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Student Experiences of *Soul Healing* in  
Music and Dance Performance Courses at The University of California, Los Angeles

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Ethnomusicology

by

Lara Diane Rann

2015

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Student Experiences of *Soul Healing* in

Music and Dance Performance Courses at The University of California, Los Angeles

by

Lara Diane Rann

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Cheryl L. Keyes, Chair

This dissertation illuminates students' experiences of "soul healing" through the cultivation of spirituality, self-love/ self-knowledge, mentorship, and community in the context of two UCLA courses: the Music and Dance of Ghana World Music Performance Ensemble, taught by master drummer Kobla Ladzekpo of the Anlo-Ewe ethnic group in Ghana, West Africa, and "Advanced Hip Hop," taught by "street dance" pioneer and choreographer Rennie Harris, of Philadelphia, PA. My definition of soul healing is inspired by historian Bernice Johnson Reagon's conviction that many African American music traditions were conceived and carried out for the purpose of treating the wounds left by "soul murder," a phenomenon that historian Nell Irvin Painter characterizes as the collective trauma that resulted from the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath. Drawing upon philosopher Arnold Van Gennep's theory of rites of passage and anthropologist Victor Turner's ensuing conceptualization of liminality, I conclude that the courses explored in this dissertation create the circumstance for a transitioning into adulthood that empowers students to healthfully matriculate through the university while

they heal mentally and physically from challenges faced before and during college. My qualitative research, based upon five years of participant observation, advances our understanding of the significance of ethnomusicology pioneer Mantle Hood's theory of bi-musicality and the role of performance ensembles in current world music pedagogy, while also prompting a renewed appreciation for the presence of African and "African descended" music and dance instruction in higher education. This study contributes to the disciplines of African American studies, African musicology, dance studies, dance and movement therapy, education, and anthropology, while adding more specifically to the fields of cultural studies and ethnomusicology.

The dissertation of Lara Diane Rann is approved.

Anthony Seeger

Jacqueline C. DjeDje

Steven Loza

Edith Omwami

Cheryl L. Keyes, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

DEDICATION

To Aurelia Joy

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If I have forgotten anyone, please charge it to my head and not to my heart.

*“Mama may have, Papa may have; but God bless the child who’s got [her] own...  
who’s got [her] own.”*

--Billie Holiday

## VITA

### Education

- 2007 M.A., Ethnomusicology  
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2002 B.A., Anthropology, Music minor, Davidson College

### Selected Honors and Awards

- 2010 Wise Scholarship, UCLA Ethnomusicology Department
- 2009 DIGSSS Award for Students in the Social Sciences
- 2008-2009 UCLA Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship
- 2005-2008 UCLA Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship
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- 2006 Quality of Graduate Education Award
- 1998-2002 Davidson Scholar, Davidson College
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### University Teaching Experience

- 2013-2015 Teaching Fellow, Department of Ethnomusicology, UCLA: *Development of Jazz, Global Pop, Chicano Music in the U.S.*
- 2013-2014 Lecturer, California State University, Northridge: *History of Hip Hop Music*
- 2009-2010 Instructor, UCLA Graduate Mentorship Program (AAP), *The Arts Initiative Honors Seminar* with Dr. La'Tonya Rease-Miles
- 2007-2008 Teaching Associate, Department of Ethnomusicology, UCLA  
*African American Musical Heritage* with Dr. Cheryl L. Keyes  
*Music Cultures of Africa and the Near East* with Dr. A.J. Racy  
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- 2006-2007 Teaching Assistant, UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology  
*Music Cultures of Europe and the Americas* with Dr. Anthony Seeger; *Music of Latin America/Caribbean* with Dr. Steven Loza

### Other Professional Employment

- 2014 Bruin Tutors: Guide and assistant teacher for students from China
- 2009-2010 Graduate Mentor, UCLA ArtsBridge
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- 2006 Graduate Student Researcher, Ethnomusicology Archive, UCLA
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- 2009 Senegal: Contemporary and traditional West African dance.
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- 2007 Egypt: Arabic (Colloquial Egyptian); music education for refugee youth.
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- 2001 Spain: Spanish language and Art History.
- 2001 Austria: German language and Art Song.
- 2000 Mexico: Spanish language, Mexican history and culture.

**Publications**

- 2009 “Book Review: Afro-Brazilians: Cultural Production in a Racial Democracy.” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 36(1), online. UCLA International Institute.

**Conference Papers and Presentations**

- 2014 “‘How Do I Let Go?’ Learning to Surrender in *House* at UCLA.” Panel Chairperson. Presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California and Hawai’i Chapter Conference, UC Santa Barbara.
- 2009 “Remembrances of a Queendom.” Presented at the UCLA African Activist Association Conference, “Narratives of Now: Visual and Performance Art in Africa.”
- 2007 “Singing in Color: Music in the Work of African American Graduate Student Artists at UCLA.” Presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California Chapter Conference, UC Riverside.

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- 2014 "Imaginings of Africa in African American Music." Presented as course lecture for "Global Pop," UCLA.
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- 2013 Copy Editor, *Ethnomusicology Review*. UCLA Ethnomusicology Dept.
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- 2010 Publications Liaison, Society for Ethnomusicology Conference (L.A.).
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- 2008 “West African Dance.” Presented as workshop for *MyBeauty* Camp for Girls (CA) and Precision Dance Center (NC)

## INTRODUCTION

In chapter four of *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me* (2001), historian Bernice Johnson Reagon considers fellow historian Nell Irvin Painter's theory of "soul murder," the "cost that is paid when one is abused, raped, beaten, and repeatedly violated," with regard to historical challenges of African American life in the United States (125). In doing so, Reagon places special emphasis on migration as a means of resisting slavery and the toxic conditions that persisted in its aftermath. Initially introduced to "soul murder" in a seminar on African American music several years ago, I perceived "soul healing" as applicable to combating soul murder in which music acts as a balm, making soul healing possible. Music, as an audible source, often couples with dance as an accompanying physical emanation in soul healing. The context for "soul healing" in this study is the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and its subjects, or interviewees, are student artists. Interviewees in this study discuss the use of music and dance practices taught to them via professional instruction. The student artists learn how to apply what they learn in order to heal from grief, insecurity, isolation, and even from physical injury.

In this dissertation, I examine student experiences in two classes at UCLA where healing occurs through professors' instruction and students' participation and interaction. Case study number one is a West African music and dance class offered in the Department of Ethnomusicology called "The UCLA Music and Dance of Ghana World Music Ensemble." Case study number two is a "house" dance class offered in the Department of World Arts and Culture/Dance. I choose to present these two courses because I have spent several years conducting participant-observation in both as an enrolled graduate student. In framing my dissertation

research, I hypothesized that some students take these classes with the goal of achieving some form of healing. I believed (and now know) that while students take the class for myriad reasons, some experience a sense of healing that they were not expecting by the time the class is over. In both classes, there is a common element of a feeling of healing that is transferred to the students through the music and steered by the instructors. As I will further examine in my study, healing of oneself is attributed to the athletic nature of dance and the physical sense of release that it incites.

This physical exertion gains potency when coupled with music in classroom settings that provide stimulating social interaction, the development of a weekly or bi-weekly practice, and opportunities for individual expression. Additionally, the breathing process that accompanies rhythmic movement potentially boosts one's mood and aids in healing, as weekly or bi-weekly dance practice becomes a meditative practice, even if unrecognized as such by the students. Thus, sensations of catharsis are often a result of the intense process of learning music and dance in these settings. My years of participant- observation in both classes place me in a position to derive a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. In framing the conceptual foundation for music and dance styles that are rooted in an African worldview, the issue of healing is invoked to provide understanding of the classes' significance to student life and campus climate at UCLA in the early 21st century.

### *Research Background*

My academic and professional background reflects a long-standing interest in student art making and black music and dance. My interest in race and ethnicity comes from over ten years spent pursuing a greater understanding of race on college campuses that I attended, both here and abroad. As an undergraduate at Davidson College (1998-2002), I conducted a study on quality

of life for African American females, who then made up about five percent of the campus student population of 1600 students. This research was informed by participant-observation in campus life as an African American female, and one year spent as a guest student at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA (1999-2000). Attending a historically black college for women provided a contrasting model for observing undergraduate women's self-perception and sense of personal growth in an environment in which the factors of race and gender were neutralized. For my anthropology senior colloquium at Davidson, entitled "Indigenous Rights and Voices," I researched the Khoisan people of southern Africa and the reclamation of their ethnic identity in the wake of apartheid's abolition. I sought to identify parallels between the Khoisan's experiences and those of African American communities in search of a renewed sense of shared identity following segregation and during ongoing processes of racial integration in the United States. In graduate school, my scholarly interests merged with my devotion to the arts. As a masters student in ethnomusicology, my first scholarly conference paper presentation was "Singing in Color," on the incorporation of music into African American UCLA graduate student artists' work in the theatre and film schools. I also professionally mentored "underrepresented" student artists as a graduate mentor in UCLA's Academic Advancement Program, designing and teaching an honors seminar that prepared students for graduate study in the arts.

My formal instruction in music began at age five when I started taking piano lessons, and has continued through graduate level coursework and community instruction in various art forms, which has included international travel to Africa, South America, and Europe. My academic interest in dance commenced at UCLA when I realized that my graduate studies did not afford me much time to practice the instruments that I played. However, I found that I could keep up my musicality by taking dance classes. I was driven to continue learning by my



determination to perform on a level equal to my classmates and thus gain fluency in communicating through dance. As a graduate student, I participated in the UCLA World Music and Dance of Ghana Performance Ensemble for five years. Further, I have studied African dance traditions in Senegal and Brazil, in addition to taking community African and Afro-Caribbean dance classes in South Los Angeles as well as instruction in jazz and reggae music performance. I also conducted fieldwork at sites of improvised communal “street dance” and drum circles in Los Angeles and Bahía, Brazil. After years of studying various styles of African diasporic movement, my self-expression through dance began to emerge more expertly. Self-affirming aspects of dance, and favorable effects such as healing, became more tangible and important to me as a practical application of my studies. Additionally I took classes in arts therapy under the tutelage of Professor Emerita Irma Dosamantes-Beaudry of the World Arts and Cultures/ Dance department. My academic background and life experiences led me to discover music and dance practices that would spur me to grow and heal, while also inciting me to explore the parallel journeys of my peers as our paths converged at UCLA.

### *Methodology*

The primary methodology used in this study is participant-observation. I am an “insider ethnographer,” having been a member of the Music and Dance of Ghana World Music Performance Ensemble for five years, and having performed as a member of the Ladzekpos’ group, Zadonu African Music and Dance Company. My work involved intensive fieldwork in Los Angeles including personal interviews that I conducted with Professor Ladzekpo and his daughter Yeko Ladzekpo-Cole, in addition to interviews with current students and recent alumni of the ensemble. I administered a survey to twenty-two students in Spring 2010 and re-administered it to seven students in Spring 2012. I also gathered archival material including

newspapers, programs, articles, and audio and video recordings produced locally by the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive, written both by and about the Ladzekpo family. Because there was a time lapse between when I first began my formal fieldwork in 2010 and when I resumed it in 2012, the two case studies are methodologically divergent. After conducting my first survey in the Music and Dance of Ghana ensemble, enough time went by so that the majority of initial class participants were either no longer on campus, no longer in the class, and/or hard to find. Thus, I was able to have in-depth interviews with only two of the students as compared to the four students that I interviewed in “Advanced Hip Hop.”

In “Advanced Hip Hop,” participant observation was, again, my principal methodological tool. As a method of collecting informational data, I administered an initial questionnaire to twenty-seven students near the end of the quarter in Spring 2012. The following July, I attended Rennie Harris’ 2012 hip hop festival in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. “Illadelph” and its workshops, which were taught by hip hop dance pioneers, allowed me to get a feel for the urban environment that created hip hop and that nurtures house and its devotees. Although house is more known for its roots in Chicago and underpinning in New York City, “Philly,” as sometimes called, is a veritable hub for black arts and artists. A year later, I conducted interviews among current students, alumni of the class, and instructors in the Los Angeles dance community to get a broader understanding of house as a cultural phenomenon. I used the Internet and primary sources in addition to scholarly books and articles to gain information about the history of house music. As a class attendee for four years, I experienced my roles as both outsider and participant observer. Although I identify myself as a culture bearer credited for creating the genre, I was largely unfamiliar with the in-group etiquette of hip hop and street dance in general upon entering the class. As an African American graduate student from ethnomusicology, I was a

minority in more ways than one. However, having taken the class for several years along with my culture bearer and maternal statuses, I was accepted by participants of the class as another dancer and house enthusiast. After collecting the data for this project, literature from a variety of disciplines helped me to interpret what I had observed.

## DISSERTATION CONTRIBUTIONS AND STRUCTURE

This study is organized into four chapters: (1) Review of the Literature, (2) “*Soul Healing in the UCLA Music and Dance of Ghana World Music Performance Ensemble*,” (3) “Soul Healing in House,” and (4) “Bringing It All Together.” Two chapter length ethnographies present the background, structure, and current issues explored through my fieldwork in the case studies, while chapter four provides an in-depth analysis of the interview data gleaned from both case studies. The potential long-range significance of this study to ethnomusicology lies in its contributions to (1) an increased understanding and contextualization of the concept of healing as it relates to music and dance in the university classroom; (2) the role of the world music performance ensemble in university student life; (3) the documentation of teaching philosophies of UCLA professors and culture bearers Kobla Ladzekpo and Rennie Harris; and (4) an insight into the changing role of time-tested music-making practices when traditional cultural performance is applied to a contemporary academic context with ethnically diverse students. This study also adds to ethnomusicological literature on movement as a reflection of sound (with dance being an aspect of musical performance that is rarely privileged in the literature).

Correspondingly, few ethnomusicological studies consider higher education and student life as contexts for exploration. However, the college campus is a valuable and accessible research site, abounding with diverse demographic groups. Potential informants assembled from this environment are often already familiar with the research process because of their own

studies. Studies that include concepts such as healing and dance are typically based upon field research abroad among indigenous cultures. However, the issue of “music as healing” is gaining significance in circles within and outside of academia. Largely due to grassroots efforts to humanize medical practice, proponents of music as a valid and effective healing tool are gaining exposure and validation. Thus, this dissertation also adds to the subfield of medical ethnomusicology, analyzing the effects of music “as” medicine employed in the university setting.

A number of artistic expressions at UCLA, through course curricula and presentations, formal concerts, and performances done through the student community, are based in “African descended” art forms. Drawn from all majors, ethnicities, and class backgrounds, “Music and Dance of Ghana” and “House” provide instruction in “black art” and simultaneously reflect the diversity of UCLA while representing very distinct cultures, brought to campus as unifying agents. The significance of studying an African music/dance class and an African American dance class is surely worth unpacking. House belongs on a continuum of musics that have their very foundation and roots in African life and are found in transformed styles throughout its Diaspora, which was created as a result of that massive centuries-long operation, the slave trade. Similarities between African dance and “African descended” dance indubitably abound, in the forms of polyrhythms, repetitive beats, call and response, conglomeration of dance and music, and aesthetic value of expressiveness. An added spiritual significance to this connection comes when contemplating some students’ ancestral relationships with Africa, and African music’s foundational standing among popular musics and religious musics found throughout the Americas, many of which converge to form house. This dissertation provides a snapshot of some of the “healing work” that is being performed at UCLA in a perhaps unlikely place: the

classroom. Here, students are physically working through their issues and, through performance and practice, emerge stronger for having faced the challenges that dance/music instructors and culture bearers Kobla Ladzekpo and Rennie Harris proffer. The strength that results from taking the classes is evidence of healing, which I prove through ethnographic fieldwork and analysis.

## CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Because my topic encompasses four overarching themes (soul healing/healing in ethnomusicology, world music ensembles and pedagogy, healing in African dance, and healing in house/hip hop), the literature review for this dissertation is extremely interdisciplinary.<sup>1</sup> The disciplines include history, ethnomusicology, musicology, music therapy, music, dance studies, dance therapy, anthropology, sociology, psychology (including clinical and transformative), African studies, African American studies, education, religion, English literature, theatre, folklore, and cultural studies. The fact that scholars from the social sciences, humanities, and the arts have taken an interest in this subject, it is not surprising that their approach to the subject varies. Although some publications are autobiographical, narrative in form, and qualitative in method, most writers use ethnography to present their findings. Scholars from music, dance therapy, and education tend to write about applied uses of music and dance in their work with patients or with youth. By and large, authors from the social sciences provide some numerical data and statistics about their studies, which they conducted from a clinical perspective. The majority of the sources that I use in the first half of the literature review are from ethnomusicology while the second half of my literature review presents work from a plethora of disciplines.

The earliest works that I cite are from the 1950s, which is one of the limitations of my study. I have not included ancient sources such as the Bible that would have addressed the historical context of music and dance as healing agents. Rather, I focus on literature written

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<sup>1</sup> I found most of my sources through Internet searches. I consulted the online UCLA Music Library website for books, databases such as ProQuest for dissertations and theses, and JSTOR for journal articles. I learned of other sources through word of mouth or was exposed to them through course content.

recently. I would like to conduct future research that takes into account the “ageless wisdom” of the arts as used by indigenous peoples and early civilizations throughout the world. The most recent works that I examine are from 2014. Another limitation of my research is the narrow range of dance forms that I consider integral to my discussion. While I consider ancient and indigenous dance forms taught and performed in contemporary contexts in addition to contemporary street dance forms taught and performed in nontraditional contexts (such as academia), I do not include contemporary/modern black dance in this conversation. Thus, this dissertation does not examine the Alvin Ailey Dance Company and there is little discussion of African diasporic dance pioneers Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus. Also, because I investigate two different genres (Ghanaian music/dance and house), I do not compare world music performance ensembles or hip hop dance classes with others of their kind, which are found in many parts of the world. This is another area of future research that I plan to pursue.

#### Organization of the Chapter

I begin the literature review with an illumination of the term “soul healing” and its background, in addition to the concept of healing within the history of ethnomusicology. In keeping with the order of the dissertation chapters, part two provides a discussion of literature from ethnomusicology regarding world music ensembles and pivotal works from various discourses that frame the Kobla Ladzekpo’s teaching philosophy. This also includes literature about African dance drumming pedagogy and instructional curriculum design. Part three presents sources from various disciplines, including dance studies, that examine the topic of healing in African dance in the United States and in other parts of the African Diaspora; this section also includes some background information on the field of dance therapy and how it dovetails with the topic of African descended dance and healing. Part four provides an

exploration of literature about healing as it relates to two music/dance genres that figure prominently in chapters four and five of the dissertation, house and hip hop.

## **PART ONE**

### **SOUL HEALING**

From my review of writings in the last three decades, I found the topic of healing evoked in the fields of social, transformative, and clinical psychology; sociology; and African American history. No matter their discipline, the social scientists that I cite tend to: 1) be African American scholars studying the phenomenon of healing among African American people; 2) be women studying the phenomenon of healing among women; and 3) take a historical approach to framing the reasons that healing is needed in African American communities, while citing the importance of spirituality to the process of recovery.

In establishing an understanding for the topic of migration and the formulation of the “freedom music” of house, I employ historian and musician Bernice Johnson Reagon’s *If You Don’t Go, Don’t Hinder Me* (2001). Here, Reagon traces her own personal life narrative in relation to African American musical traditions. For Reagon, migration is the thread that ties these traditions together. Large-scale migration occurred at various points in African American history, the first occurring among African Americans who were fleeing the brutality and indignity of human (or chattel) slavery in its various locales and manifestations. This sentiment is inferred in the spiritual that serves as the title of Reagon’s book. According to Reagon, the song’s text “captures a kind of tension” that reflects the sacrifices individuals would make in their attempts to gain freedom from slavery (1). Emanations of African American sacred music are found in urban centers (such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia) as a result of mass migrations, demonstrating Reagon’s theory that African Americans used song as a method of



*surviving* life in America and African Americans' intra-national shifts in geography and thought. She views the sacred song as a spiritual artifact of sorts, a memento that individuals and families could carry with them, weighing nothing, but that could grow and transform with the times, as needed. These songs reflected the communities from which they had come and the communities that they were now building.

In "If You Don't Go," Reagon responds to historian Nell Irvin Painter's characterization of soul murder as a consequence of slavery, with her own solution, which highlights the power of unity built from a shared identity and cooperative spirit.

[Painter] writes about the fact that there is a cost that is paid when one is abused, raped, beaten, and repeatedly violated. Even if you survive the violence, there is a way in which your soul can be distorted or destroyed. Sometimes, if you are not alone, if there are others who can surround you with understanding, the damage is lessened. She wants us to know that we do not as a people move through slavery into freedom unscarred. Being a part of a supportive community gives one a better chance of not continuing the cycle of violence. Isabella [Sojourner Truth] and her son were victims of the violence of slavery (2001: 125).

Four theoretical points, in line with Reagon's exploration of music and migration, emerged from my research: *community*, *self-love*, *song leader as teacher/guide*, and *spirituality*. These themes illumine the experiences of students in a city and institution that yearly admits students of all races who "migrate" to Westwood in search of transformation that will ultimately result in financial comfort and/or a sense of intellectual freedom, accomplishment, and social capital. Creation of a sense of community frequently arose in the interviews that I conducted. Students in both classes emphasized the fact that the learning process was made sweeter and more enjoyable due to the bonding that occurred with fellow classmates.

The themes of self-love and self-knowledge are evident in Reagon's work. Bernice Johnson Reagon places herself in her writing, noting that each chapter-essay reflects an aspect of her life as a musician, writing in first person and using a collective "we" and "our" to situate her

own positionality as one who has also migrated. “I do not know myself outside of these journeys, within the structures of transmission that include the culture into which I was born and nurtured” (11). Her own pursuit of self-knowledge through researching individual and collective histories of blacks in the United States, coupled with the cultural training that she received from song leaders throughout her life, allowed her to heal from her personal experience of the communal scars left by *soul murder*, while cultivating her ability to heal others through song. This is apparent not only from her scholarship but also from her artistry and visionary creativity as the founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock, a Grammy Award-winning African American female a cappella ensemble.

Students interviewed from both classes discussed getting to know their bodies more thoroughly as they discovered their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, participation in these classes contributes greatly to dialogues on intercultural communication and peacekeeping among diverse groups that might otherwise be in conflict. I argue that self-knowledge, when applied to dance, transmutes into *body literacy*, a finessed understanding of the inner workings, abilities, and limitations of one’s body or corporeal temple.

In students’ healing, especially in “Africanist” contexts, the concept of spirituality is inescapable. While students may or may not ascribe to a certain religion or spiritual perspective, the music/dance concepts that they are learning both internally and externally (in mindset and in body) were created and transmitted through culturally mediated, ancient cosmological concepts and time-tested spiritual philosophies. African American religion is rife with African cultural norms, values, styles, linguistic patterns, and physical mannerisms. Thus, it is not surprising that “house heads” seek a sense of freedom through communication with spirit, self, and community in song and dance that combines a number of styles from throughout the African diaspora.

Students interviewed for this dissertation learn “African descended” dance forms in a supportive, communal setting from wise elder teachers, students construct or further develop a sense of self-love that comes from knowing and accepting one’s self. While music became a source of commerce for enterprising African Americans upon migrating to urban locales, Civil Rights Movement Era teachers were quite often song leaders as well. Indeed, Reagon’s research cites the likes of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman as two African American (s)heroes and freedom fighters during slavery who were also singers. They spoke out against inequality at great cost and used song as a tool of their activism.

I found that the term *soul healing* and closely related phrases were referenced in three dissertations that looked specifically at psychological therapeutic practices designed for and used by people of African descent, especially black women. They emphasize transforming hegemonic agendas of historical and contemporary forces of oppression through self-efficacy. These works include sociologist Ingrid Waldron’s “African Canadian Women Storming the Barricades! Challenging Psychiatric Imperialism through Indigenous Conceptualizations of ‘Mental Illness’ and Self-Healing” (2002); transformational psychologist Toni A. Johns’ “We are Self Affirming Soul Healing Africans” (2008); and Canadian literary scholar Helen Pearman Ziral’s “Resilient Iris Intergenerational Spirit Injury of Diasporic African Women Spirit Healing and Recovery,” (2009). Psychologist Toni A. Johns conducted fieldwork with a company, SASHA (Self Affirming Soul Healing Africans), of which she is now CEO; her work entailed the creation of an “intra-group structure for creating a safe community” where African Americans could heal from internalized racism through the use of “body-based techniques with cultural knowledge” (v). Findings included a recognition of how the body can hold debilitating memories of race-related traumas while it can also transmute those damaging memories to be used “in service of

healing” one’s self and one’s community (v). A rather recent work that mentions “souls” and “heal” in its title is clinical psychologist Pamela D. Reeves’ 2013 dissertation, “How Music and Lyrics Protect and Heal the Souls of African American Women Who Have Experienced Domestic-Violence Trauma, Sexual Abuse, or Depression: A Phenomenological Study.” Reeves conducted qualitative research with four African American Southern California women between the ages of 45 and 56, who had been through traumatic events and felt that music was the catalyst for their healing and that music protected their souls from, what I would term based upon Reagon’s characterization of, and Painter’s definition of “soul murder.” Although none of the individuals that I interviewed mentioned suffering from “soul illnesses” such as abuse, depression was an issue that came up, as did grief. It is important to mention, as I frame the rest of the literature review and its emphasis upon both music and dance, folklorist Christopher Small’s 1987 book, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music*. This work speaks to the reason that “musicking” is a vital part of African American music and alludes to the relationship between survival and celebration that necessitates the cultivation of a sense of *soul healing*. Small’s 1987 work invokes themes of soul healing that seem to naturally occur in African American music: survival and celebration.

#### HEALING IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL LITERATURE

The topic of healing has been broached in ethnomusicology for decades, at least since the 1950s. However, it was typically examined on a surface level, and was explained as the driving force behind much of the musicking that occurs in indigenous cultures throughout the world, particularly in ceremonies that entail spirit possession (Janzen 2000: 47-8). As medical ethnomusicologist Benjamin Koen asserts, “In ethnomusicology, music and healing is usually discussed in terms of healing ritual and ceremonies that involve music” (2003: 19).

Ethnomusicologist and music therapist (“ethnomusic-therapist”) May May Chiang concurs: “Articles that show interests in shamanism, ritual healing, and trance are often focused on the procedures and contents of the ceremonies, the social roles and functions, and theoretical issues, rather than medical interests” (2008: 8). Here, I reference thirty-five works that best illustrate the relationship between the place of soul healing in ethnomusicological study, also including perspectives from two music scholars, one music historian, one music therapist, and an African American studies scholar. Twenty are books, eleven are articles, and four are dissertations. None of these refer to the specific topic of healing among university students and none focus upon dance. Thus, the most important take away of the review of ethnomusicological literature regarding healing is the realization that this dissertation’s findings prove that music is also used as a healing agent in contemporary Western contexts through dance and music instruction that is inspired by indigenous contexts. Further, just as more recent research in links between music therapy and autism and HIV are important, mental health is an increasingly vital area of study that also deserves attention. However, of the various sources that fall under the category of musical healing, a minority focuses on African cultures and an even smaller number examines the African diaspora, particularly those that will be discussed later in this chapter.

There is evidence that a link between music therapy and ethnomusicology was established early in the discipline’s history. For example, in 1956, leading ethnomusicologist Richard A. Waterman penned an article for *Music Therapy 1955* entitled “Music in Aboriginal Culture.” Others theorists who championed an interdisciplinary approach to ethnomusicology and music therapy early on include Bruno Nettl, who first published on the subject in 1956 in *Music Therapy* (“Aspects of Primitive and Folk Music Relevance to Music Therapy”) and music scholar Laurence A. Petran, who published “Anthropology, Folk Music and Music Therapy,” in

*Music Therapy* (1953). Other early examples include ethnomusicologist David McAllester's 1949 book, *Peyote Music*, and ethnomusicology pioneer Alan Merriam's 1967 book, *Ethnomusicology of the Flathead Indians*. During the 1970s, when music therapy was coming into its own as a contemporary field, medical ethnomusicologist Carol E. Robertson-DeCarbo published "Music as Therapy: A Bio- Cultural Problem" (1974). Robertson-DeCarbo advocates for ethnomusicologists to invoke music therapy more often, suggesting that culture could be seen as a provider of a set of communications, a system of behavioral patterns, a context for mental imbalances, and a source of therapy in itself that contains artistic methods of treatment (1974: 36).

There were also music therapists who advocated for the use of "world music" in their therapeutic treatment practices. Chiang notes, "As a music therapist who promotes multiculturalism and interaction between ethnomusicology and music therapy, Joseph Moreno has been one of the few 'ethnomusicological' voices in music therapy since the 1970s" (2008: 19). Moreno has championed the cause of ethnomusicological leanings within music therapy with works such as "The Therapeutic role of the Blue Singer and Considerations for the Clinical Applications of the Blues Form" (1987) and "Ethnomusic Therapy: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Music and Healing" (1995).

According to Chiang, "*The World of Music* is the only journal that has dedicated a whole issue solely to the subject, entitled 'Music and Healing in Transcultural Perspectives' (1997)" (8). Three years later, the same journal published another issue that continues this discussion, entitled "Spirit Practices in a Global Ecumene" (2000) (2008: 19). In this issue, ethnomusicologist Daniel K. Avorgbedor pens an article entitled "Dee Hoo! Sonic Articulations

in Healing and Exorcism Practices of the Anlo-Ewe,” in which he focuses upon the relationship between sound and physical/ spiritual well being.

Some related entries have been published in the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* as well, such as “Music, Trance, and Therapy in Baluchistan” by French ethnomusicologist Jean During in the Middle East volume (2002), “Music and Trance” by ethnomusicologist David Roche in the South Asia volume (1999), “Tumbuka Healing” by ethnomusicologist Steven Friedson in the Africa volume (1997), and “The Indigenous Peoples (Orang Asli) of the Malay Peninsula” by ethnomusicologist Marina Roseman in the Southeast Asia volume (1998).<sup>2</sup> Ethnomusicologists Benjamin D. Koen (2009, 2005, 2003) and Marina Roseman (2007, 1996, 1991) discuss healing from the perspective of medical ethnomusicology, which represents a step toward utilizing indigenous concepts in contemporary “world music” contexts. In 2000, music scholar Penelope Gouk edited *Musical Healing in Cultural Contexts*, which presented a collection of essays about various international cultures’ uses of music as religious ritual; the contributors came from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology. In 2002, ethnomusicologist Diane Thram published “Therapeutic Efficacy of Music-Making: Neglected Aspect of Human Experience Integral to Performance Process” in the *Yearbook for Traditional Music*. Her article emphasizes the “bonding” that occurs between a performer and the “rhythmic flow” and “pulse” of the music, after which an intense focus requires him or her to feel a sense of “freedom from self-consciousness” (2002: 136).

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<sup>2</sup> Roseman’s subsequent related works are mentioned below and Friedson’s subsequent books are referenced later in this chapter.

Both Koen (2009, 2005) and Roseman (2007, 1996, 1991) cite specific instances of music as healing in “natural habitats”: prayer in the mountains and healing in the rainforest. Nature is an important player in musical healing because, as Chiang deduces, traditional healing is intricately tied to nature and human uses of the earth as a medium to communicate with spirit (2008: 8). Chiang praises Roseman for her “medical approach” and “close examination of the musical healing tradition of the Temiar, which is a very different ethnomusicological study,” with its emphasis on “forgotten yet intimate relationships between human and nature” (2008:8).

