from the region, I see commonalities dictated by structures and molded by choice.

Acts of Transfer

I always returned to Appalachia because the community, the cultural practices, and the landscape felt like home to me. I learned to flatfoot through a process that performance studies scholar Diana Taylor describes as a "vital act of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated or 'twice-behaved' behavior."[19] I traded steps with dancers informally in the corners of dance halls amidst a bustling square dance or learned a banjo tune in the kitchen as a meal cooked. My mentors became my friends, and they shared their homes, meals, and steps with me as a way of passing on the tradition. Percussive dance scholar Janet Schroeder calls this "ongoingness," which is a "philosophy of continuation, of maintenance, of preservation and perpetuation, an enduring practice and constant outpouring."[20] This intimate ongoingness between student and teacher is an essential value within folk traditions in which learning comes from nurturing relationships and spending time together.

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19. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 2–52.

20. Janet Schroeder, "Ethnic and Racial Formation on the Concert Stage: A Comparative Analysis of Tap Dance and Appalachian Step Dance" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2018), 8.

Because I grew up in a multicultural folk revival, mentors from many different percussive dance traditions shared their ongoingness with me. This caused a variety of step dance traditions to cross-pollinate within my body. I collected steps and stories from mentors and then translated what they taught me into footwork that would fit within the structures of Appalachian old-time music. By interjecting percussive dance vocabulary outside of Appalachian traditions, I participated in a process that mirrored how vernacular dance forms have evolved in the United States. Access and resources caused tap and flatfooting to become the primary foundation of my dance vocabulary. The history, stories, rhythmic sensibilities, and weight shifts of both tap and flatfooting mixed together in my moving body, within my own physical archive. Like all vernacular artforms from the United States, this archive is beautiful, complex, and challenging. Music journalist Justin Hiltner described the embodied archive of American music and dance as follows:

> American music and dance have always gone hand-in-hand. Immigrants, bringing their folk traditions, art, and music to North America, combined and cross-pollinated with and stole and borrowed from the art and music of Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and African Americans. In that beautiful, conflicted, human melting pot way we arrived at the incredible roots genres of our modern time.[21]

Drawn to percussive dance traditions and improvisation, I grapple with the fact that my embodied archive contains multiple vernacular dance forms from the United States while simultaneously valuing the possibility that exists within the cross-pollination of these dance forms. Collaboration across racial divides has resulted in a large amount of interracial music and dance repertoire in the United States. However, Jim Crow laws, commercialization, and a world shaped by white supremacy has and will continue to reinforce the color line between black and

21. Justin Hiltner, "Nic Gareiss: The Subtle Art of Queering Traditional Dance," *The Bluegrass Situation*, August 31, 2018, https://thebluegrasssituation.com/read/nic-gareiss-the-subtle-art-of-queering-traditional-dance/.

white music and dance traditions.[22] As an academic scholar, I have been conditioned to see tap and flatfooting as separated by race; however, this perspective often ignores a long history of dancers borrowing, mixing, and sampling percussive dance forms alongside each other.

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22. Cultural Historian Karl Hagstrom Miller discusses the parallel process that occurred within blues and country music in his book, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

Chapter 2: History of Tap & Appalachian Flatfooting

When working with vernacular dance forms from the United States, steps are history. They contain the experiences of our ancestors and the world in which they lived. These vernacular dance forms were passed down through malleable oral histories. Race and economic factors shaped—and continue to shape—who is given credit for what dance step or tune. As a choreographer, it is my responsibility to piece together fragments of these histories to acknowledge the lineages of these dance forms. I use the word lineage to describe the social, political, and cultural landscapes that gave rise to a dance form. This context informs how the dance is taught, embodied, and valued. Vernacular dance carries the ideologies and histories of a community, and each dancer embodies those stories when they dance.

Tap dance and Appalachian flatfooting are both indigenous United States percussive dance forms that developed out of an Irish-Afro fusion in the early 1700s, starting with the cross racial interaction between Irish indentured servants and enslaved West Africans in the southern part of the United States.[23] Both dance traditions embrace the body as a musical instrument by using precise rhythmic footwork to sculpt worlds of sound. The merging of West African and Irish step-dance is witnessed in the slight bend in the knees, relaxed upper torso, and interaction with the floor through intricate footwork. Tap dance and flatfooting share similar origins but evolved in different environments—tap dance migrated to urban areas, and flatfooting to Appalachia. During the 1800s and 1900s, Irish, African American, and enslaved performers interacted within the minstrel circuit in urban areas of the northeastern part of the United States.

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23. Constance Valis Hill's article, "Tap Dance in America: A Very Short History," (New York City Public Library online) expands on the origins of tap dance, and she is a strong proponent of this research.

Amid this period, tap dance began to thrive in urban areas and continued to parallel the musical genre that would become jazz music, while flatfooting remained tethered to Appalachian string band music and rural landscapes. Tap dance scholar Constance Valis Hill states that tap dance evolved over a three-hundred-year process and "developed as a musical form parallel to jazz music, sharing rhythmic motifs, polyrhythm, multiple meters, elements of swing, and structured improvisation."[24] This parallelism still exists today as tap dance evolves alongside hip-hop, rhythm and blues, jazz, swing, and many other musical genres. Meanwhile, Appalachian flatfooting has continued to parallel rural fiddle traditions from the Appalachian Mountain region of the United States, mainly Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. Although it is a common misconception that Appalachia is isolated due to geography, the region has always had access to pop culture through traveling minstrel shows, vaudeville, radio, and later television.

In the early 19th century, blackface minstrelsy was the largest pop culture phenomenon in the United States, and its sensationalism reached rural areas as well as city centers. As jazz musician W.C. Handy put it, "The best talent of that generation came down the same drain…the minstrel show got them all."[25] Clogging, flatfooting, buckdance, and tap all co-existed, and influenced each other in ways that are inextricable. The banjo, a stringed instrument with a drumhead, was the foundation of the minstrel show. Born as a result of the encounters between Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and South America, the banjo reflects the United States in a world shaped by slavery. As scholar Laurent Dubois states, "The banjo has had many meanings…the sound of progress, the sound of protest—the sound of America. Most of all, the

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24. Hill, "Tap Dance in America," 2.
25. Brian Seibert, *What the Eye Hears: A History of Tap Dancing* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016), 109.

banjo has been the sound of solidarity, of gathering in the midst of exile, of being together, and in so doing being able to recount the past and imagine a future."[26] The banjo in many ways is a symbol of the complicated origins of all vernacular traditions from the United States and sits at the intersection where tap and flatfooting originated. Only through acknowledging this past are we able to "imagine a future."

Blackface minstrelsy was eventually replaced by vaudeville, and its performance circuits traveled through rural and urban areas, including Appalachia. Rural Appalachian audiences witnessed tap dance being performed for decades on stage. Local dancers attempted to replicate steps they saw performed, interjecting them into their own regional music and dance styles. This mimicry fueled overlapping footwork vocabulary between tap and flatfooting, including shuffles, digs, and slides, with local variations emerging across the region. Both tap and flatfooting validate mimicry as an entry point into improvisation, choreography, and innovation, while respecting and naming each dance step's origins. Constance Valis Hill defines mimicry as "necessary for the mastery of the form. The dynamic and synergistic process of copying to invent something new is most important."[27] Steps such as the Charleston, the popular jazz move from the 1920s, ebbed its way into flatfooting repertoire. Similarly, the paradiddle can be found in D. Ray White's flatfooting vocabulary.[28] This interplay is still present today as Caleb Teicher manipulates flatfooting using Robert Dotson's Tennessee walking step in "Bzzz,"[29] a 2019

26. Laurent Dubois, *The Banjo: America's African Instrument* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 384.

27. Hill, "Tap Dance in America," 2.

28. A paradiddle is known as a paddle and roll; it is a sixteenth note step popularized by master tap dancer John Bubbles and was apparent in D. Ray White's dancing. D. Ray was a flatfoot dancer from Boone County, WV.

29. The Tennessee walking step is a sixteenth note flatfooting step created by Robert Dotson of Sugar Grove, North Carolina, which was popularized by the Fiddle Puppet Dancers and is similar to a paradiddle in tap dance. It consists of a step, scuff, drag, brush, step.

choreographic collaboration with beatboxer Chris Celiz.[30] The commercialization of music forms associated with tap and flatfooting also fueled this mimicry process.[31] Clogging and flatfooting were seen and heard on the Grand Ole Opry and National Barn Dance, while tap dance was prevalent in traveling shows and Hollywood films. Since both percussive dance forms were accessible to mainstream media, they were able to borrow steps from each other while simultaneously creating two distinct United States percussive dance forms.

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30. Gia Kourlas, "What Goes into This Minute of Tap," *New York Times*, July 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/26/arts/dance/what-goes-into-this-minute-of-tap.html.

31. Miller, *Segregating Sound*. Miller's book describes the parallel process that occurred within blues and country music.

Chapter 3: Shift to Inquiry

As a dancer steeped in percussive dance, I chose to seek my MFA in dance at the University of Maryland within a postmodern dance program. My intention was not to become a professional postmodern dancer, but to learn and absorb the methodologies and choreographic techniques prevalent within postmodern and contemporary dance forms. During this journey, translation surfaced as a practice that guided my educational MFA trajectory.[32] Translation wasn't a new concept for me as it is an inherent part of the "passing it on" process that occurs within folk traditions. However, translating movement vocabulary and choreographic techniques into my percussive dance mediums caused new neural and physical connections to occur within my body and mind daily. The experience of constant translation was humbling and tiring at times and being surrounded by colleagues with extensive careers in postmodern, contemporary, and ballet forms caused discomfort to surface. Instead of letting the discomfort completely shape my experience, I let it inspire me to ask questions.

The shift from discomfort to inquiry deepened my choreographic practice and creative processing.[33] It caused me to think about developing choreographies using the materials of percussive dance and rearranging them as if I was a painter working from a color palette. This allowed me to grant myself permission to detach from the adherence to tradition in both tap and flatfooting to discover potentiality. I began to develop choreography from a broader percussive dance perspective, which paralleled the choreographic concepts my colleagues were employing in their postmodern and contemporary investigations. Working within the medium of percussive

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32. I refer to translation as the conversion of something from one medium into another.
33. Liz Lerman, the master artist for the 2018 OneBeat program, shared this perspective during her residency, and it has since shaped my outlook on discomfort in an entirely new way.

dance challenged me to constantly think about how the body generates sound through a corporeal, sonic, and visual approach to generating choreography.

Looking at footwork vocabulary through a broader lens of percussive dance gave me the opportunity to let dance forms rub up against each other. This provided me with distance to see the complicated floor patterns existent in square dances and extract elements of them without replicating them. The traditional old-time music and dance community was so instilled in me that it took the distance and perspective of graduate school, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, to step outside of the tradition and look at it from new angles. This MFA program allowed me to explore the tension between tradition and innovation, sampling, merging, and blending elements of tap, flatfooting, and postmodern dance to create original contemporary choreographies. Within that process I was able to ask myself, "What variations can I contribute to Appalachian percussive dance? What is my role and what are my responsibilities as a choreographer working within vernacular dance traditions? Where can I invite collaboration into the space to evolve percussive dance further?"

The dance traditions I was extrapolating conjure up history every time I dance the Tennessee walking step,[34] do a paddle 'n' roll,[35] or play Ernie Carpenter's "Elk River Blues" on the clawhammer banjo.[36] Many of the tradition bearers I studied from have passed on, but their steps and tunes remain in circulation because they exist within my repertoire. Through

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34. The Tennessee walking step is a sixteenth note flatfooting step created by the late Robert Dotson of Sugar Grove, North Carolina. I met Dotson at the Appalachian Studies Association Conference and we became friends later in his life. The Tennessee walking step became a standardized flatfooting basic step that was taught by the Fiddle Puppet Dancers, Green Grass Cloggers, and many others.

35. "International Tap Dance Hall of Fame, Biographies, John Bubbles," American Tap Dance Hall of Fame, March 1, 2022, https://www.atdf.org/hall-of-fame-bios. Also known as a paradiddle, a paddle 'n' roll is a sixteenth-note tap step popularized by master tap dancer John Bubbles.

36. Traditional Tune Archive, "Elk River Blues," accessed April 1, 2022, https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Elk_River_Blues/. "Elk River Blues" is a fiddle tune composed in 1985 by the late Ernie Carpenter of Sutton, West Virginia. He wrote the tune as he watched his childhood home flood due to the construction of the Sutton Dam by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

embodying Appalachian old-time traditions, I am able to keep these traditions alive. Folklore scholars Ray Cashman, Tom Mould, and Pravina Shukla define tradition as a process and a resource in *The Individual and Tradition*. Tradition as a *process* disrupts the association of tradition with stasis, and instead frames tradition as simultaneously embracing variations, innovation, and evolution. Tradition as a *resource* labels it as a raw material inherited by each generation, a malleable substance that an individual can mold. Reimagining tradition as a resource invites the artist to become "a crafty recycler who constructs new possibilities out of available handed-down raw materials, meeting present needs."[37] As a practitioner of traditional arts, I collect knowledge from dancers, musicians, and artisans. And as a choreographer, I recycle and reuse those materials to devise choreographic works.

