

Sheyann Murdock
ENT 4499
Culmination Spring 2023
Progress Reflection

A Dive into Dance Africa. This project sure has taught me a lot. From thinking it out, to planning it, to executing to process. After what seems like my last, or second to last meeting with my tech advisor, I only have to do a few minor changes before it's finished. And with a week and a half to spare. My only minor changes right now are to adjust my lower thirds (which is the small writing of the talent's name and/or position) and to adjust my audio a bit. This involves my key frames, which control the volume, and fading into my sound so it's not too choppy. This shouldn't take me too long and I should be done and sending out my final reviews to faculty within this week. I am glad that I was able to see through this because at first, it was only an idea in my head. I'm very glad to have watched it play out and even knowing I had a major hand in it helps me to feel accomplished. If I'm being honest, I'd say the first few weeks of this project had me a little scared, but I think the better word to use would be overwhelmed. I was overwhelmed because I didn't have the slightest idea of how this would turn out. I had a whole bunch of ideas with no leads which eventually led to a slight frustration. After getting footage, that still didn't help because now I had a whole bunch of photos and videos but still no structure.

After creating a storyboard and doing the interviews is when I started to feel a little at ease. This was because I started having a sense of direction about where this documentary was headed. My first interview was with Thurston Reyes, former lighting assistant for Dance Africa from 1995-1997. This meeting was set up all because my culmination teacher knew Thurston and advocated for me to interview him! This was a big start in my project and I'm grateful I was able to learn all of the information that I did while in the process of this interview. My next interview was with Karen Thornton aka "Mama Karen" at her dance studio, The Billie Holiday Dance Theater.

Through this interview I was able to feel a strong sense of camaraderie and togetherness. It was awesome watching her in her element and especially the dancers. Each and everyone of them were amazing. After speaking to a few of them, they come from all different backgrounds. Some have been dancing for about two years while some have been dancing for about fifteen years which is their whole lives. Watching them dance just made me even more eager to attend the upcoming Dance Africa event going on. This interview actually took place in two parts, because I had to end up taking another trip there. This is because some of my videos were too over-saturated. Going back a second time, although the problem still occurred in some videos, helped me to get a wider range/wider variety of footage to use. Therefore, although some were still over-saturated, I did have additional footage to add to it.

My third interview, although not included in the video, was with Jamel Gaines. He is a dancer/choreographer involved with Dance Africa and is also at the Mark Morris Dance Company. Going to their studio to observe the dancers was unlike anything I've ever witnessed. The choreographer was amazing, although I didn't catch his name. The dancers were very powerful. From their moves to their song of choice, you can just tell that they love what they do. Although I went to observe the practice, I wasn't able to actually connect with Jamel too much. He was very busy so at the time I couldn't interview him. Every time after that, our schedules never aligned so I wasn't able to include him in my documentary, however it was still an honor to be able to attend their practice and soak in all the atmosphere. It would have been good to get a couple words from him because he focuses on more contemporary dance, which would've surely helped with showing the ranges of Dance Africa's performances. The process of planning and executing the interviews for this project really taught me a lot. It taught me about networking and reaching out to people in a respectful way.

Because of my ties at Brooklyn Academy of Music I was able to connect with some great people who participated in the involvement of Dance Africa. My old supervisor was able to connect me with them and from there, it was my responsibility to provide my reasoning on why I wanted to do this. It took me about four or five trips to the archive office and four to five potential interviews to get the finished product of this piece. Upon finishing, I learned a lot about time management and how important it is to the overall finishing of the project. I also learned that it is super important to write your ideas down. At the beginning of this project I was very confused because I had a whole bunch of ideas but no way of knowing/no plan to execute. Putting these thoughts to paper really helped me clear my head and be able to see a way that this would finish. After starting it and having my intro down, I was no longer worried about the beginning but about the end. It is easy to start something but to see it through is a different story. Luckily, I was able to follow through on most of the plans made. This includes the interviews, the writing & rewriting of the script, as well as the structure of the documentary itself. I know now that things get smoother once you have an idea to base it on, and are not just doing things as you go along. Trying that at first led to me taking a little extra time on the start up, but it led to a great finish.

Overall, throughout the making of this documentary I have had a lot to take away. Through the process of pre production to post production, there was a lot to consider if I wanted certain things to be executed in my documentary. There are also some things I fell short on since it was just me who overall had creative freedom throughout the documentary. I think next time, especially considering whether or not it would be a big project (or more time in the sense of the length of the video) I would probably get a team together to help me. This way one person can focus on their responsibility which would in turn lighten the load but also leaves room for more improvement! I've come to realize that if one person is focusing on all aspects such as video, sound, lighting, or

etc., then it leaves more space to disregard one thing and focus on another. However, having people assigned to each role will make for more of a precise finish, because everyone would essentially have their own track to focus on.