Some recent manifestations of “music therapeutic” literature in ethnomusicology examine the use of music in treating autistic children (Bakan 2009, Bakan et al 2008), an increasingly relevant topic in the United States. Further, ethnomusicologist Gregory Barz has published several works on treating HIV/AIDS in Africa (2002, 2006, 2011). Moreover, ethnomusicologist Kathleen van Buren has published a dissertation and an article also exploring the treatment of HIV/AIDS in Africa through music (2006, 2010).

The nexus of music therapy and ethnomusicology has been written about to a moderate extent. Ethnomusicologists May May Chiang (2008) and Michael John Rohrbacher (1993) investigate explicitly the relationship between ethnomusicology and the field of music therapy while also calling for the two fields to be brought together and concurrently contemplating why the disciplines are not more often merged. According to Rohrbacher, “the link between music therapy and ethnomusicology is clear” (1993:2). Further, “music and healing represents a particular area of study within the context of music and culture” (3). The purpose of Rohrbacher’s work was to “apply research methods of ethnomusicology to the practice of music therapy at a residential institution for persons with developmental disabilities” (3). Thus, his dissertation is filled with accounts from his clinical fieldwork in which “world music” was used



in music therapy that was administered to patients in an institution. Rohrbacher went on to teach on the faculty of Florida State University, which has developed a long-standing tradition of innovative music scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Rohrbacher, whose dissertation advisor was ethnomusicology pioneer and champion of bi-musicality, Mantle Hood, describes and analyzes music therapy from the perspectives of ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology. Chiang, a specialist in Malaysian music, provides an examination of prior work done in ethnomusicology regarding music as a healing agent, and aims to bridge its aims with those of music therapy, which focuses more on clinical use in healthcare settings. Chiang's work draws on literature from ethnomusicology, music therapy, medical anthropology, musicology, psychotherapy, and psychology. Her fieldwork involved visiting professional organizations associated with music therapy, observing drum circles that were used as music therapy sessions, attending talks on medical and applied ethnomusicology at national conferences, and conducting interviews and holding meetings with music therapists.

According to Chiang, music therapists most often use Western classical music in their practice, while in recent years non-Western and indigenous musics have entered the music therapy repertoire, possibly due in part to the proliferation of ethnomusicology in the academy (2008:4). Chiang credits innovative music therapist Robert L. Tusler for this shift, which reflects a link between the world music performance ensembles and study of music therapy, as he “expressed his gratitude to the ethnomusicology program and world music performances at the University of California at Los Angeles, which changed the way he thinks of music” (Chiang

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<sup>3</sup> In 2004, Florida State University hosted a conference and published conference notes entitled *Music, Medicine, and Culture: Medial Ethnomusicology and Global Perspectives on Health and Healing in 2004*.

2008: 4).<sup>4</sup> Chiang also attributes this change to global developments and societal shifts that have brought ideas such as globalization and hybridization to the forefront of scientific thought (4).

Another factor influencing the burgeoning growth of music therapy is the initiatives for psychological care in the wake of soldiers' returning from wars overseas, as many of them suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In fact, according to music historian Ted Gioia, music therapy was used in treating soldiers after World War II (2006:133). Upon further study, Chiang found that music therapists most often use Western classical music and some popular music (2008:8). However, "awareness of and involvement with world music and traditional music were not generated until the last two decades" (8). Thus, Chiang asks an important question in pondering why music therapists and ethnomusicologists historically paid so little attention to traditional music and healing compared to medical historians and anthropologists (8-9). It is also worth noting that while the connection between music therapy and ethnomusicology have at least been mentioned, dance therapy is not considered part of this picture, and thus will be discussed further in this chapter. Some of the seminal works by ethnomusicologists that focus on music as a healing agent highlight manifestations such as trance, ecstasy, and liminality.

In *Making Music in the Arab World* (2004), veteran ethnomusicologist and performer A.J. Racy explicates the concept of *tarab*, a "rather abstract" sense of ecstasy experienced by musicians and listeners of Arab music in a cyclical relationship (203). Ecstasy is the sense of joy that results from participation in transitional states of experience caused by trance. Racy notes, "Ecstasy generates music, which in turn generates ecstasy, as each embodies the essence of the other" (208). Music makers and, in this case, professors, are swept into the "tarab effect" as they perform/teach (noting that to teach is a performance in itself). In both performing for and

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<sup>4</sup> (Tusler 1991: 13)

teaching the student-audience, students' *active listening* and, in this case, dancing as a response to the music, produces energizing, creative feedback that flows throughout students and teachers. Full participation is key in this healing scenario, reflecting Racy's observation that "passive listening in the strict sense is neither appreciated nor considered conducive to ecstatic transformation" (207). While dance is a relatively uncommon element of ecstasy-inducing music making in the Arab world, dance can, in fact, trigger occurrences of trance. "In these models, we encounter highly participatory ceremonies in which dancing leads to trancing, whereby the participants prompt their own trances," sometimes resulting in "some degree" of ecstasy "from autostimulation in the form of singing, dancing, clapping, and so on" (208). Racy's characterization of the sacred/secular tension found in *tarab* informs my understanding of the nature of moralistic-mysticism in house, a genre referred to as "church" music, but paradoxically developed in Chicago clubs that were patronized by homosexual and heterosexual dancers. According to Racy, Sufi sama al-Ghazali, a Muslim theologian, jurist, and mystic, deems most secular music as unfitting for those seeking holiness and purity, as such music's "ecstatic power" may also have sensual and "immoral connotations" (210). This argument also exists within African American culture, where to dance to secular music is often been perceived as a vice with dangerous implications.

In *Deep Listeners* (2004), ethnomusicologist Judith Becker suggests that persons who are "profoundly moved" by "simply listening to a piece of music" experience "a nearness to trance" (2). These "deep listeners" "are very emotional and often have near-religious transcendental experiences" (2). According to Becker, "Deep listening is a kind of secular trancing, divorced from religious practice but often carrying religious sentiments such as feelings of transcendence or a sense of communion with a power beyond oneself" (2). "Deep listening may be attributed to

personal psychology as in the United States, or may be culturally situated” (2). One strength of Becker’s work is that she uses the term *trancing* in much the same vein that Christopher Small introduced “*musicking*” into ethnomusicological vernacular, to emphasize “the processual, active, performing aspects of music rather than the scholarly, historical emphasis on music as text” (7).<sup>5</sup> Regarding the role of dance in trance, Becker asserts, “Trancers are always active and often dance—a response in part because of their deep emotionality. They welcome emotion; they offer themselves to emotion as they enact emotion. Musical immersion stimulates emotion and facilitates their special attentiveness, their special consciousness” (1). For my purposes, there are gradations or levels of healing that the dancer experiences, which include a sense of ecstasy as a step toward trance if one continues to dance and if the “vibe” continues, eventually sparking dancers’ transition from a blissful state of ecstasy to total trance. Meditation is also undoubtedly part of this process, as a result of constant movement, which is seen in the case of Rennie Harris’ class and the drilling of *riddims*.<sup>6</sup> Becker’s 2004 exploration of trance also questions Western medical paradigms that have traditionally dismissed, downplayed, or even vilified individuals’ interactions with the spiritual (in dance therapy, referred to as the “invisible” or the “unknown”).

In contrast to Racy and Becker, ethnomusicologist Marina Roseman (1996) presents a plethora of philosophical inquiries regarding the study of healing within the social sciences, assuming that those individuals who are strongly moved by music could actually *be* healers, and she asks if the healer can be unmoved and untouched by that which heals others. Inherent in this

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<sup>5</sup> Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press / University Press of New England.

<sup>6</sup> The “riddims,” or “rhythms,” are a crucial part of Rennie Harris’ pedagogy in “Advanced Hip Hop.” They are explained in more detail in chapters three and four.

idea is the question of how a healer is made. One might infer that the healer has become such because he or she himself was once in need of healing, and received it. This informs questions in my dissertation of instructor intent and background and even vocational choice. “Bringing personal experience into relation with symbolism, and memories of past traumas into the imaginal experience of divine embrace effects autobiographical transformations” (8). This idea is akin to dance therapist Mary Whitehouse’s work (Sullwold 1995) and her philosophies of movement as demonstrated in founding the “authentic movement” approach to dance/movement therapy.<sup>7</sup> One strength of Roseman’s work is her discussion of the healing power in musical syncretism, using her research with the Temiar as an example. Marina Roseman asserts that when cultures intermix, there is an art that springs from their coming together, reflecting the struggle to survive. “Temiars invent a poetics from the clash of competing societies. Through such creations, cultures carve their musics of survival, and gain the strength to carry on” (Roseman 1996: 264). She also lauds indigenous use of ritual performance as a site of transformation, which dovetails with my hypothesis of the classroom as a contemporary ritual site for initiation and the propagation of a culture of survival among classmates.

While music and healing is the overarching topic of this dissertation, the intersection between (African and African descended) music, dance, and healing is the crux of my research. In the tradition of Racy (2003) and Becker (2004), African American Studies scholar Aaron B. Love views healing from the lens of trancing in his 2014 dissertation, “Uninterrupted Conversations With Our Egun: Preliminary Considerations for Methodological Approaches to

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<sup>7</sup> This statement also reflects an idea popular in spiritual healing circles that follow “New Thought, Ageless Wisdom” teachings. If one brings up an event from the past that caused great pain, thinks about it and relives it as if it is happening in the present, and then infuses positive, loving energy to the memory, it can be healed, and any grievance forgiven.

the Research of African Music and the Music of John Coltrane.” Through the lens of iconic tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, Love examines the relationship between African music and African American jazz music-induced trance. Love cites constant communication with a higher power as being a common element of African and African American musical practices.

While Friedson’s forebears examined healing more in terms of trancing, Friedson emphasizes spirituality in the form of musical liminality. For fifteen years, Steven Friedson conducted fieldwork in the Volta Region of Ghana, where he established a research center on the Guinea Coast, which led to the writing of his award-winning *Remains of Ritual: Northern Gods in a Southern Land* (2008). Friedson offers a postmodern ethnographic view of the relationship between worship at a “medical shrine” with northern Ghanaian origins and music among the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana. Friedson takes a documentary approach in which he discusses his experiences and offers commentary on them, in addition to notating drum patterns throughout the text. Although he characterizes Ewe culture and music as “structured ambiguity that is resistant to synthetic analysis,” he also notes that their language is “deep,” full of analogy and illusion, with a poetic bent that leads to ambiguity (1).

One of the main themes that Friedson explores when describing ritual music and dance of Ghana is the crossroads. This discussion of dwelling in liminal space is emphasized by the quality of “being-there” and “being-away,” states that are characterized by the music and trance dancing of “spirit possession.” This duality and “in-between-ness” of polymetrics reflects an “abiding principle of Ewe rhythm” in which “the trick is to hold all of these musical possibilities suspended in the body at the same time” (143). Friedson explicates what he calls African rhythmic praxis, noting we in the West still have not found the “rhythm gene.” This statement blatantly ignores the presence of African-descended people in America who never lost this

inherent ability to understand and create numerous rhythms at once. One strength of Friedson's work is his emphasis upon dance as an aspect of relationship to the "Other," the Other being Spirit (10).

While few ethnomusicological studies on healing involve research conducted in the United States, even fewer focus upon African American experiences or the artistic products of Africans in the Americas. Herein lies the contribution of my research, providing not only insight into the role of dance in healing music, but adding African American and popular music genres such as house and hip hop to the conversation.

## **PART TWO**

### **ETHNOMUSICOLOGY WORLD MUSIC ENSEMBLE SCHOLARSHIP**

World music ensemble scholarship is a relatively new area of research in the field of ethnomusicology, although the ensemble represents one of the foundational genres and teaching tools of the discipline. Authors have written about world music ensembles from two major perspectives: from within university music departments (four books, eight articles, and one dissertation) and in contexts outside of academia (nine studies).<sup>8</sup>

#### World Music Ensembles in Universities

Ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood's 1971 book first broached the philosophy of bi-musicality and its exponent, the world music performance ensembles.<sup>9</sup> In *The Ethnomusicologist* (1971), Hood explains his philosophy of the field of ethnomusicology and the importance of

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<sup>8</sup> Through academic coursework, I learned of two books written about ensembles (Hood 1971, Solis 2004) as well as an ethnography of a music department (Kingsbury 1988). I first learned of ethnomusicologist George Dor's work when I performed with Zdonu at the 2010 Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) Conference, which took place in downtown Los Angeles. He was conducting ethnographic research there, and took a group photo of us that later appeared in his book.

<sup>9</sup> Hood was the founder of UCLA's Institute of Ethnomusicology.

scholars gaining skills in other cultures' musical languages, which gives context to the creation of the Music and Dance of Ghana ensemble and insight into world music performance ensembles' role in the discipline, and their place in music departments. Written more than thirty years later, ethnomusicologist Ted Solís' 2004 book, *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*, stands out as a collection of essays about ethnomusicologists' experiences as world music performance ensemble instructors. The authors examine issues such as representation (Trimillos 2004), authenticity (Rasmussen 2004), creating a "performing community" (Marcus 2004), the role of creativity (Hughes 2004), student perceptions (Kisliuk and Gross 2004) and, of course, bi-musicality. *Performing Ethnomusicology* optimistically problematizes the philosophy and practical inner workings of world music instruction in academic settings. Solís raises questions of structuring and representing the "Other" in the world music ensemble, analyzes the creation of ensemble objectives for student learning, and notes the value of including dance as part of the ensemble model.

Ethnomusicologist David Locke's essay, "The African Ensemble in America: Contradictions and Possibilities," is particularly applicable to my study because he teaches Ewe music to college students in a world music ensemble at Tufts University. Locke discusses issues of race and identity with which he is confronted as a non-native of the culture, and acknowledges his own shortcomings as well as his strong suits as an instructor (172). Locke also refers to a "transcendent zone" of which everyone is apart in African music contexts (185), which speaks to this dissertation's hypothesis of soul healing within the Ladezekpos' ensemble. Thus, Locke asserts that the African music ensemble can provide a space for students to have transformative experiences (185). However, neither Solís nor Locke discusses the potential for actual healing to



take place in world music ensembles.

Although Solís' work is unique in its breadth of ensembles from various ethnomusicology programs around the United States, his work is not the first to study the university ensemble model, as evidenced by Sheila LaBlanche Johnson's 1983 dissertation, "The Ethnomusicology Program at the University of Pittsburgh: A Case Study (Pennsylvania)." Ethnomusicologist Henry Kingsbury's 1988 ethnographic study of a music conservatory, *Music, Talent and Performance* is inspiring, serving as an example of an insider doing domestic fieldwork in a "music school" setting and asking key questions about the field. Prolific ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl weighs in with his 1992 article, "Ethnomusicology and the Teaching of World Music," and ethnomusicologist Jean Kidula continues this tradition of probing the direction of the discipline in her 2006 article, "Ethnomusicology, the Music Canon, and African Music: Positions, Tensions, and Resolutions in the African Academy." The revitalized interest in analyzing the role of world music ensembles in universities is also buoyed by the retirement of longtime ensemble leaders such as Kobla Ladzekpo and various shifts that music departments and universities face regarding budget constraints.

Ethnomusicologist George Worlasi Kwasi Dor's 2014 book, *West African Drumming and Dance in North American Universities: An Ethnomusicological Perspective*, looks in-depth at ensemble instruction and provides insight on instructor, student, and alumni experiences. Dor's book is indispensable to my work because it provides information on the history, resources, repertoire, teaching, learning, performance, and reception of selected university ensembles, including at UCLA, where Dor interviewed Kobla Ladzekpo and ensemble alumni such as prolific Africanist and African Americanist, Professor Emeritus Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, who is also a former chair of the UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology. Dor's work focuses on

“issues, themes, challenges, debates, agency, and directions as they relate to the strong presence and practice of this genre” (254). Dor, who identifies himself as a Ghanaian ethnomusicologist, asserts that West African dance drumming:

- 1) is one of Africa’s most compelling expressive art forms
- 2) is the most researched subject matter of Africa (specifically, its rhythmic structure)
- 3) was a suppressed genre during the period of slavery in parts of the African diaspora, and
- 4) is a resurrected genre in the North American academy under the auspices of ethnomusicology and world music (2014: 254).

Dor conveys important information regarding UCLA’s Music and Dance of Ghana ensemble in the context of African dance drumming ensembles found throughout the United States. He emphasizes a “geo-historical approach” to studying “dispersed Africans” and, as a Ghanaian ethnomusicologist, shows great understanding, sensitivity, perspective, belying a Pan-Africanist wish for unity throughout the African diaspora. One important contribution Dor makes to this literature is his couching of the phenomenon of such drumming practices in the context of African American history. As such, he gives a historical overview of West African drumming and dance in North America slavery to today.

Dor begins by discussing the significance of drums in West African contexts as a symbol of political power, embodiment of black spirituality, galvanizing tool and uniting force, speech surrogate and method of communication, and exquisite artifact (2014:14-15). He takes care to emphasize the concept of socio-cultural dislocation of African people, due to the slave trade, as causing a partial and natural disruption of drumming. According to Dor, the migration of Africans from the continent to the Americas caused the previous, indigenous structures to be interrupted and uprooted in the lives of the enslaved. Thus, some musical traditions died out among African Americans; for example, the use of “state drumming” or drumming for royalty,

simply disappeared in the musical lexicon of enslaved Africans in the Americas. Using African American history as a framework, Dor illustrates how West African dance drumming gained a presence in North American universities, with UCLA having been the first to welcome the genre into the academy through its Institute of Ethnomusicology.

Dor provides an exhaustive investigation of West African dance drumming ensembles, including mini-ethnographies of selected ensembles throughout the United States, a discussion of instructors' pedagogical approaches, the impact of ensemble participation upon students, the role of administrators and ensemble directors in the survival of such ensembles in academia, and the relationship between "world music" study and globalization. Lastly, he ties their existence to his original point: West African dance drumming represents a genre and musical practice that was transplanted in the Americas and which now "flourishes" in the African Diaspora.

#### The World Music Ensemble Beyond the "Ivory Tower"

Several instructional works have been written for world music ensemble instructors, including ethnomusicologist Patricia Shehan Campbell's 1991 *Lessons from the World: A Cross-Cultural Guide to Music Teaching and Learning* and her 1989 conference presentation with William M. Anderson, *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Learning*. Campbell's work demonstrates a very practical use of ethnomusicology in a workbook for music teachers' use. Education scholar Patricia Krueger's 1987 article "Ethnographic Research Methodology in Music Education," and Australian education scholar Elizabeth Mackinlay's *Disturbances and Dislocations: Understanding Teaching and Learning Experiences in Indigenous Australian Women's Music and Dance* (2007), illuminate issues of instructors and students in learning indigenous music making practices. Toronto education doctoral student and former elementary school music teacher Juliet Hess examines young students' experiences in "The Sankofa Drum

and Dance Ensemble: Motivations for Student Participation in a School World Music Ensemble” (2010). Her Ewe ensemble consists of students in grades 4 through 8, and is one of the few world music ensembles in its public school system. Hess highlights identity formation through a critical race theoretical analysis of student perceptions in learning Ewe musical traditions at a young age. Hess interviews nine students who participated in the ensemble in 2007, exploring both their motivations for joining and for remaining in the Sankofa Drum and Dance Ensemble. Motivations are examined with regard to the various musical, psychological and social motivations that the students cite as their reasons for participation in the ensemble. The data collected offers implications for the future of African music education and world music ensemble instruction. After 2000, several authors reconsidered bi-musicality, focusing on its applications in community colleges (Busch 2005); cross-cultural education (Biernoff and Blom 2002); elementary school students who participate in Ghanaian music ensembles (Hess 2013, 2010); and pedagogy (Morford 2007).

#### PIVOTAL WORKS THAT FRAME LADZEKPO’S TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

African musicology, an African-centered approach to the study of African music with an emphasis on practical methods of application that address the development-related needs of the continent, is significant for several reasons: it promotes scholarship and ideas that grow out of the African experience; it recognizes Africans as equal partners in research and important members of the conversation on African music; it focuses on musicological issues including history and ethnology; it emphasizes accessibility of writings (for both Africans and non-Africans); and it welcomes dialogue and partnership between Africans and non-Africans. An understanding of African musicology is useful to this dissertation because Kobla Ladzekpo’s roots can be traced to the development of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, a group that was

developed for the dual purposes of retaining tradition and introducing African music to the world within the context of liberation, which exemplifies the discipline's mission. J.H. Kwabena Nketia, called Africa's premier musicologist, characterized this "great transition" in African music scholarship history as a period of emphasis upon nation building in response to continent-wide independence movements in which colonial powers withdrew from direct governance of African territories (1998).

Former Ghana Dance Ensemble director A.M. Opoku's *African Dances: A Ghanaian Profile* (1965) is particularly intriguing because it offers historical information about the formation of the Ghana Dance Ensemble in 1962 as an initial and "modest" foray into national development and cultural preservation. The Ensemble was at one point directed by Nketia and Opoku, who was then head of the dance division of the school of music and drama in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. In this source, each dance that the troupe performed is explained. Each part of the dance is described, with an accompanying photo or drawing, and information on the dance's origin, context, and cultural significance. Dancers' costumes are also shown. Opoku provides commentary on African dance, briefly discussing occasions of performance, purpose of dance drama, the role of cycles in dance and movement. This source provides historical context for the expansion of the national African dance ensembles and its offshoots in world music ensembles. Opoku provides a "deeper insight" into Ghanaian way of life, "revealed to the serious seeker in our dance," through "involvements, motivations, crises, climaxes and resolutions," that shine a "strong spotlight" on human life and experience. The dance drama draws "special attention to the internal and external conflicts which shape our lives" (19). Ethnomusicologist Paul Schauert has also written extensively on the phenomenon of Ghana's State Ensembles, regarding artistry and "alternative education" in a

2014 article, and in his 2011 dissertation, he explored the performance of nationalism in the ensembles.

Many of the articles Ladzekpo has authored over the years are required reading for his students. The first, “Takada Drumming,” written with ethnomusicologist Hewitt Pantaleoni in 1970, highlights the technical features of polyrhythmic drumming in a particular Anlo-Ewe music-dance piece. A year later, “The Social Mechanics of Good Music; a Description of Dance Clubs Among the Anlo-Ewe Speaking Peoples of Ghana,” was published in *African Music*. A little over a decade later, Ladzekpo published an article with his brother Alfred, entitled “Anlo Ewe Music in Anyako, Volta Region, Ghana,” in *Music of Many Cultures: An Introduction* (1983), edited by Elizabeth May, one of the first students to earn a PhD in UCLA’s ethnomusicology program.

Various authors have written academic treatments of Ghanaian and West African dance forms from a musicological standpoint (Kwakwa 1980, Blum 1973, Warren 1972, Nketia 1998, 1995, 1988), providing general information about purpose and function, typical training practices in traditional contexts, roles of dancers and dances, and importance of music/dance research. In his 1988 dissertation “Procedures in African Drumming: A Study of Akan/Ewe Traditions and African Drumming in Pittsburgh,” William Anku examines African drumming in Pittsburgh and devises a theoretical framework by observing the process in which African American drummers approach African drumming. In *African Music: Theoretical Content and Creative Continuum: The Culture-Exponent’s Definitions* (1997), Nigerian music scholar Meki Nzewi develops a line of inquiry that promotes the inclusion of traditional African wisdom as a theoretical context for both teaching and learning. Nzewi begins his treatise with an African-centered critique of

ethnomusicology based upon ethnocentrism in the discipline.<sup>10</sup> Nzewi reiterates the importance of pursuing “knowledge of self” before, during, and after research while offering a creative interpretation of African musical form, including interesting diagrams and original traditional drawings that reflect ancient philosophy on musical ideas. He illustrates texture largely by circle diagrams (46-48)<sup>11</sup>. In addition, Nzewi discusses presentational form, calling the African musical ensemble an “example of human affairs,” and introduces indigenous language and terms, which are important elements of the Music and Dance of Ghana World Music Ensemble (50). In a nod to applied ethnomusicology and the perspective of ensemble leaders within the discipline, Nzewi pushes for more openness and “realness” in academic research, charging all African musicologists to use their scholarly platform to tell the truth about African history and current events.

Recent works that focus on the teaching philosophies of Ghanaian music and dance include dance studies scholar Cheryl Stevens’ 2007 dissertation, “One Language, Different Dialects: The Cross-Cultural Investigation of Ghanaian Students Learning the Umfundalai African Dance Technique,” and ethnomusicologist Alvin Petersen’s article in *The World of Music*, “Teaching African Musics: Personal Reflections in a South African University Setting” (2009). Music scholar Deborah Marie Montague discusses Ghanaian music pedagogy in her 2011 dissertation, “Traditional Ghanaian Music Pedagogy and Philosophy: An Overview of Teaching and Learning Techniques of Three Ghanaian Master Musicians Teaching in the United States,” as does music educator Shelia June Feay-Shaw, in her 2002 dissertation, “The Transmission of Ghanaian Music by Culture-Bearers: From Master Musician to Music Teacher,”

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<sup>11</sup> The circle is used in the Music and Dance of Ghana Ensemble as a common formation for dance pieces such as *agahu* and *circle atsia*.

which was chaired by innovative music education scholar and ethnomusicologist, Patricia Shehan Campbell. All of the aforementioned works contribute a deeper understanding of Ghanaian music learning and teaching, and the worldview and practices that would influence Kobla Ladzekpo's philosophy on teaching.

Various sources look specifically at curriculum as an aspect of pedagogy, such as ethnomusicologist Steven Cornelius' "Issues Regarding the Teaching of Non-Western Performance Traditions within the College Music Curriculum" (1995), dance ethnologist Modesto Amegago's 2000 dissertation, "An Holistic Approach to African Performing Arts: Music and Dance Curriculum Development and Implementation," and education scholar Robin R. Podlaski's 2010 dissertation, "In-Service Curriculum for Teaching Diversity Through World Music." Early works examined the role of African cultural arts in promoting intercultural understanding and "self-realization" (Cherry 1977, Ambush 1993). As Kobla Ladzekpo is a native Ghanaian, it is important to include works that speak to the experience of teaching African music-dance in Africa as well as other parts of the world (especially the United States for the purposes of this dissertation). Such works examine African dance education in Africa and promote an understanding of African worldviews (Adinku 1994; Agawu 1995; Aning 1972; Badu-Young 2003; Banks 2007).

"Healing and drumming" is also a topic of conversation among scholars, as evidenced by psychotherapist Robert Lawrence Friedman's 2000 book, *The Healing Power of the Drum*; transpersonal psychologist Joyce Beverly Lounsberry's 2001 dissertation, "The Power of the Drum: A Multi-Cultural Journey into Spiritual Transformations and Mind-Body Healing Experiences by Eight Professional Women Drummers"; music therapist Bill Matney's dissertation, "Percussion in Music Therapy: An Instructional Manual Based on Analysis of the



Related Literature” (2004); and musicologist Csaba Szabo’s book chapter, “The Effects of Monotonous Drumming on Subjective Experiences,” from *Music and Altered States: Consciousness, Transcendence, Therapy and Addiction*. (2006). Ethnomusicologist Jane Carter’s 2013 M.A. thesis, “Music Study Tourism in Ghana,” examines a phenomenon that is akin to the ensemble pedagogical practices in academia in which Ghanaian music and arts are taught, in Ghana, to individuals of other cultures. These individuals, who pay for exposure to African traditions, are called cultural tourists.

#### African Dance Instruction in Diaspora

The teaching of West African (specifically Ghanaian) music and dance, especially dance drumming, in various American contexts is documented by several scholars, including ethnomusicologist William Anku (1988), music educator Christine Burke (2003), Global Studies scholar Dylan A. Bassett (2010), and ethnomusicology scholar Mitchell J. Greco (2014). There are also articles and books that serve as guides for “world music” instruction in a number of contexts, including both college and grade school (Joukowsky 1965, La Meri 1977, Gaines 1989, Campbell 1991, Zaretti 1998, Miralis 2002, Perry 2006, Hernly 2012, Mc Allister 2013, Malito 2014). British ethnomusicologist Juliet Hess’ 2013 work, “Performing Tolerance and Curriculum: The Politics of Self-Congratulation, Identity Formation, and Pedagogy in World Music Education,” stands out for her interest in issues relating to healing that emerge from instructing children in ensembles designed to impart cultural lessons through Ghanaian music and dance.

#### African Dance and Healing

I found a considerable range of works that explore issues related to African dance and healing practices as practiced in various regions, ethnic groups, and/or countries in Africa. I

divide them here into *Ghana* (Opoku and Bell 1965, Blum 1973, Nuamah 2001, Burns 2009, Friedson 2008, Nyamuame 2013); the rest of *West Africa* (Ajayi 1998, Reed 1999, Maas and Strubelt 2006, Washington-Weik 2009, Heley 2010); *Southern Africa* (Oosthuizen 1989, Janzen 1992, Friedson 1997, Asante 2000, Gilman 2001, Chirambo 2005, Henderson 2009, Katz, Biesele, and St. Denis 1997); *East Africa* (Floyd 2000, Thompson 1999); *North Africa* (Jantowsky 2010), *Central Africa* (Blakeley 1993, White 1998, Evans Gondo 1999, Braun 2010, Cooke 2000, Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2001, Emoff 2002), and *Africa “at-large”* (Warren 1972, Thompson Drewal 1974, Diallo 1989, Tiérou 1992, Beckwith and Fisher 1999, Willis 1999, Kwakwa 2000, Welsh-Asante 2002, Avorgbedor 2003, Barz and Cohen 2011, Bokor 2014).

In *Indigenous Religious Musics* (2000), editors Karen Ralls-MacLeod and Graham Harvey (both religious studies scholars) present a compilation of essays written about “spiritual” world music from Oceania, Australia, Asia, Central Africa, South America, and “Native America” of the United States. Their goal is to illuminate the “interface” between religion, culture, and spirituality (151). In the Introduction to their work, they problematize the historical gaze of academics who have conducted research from a “colonialist” perspective. They discuss the definitions of terms such as indigeneity, religiosity, and music, while also questioning the uses and demarcations of the discipline of ethnomusicology (11). “Dance/Movement Therapy and Traditional Dance in a Ugandan Community: the Expressive and Healing Properties of Movement in a Traumatized Country” (2006) by dance studies scholar Indrani Parker is a work that combines African traditional dance with dance/movement therapy techniques.

### **PART THREE**

#### **HEALING MUSIC AND DANCE IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA**

While the ethnomusicological literature tends to focus on healing in “world” or “indigenous” music, music therapy examines music as healing in the Western world, with special attention given to popular and classical music. The following sources highlight examples of music as a healing agent among African descended people who have lived outside of Africa for generations. It is said that there are more African cultural retentions in the Caribbean and Americas as opposed to the United States due to the differences in slavery between the two geographic locations.<sup>12</sup> According to theologian Robin Sylvan, enslaved Africans throughout the Americas (outside of the United States) had greater opportunities to keep the cultures of their homeland alive due to the syncretism of their religious system with Catholicism (2002). Moreover, the slave trade, and the shipping of human cargo from Africa, legally ended earlier in the United States than it did in places like Brazil, which was the last country to abolish slavery, in 1888. Thus, enslaved Africans in other parts of the Americas often had more opportunities to practice their traditional religious rituals and express their cultural beliefs, of which physical and emotional/spiritual/mental healing would be apart.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Louisiana, New Orleans was an exception to the rule as a territory that was ruled by both the French and Spanish at different points. It had a very international and cosmopolitan society of individuals that had varying gradations of African, European and Indigenous heritage.