I approach choreography as a process of curation developed collaboratively with my cast. It is circumstantial and shaped to reflect the contributions of my cast, and the lineages they embody. The work has a life of its own, and my role as choreographer is to create structure, direction, or a guiding question to elicit input from the entire ensemble. I ask the cast throughout the process, "What do you hear? What do you bring to the table? How does it feel for you?" The collaboration becomes a communal practice that invites the instincts of each performer onto the stage and into the work. This approach echoes the ongoingness that was shared with me by my mentors and creates a space for collaborative exchange. Through an oral and physical transmission process, my dance mentors taught me footwork and then asked me, "What are you going to do with it?" In conversation with Roxy King, a professional tap dancer and member of my cast, we discussed how both tap and flatfooting traditions carry a sense of responsibility to share what you know with dancers you trust. King stated if we don't share and create new

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37. Ray Cashman, Tom Mould, and Pravina Shukla, eds, *The Individual and Tradition: Folkloristic Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 3–10.

footwork, "the dance form won't grow. It will stop with me." The goal is not to replicate or mass produce dancing in a certain style; it is to create space for individual contributions to expand the possibilities of percussive dance further.

Lost Patterns

In my MFA thesis investigation, *Lost Patterns,* I examine Appalachian folk traditions to reconsider a creative relationship to translation and variation. I focus on the way the body, as an instrument, translates Appalachian music. By inviting multiple artists from a variety of percussive dance and music traditions into collaboration, I welcomed numerous translations to occur simultaneously. Together with five dancers—Ashton Frech, Roxy King, Gerson Lanza, Paetyn Lewis, and Tiffany Ospino; two musicians—Daniel Coolik and Erik Spangler; and three designers—Heather Reynolds (lighting), Becca Janney (costumes), and Andrés Poch (projections and set); we devised an experiential performance that investigated translation to unearth avenues for experimentation tethered to tradition. In collaboration with my cast, we transcribed and transposed Appalachian music into choreography through three different approaches to translation: melodic replication, improvisation, and sonic abstraction.

I translated the musical phrasings and structures of several Appalachian tunes into choreographic material using melodic replication as the foundation. Throughout this process, I tracked where and when I felt an impulse to resist the replication, and where I wanted to sink into the trance of melody. I used melodic replication as a mode to question and understand the way the body is depicted as an instrument and how I specifically use that instrument.

Using this choreographic process, we wanted to invite the audience to listen to the body speak. The tunes selected to translate, using melodic replication, were several crooked

Appalachian tunes. A crooked tune refers to a tune that diverges from expected timing or phrasing; for example, a tune with extra beats added to or dropped from a phrase, or a tune with multiple parts that are arranged in peculiar ways. Most of the tunes selected for *Lost Patterns* are crooked and share a regional hyper-specificity to West Virginia. These crooked tunes twist and turn in ways a paradiddle from tap dance might better serve the choreography than a clogging basic. The crossroads where percussive dance forms merge is the place where collaboration guided my choreography in *Lost Patterns*.

Improvisation is a communal process within tap and flatfooting, and the exchange between the individual and the community is what I wanted to preserve in the choreographic work of *Lost Patterns.* I explored choreographic composition through improvisation as a means of translating in real-time and framing an idea from beginning to end. The conversational tone improvisation ignites is a rigorous practice valued in both tap and flatfooting. In fact, improvisation is integral to all vernacular dance forms from the United States, and it encompasses many approaches depending on setting, tradition, function, and other factors. Jonathan David Jackson points out that for, "vernacular dancing in its original sociocultural contexts, where there is no division between improvisation and composition…improvisation means the creative structuring, or choreographing, of human movement in the moment."[38] The questions "What if?" and "Why not?" fuel improvisation and my creative work, while also reflecting the economic and cultural landscape of the Appalachian Mountains.

As a way of processing the complexities of my music and dance lineage, I collaborated with Erik Spangler, and together we translated folk traditions through technology, through sonic abstraction. We collected and sampled sound clips from my embodied archive and Appalachia,

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38. Naomi Bragin, "Shot and Captured: Turf Dance, YAK films, and the Oakland, California, RIP Project," *TDR/The Drama Review* 58 vol. 2 (2014): 99–114, https://doi.org/10.1162/DRAM_a_00349.

combining them with tones generated by a modular synthesizer to create a mosaic of live and archival materials. By digging into how these traditions could be repurposed and transformed, I was able to activate generative avenues for experimentation. For traditions to endure, adaptation is essential.

By welcoming each dancer's lineage into the work, we were able to highlight the moments where we shared the same embodied knowledge, without compromising everyone's individuality. A shuffle is a shuffle across many percussive dance forms, but the way the body articulates that shuffle is dependent on each dancer's training. By bringing multiple percussive dance forms together in conversation, I wanted to highlight the visual and sonic diversity offered by percussive dance. Gerson Lanza and Roxy King have spent their lives steeped in tap dance, and they currently perform in numerous professional tap ensembles. Tiffany Ospino is trained in flamenco, hip-hop, modern, and bachata; Ashton Frech in hip-hop and tap; and Paetyn Lewis in modern, hip-hop, tap, and Irish step dance. My training includes an array of North American percussive dance styles with focus on Appalachian flatfooting, clogging, and tap, influences of modern, and a variety of social dance practices. Although we came from diverse dance backgrounds, the entire dance cast shared the vocabulary of tap dance, which caused tap to become the dance form we began to generate choreography from. Similarly, I chose two musicians from different musical backgrounds who shared an interest in improvisation and Appalachian music. Daniel Coolik is a multi-instrumentalist who grew up steeped in bluegrass and Appalachian old-time music. He now resides in Lafayette, Louisiana, and can be found playing Congolese rumba, jazz, Cajun, and zydeco music. Erik Spangler is a composer, DJ, and experimental musician from Baltimore, Maryland. Every cast member offered their own perspective into the making of this choreographic work, and their participation within the

collaborative process helped shape the show. Therefore, *Lost Patterns* is a collection of translations developed by the whole cast that welcomes each individual's interpretations into the creative process.

Road Map

The performance of *Lost Patterns* was created to provide a road map for the audience to follow, and it is my intent for my writing to do the same. While creating *Lost Patterns,* I navigated between the past and present by scaffolding the sonic and visual experience to highlight the intricacies of the passing of time. The choreography reflected the cyclical nature of the collective human experience, guiding the audience through the evolution of a day, a season, or a lifetime. My writing similarly sheds light on the chronological evolution of my creative process into translation.

To analyze the evolution of the work, I first want to provide a guide through the performance. *Lost Patterns* took the audience on a journey, starting with the sound of the *a cappella* human voice, and ending with a conversation between a dancer and a modular synthesizer. Most tunes throughout the show were reimaginings of traditional Appalachian old-time music, except for the jazz standard "Willow Weep for Me," and several original compositions by Erik Spangler and Daniel Coolik.[39] The juxtaposition between jazz and old-time was referenced throughout the show in both sonic and embodied ways.

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39. "Willow Weep for Me" is a popular jazz standard composed in 1932 by Ann Ronell.

The show opened with humming and lilting that referenced the melody of "Boll Weevil,"[40] inviting the dancers to improvise solos on a step-a-tune at center stage.[41] This communal experience transformed into a conversation between acoustic banjo and footwork. The footwork replicated the melody of the old-time tune "Falls of Richmond," and the banjo provided a rhythmic drone to propel the choreography.[42] This conversation ended with a virtuosic tap solo from King, where she referenced the historical exchange between banjo and tap dance.

I then entered playing "Elk River Blues" on banjo, which aimed to introduce the question of who is musician and who is dancer within the work, and highlighted how those roles are interchangeable. "Elk River Blues" was a trio that embraced full body movement vocabulary and welcomed electric guitar into the translation process. This was followed by "Nine Pin Willow," a choreography that remixed social dance practices, asking the musicians and dancers to move throughout the work. King, Lanza, and I then performed "Greek Melody," a trio that negotiated between tap and flatfooting vocabulary with excerpts of improvisation.[43] As part of this trio, Spangler began to interject his soundscape, guiding the audience into "Dirge for the Holler," and welcoming them into experimentation.[44] "Step-a-Tune Soundweb," a duet for flatfooting and modular synthesizer, dove fully into experimentation and referenced sound samples from Appalachia. *Lost Patterns* ended by returning to the vocalizations of humming to signify the cyclical nature of folk traditions and life.

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40. "Boll Weevil" is a traditional old-time tune often played on clawhammer banjo; this version comes from the stylings of Dwight Diller.

41. Similar to a tap board, a "step-a-tune" is a colloquial term for a wooden dance board common within old-time music traditions; they are often made of plywood and are usually around 3x3 feet in size.

42. The traditional Appalachian fiddle tune, "Falls of Richmond," can be traced back to 1845 to the Hammons family of Pocahontas County, West Virginia.

43. "Greek Melody" is an Appalachian fiddle tune that was passed down to me from the playing of the late George Lee Hawkins from Bath County, Kentucky.

44. "Dirge from the Holler" is an original composition by Erik Spangler.

The choreography was a fast-paced evolution through sound that investigated translation through embodiment. Transitions throughout the performance and this writing impart the knowledge of mentors, scholars, and friends, placing them in conversation with my creative process. These voices provide context and create a picture larger than I could illustrate alone. This written thesis provides a window into the creative process of *Lost Patterns* by stepping the reader chronologically through the choreographic investigations into translation in the order they were presented in the performance.

Figure 4: Pre-show projections and set design look for *Lost Patterns*.
Projection and Set Design by Andrés Poch. Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

Chapter 4: Body as Instrument

I'm a dancer that likes to dance to whatever music is being played or whatever tune is being played. I try to dance to that tune and try to match my sounds with that tune.
–Thomas Maupin[45]

My percussive dance training taught me to regard the physical body as a musical instrument, and that approach granted me opportunities to participate in music residencies where I was the only dancer present. In 2018, I was selected as a OneBeat Fellow in a cultural diplomacy program through the US State Department and Found Sound Nation.[46] Respected as both a dancer and musician, I collaborated with thirty-one musicians from around the world. In 2021, I served as a Strathmore Artist-in-Residence with six other musicians from the DC area.[47] These experiences introduced me to intricate musical ideas and trained me to consider crafting choreography in ways that guide the listener through a sonic concept.

I entered my MFA program immediately after the OneBeat tour and was surprised to discover the way I interpreted the body as an instrument clashed with the ideologies of several of my colleagues and professors. I had always conceived of the body as an instrument from a purely musical interpretation. Reading Marcel Mauss's "Techniques of the Body" within my first semester at the University of Maryland introduced me to seeing the body as a technical and mechanical instrument. Mauss states, "The body is man's first and foremost natural instrument. Or more accurately… man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time his first

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45. Thomas Maupin, conversation with author, January 3, 2022. Thomas Maupin is a buckdancer from Murfreesboro, TN, and a 2017 NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) National Heritage Fellow.

46. OneBeat brings musicians (ages 19–35) from around the world to a region of the US for one month each to collaboratively write, produce, and perform original music, and develop strategies for arts-based social engagement. OneBeat is a collaboration between Found Sound Nation and the US State Department.

47. The Strathmore Artist-in-Residence Program is a flagship program of Strathmore's Institute for Artistic and Professional Development. Every year, a class of six are chosen to benefit from the support of mentor musicians, professional development seminars, and extensive performance opportunities.

technical means, is his body."[48] In Mauss's 1934 essay, he approached the body as if it were a machine by examining the techniques of the body according to human efficiency. Whereas tap dance scholar Constance Valis Hill described how Savion Glover uses his body as an instrument through visualizing,[49] "his tap shoe as a drum—the inside toe of the metal tap is a hi-hat, the outside toe the snare, the inside ball of the foot is the top tom-tom, the outside rim of the foot is the cymbals, his left heel is the bass drum, and the right heel the floor tom-tom."[50] The way Glover embodies instrumentation distills tonality and nuance in his footwork in the same way a musician would use their instrument. Mauss and Glover's varying interpretations of the body as an instrument challenged me to ask myself, "How do I use this instrument? How do I choreograph with the instrument of the body, as a musical instrument?"

I generate choreography from a sonic foundation first. Sometimes it is a collaboration with a musician, music externally played out of a speaker, or a solo practice done *a cappella*. Ethnochoreologist Catherine Foley points out that percussive dancers merge sound and gesture into "one within the dancer's body, and although percussive dancers perform to and are inspired by music, they also make their own music."[51] Foley's distinction here acknowledges that within percussive dance forms, the body uses gestures to create sound, to create music. That sonic intuitiveness expanded when I started playing clawhammer banjo. My musicality as a dancer shifted from a purely rhythmic design to merging melody and rhythm together to create one sound. Now when I create a choreography I consider, "Where does the musical motif repeat?

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48. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in *Incorporations*, Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, eds. (New York: Zone, 1992), 461.

49. Savion Glover is a revered rhythm tap dancer who became known for directing and choreographing *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk,* among others.

50. Hill, "Tap Dance in America,"15.

51. Catharine Foley, "Percussive Relations: An Exploration of Percussive Dance at Tráth na gCos, 2002," in *Close to the Floor: Irish Dance from the Boreen to Broadway*, eds. Mick Moloney, J'aime Morrison, and Colin Quigley (Madison, WI: Macater Press, 2009), 55.

