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# ANTHOLOGY OF LOVE: LEAH FRY'S HUMBLING HOMAGE

March 31, 2021

**By Samia Williams**

Behind every riveting dance performance done by the dance students of Lindenwood is an equally as riveting choreographer—and during the Fall and Winter dance concerts, the best pull out all the stops to convey thematic passion through movement and body language. Watching it is an experience—whether you find yourself “getting it” or not—because there’s no denying that it *feels like something special* when three girls, separated by six feet, masks, and fluttering colored lights in the dark dance upon the stage and tell a story they’ve also added to by putting their own “movement and truth in the dance.”

One of the choreographers *and* dancers this year, Leah Fry, has been behind the scenes multiple times to create some wildly impressive material—namely in 2018, 2019, and 2021 for various Fall and Winter dance concerts—and no matter the boundaries that arose this year provided by COVID-19, she impressively rose to the occasion and choreographed *Anthology of Love*, a routine dedicated to her family members and grandparents. What began as a method to spark her creative ingenuity during her youth has now blossomed into something beyond her wildest dreams as she’s now able to combine her passion for dance with her passion for her family into more than just words, but into an *experience*.

Originally, her parents were the ones to put her in dance, but over time, she confessed to me, that, “as I grew, it just became something that was a constant in my life...through my life, dance was always an outlet—a way to express my joy or sadness and it evolved into my passion for making dance and performing and to share my expression with others.” Now, she sees dance as something that’s not only given her a creative outlet, but it’s also taught her a lot throughout the years she’s spent at Lindenwood in the Dance program: “discipline, teamwork, time management perseverance, how to be honest with myself and others, and how to understand my own body are just [some] hard-earned lessons.” Each skill acquired as a result of her dedication and skill matched with the diligence and excellency of the Lindenwood Dance Program paved the way for her technical success during the 2021 Winter Dance Concert held March 12-14, and her passion and gratefulness for her family, and the opportunity to convey that love, is on full display throughout the entire duration of *Anthology of Love*. Interestingly enough,

she also admitted the formulation of the routine had been a complexing one: something that challenged her and forced her to think outside the box.

When asked about it, she said, "at the beginning of the process, I created four movement phrases set to the wedding songs of my grandparents and parents. While creating movement to their songs, I tried to tell their stories of their relationship and the relationship I have with them. I then put the movement phrases over one song and put the dance together in a way to symbolize how their love has affected me and my views about love." It's always been through movement that Leah has tried to tell stories—and she has done it well enough to even be recognized for her work, "Faroe," that was produced in collaboration with Lindenwood Cinema Arts Students and was selected for American Dance Festival's Movies by Movers, an International Screen Dance Festival—yet movement had not come so easily this go-around, and that was on purpose. "In challenging my choreographic self, I wanted to create movement that was not restrained by the counts or the quality of music. I tend to choreograph very closely to the music, and I wanted to reach beyond that. I picked a song that had no solid meter or counts, which I didn't realize until we were dancing to it, but it forced my dancers and me to really on movement and each other to dance and let the movement itself be the focal point of the dance and the music be simply an aid to the overall experience."

Each day as Leah and her dancers--Megan Mayer, Mackenzie Roberts, Shelby Whitley—took to the practice room to create movement, to tell a story, and to convey passion all to a song that had no solid meter or counts to pay homage to those that supported her over the course of her journey. She admitted that the circumstances weren't ideal as the performance was being shot from several angles, therefore every angle of the move had to be considered for the audiences; the dancers were always 6ft away, therefore partner work wasn't a possibility; and halfway through the practices, they had to take a 10-minute break for a machine to disinfect the air that they breathed. "Obviously, while I prefer to make art without the restrictions of the pandemic, I think it really pushed me to think differently about creating art... as you can imagine these rules really restricted what we could do- there is no facial expression, no partner work, it limits how our dancers can move together and in a formation. It pushes you to think outside of the norm. It made me think *how do I create an entertaining and dynamic piece with limits on how we can use our dancers?* Overall, I think this was a learning curve for my own choreography and am excited to mesh what I knew and what I know in future."

Regardless of the challenges, that may have defied her technological thinking, it's was her dedication, and her partners inspired dedications, to making something out of nothing, powered by pure love, that had drove her to successfully produce *Anthology of Love*. "I am very grateful that I have had such a supportive family and great friendships. Some people are not as lucky to have people that support a performance career, but my family and friends are very involved and supportive of my work. I am also grateful to Lindenwood's Dance Program for offering so many opportunities to challenge myself, present my work, and perform in different venues. I think I have become a much better dancer and choreographer for it. Knowing that I have a community of people who want the best for me and want to help me get there or being surrounded by people who

understand because we are in the same position, is very comforting when going into a dance career,” she said, “in the end, there is a phrase that was not used through the entire dance that is kind of my conclusion statement on my anthology of love that expresses my own truth... I think my dancers conveyed this message beautifully and helped put their own movement and truth in the dance. Their individual solos were made by them pulling movement from the original four phrases to create a piece that resonated with them most. My cast was a huge part of this project and helped mold the dance into what it was.”

It's impressive to me that each question asked to Leah about her performance had not only been met with an answer that discussed her own role in her success, but she proudly spoke of influence of others on the performance, and how powerful that was: as if it weren't just Leah, but also *everyone* and *everything* that made her who she is and made *Anthology of Love* a possibility. Mentalities such as Leah's should be cherished, as her success is built from the foundation of something as rich and substantial as the moves movements she diligently works to create. It's humanistic passion that drives her love for the arts, and she has no intention of stopping her creative explorations anytime soon.

Currently, she's working on a piece for Synergy—the dance club on the Lindenwood University campus that's open to everyone who is interested. So, be sure to show your support and mark your calendars for April 30<sup>th</sup> at 4:30pm to meet outside the J. Scheidegger building and walk around campus and see some outdoor performances!