<sup>13</sup> The term “healing” appeared in the titles of several works, including music scholar Leah Brown’s 2012 dissertation, “The Healing Songs of the Orisá of Trinidad and Tobago” and cultural anthropologist Jeffrey A. Jones’ 2010 dissertation, “Music and Healing with the Skiffle Bunch Steel Orchestra in San Fernando, Trinidad.” West Indian music scholar Lorna McDaniel’s 1986 dissertation, “Memory Songs: Community, Flight and Conflict in the Big Drum Ceremony of Carriacou, Grenada,” was one of the earlier contemporary works related to music and healing in the Caribbean. Subsequently, music scholar/educator Melvin Lloyd Butler penned “Songs of Pentecost: Experiencing Music, Transcendence, and Identity in Jamaica and Haiti” in 2005; ethnomusicologist Maurea E. Landies penned “The Band Carries Medicine: Music, Healing and Community in Haitian/Dominican Rara/Gaga” in 2009; and music scholar Gisele-Audrey Mills discusses the performance of Afro-Brazilian identity through music in her 2011 dissertation. Brazil, the country with the largest population of African people in the world (second to Nigeria) remains a popular topic of inquiry, as proven further by the work of literary

Various scholars cite West African dance as providing opportunities for the forming of a sacred space that contributed to the good of the African American community. These include dance scholar Omilade Davis' 2010 dissertation, "Moving Beyond Form: Communicating Identity through Dance"; psychologist Andrea M. Brown's 2003 dissertation, "Our Roots Run Deep: Black Girls' Self-Exploration in an African Dance Company"; and folklife scholar Efia N. Dalili's 1999 dissertation, "'More than a sisterhood': Traditional West African Dance in a Contemporary Urban Setting." Several authors speak to the phenomenon of African dance in Los Angeles as providing sites in which African Americans can re-affirm a sense of community, express cultural identity, and fight oppression felt within the city and within the nation, through cultivating a sense of union with Africa. These include cultural studies scholar Giovanni Washington's 2013 dissertation, "Performing Africa: Memory, Tradition, and Resistance in the Leimert Park Drum Circle"; theatre scholar Angela-Dee Alforque's 2011 autobiographical dissertation, "Heal, Love, Play, Dance: A Teaching Artist's Journey to Life in Leadership"; ethnomusicologist Sherri Dawn Canon's 2005 dissertation, "Music, Dance, and Family Ties:

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scholar Cheryl A. Sterling's 2003 dissertation, "Where They Are with This Issue of Identity: The Reformation, Performance, and Transformation of Africa in Afro-Brazilian Discourse in Salvador da Bahia," and Brazilian musicologist Tiago de Oliveira Pinto's article, "Healing Process as Musical Drama: The Ebó Ceremony in the Bahian Candomblé of Brazil" (2010). Two sources reference the experiences of "African diasporic" peoples in New York City: folklorist Lois Eileen Wilcken's 1991 dissertation, "Music Folklore among Haitians in New York: Staged Representations and the Negotiation of Identity," and liberal studies scholar Marimer Berberena's M.A. thesis, "Dominican Gaga Music and Dance: The Remaking of a Spiritual Performance in the City of New York" (2014). Other works that speak to African American music and healing include music philosopher Joel Rudinow's 2010 book, *Soul Music: Tracking the Spiritual Roots of Pop from Plato to Motown*, and music educator Crystal Carla Carlisle's 2012 M.A. thesis, "Free jazz Improvisation: A Continuum, From Africa to Congo Square, From Early Jazz to Bebop, and the Return to Mysticism for Communal Healing and Transcendence." Lastly, Thierry Zarcone and Angela Hobart's 2013 book, *Shamanism and Islam: Sufism, Healing Rituals and Spirits in the Muslim World*, spotlights shamanism within Islam in countries throughout the world, citing North Africa as a starting point.

Ghanaian and Senegalese Immigrants in Los Angeles”; and dance scholar Phylise Smith’s pioneering study, “Los Angeles African-Americans: Expressions of Cultural Identity Through Participation in West African Dance” (1991). Although the fieldwork that therapist Aaron C. Mason conducted for his dissertation, “The Impact of West African Dance on Positive Mental Health” (2014), was conducted in Southern California, the idea of “place” was not treated as a significant factor in his study. The most telling outcome of his project, rather, added to the body of literature citing African Americans’ attitudes toward therapy. Authors have also explored reconstructing Africanity through cultural power in creating diasporic networks, developing identity, building community, and imagining Africa in specific regions of the United States such as Chicago, Portland, Tallahassee, and New York City (Zabrinskie 2013, Sandri 2012, Davis-Craig 2009, Mekuria 2006). Psychologist Karen Marguerite Wilson’s 2007 dissertation, “Diaspora River: Charting Continuity and Change in African Diasporic Slave Quarter Communities of the United States through Song, Story and Dance,” speaks to the continuity of African performance practices in the United States as a process of cultural change rather than evidence of mere cultural “survivals.” This reflects a bridge between African music and dance study and African American dance styles instruction.

African dance historian and instructor Phylise Smith’s 1991 master’s thesis provides an ethnography of the African dance community in Los Angeles, consisting primarily of traditional dance instruction from Senegalese, Gambian, and Malian traditions. These dancers, who consider themselves to be of African descent, use dance to express their cultural affinity with Africa as a homeland and source of identity construction. One connection between Smith’s work and mine is her methodological strategies, which included weekly participant-observation in

community dance classes over a ten-year period, interviews with teachers, and student questionnaires.

Smith utilizes four categories of literature: traditional African dance, ethnomusicological literature about traditional African music and dance, African American dance, and African American cultural identity. The author notes, “What is missing from the dance and the ethnomusicological literature, however, is sufficient documentation of the importance and popularity of African dance and music in the United States. Given its increasing prominence, this is an area that needs to be addressed” (19). Smith discusses the role of African dance teachers, highlighting their responsibility in sharing cultural information about West Africa, serving as models of the African dance technique, and providing the “larger Los Angeles community” with information about their culture in general “through teaching, performing, giving lecture-demonstrations, special workshops, appearing in videos, festivals and other displays” (84). This study provides an alternate view of the African dance class, with an audience and purpose that differ greatly from that of the UCLA ensemble and its heterogeneous audience of students.

Drawing from the philosophical renderings of philosopher and cultural activist Cornel West, ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt advances West’s notion of kinetic orality via her examination of black girls’ game rituals in *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double Dutch to Hip-Hop* (2006). Gaunt offers an important perspective because kinetic orality establishes the idea that many youth in the African diaspora, including African Americans, can, in fact, have a predisposal for understanding African music based on the fact that it is learned culturally from childhood. Gaunt observes this phenomenon in her study of “unique repertoire of chants and embodied rhythms” that are passed on through generations of

play (1). Gaunt also uses participant observation to elucidate how syncopation, choreography, and improvisation are embodied in the lives of black girls, reflecting traditions of speech, music making, and dancing that are reminiscent of “jive talk, scatting, and the verbal free styling of hip-hop” (1). Another strength of Gaunt’s work is that she highlights the dearth of movement-based music studies in the discipline. “Music scholars are compromised by the fact that our training tends to exclude analyzing choreographed movement, embodied percussion, and dance, not to mention gender and sexuality, in our interpretations of musical performance” (11). Of course, Gaunt notes, there are a few “quiet exceptions” to this rule, one of them being the work of ethnomusicologist Cheryl L. Keyes (2002), who addresses gender and sexuality in addition to identity and ethnicity in her research on hip hop. However, the intersectionality of race and gender is still largely ignored in scholarly music literature, in addition to musical analysis that is not about sound, texture, or the intention of a composer or performer (11). In addition, Gaunt engages in activist research, encouraging culture bearers to research and teach “our own,” which Bernice Johnson Reagon does in her calls for community education through music. “African Americans may be innovators in American popular music, but we are a fraction of its cultural ethnographers” (Gaunt 184-185).

Cultural historian Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (1996) is important for two reasons. One, “house” instructor Rennie Harris is featured on the cover; he is highlighted in Gottschild’s final chapter, “Dance and Theater in a Multicultural Context: Who Stole the Soul, Who Takes the ‘Rap,’ or Free to Be You and Me?” due to his work in bringing hip hop to the concert stage. Two, Gottschild provides perspective on the development of African diasporic dance in relation to European body aesthetics and artistic value. She notes the undeniable relationship between

dance and religion in “Africanist” contexts and also sheds light on the paradoxes of Africanist music and dance, in which *seeming* conflict is accepted, expressed, and worked through (1996: 11). This phenomenon is evident in examples of polyrhythm and polycentrism in music and dance, respectively, and speaks to this dissertation’s assertion that community is a cornerstone of “soul healing.”

It is apparent that dance is used as a healing agent throughout the African diaspora, due to works that document longstanding practices such as music and movement on the Georgia Sea Islands of the United States (Twining 1995), regional music and dance of Haitian vodou (Yih 1995), the staging of Afro-Peruvian cultural memory (Feldman 2001), “nation dance” in the Caribbean (Taylor 2002), corporeal factors and choreographic rhythms of Jamaican popular music (McCarthy 2007), music and dance of Surinamese maroon communities (Campbell 2012), and “blackness” in “music-dance” along Chile’s northern border (Wolf 2013). Sources such as literary scholar Ingrid Marion Reneau’s 2000 dissertation, “Dancing the ‘Clearing’ in African Diaspora Narratives,” and music scholar Christopher D. Stover’s 2009 dissertation, “A Theory of Flexible Rhythmic Spaces for Diasporic African Music,” speak directly to overarching diasporic experiences of African descended peoples at large.

#### DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY

Writings on the healing potential of dance typically focus on dance therapy techniques or unchoreographed uses of dance in indigenous settings for the purpose of inducing trance. The concept of dance therapy is largely based on Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung’s philosophy of psychotherapy, which emphasized studies of the human psyche and the collective unconscious. Early works that consider the value of developing a new field devoted to understanding movement in a more holistic and healthful manner include dance/movement therapy pioneer



Norma Canner's *And a Time to Dance* (1968) and dance/movement therapy pioneer Trudi Schoop's *Won't You Join the Dance?* (1974). Works published in the 1970s, such as dance/movement therapist Marian North's *Personality Assessment Through Movement* (1971), and dance/movement therapist Jeri Salkin's *Body Ego Technique: An Educational and Therapeutic Approach to Body Image and Self-Identity* (1973), reflect practitioners' desire to develop a body of literature that explore the findings that resulted from their applied work with clients. Thus, dance therapy scholar Sharon Chaiklin's entry in the 1975 *American Handbook of Psychiatry* (Chapter 37) represents a breakthrough in the recognition of dance therapy as a legitimate medical treatment for mental health.

Anthropologists have led the way in bridging studies of "ethnic dance," which were largely instructional (see Part Two of this chapter), and studies of Western and modern dance practices, initially the most used techniques in dance/movement therapy. Cultural anthropologist Joann W. Kealiinohomoku's classic chapter, "A Comparative Study of Dance as a Constellation of Motor Behaviors Among African and United States Negroes" (1976),<sup>14</sup> illustrates a shift that was taking place during the 1970s, as dance was being established as an academic field, legitimized by its prominence as a newer focus of anthropological research. The chapter, which offers an anthropological analysis of movement observed in fieldwork with African Americans, scrutinizes body movements of Nigerians through the lens of dance as a system of communication, and compares them to symbolic movement styles observed in African Americans in the southern United States. Studies such as these provide more information about the focus of anthropology and how to apply it to a new arena, which was dance.

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<sup>14</sup> From *CORD Dance Research Annual 7 (Dance Research Monograph No. 2)*, edited by Adrienne Kaeppler, 1-13. CORD: New York.

Kealiinohomoku's 1976 dissertation, "Theory and Methods for an Anthropological Study of Dance," was chaired by cultural anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Alan P. Merriam. Scholars such as Adrienne Kaeppler, Judith Lynne Hanna, and Allegra Fuller Snyder (of UCLA's now defunct pioneering dance ethnology program) also added valuable contributions to early dance research, known then as "ethnochoreology," which grew out of anthropological studies of movement as a function of human life (Kealiinohomoku 1976). In *The Anthropology of Dance* (1977), anthropologist Anya Royce Petersen asserts that dance is an aspect of human behavior worthy of anthropological study on its own. Petersen categorizes various forms of dance found throughout the world using a comparative method that consists of observation, description, and analysis. Petersen also discusses the controversial nature of dance and the body in general (159), which aligns with my discussion of sexuality in hip hop and African dance. When investigating the history of dance in the United States, she notes influences that African Americans and European Americans had upon each other both in the Southern and Northern states (115-119). British ethnomusicology pioneer and social anthropologist John Blacking's 1984 article, "Dance as Cultural System and Human Capability Anthropological Perspective," is significant because it examines early anthropological perspectives on African dance, gives an example of an ethnomusicologist applying anthropological theory to dance, and parallels the study of dance as an element of human artistic and social activity with music. This trend of developing the field through exploring the applied practice of dance/movement therapy, and documenting it for purposes of cementing its place in the academy, continues in the early 1980s in works such as Liljan Espenak's *Dance Therapy, Theory and Application* (1981), and Penny Bernstein's *Theoretical Approaches to Dance Movement Therapy*. Authentic movement, a branch of dance therapy discussed in greater detail in chapter four of this dissertation, was

founded in the 1950s by former dancer-turned-scholar Mary Whitehouse, one of the founders of dance/movement therapy. Most dance therapists, like music therapists, earn a credential that allows them to “practice” on clients who suffer from issues ranging from chronic physical pain to posttraumatic stress using various methods that will also be discussed in more detail in chapter four of the dissertation.

*Authentic Movement: Essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow* (2000), a collection of Whitehouse’s essays and essays written about her, gives accounts of interactions between dance therapists and their patients that illustrate her convictions and theories about dance’s ability to heal. In the process of engaging in authentic movement, the individual closes her eyes and allows herself to be aware of her current physical position, noting (by *feeling*) the positionality of every part of her body, beginning with her feet, traveling to the knees, back, head, and eventually opening the eyes. The way the individual is sitting or standing, holding herself in general, is actually a statement, an “actual feeling condition” that is still more subtle than actual “moving and gesturing” (2000a: 36). Whitehouse posits that the body is an accurate reflector of one’s mind state; changing the way one moves can modify his or her way of thinking. Whitehouse’s work is key in my analyses of movement practices.

Whitehouse greatly influenced arts therapist and scholar Irma Dosamantes-Beaudry, who is also a professor emerita from UCLA. She uses Whitehouse’s technique in her teaching style and adds to it in *The Arts in Contemporary Healing* (2003), where she puts forth a contemporary, interdisciplinary, developmental-relational arts-based model of healing relative to life transitions. She explores the regression-reintegration process, the human need for mentoring relationships, the public social sphere as a site of artistic cultural expression and communal healing, and the

communication of *communitas* through group art making. This work represents the link between Reagon's tenets and dance therapy precepts that combine to create "soul healing."

### Dance Therapy and Black Populations

The role of dance therapy or dance as a healing agent, as it applies to African American populations, has been examined by scholars from various disciplines. Some works do not speak directly to therapy but highlight spirituality, such as dance studies scholar Pamela Renee Randall's 1999 M.A. thesis, "Exploring Black Social Dance from the Viewpoint of Mura Dehn: Psychological, Sociological, and Spiritual Purposes, Functions, and Meanings." Cognitive therapist Vijay S. Iyer bridges African music and embodiment with African American musics in his 1998 dissertation, "Microstructures of Feel, Macrostructures of Sound: Embodied Cognition in West African and African-American Musics." Both music scholar Ama Aduonum (1999) and theatre scholar Nadine George-Graves (2010) have written about an African American dance theater group called Urban Bush Women, documenting their history as a community building force in Brooklyn, NY. Dance scholar Jacqui Malone's 1996 book speaks to African American traditions in dance, subtly alluding to that culture's ability to heal through movement with the book's title, *Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance*, and referencing the "visible" rhythms of African American dance (as opposed to the *invisible*, which is referenced occasionally in literature regarding healing and spirituality). In her 2003 dissertation, anthropologist and dance educator Mary Ann Lavery presents a historical biography of the use of African Diasporic dance in the Hampton Institute Creative Dance Group during 1934 to 1948, which was founded and directed by Hampton's departmental chair of physical education, Charles H. Williams. Lavery concludes her dissertation with a discussion of Williams' contemporaries in modern dance choreography, Katherine Dunham and Pearl

Primus.<sup>15</sup>

In her M.A. thesis, “African Inspired Healing Movements Integrated with Dance/Movement Therapy for the African American Population” (2006), dance therapist Delia Tyson investigates “whether dance/movement therapy can be made more palatable to African American clients by integrating African inspired healing movements with the dance/movement therapy concepts of mind/body/spirit connection” (iv). Tyson concludes by stating that dance therapy in itself is helpful to African American clients, perhaps due to the integral nature of dance in African and African descended cultures. Further, she discovers that adding “African healing movements” to sessions with African American clients tended to make them more effective. This speaks to my findings that ethnicity is an important factor in creating healing spaces of music/dance instruction as some students are able to identify with their communities’ values and traits that are present in the material they are learning. Dance scholar Myriam Evelyse Mariani’s 1986 dissertation, “A Portrayal of the Brazilian Samba Dance with the Use of Labanalysis as a Tool for Movement Analysis,” sets a precedent for scholars to use samba in dance/movement therapy.

### Dance and Spirituality

Numerous works have been published on the topic of dance and spirituality, but only a few relate to my dissertation because of their discussion of therapy and healing. Anthropologist Brenda M. Farnell’s book, *Human Action Signs in Cultural Context: the Visible and the Invisible in Movement and Dance* (1995), invokes modern dance as a form of storytelling through the

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<sup>15</sup> Publications regarding dance ethnologists Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, with their scholarly interests in African descended dance of the Caribbean and adapting African dance for the concert stage, appeared several times in my queries for this literature review. However, due to their emphasis on modern and contemporary forms of African diasporic movement (rather than traditional), their contributions—while pivotal—were less relevant for this study.

body. Similarly, psychologist Nancy Jean Finney explores the vortex as a generative symbol that is used therapeutically in emotional expression and transpersonal psychology of cosmological movement in her dissertation, “Spirit Spinning: An Exploration of the Healing Potential of Cosmic Dance and its Relationship to the Vortex as a Symbol of Generativity” (2002). “Cosmic dance” refers to a celebrated form of improvised movement, also characterized as “ecstatic trance dance,” in which dancers are led in a guided meditation through physical, possibly uncontrolled movement. Although this dance form is not part of my research, it illustrates the latest trends in dance therapy, focusing on individual expressiveness and freedom of movement as a path to emotional and spiritual transformation in a safe space. Indeed, it is proven that dance is useful for many individuals who are seeking to heal from various types of trauma including sexual abuse or attack (Dayton 2010). Yoga is also included in this category of dance/movement therapy (Young 2014). Yoga is referenced in dissertation chapters three and four for its therapeutic properties and its use as a warm-up in the “Advanced Hip Hop” class.

## **PART FOUR**

### Healing in House/Dance Music

I expected most of the works in this section to merely provide historical context. However, I found nine sources that demonstrate potential and actualized examples of healing in house (two books, two doctoral dissertations, three M.A. theses, and two articles), especially the phenomenon of “trancing out” among electronic dance music mediums’ intensely “subcultural” fan base. Meanwhile, seven sources (three books, two dissertations, one M.A. thesis, and one article) provide background information on house and its history and defining characteristics. However, none of sources examine house as it is taught in academic contexts or as a method of therapy. Three works were written by ethnomusicologists; two by anthropologists; two by

sociologists, and one author is a musicologist. The remaining sources were written by a dance studies scholar, psychologist, music therapist, an African Americanist, and a theologian.<sup>16</sup>

While the body of hip hop literature continues to grow domestically and internationally, the subgenre of house seems to be overlooked or unrecognized as a movement that has a large following of its own. As ethnomusicologist Kai Fikentscher declares, “Despite a growing body of literature on contemporary dance music and its practitioners, this type of musicking is still not very well understood” (2002: 9). Further, Fikentscher notes that house as a related category to “underground dance music” is still underrepresented in the literature “in contrast to other rather well studied strains of African American musical culture, such as jazz and blues” (9).

Ethnomusicologist Denise Dalphond’s 2014 dissertation on Detroit’s historic electronic soul-music scene and musicologist Hillegonda Rietveld’s 1998 treatise on house history establish the importance of American Midwest cities as the regional birthplace of house. Works by Sommer (2001), Fikentscher (2000), Hutson (2000), and Thornton (1996) position house as a music and dance form that emerged from a marginal or “underground” culture, referred to a “subculture.” Psychologist Audrey Redfield (2013) discusses electronic dance music as a space in which “spiritual healing” and “transpersonal phenomena” occur. Sociologists Philip Kavanaugh and Tammy L. Anderson (2008) explore solidarity in electronic dance music scenes while Garcia (2011), similarly, looks at intimacy and drug use, all of which help to create the sense of community and altered states that such gatherings facilitate. One must note, however, that drugs are not often affiliated with house culture while the rave scenes of Europe and the United States are associated with drug use that adds to the affect of all-night dance parties. Drug

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<sup>16</sup> The discipline of two authors cannot be determined.

use was also a common occurrence in disco music scenes of the 1970s, when turntabling was new and the culture of DJing was in its infancy. Thus, Israeli music therapist Tsvia Horesh's 2006 article, "Dangerous Music—Working with the Destructive and Healing Powers of Popular Music in the Treatment of Substance Abusers," provides insight into some of the debilitating factors of drug use within the electronic dance music scenes globally and why they exist.

Cultural anthropologist E. Jabali Stewart's 2009 examination of two Afro-Brazilian dance/martial arts genres (Brazilian capoeira and Trinidadian *kalinda*) coincides with my exploration of house music and dance, in which battling and breakdancing are paramount. Further, his discussion of the "mosh pit" phenomenon speaks to the communal nature of electronic dance music genres and derivations of house. Stewart argues that "combat dance" is not associated with war; rather, it is found in performance and "musically orchestrated" ritual (vii). Stewart examines Brazilian capoeira, Trinidadian kalinda, and hardcore punk rock "moshing," a type of unchoreographed and spontaneously inspired group movement that is also found in EDM concerts such as raves. Stewart contends that "combat dancing can serve a beneficial function in human societies," providing a "larger sense of community [and] a means of releasing real transgressive violence [that is] detrimental to the well being of a society" (viii). Moreover, Stewart argues for "a more holistic approach to the study of music and dance" (viii), which is also a goal of this dissertation.

Mitchell (2000) and Fikentscher (2000), while recognizing the marginalized status of many EDM enthusiasts, also take care to acknowledge the African American beginnings and contributions to house music. Mitchell takes this thought a step further by investigating the role of the African American woman as diva, or vocalist, and symbol for house, in which she is seen as a goddess type figure that both male and female party congregants aspire to emulate and edify,



at least in the party setting. While the above works refer to EDM as a music form or music/dance form, Kelly (2001) posits his understanding of electronic dance music from a perspective of physicality.

Theologian Robin Sylvan (2005, 2002) treats electronic dance music as a religious subcultural product while also connecting “West African possession religion” with American popular music examples such as house music and hip hop. Chapter four of Sylvan’s work, “The Dance Music Continuum: House, Rave, and Electronic Dance Music,” reveals “strong continuities” between house music and “some of the features of West African possession religion” (2002: 119). “Because of the high amplification and pounding insistence of house music beats, which are felt in the body as much as they are heard by the ears, the groove is often compelling to the point of trance induction for the dancers” (119). Since the apex of house’s success in the United States during the 1990s, various articles have been written that highlight the incitement of ecstasy in electronic dance music experiences (Garcia 2011, Horesh 2006, Hutson 2000, Kelly 2001, Redfield 2013, Scott 1998).

In “*You Better Work!*” *Underground Dance Music in New York City* (2000), the first detailed study of underground dance music (UDM), ethnomusicologist Kai Fikentscher situates house as an outgrowth of disco music and emphasizes marginality, confirming that comparative urban music studies are “still rare” (7). Fikentscher underscores the importance of situating dance as an integral aspect of music, citing Christopher Small’s concept of *musicking* as essential to his argument (57) and, like Kyra Gaunt, decries the lack of studies on dance and movement in ethnomusicology “while the examples where music and dance are elements of one and the same performance context are legion” (16). Like dance studies researcher Sally R. Sommer, Fikentscher likens the act of communal dancing in a club to Victor Turner’s “ritual process” and

the building of “*communitas*,” noting that dancing as collective performance both encompasses and transcends the concept of music consumption simultaneously, making the dancer a consumer, participant, and performer in the musical event (61). Fikentscher’s work offers perspective in analyzing the symbiotic relationship between music and dance in underground dance music, while highlighting house music’s links to disco and marginalized cultures.

Dance historian Sally R. Sommer writes the quintessential article on house, “‘C’mon to My House:” Underground-House Dancing” (2001) in which she examines the history of house and its legacy among today’s generation of professional dancers and invokes Turnerian theory in analyzing the significance of house dancing as a community.

Several aspects of Turner’s “*communitas*” (both “*spontaneous*” and “*normative*” *communitas*) apply to the nature of club gatherings and the community of dancers. The phenomenon of Underground-House dance clubs and dance practices represents unique, contemporary, “liminoid” rites of passage, with vivid stages of separation and liminality. His formulations of initiates as ‘liminal or marginal people’ striving to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination (Turner 1969, 128) aptly describe hard-core ‘househeads’ and why they come together to dance (2001: 72).

In her M.A. thesis “Dancing with Dark Majesties: House Music and African American Women as House Divas” (2000), Carmen Nicole Mitchell investigates the concept of the diva, the female body and voice in the underground house scenes of New York City and London. Of particular interest to me is Mitchell’s placing of the house diva “within the traditions of African American female performance in gospel, jazz, and rhythm and blues” and the “vocal articulation of house music by African American women” (3-4). The global mediation of black women’s representation, image, and voice through house music is key because in my study, I interrogate the bodily articulation of house dance by Black women including myself and several interviewees in a context in which we are the demographic minority, the UCLA classroom. Like Mitchell, I employ “heterogeneous methodologies” and heed theorist bell hooks’ call for African

American women to “write themselves into history” through the use of personal accounts and anecdotes (2000:6). As Mitchell states, “There is only a trickle of full-length academic books on contemporary electronic dance music,” most of which “posit an emphasis on the DJ as the record playing cultural hero or the dominant identities of white, heterosexual males in house and techno music scenes of the United Kingdom and America” (2000:2).<sup>17</sup>

Mitchell’s work introduces an important point in a discourse in which the role of black women is understated. Although black women are rarely mentioned, the music would not be what it is without the presence of the African American female vocalist, the *mistress* of ceremonies. “The diva in house music vocally articulates the subliminal desires, unrealized ecstasies and hopeful yearnings of house enthusiasts world wide” that is found “within and beyond gay club cultures” (9). Mitchell characterizes the African American vocalist, the house diva, as an “enigma,” a mysterious yet essential aspect of house on many levels (9).<sup>18</sup> Mitchell makes an excellent point in linking house music’s “digitized beat” to technologized African drum rhythms, characterizing house as an African-descended genre and thus identifying house’s place in the black music continuum (15).

In *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1996), sociologist Sarah Thornton explores “the attitudes and ideals of the youthful insiders whose social lives revolve

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<sup>17</sup> This speaks to one of the most mystifying aspects of house’s history, which was illuminated again upon the recent passing of one of its founders, DJ Frankie Knuckles. House became a global phenomenon to the degree that some of its forms became virtually unrecognizable and was no longer identified as a black music genre, although it originated among African Americans in Chicago, IL.

<sup>18</sup> When examining a house class as a context for healing, the role of the female is also interesting as the “church mother” figure who guides parishioners into a spiritual journey in the form of a singer. This model is also found as the African priestess or Afro-Brazilian *mãe-de-santo*.

around clubs and raves” (2). Thornton places herself within her study, noting that although she had once been an “avid clubber,” she now finds herself an outsider to the club cultures due to her position as a researcher in an arena of leisure, and her age and nationality, noting that she “slowly aged out of the peer group” she was studying (2-3). I take exception to her equation of club cultures with “youth cultures,” (3) however, because the house dance community includes all ages, from young children to “old heads,” typically in their mid-forties to early fifties (who may have been in their teens and early twenties when house originally emerged).

Musicologist Hillegonda C. Rietveld gives credence to Thornton’s points regarding “hipness” and cultural capital of the cool and authentic by noting, “It may be suggested that in the sense that ‘it was hip to be gay,’ African Americans created their own ‘bohemia,’ on the margin of the ‘mainstream African-American community, which had a different taste in music and entertainment” (1998:21). Further, “the social structure of Chicago lends itself especially well to the development of a distinct style within one social group” due to its history and “active policy of segregation” (21).

Thornton compares and contrasts “white” and “black” dance music, characterizing them both as “primarily producers’ rather than performers’ media,” another contention with which I disagree. Although production, of course, is crucial, the dancer’s interaction with the music is what brings it to life and gives it meaning, especially in the context of house dance music. Thornton also contends that “‘black’ dance musics are more likely to be footed in local urban scenes and neighbor-‘hoods,’” pointing to “local subcultures and city places—New York, Chicago, Detroit, Washington,” which “authenticate music,” rendering it “tangible and real,” whereas ‘white’ dance musics “are more likely to claim to be global, nationless or vaguely pan-European” (74). While house is a global phenomenon, even its name hearkens back to its early

history in Chicago warehouses. This localization of the roots of house does give it a characteristic identity and culture to which house musicians and dancers are loyal. Its roots, and the acknowledgement of its roots, serve as the main point of authenticity for house fans<sup>19</sup>.

Hillegonda C. Rietveld's *This Is Our House: House Music, Cultural Spaces and Technologies* (1998) examines power among marginalized groups in the context of dance music cultures. The author conducted ethnographic research in Chicago in 1992, and looks specifically at the decline of house in Chicago (due to a city-sponsored stifling of house parties) that perhaps spurred its ensuing spread abroad to Europe, where several offshoots developed that were tailored to the tastes of the "avant-garde." Rietveld offers important foundational information about the history of house based on interviews with DJ Frankie Knuckles and other house pioneers of Chicago and New York City. Like Thornton, Rietveld differentiates between 'white' house music and 'black' house music, noting that in Europe new categories developed called race, techno and trance house that had decreased "African-American sensibilities" (26). "Ideas of longing or of spiritual healing can hardly be found in the European versions of house," which Rietveld attributes to the idea that there was no need for "a sense of hope" in these new affluent, stable, homogenous contexts (88). Rietveld, therefore, brings forth concepts of transformation and changeover time as music is introduced in new geographic contexts, begging the question of authenticity. This perspective differs from my work in that I honor the idea that the transformative healing powers of house music are available to all who partake of it, beyond

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<sup>19</sup> Thornton's mention of Washington, D.C. as a site of a localized black music culture invokes go-go, a genre that still has "cult followings" and reflects a regional amalgamation of northern and southern popular music stylings. Go-go is often considered a "cousin" to house, a distinctive offshoot of funk with a unique beat, that pre-dated hip hop and reflects the aesthetics of an urban community constantly in flux and yet deeply embedded in the history of the city.

ethnicity, even as it is transformed from a street dance or club-based genre to an academic instructional setting. Rietveld does note, however, that the communal sense of catharsis that occurs in house settings did accompany its journey “across the pond”:

In creating a dream world of emotions through the use of stories, keywords and sounds, the sharing of that dream ‘glues’ a community together. Many house records beckon to ‘release yourself’ or to ‘let yourself go’ and in doing so the daily world with its problems seems to disappear. The crowd allows itself to be emotionally manipulated by the DJ, and if perhaps all the circumstances are right, after about six or seven hours s/he can make the crowd hold hands and jump for joy or weep and sit down on the floor, as has been witnessed” (112).