What is a sibling musical phrase to this motif? Can I layer in other phrases, other time

signatures? Is the dance offering texture to this tune or a melodic sensibility? Is the footwork at

the same frequency of volume and tonality as the music being played? Am I dancing on the front

edge of the beat or the back edge of the beat? What dynamics are being implemented?" Driven

by these questions, I excavated my inclination towards melody to understand the ways in which

melody can be translated through percussive dance movement.

Listening to Flesh Speak

       A vibration can be the sound of bodies in tune –S. Ahmed[52]

       I chose to start *Lost Patterns* with the vocalization of hums to teach the audience to listen

to "flesh speak."[53] Each individual's utterances rippled through our bodies into the audience,

resonating sound. The tone and timbre of an individual's voice is identifiable, and yet the voice

can seamlessly blend into harmonic unison with others. As stated by ethnomusicologists Feld

and Fox, the voice is "an embodied expression of social agency… a metaphor for difference, a

key representational trope for identity, power, conflict, social position, and agency."[54] I wanted

to introduce the individual as part of a larger community through the sound of voices

interlocking and clashing, creating dissonance and harmony. Inspired by Pauline Oliveros'

tuning meditation score, we hummed long notes, attuning to the other voices in the room before

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52. Sara Ahmed, "Not in the Mood," *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 82, (2014): 13–28. Project MUSE. https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/30966.

53. Jade Power-Sotomayor, "Corporeal Sounding: Listening to Bomba Dance, Listening to Puertorriqueñxs," *Performance Matters* 6, no. 2 (2021): 45, https://doi.org/10.7202/1075798ar.

54. Alessandro Duranti, ed., *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, Blackwell Companions to Anthropology, vol.1 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 161.

homing in on the key of D minor.[55] Each dancer entered the piece sonically before their bodies

entered the stage to signal the significance of the body sounding to the audience.

In the opening sequence of *Lost Patterns*, I was interested in transferring the melody of

the tune from the clawhammer banjo to the voice to the footwork, holding all melodic knowledge

within the body. In many percussive dance forms, there is a vocal tradition that mimics the

melody. In Ireland and Scotland, it is called lilting, and "involves improvising non-lexical

vocables to dance tunes."[56] In tap dance this is called scatting, which is an improvisatory vocal

styling used by musicians, dancers, and singers to emphasize the rhythmic complexities found

within jazz. In both tap and flatfooting, it is common for dancers to sing the rhythms of steps as a

memorization and pedagogical tactic. Embracing this shared technique, I had the cast use non

lexical vocables of ba da de dum to convey the melody of "Boll Weevil," and to provide music

generated solely from the body for each dancer to improvise to.

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55. Pauline Oliveros was a composer, accordionist, and a central figure in the development of post-war experimental and electronic music.

56. Catherine Mullins, "Blah, Blah, Blah: Making Sense of Nonsense in Irish Vocal Music," *Musical Offerings* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 87–117, https://core.ac.uk/reader/25545700. Non-Lexical vocables are nonsense syllables used in a wide variety of music.

Figure 5: Opening to *Lost Patterns*.
Becky Hill dances solo on a step-a-tune. Projections and Set Design by Andrés Poch,
Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds, and Costume Design by Becca Janney.
Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

I entered the stage during the humming section and made my way to a small step-a-tune

centered on stage. The step-a-tune is at the rhythmic heart of old-time music. Flatfoot dancers

carry these boards throughout festivals, setting them down at impromptu jam sessions. Often one

step-a-tune is used for multiple dancers to take turns improvising to the driving momentum of a

string band tune. The exchange is often a playful one, and I've learned many lessons on

musicality, rhythm, and expression by trading steps on these small boards. Alone on the board, I

felt as if I was calling out to others, mentors who have passed on, friends I haven't seen for years

due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the musicians and dancers who I never met but whose

sounds live within my body. As I explored the sonic possibility of the step-a-tune, the footwork

was simple, slow, segmented, and grounded. I shifted my weight slowly, transferring from a

listening attunement to creating an audible sound. Moments passed before my call was answered

by Erik Spangler—a musician in the cast—clapping a simple syncopated rhythm, followed by

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the rest of the cast trickling into the physical space one by one. They entered as individuals with splashes of improvisation, establishing a conversation that grew as each dancer took a turn improvising on the step-a-tune. Within vernacular dance traditions, being conversational is valued; it keeps vernacular dance forms social, and it's the place where you can bring your questions with you. It is the place where you reveal who you are and ask, "What do you think about this?" Being conversational requires listening and acknowledging what has been said prior to offering a response.

Melodic Replication

In a duet with Roxy King, we replicated, transcribed, and transferred the melodic structure of the traditional Appalachian tune "Falls of Richmond" into choreography that combined both flatfooting and tap vocabulary. There are many variations and renditions of "Falls of Richmond," as the tune has circulated through the old-time music scene for generations. I found myself most intrigued by the unusual clawhammer banjo stylings of Dwight Diller, an outsider artist from Pocahontas County, West Virginia, in his version of the tune. In Appalachian old-time music, the clawhammer banjo and flatfooting share similar musical roles, both manipulating rhythm and melody, within a jam session. This interchangeability provided us with innumerable ways to approach and problem-solve replicating the melody within the footwork in *Lost Patterns*.

Through a deliberate process, we slowed down the music and replayed segments over and over again. King and I were able to transfer the musical phrases, structure, rhythmic sequencing, variations, and timbre of Diller's banjo playing into footwork. I call this translation process melodic replication. Through this process, we were able to intimately know the idiosyncrasies of

Diller's banjo playing, causing his musical presence to become a third collaborator, and igniting a conversation between the archival source material we were replicating and our dancing. As a flatfoot dancer, I often learn tunes on the fly at impromptu jam sessions. By the second repetition of the tune, I can replicate several of the variations and melodic accents, but I rarely get to intimately learn a tune and all of the variations it holds. Melodic replication provided a structure that forced me to excavate flatfooting's ability to accent a melody and duplicate the structures inherent in old-time tunes.

Appalachian old-time tunes embrace a repetitive structure, most commonly in an AABB combination in a 4/4 time signature. For a standard or straight tune within Appalachian old-time music, there are two parts, A and B. Each part consists of four bars, and often the four bars of the A-part are played twice (AA) for thirty-two counts or eight bars of music, followed by the B-part played twice (BB). The structure of "Falls of Richmond" is not a straight old-time tune; it has four different parts, ABCD. Diller rearranged the structure to be played ABC / BABAB / ABC / BABA, eliminating the D part from the tune. Not every version of "Falls of Richmond" shares this specific structure; this pattern is unique to Diller's version. Intrigued by his sequencing, King and I followed his specific structure as a way to organize the footwork we generated. After listening to several other versions of "Falls of Richmond," we chose to create space to interject the forgotten D part into our choreography. The arrangement we settled on was ABC / BABA / DDD / A, transitioning directly into an improvisational solo from King that merged the sounds of banjo and tap dance. By mimicking the structures of this tune, we were able to figure out where there was space for us to insert our own variations while staying loyal to the source material.

When I started working on this choreography, I intended for the dance and music to play the same melody in unison, to train the audience to hear melody within the footwork. However,

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we realized having three voices—clawhammer banjo and two percussive dancers—in unison, using the same melodic phrasing, was too much of one thing. After becoming fluent in the melody with our footwork, we felt an impulse to resist the replication, and began to layer rhythmic phrases over top of the melody by interjecting elements of contrapuntal canon. To disrupt and highlight the trance-like state of the tune, we employed unison, call-and-response, and improvisational solos. These interruptions kept the choreography conversational, which was a tone we wanted to preserve throughout the piece.

Unsure of how to arrange the music, we sent a recording of just our footwork at 84 bpm to Daniel Coolik, multi-instrumentalist and cast member, and asked him to compose a tune to the melody he heard within the footwork. I was curious about what would happen when a dancer transposes the melody of a traditional tune and teaches it to a musician without the musician ever hearing the source material. This game of sonic telephone was an experiment that didn't lead us to the results we were hoping for. The music composed on fiddle didn't replicate the feeling of the original tune. It almost had a circus-like vaudevillian sensation, while the original tune, "Falls of Richmond," was a somber solo banjo tune. In this process, we learned that footwork has limitations on how it can replicate melody. Footwork can reference the rhythmic sequencing in melody, but it does not have the same access to tonality that other instruments do. Tonality evokes mood and emotion in ways that a purely rhythmic instrument cannot fully duplicate. Therefore, we went back to the drawing board and tried the dance *a cappella* to a metronome, and something finally felt right. In the end, we chose to eliminate both the original banjo tune of "Falls of Richmond" and Coolik's original composition, to create space for the choreography to interpret the melody on its own. We settled on having the banjo provide a repetitious drone-like

groove that slowly became more intricate throughout the piece, to support the melodic sequencing within the footwork.

This choreography asked the dance to serve as the lead musician, challenging the audience to see and hear sonic intricacies within footwork. Or as bomba dance scholar Jade Power-Sotomayor described, the dancers were "seen and heard, claiming space and sound, occupying time and place, listening to find the rhythmic gaps into which flesh can be sonically inserted."[57] Within the "Falls of Richmond" choreography, King and I claimed space and sound, guiding the ear to listen as we explored the body's ability to create music. I was curious if the dance on its own could pull the audience through the process of listening and identifying the footwork as the main melodic instrumentation without the banjo reinforcing the melody. This choreography tested our ability to "dance the tune," and caused us to ask if footwork alone can hold the melody.[58]

57. Power-Sotomayor, "Corporeal Sounding," 43–59.
58. Percussive dancer Nic Gareiss coined the phrase "dance the tune." Dancing the tune is a celebrated skill within Appalachian dance traditions.

Figure 6: "Falls of Richmond."
Performers: Roxy King, Daniel Coolik, and Becky Hill. Projections and Set Design by Andrés Poch, Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds, and Costume Design by Becca Janney.
Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

Embodied Glitches

To deepen my exploration into melody as a choreographic prompt, I revisited a solo I had created in 2017 to "Elk River Blues," and translated it into a trio. "Elk River Blues" has lingered in my head for years. It is a haunting, slow, crooked, hyper-regional tune composed by West Virginia fiddler Ernie Carpenter. There is something entirely human about the way Carpenter bends the melody that distills heartache and depicts the sensation of what it is like to live in a rural mountain landscape where extractive industries prevail. Greta VanDoren taught me "Elk River Blues" on the front steps of her house after I had spent years humming the melody to myself. We sat across from each other, and I observed how her fingers hit the notes, unfolding the melody. We only had one banjo, so we traded back and forth, and I remember noticing the way her body shifted with each curve of the tune. I was not studying a written piece of music, but learning through listening and observing her physical response, and the sound her physicality

emanated. In performance, I started "Elk River Blues" solo, playing clawhammer banjo to highlight the partner dance that musicians share between themselves, their instrument, and the sounds they produce. The audience was asked to witness the way my body shifted weight and responded to playing this intricate tune on banjo, mirroring the way I learned the tune through oral transmission.

In the process of resetting this choreography, I asked the dancers to trade eight, four, and two counts while following the structure of "Elk River Blues." This trading section illuminated how the tune momentarily shifted to 2/4 meter. I witnessed how the dancers' bodies glitched as they fought to stay true to the counts while simultaneously following the melody line. In response to those glitches, I broke down the tune to the specific counts, which consisted of four five-bar phrases in 4/4 meter, with the third bar of each phrase switching to 2/4 meter. When the dancers followed the structure of the tune without feeling the tune, I noticed how staccato their movements became. They were replicating the melody line with exact precision, and though perfectly in sync with the music, they had lost the legato feel of the original fiddle tune. As we continued to rehearse, the dancers began to hear, learn, and absorb the sensation and sounds of the tune.

Through repetition, the dancers were able to release the precision they had been holding onto so tightly and stretch the spaces between the notes to embrace the emotional sensation of the tune. Having live music present throughout this process helped, because the bodies on stage could feel the vibrations of the notes ripple between them, as opposed to hearing the music externally from a speaker. During the performance, Coolik on electric guitar, and I on banjo, stood across from each other to establish the boundaries of the space. This staging allowed the music to coalesce in the center of the stage where the dancing occurred, washing over the trio as

they performed. By playing clawhammer banjo for this piece, I was able to simultaneously be inside and outside of the dance, tracking the dynamics of the work. Revisiting this choreography caused me to identify and name the space present within the tune. "Elk River Blues" was more than a set of notes one could replicate with exact precision; the tune had a sense of breath throughout, and when we tried to purely replicate the melody without a connection to the emotionality of the tune, we lost what made the music genuine.

Figure 7: "Elk River Blues"
Performers: Daniel Coolik, Tiffany Ospino, Ashton Frech, Paetyn Lewis and Becky Hill. Projections and Set Design by Andrés Poch, Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds, and Costume Design by Becca Janney.
Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

Chapter 5: Improvisation

Learning to Listen

> *When I arrive on stage, I am listening and expanding to the whole of the space/time continuum of perceptible sound. I have no preconceived ideas. What I perceive as the continuum of sound and energy takes my attention and informs what I play. What I play is recognized consciously by me slightly (milliseconds) after I have played any sound. This altered state of consciousness in performance is exhilarating and inspiring. The music comes through as if I have nothing to do with it but allows it to emerge through my instrument and my voice.* –Pauline Oliveros[59]

I find delight in the sonic and physical possibilities my body holds, especially when that conversation is an impromptu musical dialogue between musician and dancer or dancers. As an improviser, I take cues from listening to the subtle shifts in the way each of my collaborators negotiate their gaze, weight, and breath. I examine the way musicians—or in the words of percussive dancer Nic Gareiss, "dancers who hold things"—interact with their fiddle bow to create music, or how the clawhammer banjo player articulates a boom-diddy rhythm using their fingers to pluck strings, or how another dancer initiates weight shifts. From this attuned awareness of the physical, and the sonic resonance that emanates as a result of the physical, I have developed a deep listening practice that drops me into the present moment.

Being hyper attentive to the physicality of my collaborator, and to the sound they are generating, asks me to zone into the groove. That focus ignites questions only my instincts can answer. As a percussive dancer, I am embodying a constant heightened awareness of the sound my own footwork emanates as it negotiates between gesture and sonic resonance, all while in

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59. Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (self-pub., Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005), 12.

conversation with my collaborator. "What if I translate the bowing pattern of the fiddle player with my body? Can I try on the way the musician is interpreting rhythm in their bodies? How does their interpretation of rhythm interact with my own interpretation of rhythm? How can I catch the irregular phrasing pattern of the tune the musician is playing and accent it in the present moment?"

When I improvise, my body which holds years of knowledge takes the lead. While improvising, my brain is acutely occupied in listening, translating what I am hearing, and anticipating the next moment synchronously, all while remaining in conversation with the music. This deep listening supports and invites my collaborators to arrive fully into the moment of improvisation with me. There is a spark that happens when I am able to interlock with dancers and musicians that is only accessible when I am improvising. Therefore, while building choreography for *Lost Patterns,* I wanted to craft the work in a way that invited improvisational sparks to occur.

Improvography

> *For the dancing exchange to be successful it requires acute attention and listening, the reading of cues, and the simultaneous appeal to kinesthetic intuition and memory while remaining aware of one's place within the greater musical exchange.*
> –Jade Power-Sotomayor[60]

Maggie Laszewski, a second year MFA dance candidate, and I spent six months delving into improvisation as practice. We created and implemented improvisational scores that tested

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60. Power-Sotomayor, "Corporeal Sounding," 47. This quote is in reference to Puerto Rican Bomba dancing, however this acute attention to detail during improvisation is inherent in all vernacular percussive dance forms influenced by the African diaspora, and it is present within our improvography score.

our physical instincts. We held space to "come as you are," as stated by Kendra Portier.[61] Laughter, tears, and frustration were invited into our weekly ritual of showing up for each other and for ourselves. Improvisation for each of us was and is sacred because it is where our authentic selves surface, and where we are challenged to continually confront the present.

Fueled by curiosity, we started a weekly improvisational practice that excavated the spaces where postmodern and percussive dance intersect. In every session, we would expand and develop a score together for that day, digging deeper into the physical research each time, and adding or subtracting from the score of the previous week. We began every rehearsal with a call-and-response score in front of the same two windows in the choreography studio. It became a ritual that invited us to tune into what the other was bringing to the improvisation on that particular day. We layered in rhythmic complexities, we removed rhythmic complexities, we embodied variations, and rearranged sequences. The vibrations of those movements and experiences remained in our bodies, and the process of questioning trained us to translate our negotiation with space, each other, and live music in real-time.

This weekly improvisational research began from a desire to find connections across differing dance forms. However, it expanded into a deep listening practice that trained us to attune to one another. The "Nine Pin Willow" improvisational score we developed created the structure for us to drop into a deep listening practice quickly, while challenging our habitual patterns, and embodying decisions in real-time. The final score for "Nine Pin Willow" involved:

1. A specific version of "Willow Weep for Me," a popular jazz standard that Daniel Coolik arranged on electric guitar. This unique arrangement involved reharmonizing the first four bars of the A-part to create a bass line groove. The structure of the tune consisted of an AABA pattern repeated twice with a vamp on the musical motif to end.

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61. During Kendra Portier's modern technique classes at University of Maryland, Portier often used a "come as you are" improvisation score to warm up dancers. Kendra Portier is the Maya Brin Endowed Assistant Professor in Dance at University of Maryland.

2. A sound sample of square dance caller Lou Maiuri calling and teaching the "Nine Pin Reel," an Appalachian square dance.[62]
3. A floor pattern extracted from an early 1900s hybrid quilt pattern entitled "Missouri's Puzzle."[63]
4. A call-and-response section where we traded phrases, each responding to how the other interpreted the music.
5. An intro and outro that consisted of manipulating three rhythmic patterns that cycled over one bar of music: 1&a2&a hold, hold; hold 2&a3&a hold; and 1&a hold, hold 4&a.
6. The task to drop into unison moments of stillness.

This score served as a guidepost for our original duet and was developed over a semester of investigations. Discomfort occurred, we had moments where the score felt stale and disconnected before it felt invigorated, and the creative process was rife with insight. The "Nine Pin Willow" score examined the translation process in real-time and revealed how those translations are passed on to others.

In December 2021, Laszewski had to step down from her involvement in my thesis due to health issues. When that occurred, I chose to translate the original score we had developed from a duet to a full cast piece. I was curious how the cast would negotiate the freedom to make different choices each rehearsal and performance. Translating this score to a larger ensemble work felt like an opportunity to empower dancers' agency by providing them a structure to experiment within. I kept everything from the original score Laszewski and I had created, while developing moments of choreography as a foundation throughout. Within tap dance traditions, this is called improvography, which means a combination of choreography and improvisation.[64] The choreography sections were collaboratively generated by the cast through prompts given in

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62. The "Nine Pin Reel" is a popular Appalachian square dance done in a four-couple set with one person in the middle. I was exposed to this dance by square dance caller Lou Maiuri of Summersville, West Virginia.

63. "The Quilt Index," The Center for Digital Humanities & Social Sciences at Michigan State University, accessed June 2, 2021, https://quiltindex.org//view/?type=fullrec&kid=19-15-1456.The quilt pattern was based on a handmade quilt, "Missouri's Puzzle," made from 1901–1929 by Agnes Dowell Umpleby in Pana, Illinois.

64. Gregory Hines, "Why—The Creative Process: Improvography," Joy2Learn Foundation, Dancing with Gregory Hines, YouTube video, modified September 4, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFvhwCjTuGk. Improvography is a term coined by the late Gregory Hines, tap dance master.

rehearsal, and the spatial design was generated by replicating the geometric pattern of the "Missouri's Puzzle," an early 1900s hybrid quilt pattern.

The revised "Nine Pin Willow" score began with dancers entering the stage on a cross-diagonal line, in duets that experimented with disrupting verticality. There was an ease, playfulness, and intention shared, as if the pairs were sharing a walk in the woods. The steps were an improvisational dialogue shared between two, and the choices and variations each dancer performed propelled the evolution of the dance through each performance. Each duet was assigned a different rhythm for the duration of one bar of music that looped continuously as they crossed the stage.[65] Assigning each duet different musical accents within one bar provided a sonic framework for improvisation that prevented cacophony. These improvisations asked the dancers to respond and build upon the music and each other through attentive full body listening, while maintaining a connection to the rhythmic pulse of the music. The score asked each dancer to enter the piece ready to access years of dance training on the fly, inviting multiple translations to co-exist, and overlap in the same space concurrently.

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65. The rhythmic patterns were _ 2&a3&a_, 1&a2&a_ _ ; and 1&a_ _ 4&a.

Figure 8: "Nine Pin Willow."
Performers: Gerson Lanza, Tiffany Ospino, Erik Spangler, Daniel Coolik, Ashton Frech, and Roxy King.
Projection and Set Design by Andrés Poch, Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds, and Costume Design by
Becca Janney. Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

Figure 9: "Missouri's Puzzle."
A Hybrid quilt pattern by Agnes Dowell Umpleby from 1901–1929 in Pana, Illinois, found on the quilt
index. This pattern was used as inspiration for the floor pattern in "Nine Pin Willow."

The center of the stage became the site of a cypher where each duet exchanged footwork.[66] A cypher is a sacred space within many social dance traditions where dancers hold a circle for individuals to improvise. While each of these center stage duet cyphers occurred, there were multiple crossings upstage by dancers and musicians, creating a layered effect of foreground and background reminiscent of the whirling activity of a busy dance hall. I wanted this choreography to evoke a social dance without replicating any individual tradition. There was a section that imitated a square dance, a grapevine pattern that echoed a line dance, and an entrance which sampled remnants of bachata partner work. In this piece, we tried to honor and feature each dancer's lineage. To create the communal sensation, it felt necessary to have the musicians move throughout the work with us, disrupting the separation between the roles of dancer and musician. Often, the musician stands outside the movement, and in "Nine Pin Willow," I wanted them to be within the movement, navigating the same score as the dancers, to reflect the inseparability of music and dance in vernacular practices.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught me anything, it is to pivot, and to let that pivot fuel curiosity. Translating the original "Nine Pin Willow" duet into a larger ensemble piece cemented the cast together. I didn't realize how essential it would be to create a communal space where the entire cast was in dialogue together until I witnessed how this piece transformed the energy of the ensemble and as a result the entire work. As a way of building a sense of community within our cast, we started almost every rehearsal with an improvisation cypher that involved both musicians and dancers. We would practice different approaches to improvisation, including call-and-response, matching or supporting, and countering or responding. Often, we

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66. A cypher is a freestyle dance jam where an open circle is created, and people take turns dancing in the center. The cypher has deep, long-standing cultural roots in dance forms influenced by the African Diaspora. Cyphers are prevalent in hip-hop, tap, flatfooting many other dance forms. I first learned the term cypher from dance scholar, Emily Oleson.

concluded our improvisational cypher with a short verbal reflection that discussed how the practice felt in our bodies on that particular day. This reflection is where I learned that as a musician, Spangler felt supported and heard when dancers left space for the music to respond, and where Ospino shared that using less footwork vocabulary empowered her choice making. The warm-up cypher became a place for candid exchange, both verbally and physically, and invited the dancers to truly come as they are while advancing their improvisational practice.

I started working on improvisational scores with Laszewski to understand where the intersection points existed when different dance mediums merged. I wanted to discover ways of conversing physically that invited myself and others to drop into a flow state, where the mind and body become fully immersed in the present moment. By translating these improvisational duet scores to a larger ensemble, it invited exploration to occur on a more generative level. Using these scores as the foundation allowed us to create a large ensemble work within a short time period, and it asked us to enter the performance each night with a spark of the unknown. This improvography welcomed the knowledge each individual dancer held, and it taught us all to trust the physical intelligence of our bodies while creating room for instinct to initiate movement. Personally, I was able to recognize when improvising I truly get out of my own way and can enter an altered state of consciousness shared with another person or persons. To me, that is the most exhilarating place from which to dance; it truly invites the body to do the translating.

Tilt of the Head

> *Part of it was inevitable: steps just come out different on different dancers. Much of the change was willed, dancers striving to stand out, to express their individuality through the tradition.* –Brian Seibert[67]

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67. Seibert, *What the Eye Hears*, 24.

Within a trio between King, Lanza, and myself, I used improvisation to capture the "tilt of the head"—or crookedness—prevalent within the tune "Greek Melody."[68] I first learned "Greek Melody" from clawhammer banjo player Kevin Chesser, who picked it up from playing back-up guitar for fiddler Andy FitzGibbon, who learned it from a recording of Kentucky fiddler George Lee Hawkins, who learned it from someone else who learned it from…. The cyclical nature of exchange is pervasive within folk traditions. I share this context because each person who learned the tune slipped in their own subtle variations along the way. "Tunes will always be musical sound—the only constant characteristic they carry through time and space. And that sound is always changing. It leaves a fiddler's mind, is physically interpreted through the fingers, transfers to vibration and resonance through the magic of a fiddle, and finally is processed through another human mind," stated Appalachian folklorist and old-time musician Gerald Milnes.[69] What Milnes is highlighting here is that creative expression is omnipresent in Appalachian folk traditions, which causes traditions to constantly evolve as they are transmitted to others. Chesser learned the tune through playing back-up guitar and told me in an informal conversation that learning the tune was "pretty straightforward except the long notes at the end of each part." Chesser then translated the melody onto clawhammer banjo through "internalizing the tune" when playing rhythm guitar behind it.[70] Chesser had memorized the melody so concretely through embodying the tune's intricacies on guitar that he didn't even notice the crooked pattern of the tune's melody. In this instance, the musical instrument—the guitar—

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68. Edwina Guckian, "Interview with Colin Dunne," Dance on the Box Lecture Series, Day 4, Leitrim Dance Festival, 2021. Irish step dancer Colin Dunne describes crooked tunes as a "tilt of the head" when embodying Tommy Potts' music in Dunne's solo show *Out of Time*.

69. Gerald Milnes, *Play of a Fiddle: Traditional Music, Dance, and Folklore in West Virginia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 17–18.

70. Kevin Chesser, conversation with author, February 8. 2022.

served as an extension of the musician's body, highlighting once again that music is a result of embodiment.