While Rietveld employs the works of Bourdieu and various social scientists to analyze the effects of electronic dance music upon listeners, she does not give any attention to the role of dance. One aspect of house that differentiates it from European dance music forms such as techno and rave music is that house has intricate, specific dance movements that accompany it, which are strung together in improvised combinations that necessitate an advanced understanding of each movement through formal or informal instruction from a culture bearer (this can also be ascertained by “participant observation” over a period of time) and diligent practice. With all the discussion of elation, power, ritual, community building, initiation, and even hedonistic escapism experienced in a house club setting, little attention is paid to the actual movements and their origins in African American history, nor the role of African dance and its diasporic manifestations in house movement practices.

### Hip Hop and Healing

The terms “hip hop” and “healing” in scholarly research are not often juxtaposed to indicate a correlation; however, this is a growing paradigm that combines artistic expression and social justice, such as Los Angeles’s Rampart J.U.I.C.E. (Justice By Uniting In Creative Energy), which is described on its website as “a non-profit weekly hip hop arts program that seeks to develop youth leadership and technical skills, creative expression and self-confidence through

the artistic elements of hip hop” (rampartjuice.com, accessed September 14, 2014). After exploring hip hop overseas and among non-black ethnic minorities, now is a good time for scholar-activists to examine hip hop domestically and the ways that it can be used to promote unity across color lines, especially among today’s youth.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, the university dance studio serves as a potential site for organizing and staging movements through theatre for social change.

Hip hop is considered a subcategory of house in this context because, while hip hop began to develop in New York City around the same time period that house was forming in Chicago, Illinois, the two forms sprang from the same musical roots of soul and funk, and benefited equally from advancements in technology that were occurring during the time of their births. The genres can be viewed as cousins who are close in age. Both were equally influenced by disco, which reigned supreme in American popular music of the 1970s, and they informed each other even as they grew and changed, flowing into the mainstream music industries in diverging ways. Another point that is considered and re-considered in my work is Rennie Harris’ use of the title “Advanced Hip Hop” for his class, when it is actually a class in house method, accompanied by house music. Thus, it is worth unpacking the relevance of house and hip hop in the lives of its enthusiasts. Various scholars investigate identity affirmation in hip hop for African Americans and Native Americans (Hodges 2009, Leal 2012), cultural celebration (Jabbaar-Gyambrah 2007, Rivers 2014, Stephens 1996), and the potential for peace building due to the unifying characteristics of some hip hop music (Lance 2012).

Music therapist Susan Hadley and philosopher George Yancy’s collection of articles,

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<sup>20</sup> The current proliferation of protests and uprisings in urban centers across the United States in response to widespread police brutality toward African American youth signals the need for healing to occur and the potential for hip hop music to help in that process.

*Therapeutic Uses of Rap and Hip-Hop* (2012), brings together music therapy and ethnomusicology because of its focus upon rap and hip-hop as exponents of popular music and aspects of African American musical tradition. All of the articles emphasize that hip hop and rap can be and are used to facilitate healing. These uses include “therapeutically and socially relevant themes,” freedom of expression through songwriting, communication through clients’ “finding” their voices, and “outreach through bboying.” The various populations referenced in the articles include adolescent females; “at-risk youth” in “urban settings”; youth in short-term juvenile detention facilities, pediatric medical settings, and a high-security hospital; and for those suffering from grief, substance abuse, and even cancer. The book includes articles written by contributors from a number of disciplines, “all of whom are doing groundbreaking work in the area of using rap and Hip-Hop in therapy” (Hadley and Yancy 2012: xxxii).

In Hadley and Yancy’s estimation, rap music allows and encourages clients, especially youth, to find their voices through poetic expression and to identify themselves as “heroes” who are able to escape dismal conditions in order to prevail in life (xxxix). Listening, performing, creating, and improvising (freestyling) are all seen and used as therapeutic techniques. Music therapist Stephen Leafloor’s “Therapeutic Outreach through Bboying (Break Dancing) in Canada’s Arctic and First Nations Communities: Social Work through Hip-Hop” discusses bboying, or break dancing, as a method of bringing the community together and developing self-esteem among their youth (Leafloor 2012). Music therapist Michael Viega invokes theologian Robin Sylvan’s 2002 book in his article, “The Hero’s Journey in Hip-Hop and Its Applications in Music Therapy,” noting Sylvan’s tracing of the “hero’s journey of modern popular music forms, including that of Hip-Hop,” to its roots “in West African possession rituals” (61). In “The Importance of Hip-Hop for Music Therapists,” music therapist Aaron J. Lightstone notes, “Rap



is a musical style that is highly groove-oriented. Groove-based musical styles have properties that make them particularly well suited to therapeutic applications” (47).

Hip hop writer Nelson George (2005) details the history of hip hop as a young journalist in New York just as the art form was coming into its own. Both he and ethnomusicologist Cheryl L. Keyes (2001) provide descriptions of the young rappers and conducted interviews with them in a manner that provides scholars an understanding of how rap grew in its identity and influenced the identities of those who were moved and affected by it. While New York’s youth of African American, Caribbean, and Puerto Rican descent created hip hop ciphers as safe spaces that kept them off the battle fields that were the streets during a time of crippling unemployment and unprecedented ruin in the South Bronx, African American youngsters of Chicago, having migrated mostly from the deep South, represented a generation in search of identity and freedom of expression, which they found in house.

Like Mitchell (2000) and Fikentscher (2000), black studies scholar Ronald J. Stephens (1996) situates hip hop music as an African American subculture informed by African consciousness that emphasizes the centrality of “realness.” Like Keyes, popular music scholar Patrick Rivers (2014) examines rap as a musical genre, and asserts that rap was intelligently created as a scientific outcome of knowledge and artistic expression. While theatre scholar Nicole Hodges (2009) delves into the role of identity in hip hop performance, California educator Melissa Leal (2012) discusses the role of Native Americans in hip hop. In noting hip hop’s tenets for complimenting Native American values, her arguments are similar to my discussion of hip hop and house as genres that incorporate music and movement from a plethora of indigenous cultures. From the field of women’s studies, Tara Jabbaar-Gyambrah investigates relationships between the experiences of women in Ghanaian “hip life” and hip hop cultures,

which speaks to the idea of connecting African and African American dance in this dissertation.

In “Krumpin’ in North Hollywood” (2013), communications scholar Taj Robeson and freelance writer Jessica Koslow explore the use of krump dancing to create a space for freedom of expression in a hip hop dance genre that pushes the boundaries of confrontational movement and explosively physical displays of emotion. Rennie Harris has taught some krump movements in his “Advanced Hip Hop” class. An Angeleno art form born in the heart of South Los Angeles in the world of gang warfare, krump has provided an outlet for numerous youth to get off the streets and express themselves artfully.<sup>21</sup> Robeson and Koslow found that young krump dancers, marginalized by the larger Los Angeles society, create spaces in the urban landscape and soundscape, where they can dance together and unleash their true emotions about life in a healthy and constructive way. Similarly, theatre and performance scholar Megan Anne Todd (2009) investigates krump dancing as a global phenomenon and its appearances in various forms of media as creating a form of cultural capital. Todd argues that krump dancing was birthed out of a desire and mandate for African American youth from a lower income community to heal themselves and their community through hope and ingenuity.

Activist Shawn Ginwright’s 2010 examination of hip hop also speaks to *soul healing* in the propagation of peace among youth through activism, which was a foundational aspect of my research. Several of the students who took “Advanced Hip Hop” were also involved in the Community Programs Organization, Students for Activist Awareness in the Arts (SANAA), which gave them the opportunity to create presentations for public school students in Los Angeles using the performing arts. Indeed, performing and studying African and African

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<sup>21</sup> In the 2005 documentary *Rize*, director David LaChapelle juxtaposes images of African dance with krump dance movements of today, using German photographer Leni Riefenstahl’s photos of the Nuba of Sudan from the 1970s.

American art forms at UCLA could be considered a revolutionary act in itself.

### Conclusion

Because I reviewed literature from several different disciplines, by authors from sometimes disparate fields, it was challenging to find underlying themes that tied all of the research together succinctly. However, this aspect of my literature review reveals the very interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation. Although a great deal has been written about various aspects of my topic, the research is spread across several disciplines that do not typically dialogue with one another. However, it is striking that African dance communities have emerged throughout the nation as sites where community and individual learning occurs.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### *Soul Healing in The UCLA Music and Dance of Ghana*

#### **World Music Performance Ensemble**

Students who take “Music and Dance of Ghana,” led by Ewe drum and dance professor Kobla Ladzekpo, experience *soul healing* through the propagation of spirituality, community, self-love, and mentorship. The UCLA Ethnomusicology Department’s website provides a description of the ensemble history. It states, “The Music and Dance of Ghana Ensemble began as a study group when two drummers from Ghana -- Robert Ayitee, an Ewe, and Robert Bonsu, an Asante -- served as visiting lecturers at UCLA during the 1966-1967 academic year. The course, Music 45D/Music 145D (Music and Dance of Ghana), was offered for the first time when Kwasi Badu began teaching at UCLA. Kobla Ladzekpo became the principal instructor in 1976 with the assistance of his wife Beatrice Lawluvi and daughter Yeko Ladzekpo-Cole” (“Ensemble History: Music and Dance of Ghana Ensemble”). Robert Anane Ayitee and Robert Osei Bonsu were the first two “master drummers who gave instructions in Ewe and Asante dance drumming” at UCLA (Dor 2014:47). Kwasi Badu, Mantle Hood’s “drum teacher in Ghana, replaced Ayitee and Bonsu in 1969, and Ladzekpo took over in 1976” (47). At the time of this writing, Professor Ladzekpo teaches drumming and his youngest daughter, Yeko Ladzekpo-Cole, instructs dance as her father’s teaching assistant.<sup>22</sup> The class meets on Thursday nights from 7:00pm to 10:00 pm. Each spring the Ladzekpos are expected (by the Department of Ethnomusicology) to feature their students in an annual Spring Festival of World Music concert series, which takes place in Schoenberg’s main concert hall, which has a 500-seating

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<sup>22</sup> Professor Ladzekpo retired from UCLA in Spring 2014 and the class was discontinued indefinitely, replaced by a class in Nigerian music and dance taught by Professor Francis Awe.

capacity. As when the class was first taught, instruction still takes place in the Gamelan Room, which houses instruments used by performance instructors in their respective ensembles that are taught in UCLA's Department of Ethnomusicology.

A typical instruction environment begins on each Thursday evening. Students assist in setting up chairs and instruments. Professor Ladzekpo begins rehearsals by reviewing previously learned rhythms and then introduces new drum patterns. After students practice playing the music of a particular piece, Yeko, the professor's daughter and dance assistant, teaches the movements that accompany the drumming. Most students are expected to at least try dance movements although the women, in particular, are encouraged to dance while the men drum. As Dor notes, Ewe dances taught over the years include *agbadza*, *gahu*, *atsiagbekor*, and *adzogbo*, while some dances originated from among the Beninese Ewe, and Akan instruments are also found in the Gamelan room (47). Dor also makes note of the syncretization that takes place in some of the musical artistry of the ensemble. For example, in 2010, Ladzekpo incorporated Afro-Brazilian *samba* movements into the Ewe piece *agahu*, in a collaboration with the Music of Brazil ensemble that was performed in the annual spring concert.

The Ladzekpos also teach students to sing while they perform, which helps them to understand and interpret the movements. In "Music and Dance of Ghana," the combination of song and dance together is referred to as a "piece." The songs are taught to students in the native tongue of the people who created the piece. To teach the songs, Yeko writes the words on the Gamelan Room chalkboard, and goes over them several times with students. Then the class will repeat the song together many times, usually until Professor Ladzekpo feels they have learned it. Students may take it upon themselves to write the lyrics down, but this first introduction to

the lyrics is the only one that students will have. By the next class, they are expected to remember the words. Perullo elucidates the healing power of song in performance:

In addition to dancing, song compositions are also influential in providing forms of therapeutic healing. Good composers find ways to use the combination of music and lyrics to foster a broad sense of cultural resonance among listeners. Given the frequency with which audience members quote and discuss lyrics, they obviously pay close attention [to] the meaning of songs (Perullo 2011: 99).

In “Music and Dance of Ghana,” all students enrolled in the spring quarter must perform in the annual spring concert in the departmental Festival of World Music, whether they have ever performed before or not. By the end of the quarter, they become performers, either as singers, musicians, or dancers. In “Music and Dance of Ghana,” the primary dance teacher is Yeko, who is an accomplished dancer and choreographer. Occasionally, there are invited guest teachers such as “Uncle Sulley,” Ghanaian *bamaya* specialist Sulley Imoro, or Professor Ladzekpo’s wife, Beatrice (Djzogba) Ladzekpo, herself also an accomplished dancer, who designs the costumes that students wear in the end of year performances.

### Instructor Biography

Kobla Ladzekpo first arrived at UCLA in 1976 after having taught at California Institute of the Arts for several years. He hails from a lineage of drummers in which “his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were drummers” (Ladzekpo 2011). In the following article, published on the UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology website, department chair’s assistant and website manager Donna Armstrong gives information about Ladzekpo’s heritage:

Ladzekpo comes from a family of composers and dancers who have served for many generations as lead drummers and composers among the Anlo-Ewe people of southeastern Ghana. Ladzekpo and his brothers Alfred, C. K., and Kwaku have shared that knowledge with generations of U.S. students through teaching at several California universities. (Alfred served for forty-one years as co-director of the African Music and Dance Program at CalArts, retiring in 2011; C.K. is currently director of the African Music Program at the University of California, Berkeley, where he has served for forty-one years.) Kobla's wife, Dzidzorgbe Beatrice Lawluvi, who assisted Kobla at UCLA, also served for forty-two years on the faculty of the African Music and Dance Program at CalArts, and retired in 2014. A formally trained dancer in her own right, Kobla’s

daughter Yeko Ladzekpo-Cole has taught music and dance at several universities in Southern California and assisted her parents in teaching at UCLA and CalArts. With his wife, Beatrice, Kobla Ladzekpo formed the Zdonu African Music and Dance Company and founded his own recording label Zdonu Records. He has performed in countries around the world and has been a frequent lecturer at universities in Australia and the United States including Naropa Institute in Colorado. He has also contributed to several film soundtracks, including *Mississippi Masala* and *Ali*. The Ladzekpo family is well known for producing “The Africans Are Coming,” a staged presentation of diverse music and dance cultures from Africa.<sup>23</sup>

In a personal interview with student/apprentice Karen Liu, Kobla Ladzekpo told of his beginnings in drumming (Liu 2011). He was kept from learning drumming as a child due to the influences of colonial rule that attempted to do away with African tradition by forcing children to attend Western-based schools in an effort to eradicate their root culture. However, Kobla tells a story of one of his first memories of drumming, which was a result of tragedy.

[My father] was alive when our mother died. In those days, kids were not allowed to go to the funeral. It was scary for children. Kids cry a lot. They never allowed us to watch. I remember being there with my younger brother Alfred, who was the last born of our mother. He and I and our sister who passed away. So we were not allowed to go to the funeral because we were young; we would be having nightmares about it. So anyway, somewhere in the middle, when they were about to put her in the coffin and go to the burial, our father just called my brother and me to come because they were having the funeral at another house. So then he held our hand and took us to where they were having her funeral. So as honor and respect to her, my father picked up the stick and played an opening call in that piece for maybe 10-15 minutes, and then took us back to the house, because he didn't want us to be around when they were putting her in the ground. At that time, I had some stomach problems, so I was going to the hospital for medical treatment” (Ladzekpo 2011).

Thus, music and dance was an early healing force in Ladzekpo's life. According to Ladzekpo, until the 1960s, the Ladzekpos were the only players of Agbekor in Anyako, the village from which his family comes. His father, for instance, would be called upon to play the lead drum in other regions. Originally, Ladzekpo's specialty was in teaching Ewe dance to males.

### Spring 2010

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<sup>23</sup> This is taken from “Kobla Ladzekpo Retires After Teaching for 38 Years at UCLA,” written by Donna Armstrong and published on September 25, 2014:

<http://www.ethnomusic.ucla.edu/kobla-ladzekpo-retires-began-teaching-at-ucla-in-1976>.

Accessed on May 6, 2015.

2009-2010 was an exciting year for the ensemble; there was a critical mass of experienced dancers in addition to students who were dedicated to the class and showed interested in learning more about Ghanaian culture. In a class of about twenty students, approximately seven students were majoring in Music, Ethnomusicology, or World Arts and Cultures, which raises the overall musicality of the ensemble. Several other majors were represented, from Art and Political Science to Molecular Biology, and there was also significant ethnic diversity among students.

Two students who were relatively new to the ensemble (a first and a second year member) took it upon themselves to organize weekly practice sessions in the Gamelan Room in order to polish movements or review songs and rhythms (although this endeavor was slightly undermined by the simultaneous presence of two other ensembles practicing their instruments). Some first-year students brought food to rehearsals, and many nights students lingered outside after class ends just to chat and joke, catch up, and sometimes even to sing and practice Ewe movements and language together.

As in 2008-2009, the 2009-2010 academic year began with a performance. (In fall of 2008, a small group from the ensemble performed in Professor DjeDje's class on West African music. This was a very important occasion, as it attracted a crucial new addition to the class, a recent transfer student who had just arrived at UCLA to study Ethnomusicology, Melissa Sanvicente. Melissa's background in *Danza Mexíca* facilitated her leadership as a dancer in the ensemble, raising the level of professionalism in the ensemble, as she was also invited to join Zadonu.)



In fall of 2009, Professor DjeDje invited the ensemble to perform in the AMNA<sup>24</sup> Conference (Africa Meets North America), which was being held at UCLA. A small group of experienced students from the ensemble danced adzohu, a war dance, for a crowd of many renowned African music theorists and enthusiasts and Professor Ladzekpo's longtime colleagues. Around this time, Professor Ladzekpo decided to re-launch his own dance troupe, Zdonu African Music and Dance Company, which had been defunct for eight years. Several students from the ensemble, who had inquired about private lessons or shown interest in growing as musicians, were invited to participate in bi-weekly rehearsals in a park near the Ladzekpos' home in the San Fernando Valley.

Those who participated in the Zdonu rehearsals got to know several seasoned musicians who had studied with the Ladzekpos at CalArts in the 1980s, in addition to other musicians who ranged in age from 25 to 45, who had decided to make Ewe drumming a significant part of their lives. Their decision to learn to play at a professional level gave UCLA students a model for how to aspire toward excellence in Ewe music performance. Similarly, they brought a level of professionalism to the UCLA ensemble that encouraged other students to aspire to excel by recording rehearsals to aid in their independent practice and by seeking private lessons with the Ladzekpos outside of class. The 2010 Spring Concert also brought a historic combination: the Music of Brazil ensemble, BatUCLAda, collaborated with Music and Dance of Ghana for one piece called *agahu*, adding a samba rhythm (thus making it "Samb*Agahu*"). In the concert, Yeko improvised a duet with a dancer from local Afro-Brazilian dance company "Viver Brasil" while

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<sup>24</sup> On October 22-25, 2009, the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music, Department of Ethnomusicology hosted AMNA, the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium and Festival. It featured free festival concerts that were open to the public, in addition to daily events such as scholarly sessions, workshops, and panels featuring renowned African and African American music scholars.

the ensemble members acted as a “dance chorus,” corporeally representing a waving metronome in a backdrop of sorts as the soloists improvised dancing Bahia-style samba (performed barefoot and in Orixá costume). One longtime student who eventually became an apprentice for the Lazekpos described how the ensemble changed his life:

I joined it my freshman year, spring quarter, so spring 2008. My first quarters, I was going there just to do it. Then a lot of stuff happened my sophomore year that was a really low time in my life; I was taking three science class which was crazy for me, and I was also running for the team, and then I got injured, so I was dealing with my first major injury so that was a huge psychological blow to me because running has always been therapeutic for me, and I didn't have that...and I was also going through some serious drama with this girl and there was like some heartbreak going on; and I was in a really depressive state. And I was talking with my brother, who is taking the class under Professor Ladzekpo's first cousin CK Ladzekpo, who teaches at UC-Berkeley, and he actually put it into perspective for me. He put the West African rhythm perspective and how it can be applied to situations like mine and his and how it could be effective; the metaphorical and symbolic value of drumming. And the way it is structured is that it's all based off of a polyrhythm, and so you've got to be prepared to respond to the unpredicted, and such is life, you know? There are going to be so many challenges coming your way, but you have to be well grounded. I really took it to heart and I started to really practice the music. (Felder 2013)

### 2010 Survey Results

I administered a survey to students at the end of the spring quarter in order to gauge students' reactions about the class. At the time, I was writing a paper on the role of healing in taking the ensemble, asserting that the class provided a space of healing and movement therapy for students to work out various issues they were working through as they matriculated through UCLA, with Professor Ladzekpo and his daughter Yeko as guides. This theory is reflected in the work of Victor Turner, who was especially interested in the liminal phase of rites of passage processes (1969: 238-239). According to Turner, the liminal space is one in which a group of individuals, who become comrades through bonding in order to successfully endure the phase, are isolated and endure a rough training administered by elders, in order to reach a higher status in society, after having learned essential life lessons. Going through the liminal period together creates a sense of *communitas*, or shared community, and the initiates' success at negotiating the

liminal period is celebrated in a public ceremony. In this case, the students' success at finding their individual niches in the class and ably representing Anlo-Ewe culture through dancing, drumming, and song, is rewarded through participation in the spring concert.

The ages of the students in the Spring 2010 ensemble ranged from 19 to 35. The total class enrollment was twenty-two. There were eight males and fourteen females. Of these students, two of them self-identified as Asian and one as Asian American of Japanese descent, while two students of Asian descent specified their ethnicity as Vietnamese and Chinese, respectively. Eight students identified as Caucasian or white, two as Mexican, three as African American or black, and two as biracial (African American and white). One student who identified as African American is of Nigerian origin. One student of Salvadoran origin described himself as Hispanic, and one student said that he was Afghan.

The majors represented included music composition, sociology, psychology (with an education minor), international development studies, an art and "international development studies" double major, art with a women's studies minor, art, ethnomusicology with a composition focus, nursing, biochemistry, chemistry, biology, political science and Afro-American studies double major, and a computer science/neural systems graduate. Three of the students majored in neuroscience, three were ethnomusicology majors, and there were also two World Arts and Cultures majors, one with a Cultural Studies concentration and one with a Dance concentration.

When asked how students learned of the Music and Dance of Ghana Ensemble, responses were varied: Four of them were encouraged to join the ensemble by a friend of theirs, two by a student of junior classification who had been taking the class for seven quarters. Two students were attracted to the class after viewing the spring performance or "showcase" from the prior

year. One student had seen the ensemble perform in a professor's lecture the year before, and one student claimed to have stumbled upon the class "by chance." Two students were referred to the class by their academic counselor, and six browsed the online quarterly "Schedule of Classes." Of the ethnomusicology majors, two explained that they learned about the ensemble from the department website, and two knew of the ensemble because it was an "option of required music [performance] courses" "that we need to take each quarter." One student "searched for all available Ethnomusicology classes for this term" and one student commented, "I wanted to take an ensemble my last quarter, so I looked at the catalog." Fourth year student and apprentice Akemi Felder<sup>25</sup> discussed how he got involved in the class:

Before the class, I never danced. When I got to UCLA, I had no idea about this class. I didn't even know what a PTE (petition to enroll) was. I emailed Kobla and said, 'I'm willing to audition. I have some drum experience, and I think I have a djembe.' So he didn't respond but I showed up the first day. He asked me, "How many states are there in the U.S.?" "I said fifty. He said, "Are they all the same?" I said no. And he walks away. And then I'm like, "What is going on right now?" But his message later on, when he was addressing the whole class, was "You know, West Africa encompasses a lot of countries and just because there's one kind of drum that you know about, doesn't mean they apply to all cultures, you know? So from that point on, I felt small. I felt a little intimidated by that...like, I had disrespected this man...that had been teaching this music for so long...But then I stuck to it. And I've been learning more and more about it since then. (Felder 2013)

Twelve students said they had played an instrument before taking the class, responding that they had received instruction in Western instruments such as piano, guitar, and bass during their childhoods. This was especially true of the music majors. One student replied that he or she had studied violin "for three years in junior high" and one "played the recorder in fifth grade." One student sang in the Philadelphia Opera Company as a child, and one had sung in another UCLA World Music Performance Ensemble, the Balkan choir, the quarter before. Another student had

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<sup>25</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees, except for Professors Ladzekpo and Harris.

played samba bateria<sup>26</sup> instruments in BatUCLAda, the Music of Brazil World Music Performance Ensemble during previous quarters. Three of the students reported playing wind instruments (clarinet and trumpet). Only three students reported playing African instruments in the past. A World Arts and Culture student had been exposed to the djembe and dun duns, both West African drums, and one ethnomusicology student, who had a background in drum set and Western classical orchestra percussion, had taken instruction on Ewe drumming with Professor Ladzekpo's younger brother, who teaches at California Institute of the Arts, Alfred Ladzekpo. Four students replied no to the question, with one adding a comment: "NO—I'm not musical at all."

Predictably, there were many more "no's" from students when asked if they had ever danced professionally before taking the class. Although students technically did not receive payment for dancing in the ensemble (the majority of students danced in at least one piece while a small minority solely sang and an even smaller minority got to drum with students brought in from outside the ensemble), they received professional dance training in the class. The Ladzekpos' philosophy regarding dance instruction is not for students to bring their own creative flair or physical idiosyncrasies to the movements, but that they each try to execute the movements in line with the Ladzekpos' choreography and style, to the best of their ability. It is not uncommon for Professor Ladzekpo, himself originally a dancer, to interrupt a piece in order to correct a student's movement. One student answered the question, "NO—I'm not coordinated at all." Conversely, some students had received dance training; one in Chinese cultural dance, one studied Irish dancing for nine years, one answered "No" despite having taken "ballet until I

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<sup>26</sup> Bateria means "drum kit" in Portuguese and Spanish, and also refers to a Brazilian samba band.

was 8, maybe...?” and two students were familiar with African-derived dance forms such as Nigerian dance, hip hop, and break dancing, in addition to cheerleading and modern dance.

Eight students described their primary role in the ensemble as dancers whereas other students described their roles as being multi-faceted: “dancer and drummer,” “singer and dancer,” or “dancer and drummer.” Two students noted a change in their roles, such as dancing during class but singing for performances, or “drumming until spring-then dancing” in preparation for the concert. This was typical for males who showed some ability in the dancing, because of the female-male ratio in the class. Even having just one male dancer in a piece was greatly treasured and taken advantage of for performance purposes. Four students identified themselves as ensemble percussionists, either drummers or “shaker” players (the Ewe term for the shaker, a gourd filled with beads that plays a timeline throughout the piece and engages in call and response with the lead drum, is the *axatse*). One of the four identified herself as a *kidi* player, as she was being trained in technique on that particular supporting drum pattern, learning more intricate rhythms, and was rarely asked to dance during rehearsals. Two students described themselves as singers in the ensemble, and two acknowledged the variety of hats they wore, answering that they did “Everything!” or “All, but primarily drummer (mixed instruments).”

When asked why they were taking the class, most students replied that they endeavored to develop and/or improve musical skills. The second most popular answer was “to fulfill a course requirement.” Students elaborated, “I needed more units,” “For two units,” “Extra units needed,” “Units for graduation,” “For units.” The third most popular answer was “to explore my interest in West African culture(s).” About seven students said they took the class to develop and/or improve dance skills, and five said they took the class to get exercise. Several students

gave “other” responses, including: “to get over my fear of public performing/presentations,” “My interest in Ghana, “Enriches life, satisfies my soul,” and “Learn music from around the world.” Surprisingly, none of the students reported a desire to explore the ties between African dance and their own indigenous heritage. Only one student responded to this option affirmatively, and he altered the response, stating that he took the class to explore the ties between African dance and his own self. Similarly, several students reported self-growth as a result of taking the class, as illustrated later in the survey.

Eleven students were taking the ensemble for the first time in the spring quarter of 2011. One student had taken the class for six quarters, one had taken it for seven quarters, three students took it for three quarters (completing a whole academic year of the course), five students had taken it for two quarters, and the UCLA alumnus had taken it for over ten quarters. Fourth year student/apprentice Jonathan Minelli spoke on the value in attending the class multiple quarters:

I think each quarter is very different; each year is different. It’s interesting to see how each group meshes. The performance itself really brings everybody together, bringing kids much closer because of having to practice earlier in the day before going on stage. In the class after, they were watching the performance and everyone was laughing and goofing around and joking about the performance and certain things that went on.... It was interesting to see how people get more comfortable with one another through the course of the quarter. I think that coincides with people becoming more comfortable with the music too. Because if it becomes a more enjoyable process, then you’re going to enjoy it more with the people around you as well. The nice thing about going quarter after quarter is, you get to know the people who keep showing up, sometimes after years at a time. It’s always interesting to see who might become somebody like that. It’s always a funny social dynamic that happens in there. (Minelli 2013)

When asked what their favorite part about participating in the ensemble was, the majority of students replied, “Learning the dances.” The next popular answer was “Everything.” Four students checked all of the boxes although they were asked to check only one. These included learning the songs and the drumming, meeting new people, and performing in shows. One

student checked learning the drumming, meeting new people, and performing, and one checked “Meeting new people and performing,” and one checked “Learning the Drumming and Meeting new People.” Other comments included, “Learning something new,” “Meeting the Ladzekpos, Sulley, you, Melissa, everyone!” (Sulley refers to a guest artist the Ladzekpos brought in to teach *bamaya*,<sup>27</sup> a dance from Northern Ghana). Students also elaborated: “Life doesn’t always go easy, and you must be well guarded all the time!” “It’s a toss up between learning the songs and learning the dances, but I think if I really had to choose, the dancing by far was my favorite.” Other comments included “spiritual happiness I experienced” and “Learning new things as a whole.”

When asked their least favorite part about participating in the ensemble, students gave a variety of answers. Only two students reported no complaints, answering “No” and “Leaving.” Five students reported that the time at which the class is held was inconvenient and the length of the class (three hours) was unfavorable. One ethnomusicology student lamented, “It’s pretty long and we get out at ten.” Another student commented, “I enjoyed most of it, but I didn’t like that we had to meet up so late.” Only one student, an ethnomusicology major, complained about the writing assignment, which Professor Ladzekpo instituted in order to impress upon students the seriousness of the class, saying, “The seven page paper was too much.” One student expressed his chagrin in two words: “the *kaganu*.” The time keeping drum part that does not change at all throughout any of the pieces played in the ensemble proved to be

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<sup>27</sup> “Bamaya, a Dogbane harvest dance usually performed by men in ladies’ skirts, involves wiggling of the pelvis. This special dance is based on the story of a man who maltreated his wife, resulting in a plague of famine for the whole territory. It was revealed that in order to humble the man in question to his wife, all the men in the village had to dress like women - hence the Bamaya costume. The gender equality element furnishes us with food for thought...be nice to all living things. Some schools of traditional thought links the dance movements of Bamaya to fanning off mosquitoes.” <http://www.afridance.com/repertoire.html>. Accessed April 22, 2015.



an annoyance to this particular student.