A standard old-time tune usually has sixteen counts in an A-part, which is repeated two times (AA) for a total of thirty-two counts, followed by a thirty-two count B-part played twice (BB). "Greek Melody" is unusual because each part has seventeen counts made up of eight counts followed by nine counts throughout the tune. This makes each section (AA or BB) thirty-four counts, with the extra count occurring at the end of each part. By improvising the tune with Chesser as part of our repertoire with the T-Mart Rounders String Band, I was able to understand the tune's twists and turns through repetitive embodiment.[71] I learned the tune through feeling it out and following the melody. I listened to both Chesser's sound and his physical response as he played the tune. His foot would tap the downbeat on the melody, then pause on the extra note, and then tap again on the downbeat of the next phrase. His body signaled to me that something unexpected existed within the tune.

When I began to develop material for my thesis, I knew I wanted to create a choreography which replicated the eccentricity of "Greek Melody." Intrigued by the idea of translation, I asked Coolik if he could learn it on electric guitar. He picked up the irregularity of the tune through a recording of Chesser on clawhammer banjo. Coolik stated, "I didn't count it out. It's one breath phrase that repeats."[72] Neither Chesser, Coolik, nor I heard the unusual phrasing of the tune because we embodied it physically and sonically through repetition. We all leaned in and followed the tune's melody—Chesser and Coolik embodied it on their instruments, and I in my footwork. It wasn't until I went into the studio with King and began to work on

71. The T-Mart Rounders are an Appalachian old-time music trio in which I perform alongside Kevin Chesser and Jesse Milnes.

72. Daniel Coolik, conversation with author, February 10, 2022. Coolik is a multi-instrumentalist and *Lost Patterns* cast member.

developing set choreography that I realized the unusual eight-count / nine-count patterning throughout the tune.

Folk music and dance traditions are passed down through oral transmission where unusual metering and phrasing can occur in the translation process, which is what happened with "Greek Melody." When I played the tune for King, she asked, "What is going on with this tune?" I remember thinking "I don't know what you're talking about," so we sat on the floor of the dance studio and counted it out. That is when it occurred to me that the tune wasn't straight, and that the crookedness repeated as a pattern. King and I knew instantly that we wanted the audience to hear what we heard in the tune. However, the reality of the audience sitting there counting out the tune felt unrealistic. That is when the idea of interjecting moments of improvisation throughout the unison choreography surfaced, as a way of distilling the unexpectedness of the tune.

By employing unpredictable improvisational solo lengths, ranging from three to seventeen counts, it kept both the dancers and audience engaged. We tossed solos back and forth throughout the arrangement of the choreography in ways that invited each dancer to express their own individuality while creating different translations of the music every time. I wanted to create a choreography that represented the bodies present on stage and the dance styles we represented. Therefore, Lanza and King each developed a tap dance phrase for the B-part of the tune. Lanza's phrase was an eight-count phrase, and King's was a nine-count phrase. To create my phrases, I extracted several segments from a recorded flatfooting improvisation I had done with Chesser to "Greek Melody" for the Swannanoa Gathering's virtual concert performance in the summer of 2021. King helped me translate the Swannanoa improvisations into choreographed sequences for the B-part. Together we generated two phrases of eight counts and two phrases of nine counts for

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the A-part. The entire material for the five-minute choreography was generated from three B-part

phrases and four A-part phrases with interjections of improvisation. The arrangement of this trio

took five repeats through the tune, and it looked like a math equation. It was the most mentally

rigorous choreography present within *Lost Patterns,* because it involved negotiating between

unison moments that implemented a variety of canons, facing shifts, floor patterns, and splashes

of improvisation at different durations, all while remaining interlocked with music.

| Greek Melody |

A - Daniel solo
A - GBR enter +1+5 +1+5 8ta9tal -no solos
B - BR +1+5 - Gerson solo 8 counts
   BG +1+5 8ta9tal - Roxy solo 9 counts
B - RG +1+5 - Becky solo 4 counts / GB+5 - Roxy solo 4 coun
RB +1+5 - Gerson solo 4 counts +5 pause - all catch 8ta9tal
A > unison crawls facing back towards musicians
A
B - R+B crawl - Gerson solo 8/9 - Gerson start solo @ pause
  during A part burst into it.
B - G+B crawl - Roxy solo 8/9 - G+B turn double on 8ta9ta
A > 1 unison G solo 9 / B solo 8 / Roxy solo 8
A   all catch 8ta9tal -tighten up formation
B - double up Gerson Bpart B→
B - " ∧ " B↑ R→G↓ R→3/₁ G→ Facings shift 8/9
    R↓ G→ ←B G↓
    ←R
A - 2 unison during slides Roxy moves into diagonal line R→7 8cu
  9 counts - Becky solo   B
A - G+B - 1 unison R - 3 - 8 counts   G
  Trade 3 counts each R/B/G - 9 counts
B - unison Becky Bpart 8/9 counts
B - unison Gerson B part flip facings ←R   R↓B→
                                    ←B G↓   G→
A - Roxy solo 8 counts, 2 unison - 8/9
A - 3 unison - Gerson solo 3 counts, 4 unison pause for 4 counts 8/9
B - unison Becky B part - 8/9
B - unison Roxy B part - 8/9 - catch unison arms
A - unison 1, 2 - 8/9
A - unison 3, 4 fill in ending - 8/9
B - 7 crawls forming a single line downstage   8/9
B - music cuts out on 4 during last pattern. - Freeze 8/9
Transition - game of sliding tag - into Dirge

Figure 10: Becky Hill's choreography notes for "Greek Melody" trio.

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Figure 11: "Greek Melody."
Performers: Roxy King, Becky Hill, and Gerson Lanza. Projections and Set Design by Andrés Poch, Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds, and Costume Design by Becca Janney. Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

Figure 12: Musicians Daniel Coolik and Erik Spangler during musical interlude prior to "Greek Melody." Projections and Set Design by Andrés Poch, Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds, and Costume Design by Becca Janney. Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

Chapter 6: Sonic Abstraction

Sampling an Embodied Archive

> *Tradition: how the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present.* –T.S. Eliot[73]

DJ / composer Erik Spangler and I worked with the materials of technology and percussive dance to access translation that collaged both live and archived sound. The progression of "Step-a-Tune Soundweb" explored a spectrum of connections between movement and music, sonic abstraction, with specific sound samples from Appalachia and my particular embodied archive. The auditory element of my dancing was no longer solely linked to the sound it naturally generated, but rather through the interaction of dance and electronics, it created a translation that blended the past with present. Working with sound samples from my specific dance lineage allowed me to abstract my own history to understand it. Throughout the performance, both live and archived sounds co-existed and mingled within the same sonic space. Translating these traditions through sonic abstraction disrupted the telephone game process and allowed us to imagine and generate new possibilities. By performing this for an audience, they witnessed this abstraction while immediately archiving the live experience into their own bodies, and therefore were engaged in the translation process.

The choreography for "Step-a-Tune Soundweb" was performed on a step-a-tune with my percussive dance knowledge guiding the composition. A contact microphone was taped onto the board, and when I danced, my footwork triggered the timing of patterns from a customized

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73. Quoted in Cashman, Mould, and Shukla, *The Individual and Tradition*, 3.

analog modular synthesizer.[74] Spangler used the synthesizer within live performance to play back and manipulate curated sound samples and shape tones generated by my footwork. Impulses from the amplified footwork sent triggers that clocked the sequencers within the modular system. The sequencers advanced through their patterns, dependent on the volume threshold and timing of my footwork, allowing me, as the dancer, to control the melodic movement in the piece. The way the modular system responded to the vibrations of the footwork changed every time, depending on the volume threshold setting used to generate the gate signals that drove the sequencers. This created an unpredictability that shaped the entire piece. The sequencer patterns controlled four different parts in the texture, providing a range of tones from field recording samples, an analog synth voice with variable timbre, and two harmonic resonators modeled on different physical materials. The field recording samples used throughout the piece referenced my old-time music and dance lineage. Those samples included the sound of Robert Dotson talking about flatfooting,[75] the holler of Eileen Carson,[76] the fiddle playing of Jesse Milnes,[77] and the shuffling feet of Rhythm in Shoes Dance Company.[78] The sound of the banjo—an instrument that since its origins has negotiated between tradition and innovation, anxiety and possibility, nostalgia and the present—helped guide "Step-a-Tune Soundweb."

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74. Jozef Raček,"Modular Synthesizers—A Simple Explanation," tBlog, September 2019, https://www.thomann.de/blog/en/modular-synthesizers-explained-simply/. Eurorack Customized Modular Synthesizer is an open-ended approach to synthesis in which different modules in a customizable system are interconnected using physical patch cables. A modular synthesizer is "an electronic musical instrument that consists of a multitude of different components (modules) that are used and combined to create electronic sounds."

75. Robert Dotson was a tradition-bearer of flatfooting. His step, the Tennessee walking step, is the standardized flatfooting basic taught throughout the country and world.

76. Eileen Carson was the Artistic Director of the Fiddle Puppet Dancers and Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble.

77. Jesse Milnes is a multi-instrumentalist and the lead vocalist for the T-Mart Rounders String Band.

78. Rhythm in Shoes Dance Company was a percussive dance company directed by Sharon Leahy from 1987 to 2010.

With these systems and sounds in mind, Spangler and I generated a compositional score consisting of seven sections that dictated the interchange between technology and dance.[79] This score created a container that guided us through our exploration and dictated our roles within the collaboration. For my role as the dancer, those sections consisted of:

1. Interact with the step-a-tune with hands and feet. Wait for the echo of sound to settle. Find moments of stillness and silence.
2. Segmented footwork phrases, calling in the modular synthesizer.
3. "Green Corn" choreography AABB, AB[80]
4. Sixteenth-note Thomas Maupin step while rotating into the freestyle flatfooting section at around 120bpm+.
5. Decrease the tempo during drag backstep until complete stillness, drop to the ground and slowly rise. Enter sixteen counts after banjo loop begins.
6. Share banjo loop conversation with Spangler on synthesizer and Coolik on fiddle.
7. Return to segmented footwork phrases as hums from opener fade in to conclude the score.

"Step-a-Tune Soundweb" took the audience on a vivid journey from silence to reverberated echoes, and into a fullness of subdivided footwork that caused a constellation of sounds. Spangler and I listened and responded to one another in real-time every evening, creating a conversation in dialogue with tradition but dependent on our attunement to each other in the present. Collaborating with a modular synthesizer and its unpredictability was a practice for me of embracing ephemerality and letting go of sonic precision. The modular synthesizer cannot replicate the same sonic result twice and is actively translating sounds in performance, which kept Spangler and I hyper focused, attuned, and ready to pivot at any moment. This hyper focus mirrors the trance-like state musicians and dancers feel in the midst of learning a fiddle tune on the fly at 130 bpm late at night at a festival. In these moments, it feels as if the outside world

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79. See Appendix: "Step-a-Tune Soundweb" Compositional Score.
80. "Green Corn" is a tune from the late Harvey Sampson of Calhoun County, WV, and is part of the T-Mart Rounders String Band repertoire.

fades away, and it's just you and the others you're engaged with navigating how to drop into the music.

This work was developed over a year of investigations, which involved many experiments, audio recordings, a performance at Strathmore, and multiple feedback sessions. Throughout our time in process together, Spangler and I were able to build something truly unique from a willingness to collaborate and experiment while remaining linked to Appalachian traditions. We bonded over a desire to explore the structures present within folk traditions. We disassembled those structures to discover where we could disrupt them, then reassembled them causing unpredictable adaptations to occur. Translating folk traditions through a process of sonic abstraction allowed us to question what music making can be when percussive dance interacts with technology.

Spangler and I excavated our roles within the shared body / bodies of traditional Appalachian music and dance without being constrained by an adherence to tradition. This distance gave us space to abstract and invited us to examine our embodied archives. As my foot scraped, dug, and pulled shape into sound, I was able to reflect on my dance lineage. "When I dance the archive, I feel as if I'm connected to something bigger. I am just one dancer in this Irish dance tradition, but I am a node connected to a network of movers," stated dance scholar Kate Spanos.[81] Through fragmenting sound samples from people I learned from, and who they learned from, and so on, I was able to interact with a network of traditional dancers and reflect on the "passing it on" process I have been immersed in my entire life.

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81. Kate Spanos, "Irish Dance on Repeat: Archiving the Dance and Dancing the Archive," *Our Steps Dialogue* (blog), March 2022, https://www.our-steps.com/dialogue/irish-dance-on-repeat-archiving-the-dance-and-dancing-the-archive.

The archive is a place where materials are preserved, and the body is a place that stores culture and traditions that reflect community. Ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski touched on this idea when he stated, "There is no written or explicitly expressed code of laws, and their whole tradition, the whole structure of their society, are embodied in the most elusive of all materials; the human being." [82] Performing "Step-a-Tune Soundweb" live was a vulnerable experience; I was putting my archive on display for an audience. I wasn't always emotionally prepared to hear what archived sound samples the modular would emanate, a few times the sound of my mentor's voices being sampled would thrust me into a reflective place in the middle of performing. Negotiating between past and present caused my body to act as the primary conduit in which translation occurred. I was performing in the present, grappling with the past, all while asking questions about the possibilities the future holds.

Figure 13: "Step-a-Tune Soundweb."
Performers: Becky Hill and Erik Spangler. Projections and Set Design by Andrés Poch, Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds, and Costume Design by Becca Janney. Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

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82. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2014), 9.

Chapter 7: Design

Even within what we call Appalachia, there's diversity, there is an enormous amount of diversity just beginning with the shape of the land itself, and that shows up for me as a feeling of...the first feeling, is this sense of orientation and disorientation. –Ben Nelson[83]

As a way of entering the design process, I presented my design team; Heather Reynolds, (lighting), Becca Janney (costumes), and Andrés Poch (projections and set) with artifacts that represented the landscape and culture of Appalachia. Establishing a sense of place felt vital to the world of this show because the landscape is an omnipresent force within the traditions I was extrapolating. Within Appalachia, the mountains are substantial; they impact daily life, ritual, industry, and culture with dichotomies prevalent throughout. The mountains are both insulated and exposed; awe-inspiring natural beauty and devastated strip-mined land exist within miles of each other; and vast chasms between wealth and poverty are ever present in day-to-day life. For *Lost Patterns,* the variations and contradictions present in the Appalachian landscape provided the designers with an entry point to explore translation in ways that welcomed "orientation and disorientation" into the creative process. By placing the world of the show in Appalachia, I created a structure for my designers to explore translation in the show's visual design just as I had in my choreography. This created a unified design concept for the show that connected the choreography, music, lighting, costumes, projections, and set design while welcoming experimentation into the process.

Becca Janney, costume designer, found inspiration in the color palette of a mountaintop removal coal mine site, and used the colors to evoke the contradictions that exist between

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83. Ben Nelson, conversation with author, August 22, 2021. Ben Nelson is a second-generation old-time musician and outdoor education instructor. He shared these thoughts with me informally while discussing the landscape of Appalachia.

individual and industry present in the landscape. A unisex workwear aesthetic surfaced to

acknowledge the rurality of Appalachia, and to reflect the musicians' and dancers' labor of

holding rhythm. Mimicking the striations of the landscape, Janney incorporated unique patches

for each costume, made from a crazy quilt pattern, that reinforced the design of the jumpsuits.

The jumpsuits were made from hand-dyed linen, another nod to the rich cultural traditions of

Appalachia. As I looked at performances by other percussive dance artists, I kept noticing that

several current choreographers have chosen to emphasize individuality over a uniformed design.

Janney and I were curious if we could do both. Could we give each cast member an individual

look while connecting everyone to a unified aesthetic? Drawing on a handmade, hand-me-down

feel, we were able to embrace individuality while visually creating costumes that were connected

to the landscape, culture, and to one another.

Figure 14: Color palette, landscape, and quilt pattern inspiration for costumes for *Lost Patterns*.
Costumes designed by Becca Janney.

Figure 15: Final costume designs for *Lost Patterns* by Becca Janney.

The architecture of the set was both practical and experimental. Knowing two musicians would be onstage for large portions of the show, the set designer Andrés Poch and myself chose to embrace a cubism approach to distilling the mountains. Practically speaking, we needed a large table for Erik Spangler's DJ equipment, and a stool for Daniel Coolik to sit on when playing electric guitar. We started with two cubes but discovered the geography of the set needed several more boxes to fulfill the cubism landscape. Throughout the set design process, Poch was attached to replicating a mountain vista using fabric. Therefore, we rotated through multiple designs until we settled on a design of nine fabric panels, each consisting of four squares, hung vertically in a semicircle to simulate the insulated sensation of a valley surrounded by mountains. The textural pattern painted on the panels consisted of a mountain landscape dissected into nine channels. When hung in order, the panels replicated the visage of the mountains. The painted textural pattern allowed the panels to respond to both projections and lighting in a way that generated a connectivity to the environment throughout the arc of the show. For the performance, we ended up removing two panels to shorten the transition time between *Lost Patterns* and

Tristan Koepke's show *Finally, Fairies!* The loss of the two panels two days before the show,

meant that the translation process within set design was active until the final dress rehearsal.
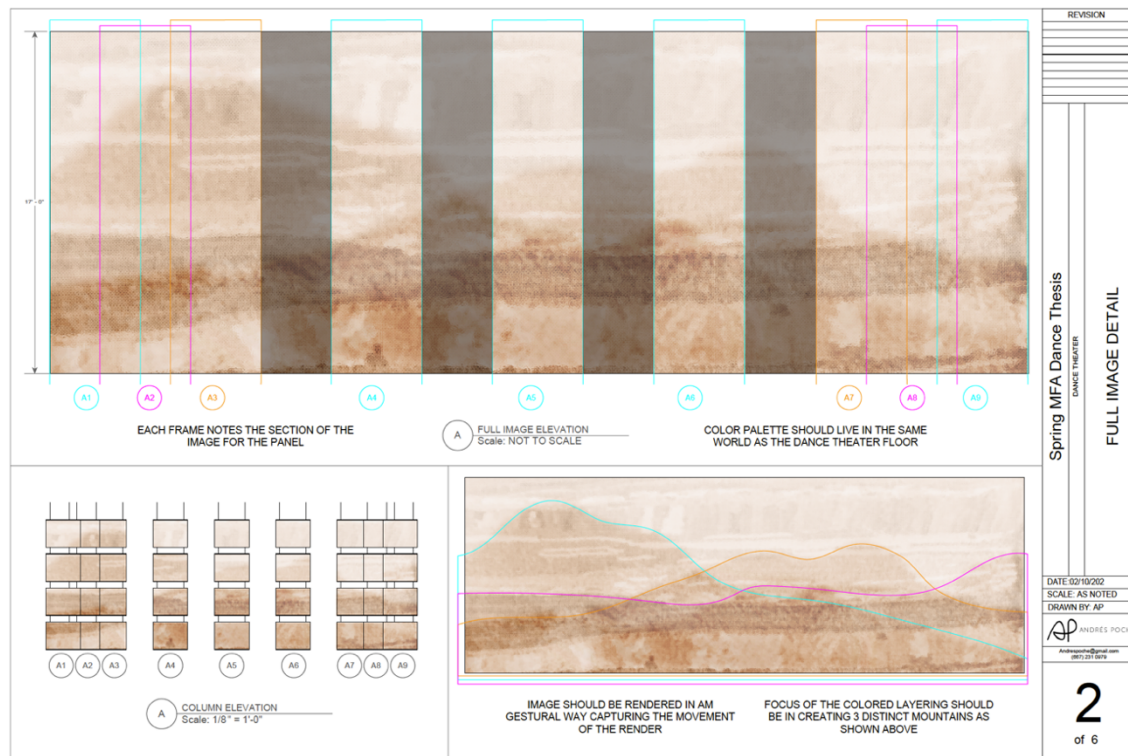

Figure 16: Paint elevations for panels in *Lost Patterns* set design.
Designed by Projection and Set Designer Andrés Poch.

Figure 17: Projections and Set Design by Andrés Poch, Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds.
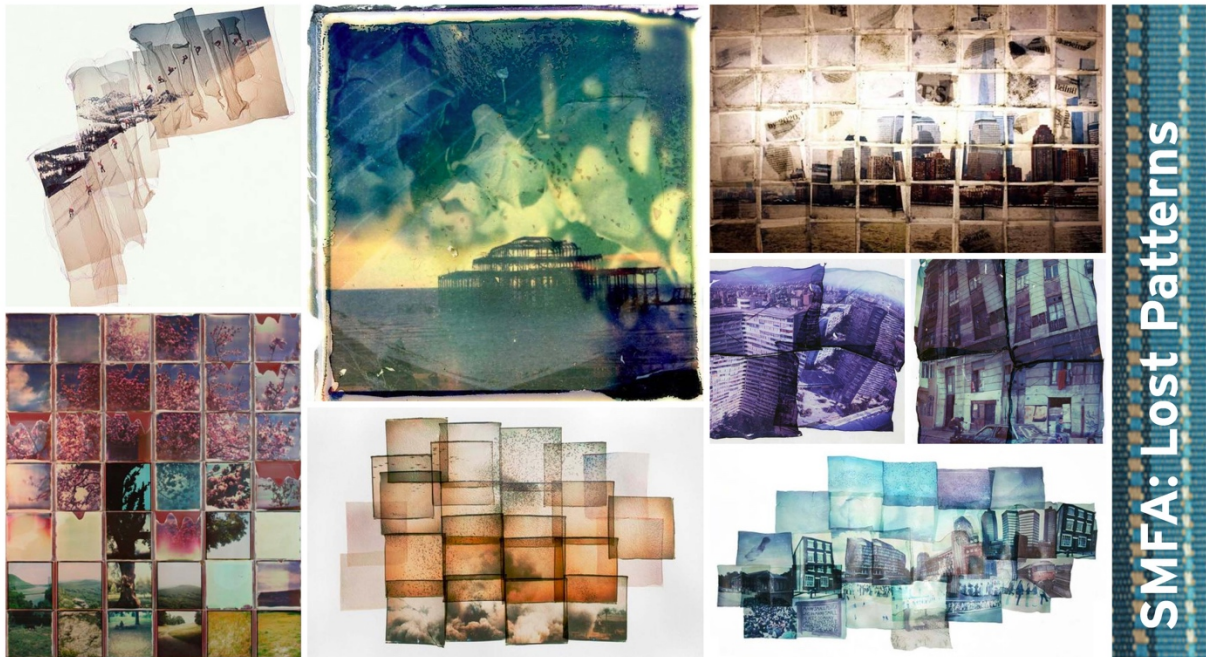Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

Figure 18: Set design research based on Polaroid emulsions for *Lost Patterns* by Andrés Poch.

The projections and lighting guided the audience's interpretation of time, echoing the cyclical progression of the choreography. Blurring the lines between past and present was a theme that arose during this creative process. Lighting designer Heather Reynolds stated that she felt as if she was "seeing history tangibly on bodies in space" after observing the "Falls of Richmond" choreography for the first time.[84] Navigating both the past and present simultaneously became a guiding principle that united the translation process throughout the whole show. Inspired by polaroid emulsions, we utilized layered effects within lighting and projections to consider *Lost Patterns'* relationship to time.[85] As a collective, we began to ask, "What is the present? What is the past? What distills the sense of time when we are suspended within the trance of a tune or a hike in the woods? How can time be flexible and structured concurrently?" These inquiries helped us fragment the arc of the show into the timeline of a day. We mapped the show out, delegating which choreographies were sunrise, the heat of the day, sunset, and the glow of night. The lighting reinforced this timeline, utilizing dappled light during sunrise; a warm pink glow to manifest the energy of a square dance and to express the ecstatic joy of dancing in community; and a blue hue to capture the sensation of isolation one can feel when awake amid the night.

Projections supported the emotionality of the show by creating a slow evolution that represented the passing of time. In an informal presentation within Adriane Fang's Introduction to Dance course at University of Maryland Poch stated,

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84. Heather Reynolds, conversation with author, September 9, 2021.
85. An emulsion lift or transfer is a process used to remove the photographic emulsion from an instant print by placing it in warm water. In this process, the emulsion can be transferred to other materials, interjecting variations and translations within photographs. The emulsion process is similar to my approach to developing choreography within *Lost Patterns*, by taking an original source material and translating it to unlock experimentation while remaining tethered to the source material.

I didn't want to put up a mountain and call it a day. The piece was about translation / transmission, so what I did was I took a base image of Appalachia, then applied a layer of blurring, then a layer of displacement, then another layer of blurring again. This distilled the color, texture, and mood of the mountains but did not place us physically there. You see the mountains, you see the sky, but you don't get the full information. I didn't want to give it all away.

By doing this, the audience was left responsible for interpreting the feelings and sensations of the projections, which invited them into a translation process. We decided that projections' role throughout the show should parallel Spangler's soundscapes; this limitation helped guide the audience's focus without distracting them with unnecessary information. During the most abstract part of the *Lost Patterns,* the "Step-a-Tune Soundweb," Poch removed projections from the panels to focus the audience on the intricacy of the footwork triggering a modular synthesizer. In response to witnessing the dance lead the score, Poch developed a floor projection that guided the audience's focus to the footwork. Poch wanted the audience to understand that everything seen and heard on stage was being triggered by the footwork I was conducting. The result of this was an asymmetrical distorted ripple projection that started on the floor then slowly rose to the panels. This projection ebbed from the step-a-tune outward, creating ripples as if I was dancing in water.

The designers' interpretations created an entry point into Appalachia composed of a collection of translations. By entering the work with a shared understanding of the landscape of the region, there was a consistency of place that grounded and connected the choreography and design. I learned an immense amount about trust in collaboration within this process. The designers and I worked from a place of "yes, and." We all took risks, we threw paint at the wall until something stuck, and the result was an evocative translation of the Appalachian Mountains and its culture.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

You move together, you just have this rhythm together, you build something together, you play this music together that is so deep and ancient. –Anna Harrod[86]

As a percussive dance choreographic work in a postmodern affiliated dance program, *Lost Patterns* was an intervention, and an opportunity to build a percussive dance community at the University of Maryland that challenged and celebrated percussive dance in its entirety. As the work progressed through rehearsals and into performance, the questions, "Why do I make art?" and "Who is it for?" kept surfacing. What I realized is I create choreographic works to build community, to invite the audience into the conversation, and to celebrate humanity.