Several complaints lodged by students concerned a yearly dilemma: how to incorporate all of the students into the spring concert, whether they have had one year or one quarter of instruction. Those who entered in the spring often faced the daunting task of becoming familiar enough with Ewe language in song texts, drum patterns, or movements, in order to perform; and they had nine weeks in which to catch up with those who had been taking the class all year. Thus, some students felt pressured: “Sometimes the instruction was a little fast and thus overwhelming to learn,” and complained about “the speed at which we are expected to learn the dances/songs.” Some did not get to perform because they had not memorized the movements by week nine, complaining of “feeling left out of the dances” or “not dancing in shows.” The difficulty of picking up the movements for some was a point of contention; they lamented “not understanding certain rhythms, moves, etc.” and “the stress of not knowing how to do the dances; even though I like it, it was tricky for me!” Dor also observed various challenges to the ensemble including the difficulty of expansion due to limited rehearsal time and storage space for instruments due to the ensembles’ shared space in the Gamelan Room:

The issue of time becomes compounded and crucial when one remembers that UCLA operates within the term system rather than the semester system; since a term is shorter than a semester, less can be learned or perfected than would be the case within the longer semester span (2014:52).

Some students, even those who excelled in the dance compared to other students, did not understand the Ladzekpos’ pedagogical techniques or methods for coping with conditions they find strenuous as instructors. One student complained about “the strict attitude of the professors,” and another simply stated, “My interactions with Ladezkpo.” The pressure was palpable for one student, who stated, “The vibe & environment of the class room was strict & uncomfortable, not allowing room for enjoyment.” Akemi discussed how he came to understand

Ladzekpo's pedagogical style:

I think that Kobla is, they call him "Ol School" in the department. He's been teaching at UCLA since '76. I didn't really know this at first, but over the years talking to him, he's like a grandfather to me now. I talk to him and I go over to his house sometimes...He's seen a lot of people come and go over the years, with a lot of different perspectives. And when he hears people talk a certain way about the music that has sustained him throughout his life, or they come in with a certain perspective, I think he's gotten to the point where he's like, he doesn't embrace the possibility that kids just don't know yet, you know? And sometimes people just get really intimidated by that because he calls it out quickly. And they think that he's just mad at them, but since he's heard it so much, what he's really trying to do is just make sure that they don't continue to have the same kinds of misconceptions, and just trying to do his part as much as he can. He loves all his students, but he wants to make sure that they take something away from it. (Felder 2013)

Two students who had been in the ensemble for at least two years reported problems with the class structure that reflected institutional issues, citing: "Limited number of performances, not enough stability/frequency of classes to pick up more pieces, awkward UCLAisms" and commenting, "I wish there were more students interested. I wish this class gets bigger, bigger than CalArts!"

When asked how participation in the ensemble affected students' lives, the most checked answer was "I made new friends." Next was "I am more culturally sensitive/aware" and the third most popular answer was "I am a better musician/dancer." Ten people checked "I am more confident/outgoing," and nine affirmed that they experienced a sense of family. One student elaborated, "Definitely—when others help you and critique your work you really get that sense of group cohesion." Four students checked, "I communicate more efficiently with those around me, two students checked, "I participated in a public for the first time in my life," and some students offered "other" comments: "relieve stress, have fun," "learned about Ghanaian culture." Students claimed to be more culturally literate after taking the class, writing: "It makes me appreciate other cultures and opens my perspective of the world" and "Given me a new window to explore another part of the world." One student added a critique: "I am appreciative

of the material I learned; however, I did not enjoy my interactions with the professor which made it extremely difficult to enjoy my experience in the class.” The negative responses from one student in particular reflects some interesting truths that manifest in a class like the Ladzekpos,’ reflecting hip hop and house music scholar Rennie Harris’ perspective as a dance professor in World Arts and Cultures, when he stated in a 2010 lecture: “Dance is the realest class you’ll ever take.” This statement reflects larger allegories such as “The body does not lie.” The backgrounds and issues that students come in with are often worked out through bodily expression because they are evident in students’ posture and body attitude. In the Music and Dance of Ghana ensemble, it appears that most often, students enjoyed the opportunity to physically move and learn movement as a group as a very positive and unique experience, perhaps for this very reason. Thus, some students viewed the class as a stress reliever or, simply, as “fun.”

However, depending upon what students are dealing with in their personal lives, the class can be a very “deep” experience, especially for students who feel they can afford to have a strong opinion about the way the class is run due to their closer proximity to the culture—either through African or African-descended identity or prior training as a dancer. The student who complained the most about her interactions with the professor, in this case, had recently lost a male relative who was a father figure not too far from Professor Ladzekpo’s age. “Being yelled at” can be even more difficult to take for students who identify as black or African descended, and who have taken dance in other contexts in which professors did more to cater to their students’ egos.

A similar situation happens for some serious dancers who take the class, only to find that they are criticized for the very body postures and movement styles that make them successful in other genres of dance, including modern and ballet. Again, one would be wise to leave his or her

ego at the door when taking this particular ensemble. It is worth noting that this issue of authority can be looked at from at least two perspectives: One, the professor's pedagogy. For instance, ethnomusicologist Ted Solís uses dance instruction in his Arizona State University marimba ensemble as a method of promoting a sense of community among students. In "Community of Comfort: Negotiating a World of Latin Marimba," Solís emphasizes the integral nature of dance in music instruction: "Most techniques I use in both rehearsal and public performance to eliminate inhibition, alleviate self-consciousness, and minimize the distance between the performers and the audience stem from dance movement" (2004: 238). The Ladzekpos teach their tradition to the best of their ability, and students may decide if they want to learn it or not. Whatever results from learning the dances and drumming are left up to the student to recognize and accept or reject.

Another perspective is that some students who take the class have a problem dealing with authority. This situation is compounded by the fact that some of them may have never had a black professor, even after having studied African-inspired musical genres in past training. One unique trait of the UCLA ethnomusicology department is that it has a critical mass of black male instructors, greatly in part due to its applied music courses. Thus, encountering Kobla Ladzekpo as an instructor, in many ways, allows students to come face to face with their own feelings about race. Africanist ethnomusicologist and Tufts University West African Ensemble director David Locke claims that the average American is ignorant about African culture, which often leads them to prejudge it. "Whites may resent the challenge to their neat little world. Blacks regard African drumming as a black prerogative and note another instance of appropriation [...] but the African ensemble is an anomaly that partakes of none" (2004:182). Indeed, the African ensemble does not provide a setting for full "fleshing out" of students' feelings because that is

beyond the scope of the Ladzekpos' objectives, and there simply is not enough time, even as the issues manifest between students and instructor interactions. As Locke notes, black students can find themselves in a conundrum when taking the African ensemble as well, because they find themselves a minority in a class focusing on what some would consider "black art," yet are given no special treatment or privilege even if they themselves feel they have a stronger aptitude for the dancing or drumming. However, the Ladzekpos regard this, too, as an issue for students to deal with on their own and move past for the sake of fulfilling their purpose for taking the class: learning the music (which includes dance).

Thirteen students claimed that they had never been exposed to Ghanaian or West African culture before. Four students had traveled to West Africa before, one student had a best friend who taught in Ghana. Other students were familiar with West African musicians such as Fela Kuti of Nigeria<sup>28</sup> and Ali Farka Toure of Mali.<sup>29</sup> All but three of the students responded that they would like to continue studying Ghanaian culture/ West African music/dance in the future, at least as a hobby or "for fun." Other student responses included: "I plan on enjoying the music and have found a new sense of rhythm," "May teach in Kenya this summer," "I would love to continue dancing," and "Maybe. I plan on doing humanitarian work in Africa some day helping orphans there; that's one of my dreams." "Yes!!"

When asked about their plans to continue in the ensemble, there were a variety of

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<sup>28</sup> "Fela Anikulapo Kuti, born in Abeokuta, Nigeria in 1938, was a singer-composer, trumpet, sax and keyboard player, bandleader, and politician. Kuti was one of Africa's most controversial musicians and throughout his life he continued to fight for the rights of the common man (and woman) despite vilification, harassment, and even imprisonment by the government of Nigeria." - <http://africanmusic.org/artists/felakuti.html>. Accessed April 22, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Ali Farka Toure' is a guitarist from a North Malian noble family. "He is known as the *Bluesman of Africa* because of his highly distinctive blues style that's a cross-mix of the Arabic-influenced Malian sound." - <http://africanmusic.org/artists/alifarka.html>. Accessed April 22, 2015.

answers. Some students said no, citing their desire to learn about other things: “I like this class but maybe need to learn something new as a composer.” “I wouldn’t want to take this same one but another African dance course, sure.” “No—but I would continue taking other West African classes.” “No, because I would like to expose myself to others cultures if I can.” Others cited time constraints: “No, I’m graduating, I’m not sure if I would have more time to be in this class again.” “Maybe—it was a big chunk of time but a lot of fun.” “Maybe, if I have time and if it can fit into my schedule.” Others enjoyed the class so much that they were interested in continuing their study of Ghanaian dance. “Yes, and when I graduate next year I’m going to have think about where I go.” “I would definitely continue if I were still enrolled.” “No; I am graduating, if I am in L.A. I will come.” “I’m graduating, but if I wasn’t I would take it again.” Not surprisingly, the enthusiasts had a lot to say: “Yes because I loved it!” “Yup; so I can get a better understanding of the music.” “Yes. The professors are knowledgeable and willing to invest. I support them in wanting to preserve their culture.” “Yes, I’ll be here next year and want to learn more.” “I plan to participate in this class again next year.” “Yes I do if I am able because I really enjoy it.”

The majority of students said they would encourage others to take the class. Two students commented directly on the Ladzekpos: “Yes, it’s a great class, [the Ladzekpos’] spirit inspired people,” “Yes, everyone can really take something special and enduring from this music and these people.” Several students emphasized the value of the class as an opportunity for cultural education, saying they would encourage friends to take the class “for them to try something new and be exposed to African culture.” “Everyone should take more classes outside their area of study. These 3 hrs/wk (sic) are great stress relief.” “It teaches you a lot about a very different kind of music that you might not otherwise get exposed to.” “It is a good way to

learn a new musical tradition.” “It is an unintimidating environment to explore new skills/experiences.”

Several students praised the challenging nature of the class: “It is a challenging class but relaxing because you are not in a book.” “It is a nuanced and rewarding challenge; the music/dance are beautiful.” One student interpreted “challenging” as a potential deterrent for future students, cautioning that he or she would encourage a friend to take the class “only if they have a dance background/familiarity or I know they wouldn’t be overwhelmed by being thrown in. Also if they didn’t mind the 7 page paper.” Other students described the class as “fun,” “fun stuff” and “a good learning experience” that was freeing, charismatic, good exercise, beautiful art, interesting, and an “enlightening experience.” “It would be fun to experience this class with my friends and see them have fun. It would be more fun overall.” One student even mentioned love, a term rarely heard or used in academia: “I would like [friends] to experience the bonding and fun and love, togetherness and oneness that I experienced in this class.”

The last survey question was, “What lessons from this class will you take with you as the academic year ends?” Several students focused upon the value of cultural literacy and awareness, noting, “It’s important to get facts about other cultures right” and “There is much to learn out there in the world, about all the different cultures.” One student mused, “There is so much I DON’T know about the world. An open mind may be more important in life than a full mind.” He or she then added, “Dancing makes me feel good.” Many students spoke specifically of how they felt about learning the dances. One student cited “a new confidence and control in the expression and movement of my body” while another student learned that one has to “be very attentive when dancing.” From “the songs and dances we learned,” one student concluded, “Practice makes perfect!”

Several students spoke of learning life lessons that reflect discipline and open-mindedness. One commented learned “when not to speak” and “to play and dance more confidently because it looks better.” Further, “by completely immersing oneself in dancing/playing/singing, one will learn faster.” “Trying things outside your comfort zone can be invaluable experiences.” “Being interested is not enough if you want to learn.” “Techniques, patience, a small amount of boldness.” “Pay attention more closely to what I learn and retain it. Also that rhythm does not need a specific time signature and can be heard by just focusing on it.” “Respect always and for everyone.” “Go into something new with an open mind.” “To be able to take criticism. How to listen with my ears and learn a rhythm or beat.” “The same: repetition—‘have an open mind,’ ‘no frozen chicken,’ ‘oh, all the words of wisdom and experience!’” “Do not be intimidated to challenge yourself.”

One student learned lessons of being a dependable teammate of sorts, despite having “two left feet”: “I will always keep trying and not give up no matter how difficult things might be. I learned that my friends in this class were counting on me to know the songs; when I had to sing them in a microphone and I worked really hard to learn them so I could make a group as a whole look good!” One student seemed to be surprised at achieving relative success in his pursuit of bi-musicality, commenting that he could be “good at this [drumming and dancing] in context of former ‘African Only’ expectations.” One of the most interesting answers, which reflects a major tenet of the Ladzekpos’ philosophy is, “Music and dance should be unifying experience.”

Additional comments included, “This was by far my favorite class at UCLA,” “At times this class felt like church to me (family singing/playing together). I liked it.,” “This class was definitely healing for me,” and “A really energizing and refreshing break from



everything else.” The majority of students indicated their willingness to be further interviewed about the healing aspects of dance and music in the context of the Ladzekpos’ class, and seemed excited about the research topic.

### Spring 2012

When I re-administered the survey in Spring 2012, the class instruction had not changed much but the class makeup was markedly different; the class size had shrunk from twenty plus, to ten at the most. Now that I (and the class) knew that healing was a main focus of my dissertation, some students made comments that pointed directly to that concept. A forty-four year old Caucasian female UCLA alumna taking the class for the first time remarked that she was taking the class to “tap more into my creativity” and “as a source of inspiration and stress-relieving.” She said she had learned of the class “through Yeko,” and was hoping that her son, an enrolled UCLA student, would take the course in the near future. She indicated that practicing was key to getting the most out of the class. When asked how participation in the ensemble affected her life, she checked all the choices given on the questionnaire and added a comment: “It gives me something to look forward to each week! It truly is VERY HEALING for me. I have a place I can come and forget about challenging aspects of life. ☺” When asked what lessons from the class she would take with her as the academic year ended, she replied, “A sense of appreciation, healing and awareness. Continue to live, forgive, laugh, dance, Love.” Developing a consistent practice was key to the value of the class:

It took me a few quarters in getting comfortable with the material that I was playing. I was hyper-aware of everything, wanting to get it all correct. And once I started getting the basics and started picking up on things that I could hear, that I wasn’t picking up on initially, I started enjoying everything I was doing. And I would leave the class much happier than when I entered it. Thursdays can be pretty stressful. I’m usually worn out by the end of the week. When I go in, I feel tired but when I leave I feel much more energized even though I was exerting myself when I was in there, dancing and drumming. I felt not as much like a zombie as I was earlier in the day. It’s tough to gauge that for the first timers because they are feeling nervous and trying to

understand everything, and it takes a while for that to happen. But once it clicked, I started feeling the benefits of everything. I was in the class; going on my third year now, I guess. I definitely feel more confident about the ability to play even when confronted with new material...I can pick up on the patterns faster because I'm thinking in terms of the structure I've been thinking of the other pieces; that's a big confidence booster in the class as well as outside of it. It's something that a lot of people are not even aware exists at UCLA, so we tell people about it. I'm even able to pick upon rhythms in more Western music now. There's a carryover, really unique and really cool. We've advised people to take the class, and it's really cool. (Minelli 2013)

One student, a twenty-two year old white male Design/Media Arts major in his first quarter of taking the ensemble, noted that his least favorite part about participating in the ensemble was the “little accommodation for steep learning curve.” He described himself as “a big fan of Ghanaian Afro-beat music” who would continue to study Ghanaian music and would have continued in the ensemble were he not graduating. When asked if he would encourage others to take the class, he replied “Maybe. I love the class, but the only reason I wouldn't recommend it is because of the musicality it requires.” Further, the lessons he would take with him included “Lessons about rhythm (and polyrhythm), culture, and humility.” A 23-year-old white male UCLA Neuroscience alumnus, who wished to remain anonymous, noted that the ensemble had affected his life in that “It is therapeutic and makes me feel happier.” The term “therapeutic” came up in an interview with Jonathan:

When I first started it, at the very first time, my first quarter, I didn't really get it. I was kind of intimidated because I had all these misconceptions that he was very quick to point out. But I stuck with it, and it took me a couple quarters to make the connection and to really feel the kind of joy that I can feel today with playing the music, and then I started to really feel the therapeutic effects of it. I may not have been fully aware of it my first two quarters and it may have had an effect, but I think I was fully aware of it after some time when I really started to understand the music. (Minelli 2013)

The soul healing themes of spirituality, community, self-love, and mentorship are evident throughout the above responses from both classes surveyed. Moreover, various issues surfaced again in the personal interviews that I conducted with students Akemi and Jonathan, both of whom began taking the ensemble during their undergraduate years at UCLA and returned to

keep studying under Ladzekpo after they graduated.

## Spirituality

Akemi and Jonathan both felt that the class had therapeutic value:

A major aspect of participation in the Music and Dance of Ghana ensemble was its therapeutic benefits. I think that people sometimes don't give themselves a chance to use the experience from the music as a way to deal with their hardship that they're going through, or their issues, and they end up using it as an excuse not to take the class again. Saying they're too busy. They may use their issues as a way to justify not taking the class again. I was super busy as a neuroscience major and as a runner. But I never saw the class as something that was out of my way. I felt like I needed it or I wouldn't be able to do those other things normally. So I harnessed it as opposed to saying, 'I can't do it.' When you're playing the music, and you're having to play your part to the best of your ability, there's no time to think about those things that are really hurting you. I was able to think about them less you can't really focus on. Now I'm able to cope with negative experiences better, because I know I have this thing I can come back to that takes me away from my troubles. It really changed me and the way that I deal with negative stuff. There is definitely that physical component to the drumming that has a lot of overlap with endurance activities. I'm a cross country and long distance runner as well, so all of that negative energy just kind of gets used up when you're running. There's no point or energy to be mad. (Felder 2013)

I'm learning this stuff because I enjoy it. This actually benefits me as well and you can incorporate that. If I'm very stressed, I know going to class can alleviate that. I can focus my energy on something that I'm not stressed about for three hours. It's an almost meditative thing. You need to be focused on what's happening, but you can step outside of that stuff you're freaking out about. You're taking the energy that you would be devoting on stuff that you really can't change and focusing on something that's right in front of you--the dancing and the drumming. It's also nice that it's not necessarily a tight, concise piece of music. It's however many times the leader wants to play it. It's a different approach to music as well. Stop thinking about it in terms of that and start thinking about it as a process that you're undertaking. It's a unified thing that everybody contributes to, and so playing becomes its own act, essentially. Some kids just don't pick up on that though. They think, this is the title, this is what we play--it's something entirely different from a band practice or pop radio. The people who get that are more likely to enjoy it and come back later down the road. (Minelli 2013)

Another spiritual aspect had to do with the concept of oneness, which emerged due to the integration of dance and drums.<sup>30</sup> Dor writes about the “seemingly inextricable nexus between African music and dance” and notes that Ladzekpo has “remained very consistent in his advocacy for the interplay between drumming and dance” (Dor 2014:104).

Beginning with a reminder of the name of the course he teaches at UCLA—“Music and Dance of West Africa”—Kobla Ladzekpo emphatically asserts: ‘Don't take the dancing away from the

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<sup>30</sup> This is true in many traditions.

drumming. Just play the drums without singing and dancing and it is dry. People will not enjoy it. You have to put them all together. They are like twins. You can't separate them.' In response to my question on what advice he has for younger directors of West African drumming and dance, Ladzekpo reiterated the need to present drumming and dance as two facets of the same art form (105).

Learning to dance, sing, and play “foreign” instruments provided an intensive learning experience for both Jonathan and Akemi:

This class gave me a lot more insight into an aspect of music that I had never really thought about as much, rhythm in general. The rhythms that we play in class are related to so many other types of music. So just hearing and focusing on one part of the overall sound of what we hear so much in Western music/culture makes you appreciate the whole thing so much more. This has become my anchor to performance in general and music in particular. I've always enjoyed the dance aspect. But the new dancers who are learning the dance themselves need someone to at least play *kidi*<sup>31</sup> or to play a few different drums so that there's music for them to dance to. When I *do* do it [dance], it's similar to the drumming in that it takes a few tries for it to click, and then it all ties in with the music and with the movements. I always feel like I start out a jumbled mess, and as I keep going around, it gets tighter and tighter, and it's like, “Oh, that's right. This is how it's done.” And it's harder to kind of un-see that once it clicks. And it's the same about a lot of the rhythms that we drum with. (Minelli 2013)

When you're playing the music, and you're having to play your part to the best of your ability, there's no time to think about those things that are really hurting you. I was able to think about them less you can't really focus on. Now I'm able to cope with negative experiences better, because I know I have this thing I can come back to that takes me away from my troubles. It really changed me and the way that I deal with negative stuff. There is definitely that physical component to the drumming that has a lot of overlap with endurance activities. I'm a cross country and long distance runner as well, so all of that negative energy just kind of gets used up when you're running. There's no point or energy to be mad. (Felder 2013)

In an interview with Dor, Ladzekpo also noted that it is easier for dancers to pick up the drumming parts: “Dancers will normally begin to remember the drum rhythmic motives and patterns as well as cues to which they have responded for years as they transfer those aurally and visually configured images and structures onto the drums.” (2014:105).

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<sup>31</sup> “Kidi is a drum which is about two feet tall, its head is about nine inches in diameter and has a closed bottom. Kidi responds to calls from the lead drummer. This is known as a dialogue. This concept is also commonly known as call and response. Kidi plays in unison with sogo when engaged in a dialogue. During a dialogue the people playing sogo and kidi will change their rhythms to interlock with those of atsimevu, the lead drum. The lead drummer will play another call to bring the supporting drums out of a dialogue and back into their basic rhythms. In a performance of Atsia the dancers will also respond to calls from the lead drummer by changing their dance movement.”-- <http://www.dancedrummer.com/kid.html> (Accessed on April 22, 2015)

I think for some people that are in the class, it is therapeutic in a sense but I think a lot of them because of the structure of the course (it's three hours on a Thursday night), feel it's a lot of stuff to cover for the performance. I think that they get a very on the surface experience with it, and they don't get to harness that therapeutic value. So that's why the turnover is so much in that class. In ten weeks and thirty total hours, you can't understand the kind of affect that it can have. (Felder 2013)

Dor explores the idea of secrecy in the musical life of enslaved Africans and its connection to contemporary African American culture. It is “abundantly clear” that West African drumming was possibly too loud “for these secret groups and activities” that included the Invisible church, use of hidden messages in song lyrics, and secret institutions such as closed religious societies (2014:19). Dor notes that U.S. slaveholders may have been afraid of the African divinities that could be called upon by the use of the drums by enslaved Africans, as “Dance drumming partly induces this spiritual transference from the physical to metaphysical realm of experience of the devotee” (20). Further, “dance drumming is a synergy behind spirit possession” (24).

According to Dor, drum/dance is a form of religious expression. However, these religious customs were “dislocated” as well and are found throughout the African Diaspora in various ways (17). Moreover, religious dances are said to help preserve drumming as a tradition.

Dor launches a discussion of how religious traditions differed between the United States and South America due to slaveholders' contrasting interpretations of Christianity (2014:17). He notes that in the United States, fewer African religious freedoms were allowed whereas among Catholic countries, which were colonized by Southern Europeans such as the Spanish and Portuguese, Africanisms in worship were often encouraged, embraced, and syncretized (19). Thus, Dor questions a seeming lack of connection between African culture and African American society: “The paradox in question here is why some degree of change in social landscape after slavery did not immediately attract a corresponding freedom of expression in all domains of the lives of black Americans” (25) and then answers his own question, citing a

“diabolization of several traditional practices as an evangelizing tool” (27). Indeed, in informal personal interviews with instructors, I found that several instructors of indigenous and African descended dance in Los Angeles felt uncomfortable introducing indigenous spirituality as an aspect of what they taught, as it could be taken as offensive and, in a word, bad. Thus, I focus upon more generalized and “secular” aspects of spirituality that are found in class participation, rather than basing spirituality as a religious tenet.

### Self-Knowledge

#### *Loving the Self, Loving the “Other”*

The world music ensemble is one of the few areas within ethnomusicology in which indigenous points of view are privileged. It is a role reversal of sorts that students rarely encounter, which may contribute to some of the ego-driven battles that seem to ensue between students and instructors of non-Western cultural backgrounds. The experience of learning and embodying the culture of the “Other” can be quite different from going into the field and merely studying the culture of the “Other,” though many people study performance while there. However, despite Mantle Hood’s original plans for the success of the World Music ensembles, ethnomusicologist Steven Loza feels that the role of performance in ethnomusicological education has diminished over the years. “I started noticing a distancing of that philosophy [bi-musicality] as the program went on, so that now I feel the gap is wider than ever. The performance aspect is just more of a utilitarian side bar” (Loza in Vallejo and Warden 2010). According to Ladzekpo, bi-musicality was always a less emphasized aspect of ethnomusicology, which is evident in his course’s mere two unit offering for students. “When we began, the class was worth only one credit!” (Liu and Rann 2011).

The role of the world music performance ensemble instructor, especially one who serves

for years at an institution, such as Professor Ladzekpo, is part of this discussion of the role of “other’s” voice in academia. Although Ladzekpo has written articles, they are rarely cited in ethnomusicological literature about Ewe culture. Meanwhile, theorists of Western birth who studied under Ladzekpo go on to build careers writing books and teaching classes that offer Western analyses of the music of the culture that Ladzekpo was born into.

American and European scholars hardly ever reckon with African scholars and seldom use their works as citations of authority. When you look at the average literature on African music written by Americans and Europeans, the citations of authority are overwhelmingly American and European, as if the knowledge of African music resides in America and Europe. This is not true; the knowledge of African music resides in Africa (just as the knowledge of European music resides in Europe and that of American music in America) and the idea that American and European scholars know more about African music than African scholars is totally unacceptable (Euba 2001:138).

In fact, very few ethnomusicologists who research Africa are African. Therefore, the first task of the *African* Africanist musicologist is to convince his non-African comrades to adopt the philosophies of African musicology rather than continue to approach studies from an ethnomusicological perspective. Similarly, Professor Ladzekpo is faced with the challenge of impressing upon students, no matter their age or level of education, that the proper way to learn the movements and rhythms, is *his* way, reflecting the traditional African values of his people, and pedagogical methods which do not typically include writing down rhythms. Indeed, when introducing new songs to the class, Yeko writes the lyrics down one time for students to record and learn on their own. They are never written on the board again. One could argue that the presence of world music ensembles in the ethnomusicology curriculum represents a step toward more inclusiveness, as students spend at least a quarter immersing themselves in the culture as presented by a culture bearer, giving their time and energy and remaining accountable on some level to the instructors and the departmental community.

While bi-musicality is a foundational part of the theoretical make up of the discipline, it could also be considered a form of “applied” ethnomusicology because it potentially leads to professional pursuits in ethnomusicology outside of just teaching on the college level. Professional performance, teaching children and older adults, diplomacy, and arts therapy are several examples of career options to which serious pursuit of bi-musicality can lead on the undergraduate or graduate level in ethnomusicology, while they continue to give credit and pay homage to culture bearer professors who remain apart of the local academic culture. African musicologist Meki Nzewi draws on a unifying principle of African music, the “supernatural mandate” to perform, noting that to sing means “to expose” (1997:79). In Igbo tradition, the musician is a voice of truth constantly and consistently promoting the common good (Ibid.). Thus, performance is an end in itself, the sharing of an experience, the sharing of talent, the sharing of ideas that reflect and promote the collective psychic ebb and flow of a community of participants.

*Identity: Naming or Re-claiming?*

According to ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt (2006), many girls in the United States give up on playing instruments, singing, dancing, and various artistic pursuits as they grow older and step into the “real world” of work and responsibilities. Thus, Professor Ladzekpo’s ensemble provides an opportunity for young women to review and relive the “movement culture” of their childhoods by expanding their kinetic orality through learning Ghanaian music and dance in a communal setting. Indeed, one feature of the ensemble is that traditional, strict gender roles are bent. According to Dor, Professor Djedje related that “Kwasi Badu did not allow female students to drum in his early 1970s UCLA ensemble, as he rigidly adhered to the Akan tradition” whereas Yeko teaches lead drum parts as well as dance in the current ensemble (2014:51).



The experience of the African American woman in the Music and Dance of Ghana ensemble can be a particularly sensitive one due to the presupposition (whether made by herself or others) that she will have a knack for learning the rhythms because she is of African ancestry. This assumption is one that the Ladzekpos routinely and explicitly address, letting students know that just because they are black does not, by any means, guarantee an easy A. (Ironically, African Americans have constituted a minority presence in the class for the last six years.) The African American female student might assume that she will have an easier time understanding the movements and mastering the movements because by the age of twenty, she has probably established a competent level of kinetic orality. This also is not always the case, as her proficiency with certain popular dance styles may actually predispose her to execute Ghanaian movements incorrectly.

Dor takes care to note the connections between Africans and African Americans and attempts to unpack the sometimes difficult issues surrounding them. For instance, Dor credits choreographers Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, and Babatunji Olatunde as “pan-African cultural ambassadors,” noting that Olatunde intended for there to be a cultural center in each city in America, which would combat stereotypes of Africa (2014:39). According to Dor, some African Americans view Africa as an ancestral homeland whereas others, a minority, seem to harbor bitterness at Africans for having sold their ancestors into slavery (28). As such, ethnic identity is not considered a factor that will ensure a student’s success at learning West African dance:

Awareness of one’s ethnic or ancestral background coded in negative pride and utopian claim to automatic knowledge by virtue of identity, according to Beatrice [Ladzekpo, wife and assistant of Kobla’s, and professor in her own rite], have in many students affected the extent to which they could have mastered specific West African dances. Rather, the key to good execution of West African dance is willingness to learn, listen to one’s teacher, and at times be ready to relearn some movements according to the acceptable aesthetics of a specific culture from which a dance

originates and is part. Sometimes this process may require undoing the different dance baggage students bring along from other cultures; the aesthetics for West African dance is completely different from that for ballet, and aesthetic nuances may exist between dances from two different ethnic groups of the same African nation. However, persistent spirit and desire to know the right thing eventually pays off for students irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. (Dor 2014:106)

“African dance” professor Phylise Smith believes that African Americans do have a reason to feel entitled to learn African music. “From slavery to the present, music and dance and other aspects of African-American life have consistently reflected African elements” (1991:135).