As a choreographer within vernacular music and dance traditions, creating a sense of community on and off the stage is necessary to generate meaningful work. Collaborators need to feel welcomed to bring the whole of who they are into the creative process, and that takes time and trust. I have learned that if I can empower everyone's individuality while finding places of commonality, then the work will make itself. In the words of Heather Reynolds, the lighting designer for *Lost Patterns*, "You create a space in which people are safe and comfortable to be themselves, and in doing so, you elicit some the of their best possible work while maintaining a clarity of vision, precision, and expertise that allows you to shape the work best."[87] Building community takes effort, persistence, and commitment by all who are involved, and I feel fortunate that this cast chose to engage in a creative process that was more than just dance steps.

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86. Anna Harrod, conversation with author, January 3, 2022. Anna Harrod is a Kentucky native and second-generation fiddle player. She shared these thoughts with me regarding why she plays old-time fiddle in an informal conversation.

87. Heather Reynolds, note to author, March 13, 2022. Lighting designer Heather Reynolds shared this with me in a thank you card.

During the beginning stages of my choreographic investigations, we were in the midst of

a COVID-19 pandemic, rehearsals were done in KN95 masks, and the Omicron surge was

happening. Despite those constraints, my cast still showed up, however there was a distance

created by the pandemic that echoed in the bodies present. After our second work-in-progress

showing, the steps and music were there, but the camaraderie wasn't. That's when I asked

myself, "How had I managed to make a choreographic work rooted in vernacular dance

traditions but left the communal aspect out of it?" The fatigue of the COVID-19 pandemic, along

with scheduling and coursework, meant it took time for a cohesive community to solidify within

Lost Patterns. It took sharing moments outside of rehearsal, outside of the walls of the Clarice

Smith Performing Arts Center. It took laughter and the practice of improvising together in a

cypher during every rehearsal and show. Through these interactions, we began to see each other

and be seen, and this dynamic made the show accessible and conversational.

The audience was able to witness the generosity and respect we had for each other, and

the passion we shared for our art, which in turn invited them into the work. Henry McGrath, a

current University of Maryland student, shared this response to *Lost Patterns* with me:

> Your performance very much respected the audience. The presented medium of dance
> was outside of the usual realm of experience of the audience but did not leave them lost
> in a world of artistic interpretations. What I mean by this, is that I, as the audience, have
> little experience seeing tap dancing. However, I was still anchored to the performance
> because I was *familiar* with the emotions being conveyed…. So, even when the
> performance did become artistically adventurous, it still remained true to the theme I
> could recognize, allowing me to relax and be able to enjoy this foreign expression of
> emotions.[88]

By inviting the cast to share connectivity with each other, we were able to transcend the

proscenium and instigate a shared experience that involved the audience.

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88. Henry McGrath is a student from the Introduction to American Social Dance course that I taught at
University of Maryland, Spring Semester 2022. This is an informal reflection written in response to *Lost Patterns*
that he submitted for extra credit.

The positive reception received for *Lost Patterns* by the audience and cast was overwhelming and is ultimately what will empower me to continue choreographing. I have learned through this process that it is impossible to please everyone, and there will always be someone eager to analyze why you made a particular artistic choice. If I can free myself from the fear of judgment and live, perform, and work in the present moment and in collaboration with community, then I have not only unlocked a creative process, but a way of living. This way of making invites others to show up in the present as well, and it asks the audience to slow down, causing them to sit at the edge of their seats or rise to a standing ovation. To me this is an ultimately self-sustaining artistic process because it invites and creates space for others.

This thesis research is just the beginning. *Lost Patterns* is a show built through a collaborative process that reflects each individual's contributions, and the dance and music lineages they bring into the work. The same investigation into translation with a different cast would yield completely different choreographic results. *Lost Patterns* is a relational piece built out of conversation. Being in the creative process with others, united under a theme, is where I flourish. I delight in asking questions bigger than myself, that rely on collaboration to answer. I welcome questions as a way of making, as a way of living, and as a way of pushing traditions to places where innovation occurs.

Addendum

Figure 19: Final moment of *Lost Patterns*.
Performers: Paetyn Lewis, Ashton Frech, Roxy King, Daniel Coolik, Becky Hill, Erik Spangler, Gerson Lanza, and Tiffany Ospino. Projections and Set Design by Andrés Poch, Lighting Design by Heather Reynolds, and Costume Design by Becca Janney. Photo by Jonathan Hsu.

The Curtain Call

The last gesture that occurred onstage during our performances of *Lost Pattern*s was the curtain call. It was a moment where the entire cast stood in a line downstage, breaking the fourth wall with the audience. As a unified cast, we took two bows together, prior to Coolik playing "Lester Leaps In" on fiddle.[89] As Coolik sounded the fiddle, the cast stepped into a semi-circle, the lighting shifted to evoke the warmth of a community hall, and the cast began to clap along to

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89. "Lester Leaps In" is a standard swing tune written by Lester Young, member of the Count Basie Big Band.

the fiddling, guiding the audience to do the same. At that moment, the circle between performer and audience was complete. Each member of the cast stepped into the center of the circle and took a brief, playful, improvised solo and were seen for who they truly are. This curtain call cypher represented the creative process of building *Lost Patterns* because it validated everyone's contributions. With that same sensibility, I wanted to welcome the voices of my collaborators into this written thesis.[90]

Reflections from the Cast

Reflection from Paetyn Lewis, dancer.

> This was a really different experience for me with tap. I've only ever done tap in a studio setting where we're performing stylized choreography for an audience. Everyone has to look and sound the same. In this show Becky really stressed the importance of each performer really being themselves and wanted each individual to shine in the way they felt most comfortable. For me this really put me out of my comfort zone in relation to tap, but it was in a way that made me feel excitedly nervous and challenged. Secondly, because of the individuality of every performer, the show had an incredibly unique quality. Everyone's different backgrounds with percussive dance put so many forms together in a way that I've never seen. In writing, it almost seems like it wouldn't make sense, but it really made for a beautiful collection and celebration of percussive dance.

Reflection from Ashton Frech, dancer:

> Improvising has always been something that has been difficult for me. So, when it came up that there would be improvisational moments in the show, I was nervous. In order to get us more comfortable with the idea, Becky would have the cast start each rehearsal with a cypher. At first, it was a bit rough for me. In improvisation I always felt like I had to pull out tricks to show off and I would quickly run out of ideas on what to do. However, as we tried different prompts and as time went on, I was able to get more comfortable in simply vibing with the music and the people around me. I learned how to let the steps flow out in conversation with the musicians by simplifying my moves and letting go of the idea of having to show off. Working on improvisation also helped me to find my own voice throughout the show in the moments that were choreographed. By the

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90. All reflections were shared with me informally following the performance of *Lost Patterns* in March 2022. These reflections are organized in the order in which they stood in line, from left to right, during the curtain call.

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time show weekend came, I felt comfortable and confident in my ability to improvise in front of an audience.

Reflection from Roxy King, dancer:

Who would have thought the world of translations could be so fascinating? Coming from a tap dance background, I approached this project with tap dance in mind. Learning steps and being able to create or embellish music has been something I've always known. I didn't initially realize just how translations require you to go much deeper than that. Being introduced to the idea of translating one musical culture through the vessel of another was wildly exciting for me. I found over the length of the process that translating requires you to really connect to how one understands music. For example, two people can hear a single phrase and yet create two very different steps based on tonal preference. The music we were deconstructing was foreign to me to say the least. One strum of the banjo and I was done. Over it. However, having to stick with it opened history for me. Through any music you can hear the history of the land, the instruments used, and of the people that played them. In alignment with that, it made me think about how it's the same for tap dance. Every time we put on the shoes we are calling and honoring those that came before us. Turns out these two dance genres are not so foreign after all. The end collection of pieces truly was some of the most connected pieces I've ever had the pleasure to dance. All dancers and musicians were in conversation during the construction of said pieces which meant a small part of all of us were in there too. The amazing part about all of this is that when you hear or see any of these pieces, you too will now be a part of the community we created together.

Reflection from Daniel Coolik, multi-instrumentalist:

Throughout the show, there was a proper balance of improvisation and arrangement. I felt like we could communicate in the moment, and I could change musical phrasings to react to what the dancers were doing. Whether it be a rhythmic idea or a movement that caused me to decide to do something different. I felt as if we all could contribute ideas within the piece to have it flow. When Becky sent me the idea for "Falls of Richmond" she just sent me an audio file of her and Roxy playing all the musical parts. We then went back and forth and had discussions about how to let the dance play the melody while I accompanied them, which is the reverse in the music world. It was very informative for me to think in a different way, and when we rehearsed, and I saw the movements with the music it all came together.

Reflection from Erik Spangler, DJ and composer:

The development of my role in the sonic design of *Lost Patterns* evolved in many unexpected ways, which have made it a joy to be collaborating with Becky. This began with a very specific exploration of ways that we could use a danceboard as a controller for electronically generated sounds. A collection of sound sources within a modular synthesizer patch are mixed live, all initiated by the kinetic impulses of Becky's feet on the board. My role of coloring her steps with different melodic sequences, and combinations of electronic voices suggested a new mode of performance interaction,

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which I came to think of as 'sonic spooning.' As our collaborative composition developed, it was enriched by incorporation of audio samples connected with Becky's dance lineage, rhythmic patterns from the fiddle tune "Green Corn." Within the composition that came to define our central collaboration, "Step-a-Tune Soundweb," we were able to play with the unpredictable aspects of performing with a modular synthesizer, while also tightening and defining the shape of the work within the narrative framework of *Lost Patterns.* As the work developed through rehearsals, I enjoyed the process of opening from a one-on-one collaboration to a group dynamic, including moving further into group composition with multi-instrumentalist Daniel Coolik. I was able to grow in other ways as a performer by Becky's invitation to participate as a mover alongside the dance cast. This also helped to shape my understanding of the larger story being told through *Lost Patterns*, how traditional dance and music forms may be transmitted and transformed through various layers of cultural influence. Working in a collaborative way on soundscapes throughout the show helped provide a wider and deeper meaning to the abstract explorations of movement and sound in "Step-a-Tune Soundweb." I especially enjoyed our development of humming and voices generally as a thematic element, to mark the beginning, middle, and ending stages of the theatrical narrative. We also shared in the selection of field recordings which helped to shape a collective sense of place.

Reflection from Gerson Lanza, dancer:

Rebecca Hill's creative process of *Lost Patterns* built a unique framework that allowed dancers to bring their voices and creativity into the space. Within the realm of percussive dance, exists many diverse forms that use the body to reach a musical intent that resonates visually and audibly to outside participants. I am a tap dancer that enjoys a close connection with the floor, syncopation, and musical virtuosity. As a participant in this creative process, I felt supported in my offerings to Hill's thesis performance presentation. *Lost Patterns* had the representation of tap dance, flamenco, hoofing, Appalachian flat-footing, and sand dance. In *Lost Patterns*, all these percussive styles had a harmonic conversation that brought joy, community, and appreciation.

Reflection from Tiffany Ospino, dancer:

Having previous experience in percussive dance, I was thrilled at the fact that I was able to showcase a bit of my background, which I feel has been pushed to the side since coming into a Modern dance program. In a past performance at UMD, we had a violinist play while we performed; however, there wasn't any interaction between the dancers and the musician. Becky's piece allowed me to have moments of improvisation and interaction between the musicians. Not only did my solo improvisation change every night, but the way I played with the musician's rhythm changed as well. I had genuine connections with the entire cast and you could see that shine on stage.

Appendix: "Step-a-Tune Soundweb" Compositional Score

Over the course of fourteen months, February 2021–March 2022, Erik Spangler and I developed a detailed composition for percussive dance and modular synthesizer entitled "Step-a-Tune Soundweb." The original score debuted in August 2021 at Strathmore and evolved into this arrangement for *Lost Patterns*. This composition provides the technical and choreographic specifics utilized within "Step-a-Tune Soundweb" during the March 11–13, 2022, performances of *Lost Patterns* at University of Maryland College Park.

Step-A-Tune Soundweb
score for amplified foot percussion and modular synthesizer

Erik Spangler and Becky Hill (2021-22)

Instrumentation

- Eurorack modular synthesizer (details on following page)
- Audio playback: Traktor Pro software / Traktor Kontrol S4 - DJ controller
- Mixer
- Contact microphone
- "Step-A-Tune" dance board

Eurorack modular system

Individual synthesizer modules from different manufacturers are installed in two cases with power rails (one 3-row, one single-row). This system is a customized collection of modules assembled between 2014-17.

With sequencing from Arturia Beatstep Pro.

-Pittsburgh Modular - Move 104 case
-Pittsburgh Modular - Structure 360 case
-Pittsburgh Modular - Oscillator mk1
-Pittsburgh Modular - Oscillator mk1
-Pittsburgh Modular - Waveforms
-Pittsburgh Modular - LFO2
-Pittsburgh Modular - ADSR
-Pittsburgh Modular - ADSR
-Pittsburgh Modular - FLTR
-Pittsburgh Modular - Filter
-Pittsburgh Modular - Mixer
-Pittsburgh Modular - Sequencer
-Pittsburgh Modular - Envelope
-Pittsburgh Modular - Envelope
-Pittsburgh Modular - LPG
-Pittsburgh Modular - Mix Mult
-Pittsburgh Modular - Outs
-Make Noise - Phonogene
-Make Noise - ModDeMix
-Make Noise - Optomix
-Make Noise - Wogglebug
-Make Noise - MATHS
-Make Noise - Function
-Make Noise - LXD
-Make Noise - Echophon
-Make Noise - Pressure Points

-Doepfer - A-119 Ext.In.
-Doepfer - A-124 VCF5
-Doepfer - A-199 SPRV
-Doepfer - A-190-3
-Mutable Instruments - Rings
-Mutable Instruments - Clouds
-Malekko - Noise
-Malekko - Fade
-Malekko - Invert Mix
-Bastl - grandPA
-Bastl - SPA
-Bastl - Little Nerd
-Intellijel – uStep
-Intellijel – Planar
-Intellijel – Passive Mult
-Intellijel – uJack
-4MS - Quad Clock Distributor
-4MS - Spectral Multiband Resonator
-Analogue Systems - RS-35
-WMD - Ultrafold
-Circuit Abbey - Invy
-Music Thing - Mikrophonie
-Expert Sleepers - Disting mk2
-Qu-Bit - Nano Rand
-Erica Synths - Black Polivoks VCF
-Alright Devices - Chronoblob
-Evaton Technologies - RF Nomad
-Copper Traces - Seek

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Connections between Eurorack modular cases & Beatstep Pro

- Beatstep Pro - Sequencer 1 CV Pitch > Rings - V/OCT
- Beatstep Pro - Sequencer 1 Gate > Rings - STRUM
- Beatstep Pro - Sequencer 2 CV Pitch > grandPA - CV IN
- Beatstep Pro - Sequencer 2 Gate > grandPA - TRIG B
- Beatstep Pro - Drum Gate 1 > Spectral Multiband Resonator - IN odds
- Beatstep Pro - Drum Gate 2 > Spectral Multiband Resonator - IN evens
- Beatstep Pro - Drum Gate 7 > Spectral Multiband Resonator - Rotate Trig clockwise
- Beatstep Pro - Drum Gate 8 > Spectral Multiband Resonator - Rotate Trig counter-clockwise
- Quad Clock Distributor - Out 4 > Beatstep Pro - Clock In
- Pressure Points - Pressure > Clouds - Density
- Pressure Points - Gate > Function - Trigger
- Pressure Points - CV Row 1 > Clouds - Size
- Pressure Points - CV Row 2 > Clouds - Texture
- Pressure Points - CV Row 3 > (Pittsburgh) Sequencer - ADD
- Spectral Multiband Resonator - OUT odds > (Pittsburgh) Mixer - Input 1
- Spectral Multiband Resonator - OUT evens > (Pittsburgh) Mixer - Input 2
- A-124 VCF5 - LP/HP Out > Echophon - IN
- Echophon - MIX OUT > Planar - Input D
- RS-35 - LEVEL-V OUT > RF Nomad - CV In
- RF Nomad - Audio Out > (Pittsburgh) FLTR - Input
- ModDeMix - Mix Out > LxD - 12 dB Input
- Function - positive output > LxD - CV 1
- LxD - 12 dB Output > Planar - Input C
- Passive Mult - A (gates) > Function - Input
- Contact mic > Mikrophonie - MIC IN

Patch details

Contact mic to sequence polyphonic layers

Mikrophonie contact mic amplifier into A-119 asym input, audio out 1 into Pittsburgh Filter; variable filter output going into Mixer - channel 4, then into Clouds for stereo granular delay, then into output module.

A-119 out 2 into RS-35 external processor; Trig out of RS-35 into QCD clock input, stackable cable mult into clock input of Beatstep Pro.

RS-35 - Freq-V V-Out > Black Polivoks VCF - CV 2 (control over filter frequency, with attenuation).

RS-35 - Level-V Out > FLTR - FREQ CV In.

Pittsburgh Sequencer > Disting - quantizer mode (minor pentatonic) > Waveforms, using blade and sine outputs.

Blade output into Erica Synths Black Polivoks VCF; sine output into WMD wavefolder > Pittsburgh Modular LPG.

Both filtered Waveforms outputs going to Fade (VCA with crossfade) > Chronoblob > Mix Mult - In/Out 1 > Planar - Input B.

Waveforms - Sub out > FLTR - lowpass out > ModDeMix - In 1 (modulation input 2 from Oscillator 1 - Triangle for ring mod) out 2 > LxD - In 1 (Pressure Points gate out triggering envelope from Function to CV 1 of LxD) > Planar - Input C.

A-119 - Gate Out > ADSR (1) - Input; ADSR Output > Fade - Level CV

Mixer module:

1 - Spectral Multiband Resonator - odds

2 - Spectral Multiband Resonator - evens

3 - Planar (4 sources)

4 - Contact mic

Planar:

A - Rings resonator

B - Analog synth voice

C - Sub-oscillator (analog synth)

D - grandPA/ Phonogene samples

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Modulation of analog synth voice

- Waveforms sine out > Ultrafold - Shift CV modulated by a mixture of LFOs combined and reshaped in the Invy (dual attenuverter) - Mix out.

- LFO2 - Triangle out > Invy - In 1; Envelope (Rise and Fall CV modulated by another Envelope, with Rise CV modulated by LFO2) > Invy - In 2.

- Ultrafold - Fold CV modulated from Wogglebug - Stepped output.

- Waveforms - Blade CV modulated from MATHS - Out 1 (cycling envelope).

- Waveforms - FM CV modulated by sine output of Oscillator 2.

- QCD clocked by triggers from RS-35: QCD Out 1 > Chronoblob delay - Sync

- QCD Out 2 > uStep - Clock In; uStep - Gate Out A > ADSR 2 > IMX - inverted output > LPG - Freq CV In; IMX - sum output > Black Polivoks VCF - CV 1.

- QCD Out 3 > Wogglebug - Clock In.

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Modulation of Rings resonator voice

- Beatstep Pro - Sequencer 1 - Pitch > Rings - V/OCT; Sequencer 1 - Gate > Rings - STRUM.

- Pittsburgh Modular Envelopes 1 & 2 (Envelope 1 cycling with Rise CV modulated by LFO2 - Square > Envelope 2 - Both CV, both Rise and Fall modulated by Envelope 1) > Rings - Structure CV.

- Nano Rand - Random waveforms clocked by Little Nerd (clocked in turn by Wogglebug - Burst) > Rings - Position CV.

- Rings - Odd & Even outs > Optomix - Inputs 1 & 2 (knobs manually adjusted to control level before going to Planar - Input A).

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Modulation of grandPA / Phonogene samples

- Beatstep Pro - Sequencer 2 - Pitch > grandPA - CV In; Sequencer 2 - Gate > grandPA - Trig B.

- MATHS - 4 > SPA (grandPA expander) - Grain Size; MATHS - 2 > SPA - Shift Speed.

- grandPA - Out > Phonogene > Wasp filter > Echophon > Planar - Input D.

- Wogglebug - Smooth output > MixMult - channel 2 > stackable cable mult to Wasp filter - CV 1 AND Pittsburgh Filter (contact mic) - Frequency CV.

- Oscillator 1 - Sine output > Wasp filter - CV 2.

- If using Phonogene to record and manipulate audio from grandPA: Nano Rand - S&H out > Phonogene - Slide; Wogglebug - Woggle out > Phonogene - Organize; RS-35 - V-Out > stackable cable mult > Phonogene - Varispeed; uStep - Gate Out B > Phonogene - Record.

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Performance preparations

- Pre-tune modular melodic sequencing to banjo loop

- Adjust RS-35 Trig Sense

- Beatstep Pro start button, set to CLK

- Adjust volume of contact mic relative to volume of other parts (not too loud)

- Adjust volume of samples relative to other parts

- Check contact microphone response with footwork

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I.

Modular

- Contact mic on board, amplified and filtered; adjust frequency cutoff on Filter. Mix Mult - channel 2 attenuates the amount of random frequency change from Wogglebug - Smooth Output.

- Hit Play on Beatstep Pro - first sequenced part to be heard will be from Spectral Multiband Resonator > Mixer - channels 1 & 2. Adjust Spread control of Spectral Multiband Resonator. Move through "Drum" Sequences 1-4 to trigger different patterns on the SMR.

- Mixer - channel 4 (contact mic) at 10:00; bring up channels 1 & 2 (Spectral Multiband Resonator odds & evens outputs) to 2:00; channel 3 down.

- Planar - joystick set to B (to be ready for introduction of analog synth part in the next section)

- Pressure Points - Pressure Out > Clouds - Dens, apply pressure to increase density of granular delay.

2'

Dance Board

- Begin exploration of hands on board- finger taps, swishes. Moves into swiping the forearm and sliding the foot across the board, circling the foot. Finding moments of pause, moments of quiet stillness.

- Rise to standing. Foot swishes, ron de jambe, shuffles, heel drops - fragmented explorations of sound. Gaze is on the board and slowly rises up to audience.

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II.

Modular

- Bring up channel 3 on Mixer; contact mic triggers from feet create analog synth tones.

- Transpose sequenced tones with Pressure Points - Row 3 > Sequencer - Add input.

- Adjust frequency of Black Polivoks filter, manually, with CV 1 level (ADSR 2) and CV 2 level (RS-35 - Freq-V).

- Activate gates from uStep to trigger ADSR 2 and modulate Black Polivoks Filter freq cutoff.

- Fade - crossfade control to blend Waveforms sources (1 is Blade output > Black Polivoks; 2 is Sine output > Ultrafold > LPG). Also adjust freq cutoff on LPG for channel 2.

- Mixer output goes into A-199 SPRV spring reverb. Adjust Mix level on A-199.

- Planar - move joystick between B & C positions (analog synth voice / sub-oscillator triggered by touch plates on Pressure Points.

2'

Dance Board

- Standing percussive footwork interjects brief phrases of flatfooting, with different amounts of space between them alternating tempos. Discover moments of complete stillness movement holding pauses until the boards ripples of sound are quiet. Sporadic, repetitive, recognizable bits from "Green Corn" Choreography, and other sections from the show interjected here.

12

III. **Modular**	• Move Planar joystick halfway between A & B to introduce Rings resonator module; melodic sequencing from Beatstep Pro follows unpredictable clocking response to contact mic input. • Beatstep Pro - Sequencer 1: start with sequence 1. Then move between sequences 6 & 7. • Adjust presence of Rings voice with Optomix levels, and with Planar joystick position (Rings is on A). • Rings - Brightness & Damping controls. • grandPa - mix in samples triggered by the feet. Sequencer 2: sequence 12	**2'**

Dance Board	• Green Corn Choreography from T-Mart Rounders Repertoire. Cycle through pattern AABBAB increase tempo during last AB. Facings shift during B parts.

13

IV. **Modular**	• Planar - move joystick between A & D positions to mix in samples triggered by the feet. • Beatstep Pro - Sequencer 2: move through first few sequences controlling granular samples from the grandPA module > Phonogene > A-124 VCF5 Wasp filter, high pass output (adjust) > Echophon (play with delay) > Planar - D input. • Planar - move joystick to middle, stay there for awhile; then end with slow movement to D position. • Mixer - bring down channels 1 & 2 (Spectral Multiband Resonator), fade out.	**1'**

Dance Board	• Increase syncopation, with 16-note rolls - Maupin step while pivoting in a circle. Increase tempo to 120 bpm. Keep consistent bpm. Flatfooting improvisational section utilize steps collected from Thomas Maupin, Robert Dotson, Eileen Carson, Rodney Sutton, Sharon Leahy and others. Think freestyle footwork vocabulary in the midst of a bustling square dance. • Build Energy

14

V.   40"

Modular

- grandPa - Sequence 9 from Beatstep Sequencer 2

- Mixer - bring down channels 1 & 2 (Spectral Multiband Resonator), fade out. End section with just the samples and contact mic.

Dance Board

- Release into drag backstep slowing the tempo down incrementally until complete stillness.

15

VI.   2-3'

Modular

- Fade in banjo loop audio on Traktor Kontrol S4

- Feet triggering analog synth voice.

- Mix Planar positions A & B, mixing and alternating between Rings resonator and analog synth voices.

Dance Board

- End with a double turn facing the modular synthesizer, change levels from standing to touching the step-a-tune. Use sustained slow full bodied movement to rise up to verticality. Start improvising segmented phrases after16 counts into the Banjo Loop A. Breathe.

16

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VI. Continued

Modular

- Audio playback moves from banjo loop to longer modal melody, to major section, back to modal melody, back to banjo loop with added hums.

- Joined by live fiddle playing loops centering on sustained double-stops.

Dance Board

- Banjo loop A section: segmented phrases - call and response with fiddle. Banjo loop modal melody section: syncopated paddle and roll variations. Banjo loop major section: clogging / flatfooting footwork referencing Eileen Carson, Thomas Maupin, Robert Dotson and others. Back to Banjo Loop A section: segmented phrases.

- Step off step-a-tune after second hums ending with a ron de jambe.

- Dance cast enters and exchanges phrases of footwork as the modular sythnesizer sounds fade out, leaving the hums of human voice to conclude the piece.

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Version created for Becky Hill's M.F.A. Dance Concert,

Lost Patterns (University of Maryland, 3/11-13, 2022)

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