The current expression of African identity through African dance is an expanded quest by Los Angeles African-Americans to deepen their affiliation with Africa—to interpret their heritage as they view it. Next, it is concluded that for the Los Angeles African dance community, the African dance class event is utilized to relate to Africa in a variety of ways. Participation in the dance is important. (136)

This would potentially be a relevant point in the context of race relations at UCLA. The number of African American students on campus decreases yearly, and several public instances of racial discrimination have been reported in 2013 alone. However, the Ensemble overwhelmingly attracts a diverse blend of students in which African Americans and Africans are consistently the minority. One of the most compelling questions of the dissertation, then, is why dancers not of African descent are drawn to the class and to the culture. While the Ladzekpos take care to emphasize in their classes that African Americans have no special claim to, or aptitude for, African dance, Smith suggests otherwise. “The majority in the African dance community would counter argue that African dance is their true heritage” (139). Similarly, Dor seems to challenge deeper thought among scholars about the significance of African Americans who take an African dance class in academic contexts, examining the history of African drums in the United States and in the diaspora at large. For instance, Dor situates the usage of drums as a form of rebellion, invoking their use in the Stono Rebellion of South Carolina in the 1739 (2014:20). Dor asserts that drumming, then, is “lost” in black Americans’ “collective memory” (27). Dor also notes an

“absence of emblematic phenomena pertaining to Africa and African America” (39-40).

However, hip hop, often referred to as a musical form of rebellion used by young blacks [warriors], thus uses drums (beats) in a similar fashion.

Dor also points out that enslaved Africans, who were often barred from using drums, created “drum substitutes” such as ring shouts, handclapping, foot stomping, and “patting juba” (18). This lends credence to the idea that African drumming is transformed in the context of hip-hop beats. The Music and Dance of Ghana class provides a site for discovering and developing one’s ethnic identity *after* being humbled and reminded that the value and worth of African lineage and African American presence at UCLA is still highly contested.

### *Body Literacy*

When the Ladzekpos teach movement, they do not necessarily focus on what the movements themselves mean or how they may make students feel. However, as individuals, students receive feedback from their bodies that reveals the depth of life lessons learned from the class. As Rennie Harris often says, “Dance is the realest class you’ll take.” Although classes like his and the Ladzekpos’ are not dance therapy classes, the process of learning dance in a group can reveal information about what a person is feeling, her personality, and even what she is experiencing in her life. In “authentic movement,” the clues to one’s subconscious often lie in the movements that the dancer finds difficult or awkward. Ghanaian dance within the UCLA ensemble is largely un-improvised. There are small variations and stylistic additions that an individual can add to the dance, but it takes so many years to learn the dances that most instruction time is devoted to learning to execute the movements correctly and to the appropriate rhythms of the accompanying drums (which can vary by the dance being performed).

### *Improvisation*

In a class such as “Music and Dance of Ghana,” uncontrolled or unpremeditated movement is not encouraged, as the goal is for students to learn correct execution of movements before they can add creativity and style on a very basic level. As students learn and grow, they are encouraged to add improvisatory flair, usually within the confines of Ghanaian aesthetics. This is reflective of most traditional African dance. In traditional African pedagogy (traditional meaning not contemporary techniques, cultivated in antiquity yet still practiced today in village settings), students learn by watching and imitating as they accumulate years of practice, and under threat of leaders who corporeally correct errors. It is quite possible that the “authenticity” inherent in indigenous dance also lends itself to expression and acknowledgement of the true self, although its steps are pre-choreographed, in a sense (by unknown authors, of course). “As I let go of the materials of formal instruction, or used them differently, I saw that the deeper I could get into the sensation of how movement felt to the person doing it, the more expressive it became and the more clarity emerged” (Whitehouse 2000d: 60).

### *Body Attitude*

The “body attitudes” found in both movement types reflect cultural norms, worldviews, and even survival techniques developed over the years of adapting to individuals’ environs. Yet there is information to be learned by the individual when she examines which movements are more difficult for her than others, or if she observes her feelings regarding each movement that she learns. “Working with movement is an initiation into the world of the body as it actually is, what it can do easily, with difficulty, or not at all. But it is also, or can be, a serious discovery of what we are like” (Whitehouse 2000: 45b). Thus, if a movement is particularly challenging for a dancer to execute, it is possible that something about the movement or part of his or her body that it requires, has a message that the movement is calling on that person to recognize. “There

is an appropriate anxiety, an instinctive perception that emotions are rooted in the body” (56). Accordingly, one’s resistance to learning a movement can also reflect fear or avoidance of revisiting an issue. It is so easy to disregard such messages or write them off, but blocks do come from somewhere. “ ‘Making it up’ and ‘censoring,’ both of which can easily happen with words, produce patent artificiality in the first case and stoppage of the movement in the second” (57).

In Ghanaian dance, opposition is seen in steps that imitate walking or marching (such as *circle atsia* and *agahu*). Also, it is rare to only execute a movement on one side of the body. Perhaps that is why there is so much repetition in Ghanaian dance. Movements are typically done on both sides of the body although in circle dances, the circle typically moves counter clockwise even while individuals move back and forth toward one another while singing. Another key issue in “Music and Dance of Ghana” is the roles of individuals when they dance as partners. Some dances (such as *bawa*)<sup>32</sup> require physical contact between two individuals who are next to each other in the circle, and each individual must complement the other, executing their own versions of the same movement. This process does involve “moving” one another at times and then turning around to perform what is called “the bump” in African American parlance (two individuals bumping backsides in time with the rhythm of the percussion instruments). Here, self-directed movement and “being moved” occur simultaneously. For instance, there is a movement in “*bamaya*”<sup>33</sup>, a piece from Northern Ghana, in which partners turn to each other, do a twisting motion toward each other, and, as the circle rotates in counter clockwise motion

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<sup>32</sup> “Bawa is an essential part of celebration and thanksgiving for a good harvest among the Dagarti/Lobi people of Northern Ghana.”--

<https://home.comcast.net/~dzinyaladzekpo/repertoire.html>. Accessed on April 22, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> A similar movement is found in *tora*, a dance-drumming piece from the Dagbamba culture in Northern Ghana.

repetitively, until the lead drummer decides to call the dancers out of that rhythm and moves into another one. Upon sustained performance of this sequence of movements, the entire group rises out of time in an “altered, receptive state of consciousness” (Dosamantes-Beaudry 2003: 15). The longer this dance continues, the more likely that participants will enter a dream space and a trance state induces the continued movement and playing.

#### Mentorship: “Song Leader as Wise Elder”

Professor Ladzekpo uses concepts such as “retentive memory” to characterize one of the most important traits his students must have, especially those at UCLA who do not readily have the benefit of private lessons or extra practice time. (The class meets one evening per week, and access to the instruments outside of class time is limited.) Yet, there is a negotiation of worldview that reflects intrinsic differences between Western and non-Western culture. Thus, the movements are not watered down from their original execution. The body still moves in accordance with ancient rhythms in response to indigenous cosmologies and plainly stated values such as coming of age rituals, promoting procreation, through signaling the attractiveness of the female body, preparing for war, and instituting an overall reinforcement of community well-being and preventive healing that crosses generations. As a remedy for balancing the academic career, which often calls for intensive use of paperwork and electronic communication, one might argue that the need to persist in practicing and performing music becomes greater. Further, because the ensemble is only worth two units, and occurs once a week for three hours, the students by and large do not practice outside of class time and/or do not spend enough time (years) in the ensemble to really learn *how* to do Ghanaian dance or retain the lessons. If a student is not paying close attention, or seems to have an arrogant attitude, that student may be talked to in what could be perceived as a harsh manner. An abundance of encouragement is not

typically offered to beginning students in Ghanaian music and dance traditions (teaching seems to have more of a “tough love” tone), while some UCLA students seemed to lack respect, understanding, or commitment to learning about the very culture they were studying. This is in stark contrast to the students at CalArts.<sup>34</sup>

He not only teaches very traditional music, but he teaches it in the traditional way. And I think that is very, very foreign. It adds another foreign element to a lot of kids because the music itself is already so complex. He teaches it in the way that is also consistent with the cultural values. So that’s another element that they can’t understand. And even musicians who take it are confused, because written musicians in this culture are so used to written notation as a means to learn music. But this music is taught aurally and also through the years. You don’t write it down. You have to listen to it and understand the language of it. Like bar by bar. If he critiques you, it’s not because he’s angry at you. Everything will go a lot smoother if you just do what’s expected of you and that’s that. Some people still show up from ten years ago. (Minelli 2013)

The Ladzekpos teach from a time-tested tradition, and it is up to the students to give “permission without resistance, without judgment” to the process of learning it (Whitehouse 2000f: 88).

Unlike authentic movement, in the Ghanaian model, the student does not “gradually take over responsibility, accepting or rejecting the teacher’s suggestions” (88). The student listens to the critiques, takes them, and adjusts her movement style or thought process about the movement in order to improve, because there *is* a right way to execute the movement, especially in the beginning stages of instruction. Jonathan discusses students’ misunderstanding of more traditional pedagogical styles used by Ladzekpo:

It’s a multi-quarter thing in order to really see through and use the class as a beneficial thing in your life. Again, there was always that initial shock of wow, this is really different from anything I’ve ever done before. So I think they initially have to get over that shock. It also manifests itself in their interactions with Kobla when they first meet them. With him it’s really unique because I think he comes from a very old school way of teaching as well. Kids today are taught so differently today, even from like 15 years ago probably; what you do even in high school is different. Now it’s so competitive for kids to get into college so you have teachers bending over backwards for the students and parents breathing down their necks to accommodate everything.

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<sup>34</sup> “In addition to his position at UCLA, Ladzekpo served for thirty-six years as co-director of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) Music of West Africa Ensemble and retired from that position in 2007.”—“Kobla Ladzekpo Retires After Teaching for 38 Years at UCLA” by Donna Armstrong. Published: September 25, 2014. Accessed: April 27, 2015.

The biggest thing I always want to tell the kids is, if you screw up or something, don't apologize; just do it better next time. A lot of kids will try to explain or make excuses for themselves, "Oh it's this, this, this...Just stop talking; but I think that's part of how kids are taught to learn now. When people say that, they're approaching the class as something that they're taking this, as wanting to get a good grade and move on, and that's not the point of learning at the end of the day. It's to find something you're interested in and use it down the road. And you see kids that drop the class early. (Minelli 2013)

The Ladzekpos do not necessarily just teach people who consider themselves "dancers." In fact, some professional dancers do not stick with the class because they are not used to the indigenous pedagogical style, which is not friendly to the typical Western ego. Rather, the Ladzekpos teach everyone as if they are new to Ewe traditions and, while they are all still learning, we should devote time and effort to really understanding and recognizing the rhythms and movements. The experiences I have had in a lifetime of dancing connect to physically tell my life story. "The experience related here must be seen not as the isolated happenings they appear to be but as points of revelation in a process of developing awareness" (Whitehouse 2000c: 57). "And the assimilation of this discovery strengthens and releases consciousness for growth, which is, I think, the basic meaning of personality" (ibid). UCLA alumni who no longer need to enroll in the class often return in search of fun and a sense of family, and experience a sense of nostalgia years after taking the class. Whitehouse mentions that students may not know why they come to the class; they may have come out of "a special sense of having come voluntarily, out of curiosity" (ibid.). Akemi explains how he began drumming in the class and eventually became a dancer as well:

I started with the drumming because I had a small drumming background and I was never comfortable with dancing. I tried to learn *bawa* the first time and I just, like, couldn't put it together...And then it took me a couple of quarters to where I started embracing it and owning my role as a student and really just bringing that energy; and once I brought that energy, it just shattered that hesitation and I didn't care how it looked...I just went into it and started dancing. And then the first time I really danced, it was during *circle atsia*, where we do the "basic" movement during the first dialogue, and I was doing it really strong; just like really hard, and Yeko paused afterward and said, "Your basic is looking really strong." (laughs) "I said, 'Awesome!' I was feeling really great, you know, cause I was trying really hard. And they



acknowledged that. And since then, I really started to see myself as a potential dancer too. And then I started learning dance after that. And then once I learned the dancing, then it all started to come together. The music serves not just the drummers but also the dancers and the singers too. And so once I got to experience all three of those things, I began to see the overall picture and understand the sound. (Felder 2013)

“Working with a dancer [...] presents entirely different problems than working with those who have never for a moment considered their own physical reality” (Whitehouse 2000f: 88). In the Ladzekpos’ class, this is evident among dance majors who take the class and present resistance to learning the way the Ladzekpos practice and perform, clinging to certain habits they developed in their own genre of dance. For instance, a student from WAC who took the class in Fall 2005 was always dancing on her toes because she had a classical background. Yeko had to constantly remind the young lady not to be on her toes, and to let go of her “modern dance” posture in order to dance correctly in the Ghanaian tradition (Ghanaian dance typically is executed with bent knees, in a posture that is low to the ground). An older student in the class taught me *how* to learn from the Ladzekpos. She advised me to just watch Yeko and do what she did. Following that advice, I returned to the class and continued on for years, eventually joining their professional troupe. I became committed to getting better and practiced different types of dance to become a stronger dancer in general.

### Community

The answers to the survey responses speak to the community building that takes place in Lazekpo’s class on a grand scale. Whether students enjoy the class or not, they are all actively engaged in a manner that few other classes require. Most have gained a valuable form of knowledge that they can take with them throughout life and at the very least, they have made friends with whom they have shared a unique experience:

There’s this moment after class that nobody wants to separate, because we’re so used to performing together and communicating; it’s hard to be like ok, bye! This one person called it

the Vortex. Cause you spend so much time playing together and communicating with each other nonverbally, and you are still communicating, and you get really comfortable with that, and you don't want it to end, so you stay together talking as a group...you get sucked into it, like the music, and its' hard to pull yourself away from that. (Felder 2013)

Indeed, as participants learn to work together, they also learn the importance of equality:

The idea of the master drummer doesn't really exist, that any one person is too good to play a role in the music, because each role (the dancing, the rattles, the singing, the lead drum) is all equally important. The music wouldn't happen if they all didn't contribute and play their part. So I gained so much respect for the music. I had thought it was a hierarchy, but really everyone's using each other's strengths and making this cohesive sound happen. As long as you're doing it right and making the music work, then that's the most important thing. (As opposed to 'this person has to play this,' because he has this skill.) But then I learned never to use that terminology again. And it's so frequently used in this culture. Some people are so quick to call themselves master drummers. Now I'm more skeptical when I hear that now, because it's used to achieve status. If you're considered a master drummer in their culture, there's such a different way of going about becoming a master drummer. It's such a different context. (Felder 2013)

Some pupils leave "Music and Dance of Ghana" as enthusiasts, studying West African dance and drumming in their lives beyond college, and encouraging their friends to take the class quarter after quarter at least for the experience of performing. Others may discontinue their instruction after a quarter, preferring to leave behind Ladzekpo's "old school" pedagogical style, which has been characterized over the years by an unwavering expectation of humility from pupils and sharp correction of their mistakes regardless of one's skill level or relative newness to the art.

I couldn't understand at first if I was doing something right or wrong, because the Ladzekpos don't tell you if you're doing something right...unless you do it wrong. And they won't really say anything unless you make a mistake. So if you're doing it right, they won't say anything, so for a lot of people, I think that in this culture, we're used to constant positive reinforcement. I felt like I needed it and I think a lot of kids misinterpreted it. It challenges your own confidence. And your willingness to make mistakes. I think today, a lot of kids aren't willing to make mistakes. They're kind of taught, 'you have to get it right the first time.' And it kind of prevents kids from taking risks and learning to step outside of your own skin. (Felder 2013)

## Conclusion

It is rare for students to walk away from the class with a neutral opinion about what they have experienced, after the class culminates with an end-of-year performance, which consists of many students who just started taking the class eight weeks before. Through the initiatory

process of taking the “Music and Dance of Ghana” ensemble, students heal by cultivating within themselves and with one another, a sense of self-love and self-knowledge, spirituality, community, and mentorship.

### CHAPTER THREE: *Soul Healing* in “House”

House represents the embodiment of a “black dance” timeline. It reflects the progression of ancient movements formed in Africa that were altered in the Middle Passage, gradually transformed in slavery, and continually re-created. While hip hop continues to receive attention in popular culture and its corresponding body of academic literature steadily grows, house remains largely a misunderstood and overlooked subgenre of hip hop. Many house songs are created with the “intent to heal,” through the lyrical content, clear and powerful vocal delivery, and pounding, pulsing beat intended to work the dancer out until he is sweating and dancing beyond what he thought he could physically handle. In house, the letting go of outer distractions and the long reach inward that push the body to move in virtuosic ways is a catalyst to healing. The physical exertion and level of fatigue that students experience in Rennie Harris’ class, for example, especially later in the quarter, after they have learned over a hundred footwork rhythms, can drive dancers into a sort of trance state, where on some level they forget the body and thus “let go” enough to execute movements with dexterity and precision alongside seemingly reckless abandon. This is not unlike the same “zone” that many professional athletes seek in their physical performance.

#### What Is House?

The term *soul healing* is applicable to house for many reasons. House originated on the south side of Chicago, an urban locale peopled by African Americans who migrated from Southern states like Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. While many African Americans left the South in search of higher wages and better treatment by society, they were implicitly seeking healing for their souls. House music is a reflection of this yearning for freedom, physically made manifest, while it also served as a powerful outlet. To this day, house music is a source of pride

and solidarity for native Chicagoans, especially in the African American community. It is a nationwide movement among African Americans who appreciate mixing “Old School” dance moves with soulful singing and “unity-oriented” lyrics in among familial crowds. The global reach of house is beyond the scope of this dissertation but speaks to the influence African American music has as a galvanizing force of peace and healing in the world to this day, even in the realm of electronic dance music (EDM).

From 1915 to the 1940s, over fifteen million African Americans embarked upon the Great Migration, moving from “rural farming communities to urban centers of the nation” (Reagon 2001:5). This migration was many African Americans’ response to the terror of slavery’s aftermath, the failed and often sabotaged attempt at “Reconstruction” which yielded acts of violence perpetrated by vengeful Southerners and an air of hellish fear that was all too reminiscent of slavery. The “racial, economic, social, and political oppression” now stagnating the “fresh air of the rural South” led scores of African Americans to now seek the “uncharted ground” of the cities of the North, Midwest, and West (8). They sought “new territory” for the transformations of their future in cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, urban spaces that appear throughout this dissertation. Chicago is the home to house music and the cult following of house in Los Angeles is largely in thanks to house heads who migrated there from Chicago and the East Coast. House as a regional music/dance movement also reflects the phenomenon of various African American communities throughout the nation who brand their identity through creating a new musical form, predating and including hip hop music. These include the go-go movement of Washington, D.C., funk scene in Ohio, “chopping and screwing” of the Deep South, and Miami bass sound of Florida, Chicago “stepping,” and South L.A. “krumping.”

Hillegonda Rietveld notes that DJ Frankie Knuckles, the pre-eminent house DJ who popularized house in Chicago after arriving there in 1977, “became resident DJ in Chicago dance club The Warehouse” after gaining experience in the “mushrooming underground ‘gay’ discos” in New York (1998:16). According to Rietveld, when Knuckles arrived in Chicago, “perhaps the city had about two or three clubs that employed DJs at the time,” noting that most of the clubs were “drinking places with jukeboxes” (Ibid.). At The Warehouse, Knuckles “gained a large audience,” spinning records from New York and mixing “Philadelphia soul music, New York club music, Euro-disco and sound effects such as a running train in order to create a sound for the entire night” (17). Knuckles had a special style of layering sounds and restructuring disco songs, which closely resembled techniques that were being employed as young people in New York were developing hip-hop. He also used “rhythm makers” and “drum machines” while accentuating the bass in the tracks that he played (Ibid.). Songs were typically played at 124 beats per minute and were directed at a specific type of audience:

The entertainment was specifically aimed at young homosexuals, male and female, who were mostly from an African-American and Latino background. The management allowed for an inter-racial gathering, which was quite unusual in Chicago. Like a New York underground dance club it provided the punters with non-alcoholic drinks (‘Juice Bar’) and snacks (‘munchies’), which according to Frankie Knuckles was never done before in Chicago; up till then, clubbers used to go out to drink until 2 am (Rietveld 1998:18).

As an aesthetic, house music started as an effect of the positive power of a sense of community and a particular style of musical presentation that was specific for a dance floor, not radio listening, although this medium was important. However, it was also the effect of the negative power of racial and sexual segregation (Rietveld 1998: 25).

House music emigrated from the United States to Europe and gained worldwide acclaim, even morphing into several different styles known as techno, trance music, rave, hard core, garage, speed garage, acid house, and underground garage, “all of which eventually became part of the

popular music scene there” (Fikentscher 2000:78)<sup>35</sup>. According to African American music scholar Carmen Nicole Mitchell, “The role of black British men is very prominent in the creation and audience of drum ‘n’ bass,” which can be compared to hip hop’s association with African American men” (Ibid.). Drum ‘n’ bass, which is often called “jungle,” features reggae and reggae dub influences along with techno (Mitchell 2000:54).

Rietveld attributes house’s “invasion” of Europe to interactions that occurred between London based DJs, journalists, and record label executives with records that were imported to England through “independent record ships and trips” (1998:44). Further, she states that Europeans essentialized the music as exotic because it was created by black Americans, while they also celebrated a sense of defiance that was inherent in the music’s use and, really, in its very existence:

In an act of desire for ‘the other,’ bohemian young ‘white’ Europeans and in particular the English, were keen to buy in on the sense of strength of resistance (as well as the musical energetic novelty) that this underground and its music showed. (25)

Fikentscher, who refers to house music as “the electronic child of disco,” argues that the genre is still largely underground in the United States, and has not been embraced by mainstream popular culture; however, house is quietly felt in many sectors of American society, marketed to a cult following and used by producers to create tracks for vocalists such as Madonna, Cher, Maxwell, and Jill Scott. It is often used to provide danceable versions of popular ballads. One can even hear it being played overhead through the speakers of clothing stores, as I did at a local Old Navy. Although it still has a largely underground following that stays abreast of the newest

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<sup>35</sup> “Speed garage is a combination of the fast, dominant percussion sounds of drum ‘n’ bass and the vocals of house music. There is much contention over naming this music speed garage” (Mitchell 2000:54).

house productions and hottest new remixes by various deejays, house is gradually joining the ranks of hip hop in promoting a “street dance” form that was created for and by underprivileged, urban blacks and Latinos and now is taught to privileged, mostly non-black and Latino students in universities’ dance departments.

### House as Gospel: “It’s Gonna Set You Free”

“Dance is one of four or five tools used to worship” (Patterson 2001).

The house club was like church for the youth who loved it:

For a group of mainly urban African-American youths, who liked to transcend the oppressing boundaries of a racist, homophobic and sexist world, these parties and clubs were a haven, a night time church if you like, where a sense of wholeness could be regained. (Rietveld 1998: 21)

The formation of the ancestor of the first Black church was a largely clandestine, underground enterprise, even beyond the period during which the conversion of slaves to Christianity was a topic of controversy among slaveholders. Whereas the need for clandestine religious gatherings of people of African descent has changed since the times of slavery, there are to this day cultural spaces defined largely by and for African Americans that are as “invisible” to mainstream America as the Black church was in its early days. (Fikentscher 2000:101)

Mitchell places the history of the house diva within the context of African American church vocalists who “have an extensive background of vocal training,” noting that “gospel house is a genre within house music that showcases gospel lyrics behind a stomping house beat but just placated within the space of the dance club” (2000: 13). “House music has been liberally informed by gospel with its use of rolling piano forays, the solo matriarch vocalist, and motifs of peace, love, unity and rejoicing. In fact, there is an incredible number of corollaries between house music, gospel music and church (14).

Rietveld also pointed out that matriarchal lead vocalists are often featured in music of the black church (159). In *A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic*, Pearl Williams-Jones characterizes the “gospel blues” as an African musical aesthetic that is found throughout black musical genres, whether considered sacred or secular. Williams-Jones illuminates the ritualistic



nature of the “gospel experience” in its “sustained drama and spiritual intensity,” and the presence of Africanisms in singing style, delivery, scales, and emphasis on rhythm, improvisation, communal participation, and functionalism of the music (1975: 378-380). House “divas,” also known for their recordings of soul and, sometimes, disco music, include Martha Wash, Ann Nesby, CeCe Peniston, and Crystal Waters. These vocalists, who are known for their powerful and stirring delivery, use their “church” sounding voices to sing the secular lyrics found in house. However, it is fitting for gospel sounds to infuse house beats and house clubs, because spiritual liberation was the ultimate purpose and highest aim of house as a movement and culture. While “finding God in the club” is a bit of a stretch for some, the use of sacred music in secular environments to create a healing effect is not unique; it is found in denominations and sects across the globe.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, it is not uncommon to hear references to Jesus Christ and other Christian iconography in the music played in a house club setting.<sup>37</sup> “Songs that tend to be the most therapeutic are those that address social issues relevant to everyone in attendance. They contain lessons within the lyrics that provide the potential for personal connection” (Perullo 2011: 99).

In *Deep Listeners* (2004), Judith Becker discusses one Christian denomination’s use of music to incite an appearance of the Holy Spirit and an accompanying dance that is unique to

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<sup>36</sup> This point begs the question, “Does the role of African American woman as house (singing) diva convert to house (dancing) diva?” Are there black dancing divas that fill a similar or accompanying role to the vocalists of house? Marjory Smarth might be one example; however, in this regard, the musician may be more spotlighted due to the potential for the dissemination of her voice in multiple locales for an undetermined number of years due to recordings. This question would require further research.

<sup>37</sup>I encountered this when conducting fieldwork at a Hollywood club upon the arrival of Chicago house DJ Gene Hunt, who was spinning there. It was possible to get the Spirit, shout, and testify, all without being heard because the thumping music was so loud.

each “trancer.” Many of these elements can likewise be found in house tracks, such as the use of repetition and a variety of timbres, diverse instrumentation, the presence of polyrhythms, and the blending of new verses with old poetic sayings and subtle, anachronistic references to church music that are characteristic of house:

Pentecostal churches use a wide variety of musical instruments, often including piano, electric organ, synthesizer, guitars, and drum set, to back up their driving, repetitive gospel hymns. Just as eclectic as their instruments is their selection of musical repertoire. Old evangelical hymns are mixed with current popular gospel styles in a musical *mélange* that draws from diverse sources (2004:97).

In pentecostal performances, Becker reports, “The emphasis remains on total participation, total commitment, and loud, strongly emotional delivery” (Ibid.). In some Christian churches, it is commonly held that there is potential for all types of healing to take place in the midst of time spent in “praise and worship” through song and, in some faiths such as Pentecostalism, the ensuing praise dance. Similarly, in house music, melodious vocals are valued for their power. Correspondingly, this “soulful” aesthetic also signals the mark of a serious and “good” house dancer. Perhaps the long, late nights of dancing in clubs could parallel the concept of “tarrying,” or “waiting for the Holy Spirit” (99), who might bestow a blessing upon the parishioners or, in this case, club goers, who often are just as eagerly and hopefully awaiting “deliverance” from the troubles that they face. “The dancing crowd were in the club from midnight on Saturday until Sunday noon, losing themselves in an ecstatic, frenzied dance” (Rietveld 1998:19). Rennie Harris also used the term “gospel” to describe house music in a 2010 informal interview:

I think it’s the gospel of hip hop. It’s the “church” of hip hop, is house. You get me? That spirit is overwhelming. It’s way beyond any other stuff. Like, hip hop itself is more about the, um, politics, socialism, ya know, the shit like economics, like, opens your eyes to shit. Supposed to, ya know what I mean? But House is worship; you do nothing but let shit go (Harris 2010).

House hearkens back to hip hop’s early days, and expands the movement vocabulary to early black vernacular dance steps, while adding movement from other parts of the African Diaspora

(like salsa, samba, and capoeira), while incorporating some of the advanced footwork found in tap. However, the songs bring a sense of dancing to deal with modern day issues and problems from a spiritual perspective:

Just as certain songs contain melodies and rhythms that can alter our emotions—from happiness to sadness—so too can lyrics provide a deeper realization of people’s connections to each other and to life’s experiences. The appropriately composed song can provide a sense of belonging, which in itself is a form of healing. (Perullo 2011:99)

That said, most if not all of the music we danced to in Harris’ class had inspirational or introspective messages, if only refrains, like: “If I could do it all over, If I could do it again...” “There goes peace,” and perhaps one of the most famous house songs, “Follow me.” The lyrics are a significant piece of what makes house “feel good music” and a little different from both mainstream and underground forms of hip hop. Many house songs have messages of spiritual themes and ideas: “Often the lyrics of Chicago house music portrayed a sense of hope for the community as well, much in the way that gospel lyrics do. Many of the American singers of the house music genre [...] were trained in gospel church choirs” (Rietveld 1998:21).

#### House as an African American Dance Form

Although house has its roots in popular dance music of the 1970s, elements such as its soulful vocals and virtuosic dance styles hearken back to music of the black church, early twentieth century tap dance, and of course, musical aesthetics common during slavery and derived or descended from African cultural aesthetics. Carmen Nicole Mitchell links the digitized beat of house music to African rhythms of drumming, and documents the backlash it has historically received in Western culture, which further informs its role as in the African American music continuum and as a tool for marginal cultures to seek spiritual freedom through bodily movement. “This continuous beat is central to the musical sensibility in many African and African American musical traditions transplanted from Africa by enslaved Africans in the North,

South and Central American and the Caribbean” (Mitchell 2000:18). Dancer and choreographer Cydney Banner weighs in on African and contemporary African American dance forms and their influence in *house*: “Hip hop is a direct descendant of African dance. There’s no two ways about it” (Banner 2013). Moreover, African dancers in Chicago influenced house dancers by their participation in the club culture and house ciphers. “Some steps in house are straight African (the aesthetic), and African freestyle is incorporated in the movement of many house dancers who are from Africa. It’s a definite connection” (Banner 2013). Harris holds that enslaved Africans, during the Middle Passage, were “exercised” by European slavers in order to keep them healthy. Their ability to move was altered due to the shackles they wore; therefore, any kind of dance that they may have even attempted to do—for purposes of health, morale, or when they were formally “danced” was transformed. Thus, Harris contends that “dancing the slaves” was possibly the catalyst for black contemporary expression. Body language was also an important form of communication due to lingual differences among enslaved Africans from geographic areas of the continent and language groups and their convergence on the boats and in the “new world,” which also contributed to the foundation of African American movement. Movement that developed in the wake of slavery and reconstruction evolved into steps that are used to this day in house. According to Harris, “Black dance to me is everything that was street, that’s jazz—jazz dance went to some other thing. But, you know, Lindy hop, b-bop, swing, hip-hop, hoofing: that’s black dance to me” (Carbonneau 2003). Tap is another integral element of house dance, found in its footwork and some floorwork. In the house cipher, there is an exchange of movements, where everyone “catches the step,” which also occurs in tap ciphers wherein imitating and taking on the movements of another are seen as a compliment. Dance critic and historian Suzanne Carbonneau discusses the plethora of dance forms evident in

house: “With the popularity of Bruce Lee films in the '70s, the precision and dynamic movement of Asian martial arts were also absorbed [into house], as well as, some have suggested, the floorwork of capoeira, the Angolan/Brazilian martial art form" (2003). In the context of a club ciphers, one may see emanations of Afro-Brazilian martial art capoeira which, while typically “played” or performed to live music, is associated with syncretic Afro-Brazilian religious practices.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of house, the use of soulful recorded vocals sparks inspired dancers to use house and hip-hop vocabulary in order to improvise, or spontaneously create sequences of movement. The singers’ vocal effects infuse house music with soul, as the beat does not change. The deejay also arranges the use of various records, beats, and breaks to augment soulful sounds from recorded music. Likewise, the dancer infuses movements with soul, adding elements of personal style. The presence of soul is particularly prized in subgenres such as “deep” house and “vocal” house. According to ethnomusicologist Portia Maultsby, soul singers elicit physical responses from audiences, which include “hand clapping, foot stomping; head, shoulder, hand and arm movement; and spontaneous dance” (2006:280):

Soul singers achieve the heterogeneous sound ideal by alternating lyrical, percussive, and raspy timbres; alternating straight with vibrato tones; weaving moans, shouts, grunts, hollers, and screams into the melody; and juxtaposing unique vocal and instrumental textures. They also vary the pitch by contrasting voices of different ranges; shifting from high to low pitches; and incorporating “bends,” “slides,” “melismas,” and passing tones in the melody. (2006:280)

House is a direct descendant of this soul tradition, which branched out into other subgenres that preceded house. For instance, Carmen Nicole Mitchell calls house music “the obvious musical descendent of disco:

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<sup>38</sup> Capoeira, which takes place in a ciphers called a *roda* in Portuguese, appears to be a natural addition to the “battling” environment that takes place within hip hop circles.

Both musics employ a consistent 4/4 dance beat and the use of sampling and new music technologies by DJs and music producers. They received initial growth and popularity in underground African American and Latino gay clubs in major metropolitan areas of the United States and showcase the vocal abilities of African American women whose lyrics often spoke of inclusive acceptance of all, freedom, love, and struggles in contemporary relationships. (Mitchell 2000:11)

Kai Fikentscher defines house as the main form of underground dance music, and a direct descendant of disco music. According to Keyes, “The three most distinct black popular styles of the 1970s were funk, disco, and rap. Funk and disco were catalysts in the developmental stages of rap as a musical genre” (2002:40). Similarly, funk is a key element of house as well:

[George] Clinton, who coined the term ‘P-Funk,’ or pure/uncut funk, viewed his music as a way to induce a relaxed mood in his listeners. In establishing this mood, Clinton manipulated varied sound effects produced on the synthesizer and dictated to his audience via an accompanying rappin’ monologue loosely chanted over music how to be and feel ‘cool’” (Keyes 2002: 41).

Accordingly, the synthesizer is a key instrument in electronic dance music as well as in hip hop.

### On House and Hip Hop

On March 8, 2013, I informally interviewed two house heads, one an East African female from Australia and an African American male, after a local master class taught by New York female house pioneer Marjory Smarth. They acknowledged that house as a genre really is hard to define, and situated it chronologically as a successor to hip hop, and the “youngest” new black dance form. The relationship between house and hip hop music is complex. Many do not know the difference between the two, and others would never mistake them for each other upon hearing them juxtaposed. The line is blurred even more when contemplating hip hop dance and house movement, which share many styles such as breakdancing.<sup>39</sup> According to Harris, hip

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<sup>39</sup> According to Rennie Harris, many who see house while it is being performed, might ask what it is, possibly labeling it as “jazz” because it incorporates such a plethora of styles and a unique attitude.

hop is a culmination of all street dance styles. Delineating between house and hip hop is very important for this dissertation because it is inherent in the work. Harris' class is actually entitled "Advanced Hip Hop." When I asked him the first two times, he replied that the Dance Department had named the course and just never changed it. However, upon asking him a third time, he explained that house is actually an advanced form of hip hop: "People want a hip hop class and they get house so they jump into that. House is harder so I feel like it's more advanced than hip hop is; that's how I justify it" (Harris 2013). Harris describes hip hop dance as more confrontational than house dance, which is more flowing. Loft movements are reflective of the house attitude, which also highlights showy, stylized mannerisms such as "wacking" and even "voguing," which evolved in response to disco. Although house dance combines a plethora of dance styles and traditions, there are specific "rhythms" or "riddims" that are characteristic of house dance, such as the "loose leg" and its several variations, the "farmer" (and "reverse farmer"), the "heel step," "happy feet," and the "sidewalk" (with variations called the "sidewalk tap" and "sidewalk floor"). Many of these "steps" are found in other African diasporic genres of dance such as salsa, samba, tap, and hip hop ("breaking"). There is definitely some overlap in moves that are traditionally classified as hip hop while used often in house. This includes early "street dance" styles like locking and electric boogaloo. According to Harris, "street dance" evolved into "hip hop dance," which is, perhaps erroneously, used as an umbrella term:

A lot of people don't realize that there's a lot of styles of dance that fall under the umbrella of hip-hop. You know, you're talking about robot, popping, boogaloo, strutting, sagging, boogie. You're talking about flexing, house, trendy, vogue, second-line. Then you have B-boy, then you have hip-hop proper. So there's a lot of different styles that go under the umbrella of hip-hop, and a lot of times the public is only bombarded with the acrobatics of hip-hop, which is B-boying. (Carboneau 2003)

Every other year, at UCLA Harris teaches a "History of Hip Hop Dance" lecture class in which he defines the terminology and codification of West Coast funk styles such as Campbell Lockin,'

robot, boogaloo & popping, wacking/punking, and East Coast hip-hop styles, bboy/girl, hip-hop “proper,” webo, lofting and house. In his “Advanced Hip Hop” class, Harris also incorporates some moves from krumping and clowning.<sup>40</sup> Voguing was created through hip hop and developed by house dancers long before it was popularized by Madonna with her 1990 single, “Vogue,” which exhorted dancers and listeners to “strike a pose.” According to Banner, voguing as seen in house clubs represents an aspect of hip hop dance that contributes stylized “lines” that come from “trained” dance, added by modern and ballet dancers who also come to the cipher. “‘Trained’ dancers use their technique and add it to such styles as voguing through ‘attitude lines’ and ‘arabesque lines’” (2013). In this space, the non-trained dancers imitated the lines of trained dancers. Banner notes, “When you’re around something, sharing space, then that influence starts to rub off, consciously and unconsciously” (2013). Harris worked with many hip hop pioneers early in his career:

For a brief time, Harris was a member of New York City’s Magnificent Force. He also toured with and opened for acts such as hip hop pioneer African Bambaataa, West Street Mob, Kool Mo Dee and the Treacherous 3, Super Nature (later known as Salt and Pepa), Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five and Doug E Fresh to name a few. After extensive touring, Harris finished his commercial run as the choreographer and dancer for Cathy Sledge of the famed Sister Sledge. He returned home to the Philadelphia Scanner Boys, who were an innovative hip-hop dance group that pioneered Philadelphia hip-hop movement in the early 80’s. (Harris 2012:8)

While Carmen Nicole Mitchell refers to hip hop as *house*’s “close and more popular cousin”

(2000:1), Harris characterizes house as a less masculine “vernacular” of hip hop:

The aesthetic and application is different. Hip hop is a lot more aggressive and a lot more groovy and funky in that way, and house is a lot more musical, with more musicality; it’s a softer texture. No matter how aggressive the dancer is, the vocabulary of house isn’t aggressive. Females are engaging but it’s an aggressive male movement. Same with hip hop. Popping, locking, breaking

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<sup>40</sup> As seen in 2005 documentary “Rize,” krumping is a genre that emerged from South Los Angeles in the 1990’s as an extension of “clowning,” as created by Tommy the Clown (Thomas Johnson). The movements are reminiscent of a very aggressive form of African dance, and battling between squads is common. Movements are large, expansive, and confrontational, and were used as a form of resistance against street violence.



are all performed through the male perspective. But house, you're gonna approach it from a soft texture. It's androgynous. It's more free. Codifying house movement or not, no one can say I'm not doing house. It's spiritual, especially at the club. (Harris 2013)

*The Instructor: All About Rennie*

Lorenzo (Rennie) Harris, dancer, artistic director, choreographer and director, was born and raised “in an African American community in North Philadelphia” (Harris 2012: 7). Since the age of 15, Harris has taught workshops and classes at universities around the country and calls himself a “powerful spokesperson for the significance of ‘street’ origins in any dance style” (Ibid.). In 1992, Harris founded Rennie Harris Puremovement, “a hip-hop dance company dedicated to preserving and disseminating hip-hop culture through workshops, classes, hip-hop history lecture demonstrations, long term residencies, mentoring programs, and public performances” based upon the belief that “hip-hop is the most important original expression of a new generation” (Ibid.).

With its roots in the inner-city African-American and Latino communities, hip-hop can be characterized as a contemporary indigenous form, one that expresses universal themes that extend beyond racial, religious, and economic boundaries, and one that (because of its pan-racial and transnational popularity) can help bridge these divisions. Harris' work encompasses the diverse and rich African-American traditions of the past, while simultaneously presenting the voice of a new generation through its ever-evolving interpretations of dance. Harris is committed to providing audiences with a sincere view of the essence and spirit of hip-hop rather than the commercially exploited stereotypes portrayed by the media. (Ibid.)

Harris believes that hip-hop is “the purest form of movement, in that it honors both its heritage from African and African American-Latino forms, and honors the individual” (Ibid.). Further, he has devoted his life to service as an emissary of hip hop for all people, with the belief that “hip-hop expresses universal themes that extend beyond racial, religious, and economic boundaries” and, due to its “pan-racial and transnational popularity,” can be a source of mediation and diplomacy (2012: 7-8). Harris discusses the creative process of healing himself in his choreography:

When I make a work, I am never trying to send a message. I don't intend to tell people anything. I am healing myself by expressing things that have something to do with my life. In many ways I am creating work blindly. I hear music and I know the quality of movement that belongs with the music. I work with things as they happen. As children we never knew what each day would bring, there wasn't any planning for anything, when it happened you took advantage of it and that's how I dance and how I create work. It's all about the present, the only thing that's real is what's happening now. Structure provides a guideline, it should not control everything. (2012:6)

When critiquing the concept of structure, Harris explains hip hop as “another way of thinking” that reflects “getting around the system,” and combatting a system that tries to “control us, and steal from us,” even when it comes to ideas and style (2012:7). Further, according to Harris, in black culture, experience is the greatest teacher. Harris recalls being inspired by Don Campbell's group, “The Campbell Lockers” and being complemented on his dance skills as a young child. After years of dancing with well known hip hop artists and choreographing professionally for soul singers such as Sister Sledge, Harris gained renown in the concert dance world as choreographer and director of *Rome & Jewels*, which used the text of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, combined with hip hop vocabulary, and was loosely based upon the plot of *West Side Story* as performed by a multicultural cast (8). To date, *Rome & Jewels* is the longest touring hip hop dance theater work in American history (8). Harris' choreography probes ideas of gender that “counterbalance natural machismo” and challenge assumptions about “what hip-hop dance is” (9). Harris' work has international elements as well. He has incorporated Japanese butoh movement style into some pieces in order to “integrate pain, struggle and turmoil with ‘funk styles’ that fall under the umbrella term Hip-hop,” highlighting “acrobatic and high powered movements” that many audiences rarely encounter in hip hop dance while problematizing the characterization of hip hop as a spectacle (Ibid.).

#### “Advanced Hip Hop”

“Advanced Hip Hop” becomes a gathering place for dancers who know they will receive

a good workout and a challenge. The first ten to fifteen minutes of class, students come in, socialize, stretch, and change into their workout clothes (there is a unisex, handicapped accessible restroom inside the studio). The first half of the class consists of what Harris calls a “warm up,” which some students claim could be the whole class, with the exhaustion that they feel afterward. This warm up prepares students to recall the movements they have learned throughout the quarter, called “rhythms” because of the sounds created by the movement of their feet. After drilling riddims, Harris sometimes leads the class in stretching and abdominal work, which usually includes sit ups, push ups, and yoga led by him. The last part of the class typically consists of movement “across the floor.” Students gather into five lines, and a representative from each line executes a movement down the floor, that Harris demonstrates first or has a student house head demonstrate. Harris offers suggestions as he watches the dancers, and they will have a chance to try the movement again going the opposite direction down the floor. Harris might use the last fifteen minutes to teach a sequence during this period, called a routine, stringing together movements from the riddims for students to memorize on the spot and perform for Rennie and eventually for one another in groups. However, Harris does allow the class to unfold differently each meeting if need be:

It’s not about warming up, or planning, or counting; it’s about showing up, about the spirit, how the day went, recognize that and move accordingly. Today may not be your day to jump around. Feel that and go from there, work with what you have. The hard part is staying on the path; lots of time I don’t know what I am doing. I stay with what’s happening right now and then I try to find the flow, make sense of it. That’s how I work. (Harris 2012: 8)

#### “Breaking It Down:” Spring 2012 Survey Results

In the spring quarter of 2012, I administered a survey<sup>41</sup> to “Advanced Hip Hop” students. I collected 28 responses from dancers in the class, including at least two UCLA alumni

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix B

who were sitting in on the class. As the survey was administered during the first ten minutes of class, which was also “stretching” and warm-up time, students who came in late were not included in the survey. I did give out the survey to several students who had arrived late; however, not surprisingly, I did not receive completed surveys back from them. Although I was probably missing about ten enrolled students in addition to several dancers from a local hip hop/dance company who had come to support and/or train with Rennie, their mentor and teacher, the information relayed in the surveys that I *did* receive, appeared to reflect a good mix of students and overall student sentiment. I was glad to have input from two graduate students and UCLA alumni, who could give a more seasoned perspective to their understanding of the level of instruction and their years of experience dancing.

Only two students identified themselves in the survey as African American (a female described her ethnicity as “Black” and a male alumnus described himself as “African” although he was born and raised in the United States). This was initially discouraging, as I was hoping to have more input from black students, who I intuited probably appreciated the class in a different way than the other students, coming from the culture from which hip hop was born and yet representing a minority of the class’ population. One of the points of this dissertation is that students seek healing through learning black, or “African derived” dance forms; thus, I asked students if they had a particular affinity for black dance/music. Some students grouped it with all dance types: “I love it along with all styles of dance.” Some students skipped it and left the question blank. One student replied, “Of this I am sometimes uncertain.” Some felt drawn to it and became apart of it, unashamedly and with pure intentions: “I love its history, its culture, its philosophy. I have found a connection to Hip-Hop with my own life.” “I find a connection to the music and love the culture. It’s apart of my identity and the dance is what I am good at and

am confident about. It gives me a voice where I am heard.” “It’s something I am passionate about.” “Love, life, and learning (of self)” “Because it’s fun, energizing, and a lot about community and supporting other (dancers).” “Because I like it;” “To relate and enjoy myself.” Others appreciate the challenge it presented, when asked why they study “hip hop dance:” “I like it, it’s a different kind of body control and musicality than I grew up with.” Surprisingly and disproving my assumptions, I rarely picked up on a sense of defensiveness from the respondents.

Harris, once called “a dancing guru spreading spiritual enlightenment and cross-cultural understanding in an urban idiom” (Carbonneau 2003), generally finds favor with his students as a role model and coach with a great sense of humor and a strong—sometimes painful—work ethic. Harris’ pedagogy includes storytelling: “I come from a tradition where we tell stories, share, do, and that evolves into practice” (2012:6). Harris demands that his students undergo the physical training that it requires to build enough endurance to dance house, a dance form that is designed to last for hours on end if need be, through the night, not unlike African dance forms that are part of hours-long or days-long rituals. All of the students surveyed agreed that Harris is an effective teacher in his style of instruction and persona demonstrated in class, and they elaborated on this point: “He pushes you to learn the movement in yourself as well as imports insightful words on dance and life.”

Harris’ style of drilling rhythms was particularly popular, and he is also praised for his knowledge as a culture bearer: “Repetition/drills are the best. Cultural historian with rich knowledge. Clear communicator.”

“[He is] very effective for people starting anew, drills fundamentals into your system.”

“He knows how to explain the moves well and inspire people;” “He knows how to make

sure we understand the dance steps he is teaching.”

“Sometimes he goes too fast, but that’s on days when I’m slow and eventually I catch up. I like the drilling because you can get the base step and then experiment and at one point you get so tired that you can relax into the groove.”

“Rennie is a historian of cultural dance. His style is clear and his experience rich.”

“Pretty good! Wish he would break things down more.”

“It is very effective because he is showing the moves we need to know and all the different variations.”

“Great; he has great energy and knows what he is talking about. Really cares.”

“He has taught me before and his attitude was more positive but sometimes it’s hard to teach a group of kids who don’t give a shit.” Here, a student critiques his classmates, and their passion for hip hop is questioned. This comment was telling because it speaks of the average UCLA student who takes “Advanced Hip Hop.” This sort of comment could mirror Ladzekpo’s argument that students do not take enough of an interest in his class, evident in their unwillingness to practice on their own time, or to consistently attend the class long term.

One graduate student and dance major in her thirties stated a major objective for taking the class: “I want to have more space in my life for GROOVE.”<sup>42</sup> When asked if there is a healing or spiritual aspect to house, she replied, “I don’t think of it that way.” When asked if she felt like she could express herself through dancing to house, she replied, “Yes; not necessarily in class, but in a club environment.” Another graduate student in dance (in her thirties) agreed that dance does not so much have a spiritual purpose in her life, responding “I don’t think of dance this way.” I found that response interesting because vocation is so intricately tied with one’s

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<sup>42</sup> This is how the student actually wrote the word, in all capital letters.

purpose, which seems inherently spiritual, and this particular dancer came from a background in which sacred cultural dance is highly valued while also pursuing a Masters of Fine Arts in Dance. One valuable outcome of the revelation of this particular line of thought is that it brought me comfort to know that my own use of the word healing in the survey was not over-influencing (all of the) students, or leading them to use the term when they normally would not. In that regard, perhaps the class itself is not particularly healing; rather, Professor Harris provides the tools for students to use in environments that *are*.

The word “groove” (or “groovy”) came up three times, which also refers to music, beat, and rhythm, and especially the “jack” movement. One of the most important elements in house dance for maintaining a continuous groove to the music is the “jack” movement. The term “jack” came up four times in the survey results. Jack is an important term in house jargon, describing a movement that strongly resembles a movement called the “basic” in Ghanaian dance, a physical pulsing of the chest that links the dancer and the music. In Ewe dance, this movement is slight and subtle, but always there, a constant in keeping time with the music and in facilitating flow between movements. In house, the movement is larger, using more of the torso and pelvis in a pushing motion. It is more deliberate, a statement in itself. However, both the basic and jack are continuous throughout the dance/music’s duration and infuses every other movement. The basic and the jack are part of every movement, as a foundation through which other motions are interpreted. In a 2010 interview, house student Philip Nguyen asked Harris about the roots of “jack.” “Jack was an actual dance in which, they used to get on each other and hump each other. And it evolved into a different thing” (Harris 2010). According to Harris, the jack movement allowed a “social moment” to occur in the dance, characterized also as “Ya know, freaky” (Ibid.). Here, Harris evokes sexuality in hip hop dance, and its evolution from

references to procreation in African dance is apparent. Hillegonda Rietveld describes the movement's use in Chicago's first house club, The Warehouse: "The dancers were 'Jacking,' while at times holding on to the pipes that led diagonally across the walls. To 'Jack' is a term specific for the type of sexualized dance movements made to the music (1998: 19).

The term footwork came up seven times in the survey results (once merely listed as "feet"). This very important term describes one of the traits that differentiates house from some other hip hop dance forms: it is characterized by intricate footwork, which links it to "stepping" (another dance form that was born in Chicago) as well as breakdancing which brings footwork to the floor in "floorwork." The word "intricate" was also provided, quite possibly with footwork in mind. This also evokes the elements of tap dancing that are found in house movement, making apparent house's role in the continuum of African American choreography. Here, the term "execution," also listed above, comes to mind, especially with regard to the *riddims*. I use "execute" throughout this dissertation as a synonym for "do" or "get done." It connotes a starting and following through that must occur for every movement, born of a thought, to be realized in the body. Each movement is not just done, it is "executed."<sup>43</sup>

"Rhythm" came up five times in the survey responses, in addition to the word "polyrhythmic." However, in house, rhythm has a special meaning because of the heavy use of footwork, and is often used in correlation with pidgin term "riddim," to describe the specific ways to move one's feet in house. Some aspects of footwork have names, and these riddims are typically drilled at the beginning half of each of Harris' classes. He boasts the number of

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<sup>43</sup> At the March 8 Open House Anniversary party workshop in Los Angeles, professional house dancer Marjory Smarth, a Haitian American woman who was visiting from New York City to teach a master class in house, used the phrases "Work it!" and "Work it out!" to encourage students as they attempted to execute footwork.



riddims that students will learn by the class' end. The drilling of the riddims is undoubtedly what inspired some students to offer the words “tiring,” “heat,” “repetitive,” “synchronized,” as students executed sometimes thirty different riddims, one after another, often without a break, in five sets of eight (eight beats in five different directions) when describing house. “On-going,” “bass-y,” “moving,” “beat” “get in a zone,” and “hypnotic” refer to the music of house and the potential for trance with which it is produced. This is discussed in further detail in chapter four.

Harris does teach breakdancing or “breaking” moves as well. These are typically taught in the second part of the class, when students “go across the floor” in lines of four individuals. Harris will typically demonstrate and/or describe the movement and then students repeat it over and over as they travel to the other side of the room. Breakdance moves that Harris teaches include the “dolphin dive” and the “corkscrew.” Interestingly enough, breakdance can also be found in the Music and Dance of Ghana; at the end of *adzohu*, dancers can come back to the center of the stage and, as the last drum beats sound, execute what is known in hip-hop as a “helicopter,” or “coffee grinder” in time with one another. It could be argued that house presents a smoother dialect of hip-hop movement, in which flow and grace are prized over jerky, staccato moves and insolent attitudes that often characterize hip-hop. In describing hip hop choreography, Harris noted a lack of smoothness in hip hop dance:

My passion is trying to find the through line from one movement to the next, which is the hardest thing to do with hip-hop because it's not a movement that flows, for the most part. It's very abrupt. It just stops. It goes. It stops. The flow is a staccato kind of flow even if it's breaking. (Harris 2001)

Various students described house paradoxically, using terms like “relaxed” but “fast;” “energizing” and “chill;” “bouncy” and “aerobic” but “smooth” (listed twice) and “controlled.”

Students also seemed to value the group dynamic of house, giving responses such as “community,” “social,” and “feeding from others.” When danced in club settings, house also

lends itself to a communal vibe in which individuals come together to form ciphers, battle each other or cheer on various competitors within ciphers, and play off one another's energy. Sally Sommer characterizes vibe as a communal construct in dance: "The goal of the die-hard Househead is to be a part of the group yet maintain a sense of individuality--to seek the good vibe and hit the zone through the physical rapture of hard dancing," which she also characterizes as "virtuosic" and "competitive" (2001:73). Energy and "vibe" are closely related.

Several students mentioned "soul" to describe the class. I saw soul as having two different meanings in the context of house. On one hand, there is the feeling that is said to come through in African American music, a *soulful* vibe. Secondly, there is soul, a part deep within the body that lives on after carnal, earthly death. Harris speaks about life and death and his first experiences with house music:

Well, you know, I think [house] is the only dance style I ever danced, that I felt like, "Alright, if I die right now, I'm good." Ya know what I mean, like, the music was so good, it got you so high on the floor, and that you could die, and it would be the perfect moment to die. I started having lots of those moments, and I would say there, 'If I could die right now, this would be great.' Ya know what I mean, I'd be satisfied. And that was how good the music was. (Harris 2010)

The term "liberating" also appeared twice in survey responses. Liberating is a particularly interesting choice of words, given the history of African American dance, which may have actually begun on slave ships during the Middle Passage. One of Harris' favorite house songs, "How Do I Let Go," describes the desperation of an individual who is ready to let go of another person, as he "dances to be free." Professor Harris discusses freedom in dance:

Before hip-hop it was rhythm and blues, it was rock, it was jazz, it was classical, it was whatever gave you that sense of freedom that you could just go ahead and do your thing and just be in tune with the divine order, so to speak, and understand the moment of now. It's not categorized, it's just another means by which we can get there, a vehicle to get to get back to loving ourselves, and getting back to, ultimately, loving in general, you know what I mean? (Carbonneau 2003)

According to Reagon, the word “freedom,” which emerged as a key term students of house use to describe the dance form, also characterized the protest songs of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s: “During the Civil Rights Movement our freedom songs no longer operated in code” (2001: 3).

During the nineteenth century, being on your way out of slavery usually meant leaving a place to go to another place, covering geographical territory. You actually had to put distance between where you were and where you were headed. During the twentieth-century Civil Rights Movement, being on your way often meant staying where you were and wreaking havoc in your local community, insisting on its transformation so that a new construction could be possible. (4)

The issue of migration is key in understanding the history of house and its place in the African American continuum: “Sometimes those of us who survived slavery came into freedom bearing scars that shaped the way we looked at freedom and independence” (116). “You did not leave town geographically, but in fact stayed and moved yourself through new behaviors and challenges, throwing your life up against a system and demanding that it fall so that something different could take its place” (5).

Two different students listed derivations of the word “style” to describe house. When thinking of the words *stylistic* and *stylized*, one is reminded of the individualism of house dance that Professor Harris describes, the “personal” nature of house dance, the personal reasons that people engage in the dance, the personal sense of “release” from which it emerges, and the individual touches that each individual puts on the moves once they have learned them and the body has fully internalized the movement.<sup>44</sup> Each dancer’s sense of style shines through after they have put in time to fully understand house movement. “And also, too, house is such an individual thing, you could dance with somebody to house music, together, but you still find yourself doing your own, being in your own space with that person. Originally, proper house

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<sup>44</sup> “Personal” and “release” were also words that came up in response to this question.

was that way, freaky...”

The course structure of “Advanced Hip Hop” does not allow for teaching the lyrics of songs. Rather, Harris brings his own music, recorded by iPod, and plays whatever songs he feels like playing on a particular day. However, Harris emphasized the importance of allowing the songs, the lyrics of the music, to inspire dancers’ movements and to make them more spirited as the dancer bodily interprets the lyrics. One anecdote Harris gave regarding this point came in the middle of class, after having students perform a certain *riddim*, in which he noticed some students over-articulating the movement with good body accuracy but not enough “swag.” He noted that although younger dancers may be physically superior at executing certain movements due to their youthful vigor, they could still get “served” or outdone by older dancers who know how to 1) conserve their energy and thus add more finesse to movement and 2) enjoy the movement on another level because they know and like the song to which they are dancing.

In “Advanced Hip Hop,” this point also brought home the relevance of kinetic orality when applied to musical knowledge. During one class, as we were about to practice movement going across the floor, often a potentially intimidating task as it spotlights four dancers at a time, so that onlookers can observe one’s movement style, strengths and weaknesses, Rennie played a song that I was familiar with from when it was released in the 1990s. It was a house version of soul singer Jill Scott’s “He Loves Me,” which came out on the Philadelphia soul singer’s first album. At first I could not place the song, as it sounded markedly different with its remixed beat. I started singing the words and made eye contact with another black female student who was familiar with the song and who was “jamming” to herself as well. It was exhilarating to be able to do our drills or go across the floor and thus give a personal interpretation of how this particular song made us want to move, even while executing the same movement. According to

Alex Perullo, the creativity that is showcased in movement across the floor, a performance of sorts for the professor and fellow classmates, is a critical site for healing to occur. “Researchers even acknowledge the way that creativity may be an adaptive form of survival, since it promotes healthy expressions of emotions that may be beneficial to the body and establishes brain wave shifts that improve overall health” (101). “Dancing, then, is not merely one form of musical consumption. As long as the dancer is on the floor, he or she is performing, either for him- or herself, for one or several dance partners, or for the DJ” (Fikentscher 2000:67).

“Advanced Hip Hop” or “House?”

Many of the students surveyed did not make a clear delineation between hip hop and house. Perhaps the majority of the students thought of the class as a way to build their skills as hip hop dancers in general, not particularly as house dancers. The fact that Harris happened to be teaching house did not matter especially; the tools they would gain as hip hop dancers attracted them, no matter what form Harris was teaching. The question asking students to provide three words that describe their relationship with hip hop came before the question about three words to describe house. Maybe due to the order of these two questions, students used a wider variety of terminology, which I will list here:

creative, long-lasting, fun; complicated, difficult, emotional

(blank); dedication, strength, community

communication, community, support; life, love, (blank)

healing, family, Life; release, energy, exploration

family, tradition, drilling; passion, energy, rhythm

life, love, celebration; (blank)

personal, empowering, resilience-building; commitment, freedom, family

dedication, motivation, perseverance; fun, sweaty, <3 (heart)

practice, release, energy; fun, spirituality, community

freedom, chill, family; cleansing, training, chill

expressive, social, friendly; spiritual, educational, inspiring

groove, music, feeling; expression, lite, passion

fun, expressive, (blank); love, passion, life

love, stability, motivation; passion, spirit, love

One thing that struck me about these words was that they are not typically used to describe hip hop as it is typically characterized in American culture. Another explanation for these answers is that students have a greater understanding of and appreciation for hip hop as a whole than for house specifically. Rennie Harris, however, would argue that hip hop has gotten a bad rap, so to speak:

Why have they got women in high heels and naked on the TV? Why are they showing violence all the time on TV? It has nothing specifically to do with hip-hop. Hip-hop is not violent. The culture is violent. We are violent. People are violent (Harris 2001).

Perhaps the majority of Harris' students come from a generation that appreciates hip hop in a different way than did their predecessors. There is much derision over house's relationship to hip hop, possibly because the two seem so different from one another when examining their social context. However, there is overlap in the worlds of hip hop and house.<sup>45</sup>

While waiting in line to attend the house dance party following Marjory Smarth's dance workshop, two dancers in their early twenties, an African American male and an Afro-Australian female, mused about the genre's indescribability, agreeing that it really is a mixture of many

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<sup>45</sup> At the March 2013 Marjory Smarth workshop, I asked a self-proclaimed hip hop dancer from Italy about the difference between house and hip hop. "They are the same but different," she replied.

things. Both dancers acknowledged their status as outsiders of society, individuals who do not fit into a mold or any prescribed identity. The young lady acknowledged that her heritage as a native of a war torn East African country currently living in a British protectorate, made her an enigma. Her dance partner, a young man wearing moccasins and indigenous garb, agreed that he seemed to think differently from most of his counterparts. The couple agreed that house's history is hard to define but emerged after hip hop, making it one of the youngest dance forms currently out.

### Conclusion

House is gaining popularity throughout the world with hip hop fans and in the United States with youth of many cultures who are also embracing other urban dance forms such as “stepping” (which was also popularized in Chicago) and the Brazilian dance and martial arts form capoeira, which is also used in house. I inferred, after watching performances of house and hip hop freestyles performed by various groups and individuals, that house dancing is for those who intend to physically express themselves artfully and powerfully through dance or to “work some things out,” work through emotions and experience catharsis. I come to this conclusion because house dance is done so purposefully and with so much integrity to its roots as a black dance form, and the term “work” or “werk” is used often within house culture. Unlike hip hop, there is no “studio” version of house—at least, not yet. The classes taught in studios are typically still true to its beginnings, simply because that is the nature of house. In the following chapter, more attention will be paid to the manifestations of healing in “Advanced Hip Hop,” from the voices of the students.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Bringing It All Together

In this chapter, I look more in-depth at the potential and actualized use of music and dance as healing agents, drawn from interview data. Among those interviewed are Professor Rennie Harris, professional choreographer and teacher Cydney Banner<sup>46</sup> (African American female), house instructor Amir Isreal (African American male), and house students Gracie (Caucasian female), Aminah (African American female), Violet Zephyr (Mexican American female) and Benjamin (African American male). I will analyze their responses through the lenses of four tenets of “soul healing” that I developed and discussed in the introduction: spirituality, self-knowledge, mentorship, and community, with primary emphasis on spirituality and self-knowledge. These four precepts also reflect the “authentic movement” theory of dance therapy pioneer Mary Whitehouse and anthropologist Victor Turner’s theory of the development of *communitas* through the use of rites of passage rituals.

### Spirituality

“It was through movement that I gained access to the unknown.”

-Mary Whitehouse, Dance Therapist (Sullwold 1995: 48)

A discussion of spirituality is imperative when considering the healing power and potential that lies in music, in dance, and especially in the combination of the two, for many people. One of the most groundbreaking aspects of Mary Whitehouse’s work is her insistence that the theory for authentic movement must include “the irrational, illogical, unknown” through individuation. Thus, “Mary approached each [dance therapy] session with openness and respect for the unknown” (Sullwold 1995:46). Additionally, Professor Rennie Harris discusses the

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<sup>46</sup> Pseudonyms are used to ensure interviewees’ anonymity.



importance of spirituality and his use of dance for personal therapeutic purposes:

I've always been on the path of journeying, so to speak. Because really, it's not about other people, it's about me. It's about how I'm dealing with me, and so right now, this is my therapy, and if it relates to other people, then God bless, you know, that's cool, and if it helps them, that's fine, but right now that's what it's always been about, me trying to figure out where I'm going. (Harris 1999)

Student Violet Zephyr gave an impassioned account of dance's healing powers in her life:

You just have to experience it to know why it's healing. It's this powerful energy; it's unexplainable. I always have trouble articulating what dance means to me, because I'd rather show you through me dancing because it's so spiritual. I feel because it's so connected to music, that's another reason it's healing too. When you're listening to music, feeling the worst, it brightens your day. So healing is being uplifted, feeling happy and joyful, ready to tackle (do) anything. (Ignacio 2013)

To further elucidate the significance of spirituality in this context, it is imperative to discuss two dimensions of it: surrender and improvisation. In this study, "to surrender" means to submit one's self to a will greater than one's own. Racy, for example, examines the concept of surrender when describing *saltanah*, the "creative ecstasy" experienced by many performers in Arab musical traditions (2004:120). He notes, "The two notions of surrender and empowerment, or of being dominated and becoming dominant, are closely intertwined in statements made by musical critics, connoisseurs, and performers regarding artistic inspiration" (123). Racy also describes the process of surrender as, paradoxically, "becoming empowered" through "succumbing to power" (122). As Roseman states:

Korean shamans are usually women who have had signs that the spirits are calling them to the profession, such as sickness, bad luck, poverty, bad marriages, men harming and neglecting them. But learning to be a shaman is very difficult. Chini does not succeed because she fails to act like a shaman: she cannot clear her mind and open herself to her feelings, losing herself in performance. For Chini to be successful, her words must go beyond the formulaic. She fails because she is self-conscious and inhibited: She lacks the ability to perform (Roseman 1996: 6).

"Mary encouraged people to feel the difference between doing something and letting something happen" (Frieder 1981: 40). Local house instructor Amir Isreal related House to the tradition of the "whirling dervishes" of Islamic faith and Near Eastern culture, noting that one must "keep

moving” and “stay God-minded” while gaining the ability to surrender the ego through exertion (Isreal 2013). Student Benjamin appreciated the House class because it brought him to a level of exertion that he finds crucial as a dancer and that had been lacking in other dance classes that he had taken in college:

I went back to dancing like I’m used to; fully exerting myself the whole time. A break is a break; it’s just more focused where if there’s too much talking going on, [Harris] would definitely say something. Just the focus would be different, and that’s what I was used to before I came here in terms of the classes and rehearsals that I was apart of; they were more intense physically and with focus and passion. (Harper 2013)

Instructor Rennie Harris underscores the important role that his class has in establishing a practice for students, which puts them on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule for undergoing physical and mental conditioning in addition to rehearsing movement. “At the end of the day, it’s like yoga, it’s like capoeira. All of that, they call it a practice. It’s a continuation, always engaged on many levels. You’re always learning” (Harris 2013). Thus, attending the class twice a week might be considered a meditative practice to be developed and maintained in order for spiritual, physical, and mental growth to occur:

Dance is like being in a relationship—you have to work at it. It’s not gonna be easy and it’s not supposed to be easy. If it were easy, there would be no need to practice. Practicing just builds that relationship with yourself. That’s why training is important. You get to know yourself; you get to know what are your strengths, what are your weaknesses. And that’s important too, cause in life you need to know these things. (Danza 2013)

Surrender occurs in the midst of dance instruction because what is happening on a physical level stimulates community building, healing from injury, and a sense of freedom both within and among students. This phenomenon is bolstered by the presence of Harris as a dance instructor and informal life coach, so that the students’ experiences of surrender evolve and sharpen during their time in the class, even over years of returning to take his class:

[Rennie’s] class is more about drilling versus some other teachers will make it about ‘Oh have fun with the movement. But I feel there is value because through drilling it and just exhausting your body, there’s a lot of release that comes a lot of healing and power and empowerment

through the music. I pretty much enjoyed it all, but I think I really enjoyed seeing the hard work of learning all the riddims and drilling them everyday, come out when I myself would go across the floor. (Danza 2013)

Anthropologist Victor Turner addresses how neophytes undergo the liminal period of their initiation process, in surrendering to the rituals, they in their weakness, possess power. Turner states that those of “low status or position” (in this case, students) are endowed with “mystical and moral powers,” and “permanently or transiently sacred attributes” (1969:103). Accordingly, the tasks that neophytes perform while in their liminal state might contribute to these sacred thought forms and abilities. For instance, performing the “riddims” in House class was cited as a meditative catalyst that could even foster trance:

Trance state from the 8s, gets people focused, it’s tiring. You get so tired that you no longer think about doing the movement, you just do it. And then that rhythm begins to take you over, and you’re able to see, unconsciously. There is a meditative quality about it that takes hold of people once you get it. (Harris 2013)

Violet Zephyr countered arguments from her peers in the class that undermine the importance of drilling the rhythms and its potential to help dancers learn to improvise, another sacred attribute to be attained while in the liminal state of the classroom:

I know, I’ve heard from a lot of people that sometimes the class can be boring because it is repetitive. But to me, reviewing foundation over and over again just gives me time to review my steps. But also, I go into the class with a different approach. Like, to me it’s not boring because of the music, and I set myself: Like how can I do differently. I already know this step, so what can I add to it? What is this song making me feel that I could change my movement? And sometimes not even thinking and just doing the repetitive movement. It’s like a meditation. You’re doing that constant movement over and over again. To me, it’s amazing. A lot of people might view it as, like okay are you going to change it up. But this is not the only class I take. Outside of class, I practice; let’s see what I can create, invent, or alright, I already have all this knowledge. Let me just dance. See what I create. (Ignacio 2013)

The concept of trance goes hand in hand with many conceptions of healing music and dance that incites a deep meditative state, and from which the “patient” emerges, healed. According to Perullo, while this sort of phenomenon could be expected more in the Ghana ensemble, it would be impossible to find in “house” because of its status as “popular” music. “Popular music does

not produce trance in the same way, but dancing at events has a similar effect. Interaction with performers and other audience members produces deep psychological and emotional pleasure” (Perullo 2011: 99).

In “Advanced Hip Hop,” one of Professor Harris’ main goals is for students to enter “the zone” as early on as possible. This is facilitated by the (electronic) music, with repetitive bass lines, driving beats, hypnotic melodies, and few lyrics. As class commences, and students begin their daily “riddim” drills, the dancers are forced to “turn within” in order to remember how to execute the movements in their most basic form. With each week’s practice, they discover how to improve their “delivery” of each movement. This is a very individual process, as one must know his own body well enough to decide how his/her body will achieve the particular nuance that the dances require. This could range from lengthening one’s torso on a certain movement to coordinating arms and legs to moving the neck to one side at the right time, on beat, and in step with the rest of the class. Harris points out the relationship between dancers and drummers, who are likened to deejays:

It was about commanding time. Who else knows how to command time other than us because this is what we do? It was about that moment, about how you got under the groove and get into it. Even when I teach, people come out and they want to learn all this stuff. If I put on some hardcore hip-hop with just a beat they look at me like I’m crazy. “How am I going to do this?” They can’t dance because they don’t know how to command time. That it’s all encompassing—it’s song and musicians and visual. As a dancer you’re the vessel for all of it. And this song—it’s a dance that you sing. You use all the tools to express the dance. When you dance you create rhythm all the time, so you are a musician at the same time and create the rhythms within your body. And you create the rhythm and you spill it back to the drummer. And the drummer has to play that rhythm back, what you just did with your feet. And so I think we visually become the painting. So I think we encompass all of that—the visual, the song, the rhythm and the understanding. (Harris 2001)

Local house instructor and native New Yorker Amir Isreal invoked Nigerian Afro-Beat luminary Fela Kuti as example of a musician who had mastered the art of healing audiences through song structure using distillation of sound added to the lyrics’ political content. Deejays employ Kuti’s

music by putting it to house beats; the songs are then referred to as belonging to the category, “jungle house.” The cipher setting that takes place within Kuti’s band and among the dancers, with a jazz band structure (every musician gives a solo, for instance) is designed to elevate the listener emotionally, according to Amir:

Some musicians have mastered the art of getting you to that point. There is the mechanical, contrived kind of formatting of ‘Oh, this is what you need. I lower the beat, I bring [the music] up, it comes down really low, then the drums come in, and the lights come in with this same feeling.’ It rivals symphonies in that there’s movements to it. And the deejay’s job is to deliver this musical sermon to take you to different states, to get you up to a place and then keep you at a place. (Isreal 2013)

Thus, in many African cultures, the drummer’s continuous beats and the never-ending rhythms found in the natural flow of each day are the natural forebears of the deejay, whose primary goal is “to produce an endless stream of music that enables uninterrupted dancing pleasure for the audience,” thus “wielding tremendous power in house music expressions and culture

(Fikentscher 2000: 19):

It’s in the tradition of some parts of Africa where culture is law that you don’t just play the music, you’re not just a musician. The drummers dance and the drummers sing: you’re all part of that same thing, and it’s only in western culture that we start separating them. (Harris 2001)

Mary Whitehouse espoused, “Body and psyche are a totality and the physical condition is analogous to the psychological one” (Frieder 1981:39). Thus, “the psyche changes in the course of working with the body” (1981:39). Racy confirms this point:

At the same time, the tarab state can be physically empowering. It may raise the participants’ threshold of physical tolerance or as frequently demonstrated, boost the singers’ level of endurance on the stage. Ecstatic transformation may also lead to a heightened sense of musicality. (Racy 2004:201)

Benjamin reiterated the fact that while practice is not necessarily pleasurable, it is necessary and it provides the space where one improves and is forced to initially try things that are normally outside of his or her usual agenda or presupposed ability:

I hoped that we would do some free styling this quarter in Rennie's class, but that's partly because I didn't feel like doing the 8's. Well, certain ones. There are like 110 rhythms; there are just certain ones, where I didn't want to do an 8 for this step. I'd rather use all my energy dancing my ass off rather than doing the 8's. But it builds stamina, so you have to do it in some form or fashion. Some steps, I don't see myself using. You feel certain steps in your body and it doesn't feel as natural. There are just certain steps that don't feel right for you. I mean, you gotta learn how to do it. Just because it doesn't feel natural doesn't mean that you shouldn't practice it. It's kind of further away from you. (Harper 2013)

### *Improvisation*

Improvisation is “the key element” in authentic movement (Frieder 1981:36). “As people begin to move in their own way, they are faced with feelings of surprise and delight and, often, of anxiety and embarrassment. Judgments, corrections, and explanations are of no use. It is their movement and it happens just that way” (Whitehouse 2000d:60). As Whitehouse worked in movement, especially in improvisation, again she found that new nomenclature was needed. “When the movement was simple and inevitable, not to be changed no matter how limited or partial, it became what I called ‘authentic’—it could be recognized as genuine belonging to that person” (Frieder 81).

I'm really big on improv because of tap. But I have trouble like I'm not comfortable as a hip hop dancer, to where I could just improvise all the time. As dancers, because I have that “in the club” that's just so natural, and then we spend so much time dancing in this environment—you're just this, this, and that. “I have these steps I've learned, I have this music... That's what improv is; it's just reference after reference after reference. (Harper 2013)

Amir attributes the risk taking element present in free styling and dancing improvisatorially as a practice that aids in spiritual communication, as one trusts a higher power to guide him or her to intuit the next move or to attempt a movement that is difficult, challenging, or heretofore untested. Some of these moves defy gravity and seem like they would be physically impossible if not at least injurious to the dancer. The rush, the high, and the assurance that “God's got” the dancer propels him or her forward in the midst of the trance state. In the moment, they are too

“high” to question that they are unconditionally loved and capable of doing anything, communing with a higher power in the realm of music and dance.

Once you let go, it’s amazing...it’s a high. After you go into the circle and you just let go, you’re gonna feel so free. And that is therapy. That is freedom. That is diving into a different world, a different dimension. That’s what I’ve experienced. You stop feeling the pain because you zone out. Once you get to that point of just zoning out, you get to that feeling like no other. To see that somebody actually can do that...the music can make you do that. (Ignacio 2013)

As Racy notes, music can be felt. “A product of creative listening rather than passive hearing, the experience tends to be visceral and for that reason the music is said to be ‘felt’” (2004:199).

This physical feeling of music is what inspires movement to occur in dancers. New York native and local house instructor Amir describes a sense of ecstasy that is experienced in “house club” settings:

There’s a spiritual part of the vision quest, the out of body experience that we associate with the religious experience...at the verge of death, the leaving the body aspect of it. During lovemaking and dancing, you feel like you’ve left the flesh and you’ve connected emotionally to somebody else. So if a song is emotional enough, and then we have the physical element; we feel that the body is spent; we have the same out of body experience. We’re all physically tired. We’re hot, we’re sweaty, we’re right now. You guys are all chanting [to the music] in unison, so it’s a unison of the divine ability to create in the flesh. It’s synchronicity; it’s that physical exertion, the release from the ego. It definitely is like a Buddhist chant almost. (Isreal 2013)

The circle, often called a “cipher” in African American communal music/dance contexts, is found across cultures as an important spatial tool for facilitating communication and exchanges of energy. Many of the Ewe dances taught in the Ladzekpos’ class are executed in circles, and the cipher is an all-important concept in hip hop culture. While Rennie Harris’ house class does not consist of ciphers, circles are there nonetheless in a powerful way: the eight-count “riddims” are executed in a circle, with students dancing counterclockwise and then clockwise, in place. Learning the rhythms in this way prepares students to “freestyle,” or improvise, in ciphers by providing them with movement vocabulary and by establishing “groove” as part of their body

memory. Violet echoed this sentiment as she exhorted students to face any fear of free styling within the cipher:

If you're going into a circle and you want to try something, just go for it. You shouldn't be afraid of not getting it, or others judging you. Everybody starts somewhere. You never know where it's going to take you if you don't dive into it. If you settle for less, you'll never get anywhere. Because you are sometimes afraid to go in the circle which is a cipher that is created in the dance world. Cause within yourself, you're constantly battling with yourself just because you have these thoughts in their heads that are not allowing them to do what they are actually really truly feeling. Cause they're always, what's bad, what's good, I have to do what's good, why is it that you can't just do what you feel? There's no right or wrong in dance. And why fear failure? Failure is success. That's how movements were created. That's how you learn. That's how you get stronger. There shouldn't be fear. And there also shouldn't be attachment. Once you're attached, that's not good either for your soul. Cause if someone takes that from you, then you're doomed. (Ignacio 2013)

Development of self-confidence and an intuitive relationship with the music allows for greater surrender in ciphers found in clubs and on the streets. According to Banner, cipher behavior distinguishes hip hop from house. "House culture is the opposite of that. There's a huge battle culture, of course, but there is a sharing that happens first. House culture comes out of sharing; African dancers coming and sharing the same space and influencing each others' movement" (Banner 2013). "It's an extension of African dance and hip hop, and hip hop is an extension of African dance and culture. Hip hop is just a continuum of the African American experience, a continuation of African culture and dance" (Harris 2013). Banner's initiation into the club culture of house dancing in New York meant that she was dancing with some of the best, and she had to prepare accordingly to share the cipher with them:

To jump in the circle with those kind of people [SkillzMethods, world-class b-boying champions, all these house and hip hop dancers] was just terrifying. So for a long time, I just didn't dance in circles. Eventually, I just started in—we would have freestyle sessions, and I started to feel more comfortable with my freestyle. I would move the couches and practice in my mother's house till I was dripping sweat. And I had to remember, less is more. You might fall, you might turn that fall into a movement...It's about quality, and it's about building your freestyle and who you are as a freestyle artist. (Banner 2013)

An important part of the circle is the energy that it emits and facilitates among participants:



If I jump in the circle, it's because I've been outside the circle for a second, feeling something. Feeling out the surroundings and the energy in the circle. 'Ok, how do I fit into this energy or how do I not fit into this energy?' The best times that I've really felt free, I don't remember anything. And I like it like that. I used to be terrified, first of all, of getting in circles. When I got comfortable free styling, it changed who I am as a dancer, in every form of dance. I started using my freestyle from every technique I had learned, which changed who I was as a choreographer, and what I incorporate in my choreography, and fusing styles. I used to be a nervous wreck. And I started to have those moments where I felt free. And then that's when my freestyle started to feel organic, or good, for me. And it's not about validation from other people...solace and comfortability in your own skin. Develop and identify who you are as a dancer. And so, now I don't feel any way about jumping in the circle. Sometimes you still have off times, but the off is not like you're dancing off the beat like it used to be. For me, I go blank. When I try to remember what happened in the circle, it's like snow. (Banner 2013)

Freedom is a key topic in the spiritual nature of dance because it is often the ultimate goal of the dancer. He or she desires to constantly gain more proficiency at communicating by using the body, in a pursuit of a strong sense of freedom. This concept is especially relevant when considering the experiences of African Americans and other subjugated groups. According to Bernice Johnson Reagon (2001), the yearning for freedom is what pushed African Americans into migrating from the South in the first place. Harris speaks to this aspect of the Black music continuum that is still invoked among descendants of the formerly formally enslaved:

Before hip-hop, it was rhythm and blues, it was rock, it was jazz, it was classical, it was whatever gave you that sense of freedom that you could just go ahead and do your thing and just be in tune with the divine order, so to speak, and understand the moment of now. It's not categorized, it's just another means by which we can get there, a vehicle to get to get back to loving ourselves, and getting back to, ultimately, loving in general, you know what I mean? (Harris 2003)

As Violet Zephyr notes, freedom and surrender combine to form the freestyle:

That's the definition of free styling; letting go and being free. Yeah, cause you do have to surrender to whatever your mind is telling you. If you're not trying to be a professional dancer, that's good too. You don't need to be trying to be a professional dancer to be free and let go. (Ignacio 2013)

The classroom can indeed be a healing site, even when used as a laboratory of sorts. Cydney noted that she loves being in class perhaps more than being on stage performing, because performing requires so much structure as opposed to class, where there is the freedom to try new

things, make mistakes, and explore movement. “Whether it’s how I dress, what I do with my hair, dancing for me is the freedom to be my true self. When I’m dancing, I have the freedom to be myself. When I do my thing, dancing gives me freedom to be my true self. So that in itself to me is healing” (Banner 2013). Gracie found that choreographing a House piece based upon her participation in the class helped her find freedom from the emotional pain of loss and grief, providing a sense of catharsis:

The piece that I put on for my project was inspired by my brother, who passed away about a year and a half ago. And I created a piece about what I’ve been through since then. And one of the sections was a House section. And that part for me was absolutely about healing and you know just that that amazing energy that comes from being in a room with a bunch of people with the music up loud and people just dancing and loving what they do and moving their bodies. And I think I’ve seen that in a lot of dance styles but I think I’ve seen it the most in House. And I’m not sure why, I’m still trying to figure that out. But I think that may be partly due to the fact that House incorporates so many different styles of dance, or it can if you want to. You can throw in a little salsa, a little of this a little of that as long as you have the foundation, and there’s a lot of freedom to move within it and a lot of joy I personally have been really transformed by that experience, and definitely all the different classes I’ve taken where they embrace that. So yeah, it’s been really healing for me, and helped me let out of the pain, you know? (Danza 2013)

Gracie’s experience also reflects Whitehouse’s premise that through the “discovery of previously unavailable feelings,” individuals can change their lives in order to “explore and extend their aliveness” (Whitehouse 2000d:60, 59). Racy also alludes to great artists’ ability to tap into their own sense of ecstasy and the passion they feel regarding their creativity. “The innate ability to feel the music, or to interact with one’s own performance ecstatically, prepares the artist to attain high levels of saltanah” (Racy 2004:128). Cydney discussed the relationship between music and dance in the class:

There’s an instinct that comes. Sometimes you may hear a song, and then you may hit something in the song instinctively. You may hit a snare that, your body knew that it was coming. You learn how to hear things, how to anticipate things...and there are some songs you know in and out and you can’t wait to dance to it. As a dancer, you interpret the music and have a conversation with the music. In freestyle, you’re one with the music. They are the music personified. Amazing dancers literally are the music. (Banner 2013)

In “Advanced Hip Hop,” many of the students are already performers who take the class to improve or to gain ideas to improve their performance, mostly as hip hop dancers and choreographers. “The healing effects of performance are, on one level, caused by the catharsis that can occur when a patient’s unresolved emotional distress is reawakened and confronted in a dramatic context” (Roseman 1996:7).

Performance is also a consciousness about cultural, political, and economic issues that surround those in attendance. Performers must be able to interpret an audience’s mood and desires and create an environment in which audiences deal with events occurring around them and establish strategies to resolve fears, tensions, or concerns. (Perullo 2011:101)

Although students in “Advanced Hip Hop” are not taught to sing, awareness of the songs helps with the healing effect as they are interpreted through movement. “Just listening to the songs he would play, those were very healing, like “Keep moving forward.” The steps themselves make you release any stress or anxiety or worries that you have, in that space and time” (Todd 2013).

Racy also discusses the use of “signal pieces” by *tarab* musicians “to produce immediate ecstatic frenzy among the impassioned listeners” (2004: 208). Cydney discussed a similar phenomenon:

There’s an instinct that comes. Sometimes you may hear a song, and then you may hit something in the song instinctively. You may hit a snare that, your body knew that it was coming; you learn how to hear things, how to anticipate things...And there are some songs you know in and out and you can’t wait to dance to it. As a dancer, you interpret the music and have a conversation with the music. Interpretation comes with choreography and performance. In freestyle, you’re one with the music. They are the music personified. Amazing dancers literally are the music. (Banner 2013)

Ethnomusicologist and “trancing” expert Marina Roseman concurs: “Grounding images in the body enacts a geography of healing” (1996:9). Such images are often invoked through song lyrics. Violet Zephyr concurred that the music provides inspiration for the dancer to move in any given way, while also intensifying lyrical meaning:

Especially with the music he plays. He plays so much vocal house and what the music’s saying, what the lyrics are saying, really speaks to me. And just dancing to that and getting into the lyrics and really listening to the music and really listening to yourself, what’s going on in your life. And when you connect to that, it’s even more powerful. (Ignacio 2013)

## Self-Knowledge

“This expansion of self is, in itself, energizing and healing” (Sullwold 1995:46).

One of my hypotheses upon beginning this study was that students could be healed through movement, particular to movement as directly descending from African traditions (here, contemporary instruction of traditional West African dance-drumming and hip hop–inspired street dance created by African Americans). Dance therapist Mary Whitehouse contends that merely moving *differently*, especially while connecting with others in a safe space, provides physiological healing. Through the “discovery of previously unavailable feelings,” she wanted to help people change their lives in order to “explore and extend their aliveness” (Whitehouse 2000d: 60, 59). Self-knowledge dovetails with the *soul healing* precept of “self-love,” which in my estimation, means that an individual knows one’s self, first and foremost. Like Reagon, Whitehouse emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge, which is both sought and expressed through music and dance, in relation to African American ethnic identity. In her conceptualization of soul healing, Reagon privileges teachers not as therapists but as leaders who help to build community, and the community provides the sense of healing by providing social support and unconditional love. These issues will also be explored as they converged and diverged in the interview data for both case studies, beginning with House. When contemplating the idea of self-love, reflected as self-knowledge, in the context of “Advanced Hip Hop,” I explore two major themes that emerge throughout the interview data: body literacy and communication.

Professor Rennie Harris discusses the concept of the “personal” in house, lending to an understanding of infusing one’s “personality” in dance. In the beginning of his History of Hip Hop Dance class, the word personal was used in his definition of hip hop dance: “Cultural

traditions may also affect personal temperament, which in turn affects our movement.” This reflects philosophies of authentic movement and dance therapy in which personality and movement intertwined. In an interview with arts administrator Arnecia Patterson (2001), Harris reveals his goal of imparting the lessons of dance that his students might improve their own lives and relationships as they learn to recognize and appreciate differing perceptions:

We can all see the same thing, but we’re all going to perceive it differently. The chair may be twisted to you but it’s not twisted to me. And so I try to recognize that everyone sees and perceives what they’re going to get and what they’re supposed to get in life for their path to help them move forward personally. I want people to have dialogue. And I want it to be raw; I mean it’s all simple bullshit questions. You deal with what’s on your plate and as it comes, one day at a time. So in that way dialogue is what I want. And I want it to be truthful and get beyond the bullshit of, ‘Yes. Okay. Well, all right.’ (Patterson 2001)

According to Mary Whitehouse, children in Western cultures are taught to be inauthentic as part of the process of socialization as they pick up the movement patterns of their parents and emulate the behavior their teachers tell us is appropriate for public settings (Whitehouse 2000a:33). They imitate the movements that seem common and acceptable as they learn to “isolate [their] motions” and be “physically inexpressive” and “uncreative,” avoiding closeness and intimacy and sublimating and projecting true feelings, masking their thoughts (34).

Whitehouse describes this disconnect or division of mind in the contradiction of speaking untruthfully while body language reveals the truth. Thus, an individual may say she is doing fine, when it is obvious when observing her posture or eyes that she is tired. One “symptomatic condition” that Whitehouse describes as “major,” exceedingly common and instantly recognizable, is tension of the neck and shoulders, which she attributes to an emphasis on the head, or verbal reasoning based upon “knowing in an intellectual way, explaining, controlling” (Whitehouse 2000a:37). According to Whitehouse, Westerners then experience tension “because we are not sincere—that is, our real feeling is not expressed” (38). Gracie spoke to the natural

expression that house dance provides, allowing one to learn to be “in one’s body” and, thus, authentic to one’s self even in physically challenging situations that Harris presents:

It’s just natural movement; it can allow you to just be in your own body. And I feel like in life, there are so many moments when we’re out of our own body or out of our own mind whether we’re thinking too hard or trying to impress somebody or just worried about something. You don’t really get the chance to be in your self and work through the stuff you’ve got to work through. So to be able to do that in a dance class, is really amazing. It’s really amazing to be able to take a class and feel better, and just really feel like, “Okay.” Like you have enough energy to continue the day. It’s really cool how art can impact you. It can impact you in a positive or negative way. But when it can do something like foster healing in a person, it is really cool. (Danza 2013)

Thus, authenticity is purportedly something that does not often come naturally to Westerners, perhaps especially in corporate and academic settings: “We often say ‘Yes’ when we want to say ‘No’ or ‘No’ when we are afraid to say ‘Yes,’ with the result that we stiffen and are not convincing” (Whitehouse 2000a: 38). Individuals can, instead, “allow our own naturalness” by taking a moment each day to assess their current “body attitude” without judgment or criticism through improvised movement (39). In “Reflections on Mary Starks Whitehouse,” Susan Frieder identifies five principles of authentic movement: a “humanistic growth model, process-oriented rather than issue-oriented approach, belief that the individual can connect to the unconscious through movement and this process itself has inherent healing value, belief that movement reflects personality, and belief that movement with awareness can produce psychic changes” (1981:37).

Because “Advanced Hip Hop” is not a Dance Therapy class as such, Harris’ approach is more pedagogical; that is, he teaches how to dance, as do the Ladzekpos in the Ghana ensemble. The life lessons that come with learning to dance provide the informal therapy, the healing effects that students may experience. Harris also agrees that movement reflects personality. In his Hip Hop History class syllabus, he notes that “Environment, political affiliations, social and

spiritual associations may also govern our movement and posture” (2012). According to Whitehouse, first one must become “aware of the body and movement as a primary step, trusting the inner impulse and allowing the movement to happen, and making an outer connection” (Frieder 1981:37).

### *On Routines*

#### Friday, April 26, 2013: Field Notes

*So one of the issues I'm facing now is what I might call an issue of accessibility in the dance class. The second half of the class today was too hard for me. I couldn't keep up with all the choreography he was adding with every new rotation across the floor. On Tuesday, I acknowledged that I wasn't paying close enough attention. Today, I immediately guessed that it was my lack of classical training that was making me fall behind. I heard myself mention to a classmate that I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to do those capoeira style movements again (because I am older and my body has changed since I had a baby). And then, of course, there's ego. There was the frustration of not being able to execute the movements and the embarrassment of having to stare at my line mates' feet as we went across the floor, which probably made it more obvious that I didn't have the step. Perhaps I was too focused upon getting and understanding each step perfectly. Another graduate student helped me understand that she just knew the first new part had a lot of kicks so she just did a lot of kicks during that part, knowing eventually it would click and make sense. Another graduate student, who had just rejoined the class, also observed, "It's more challenging this year."*

One issue of contention for some (especially amateur) dancers is the presence of routines, or choreographed sequences, in classes taught in formalized instruction environments.

Especially in a class like House, which is based upon street dance, the requirement to learn a routine during a class period often separates students who are trained dancers versus those who learned in more informal environments or using natural talent. Harris cautions students not to privilege choreography over learning the rhythms:

*Learn the rhythm first, the choreography last. The rhythm of movement is the most important part. Once you have locked the rhythm of the movement phrase or the movement itself the technique of the movement will eventually evolve. As long as there is a pulse the body will respond, and if the body knows it, you will always know it. The rhythm is a feeling that locks itself into your muscle forever and you will never forget it once it has done so. (2012:8)*

Another question is the importance of classical training in learning street dance. Some feel that classical training can expand dancers' repertoire and range of movement styles, while others feel that classical training should not have any bearing on determining whether a student is competent at street dance. As dance majors, several interviewees weighed in on this idea:

Once I started doing hip hop at the studio, [mentor and house dance coach outside of UCLA] Jackie suggested I take ballet to get at least more of a dynamic and diversity of dance forms. So I did ballet for a year and I took a class here, but that was it. I got a taste of it so I could see what it is. And it really is completely different. You get a sense of different muscles. You get a sense of who you are in your body. It really depends on the person. Because if they're like kinesthetic learners or visual learners, it really depends. It could help. If you do ballet, you might be able to get a leg swipe into something else....But if you do ballet, you're here (gestures toward torso), not here (gestures toward waist and pelvis), so that's what's hard. (Danza 2013)

As a tap dancer, Benjamin had taken all sorts of dance classes, and thus can see and use the interconnections between each one while appreciating their wholeness as movement:

If you can do all this difficult, almost impossible stuff at times, especially in these other disciplines, but you can't hit a jack or two-step, it doesn't have to be this complicated thing. And it's cool when others can do this complicated stuff, but..movement is what it is. That's what cool about seeing a house dancer do all this complicated stuff but still "jack;" you can still feel the heartbeat of what they're doing. (Harper 2013)

One might argue that in "Music and Dance of Ghana," the pieces taught are routines in a sense; they are the same every time. However, the intent behind teaching in this manner seems to be different; students are given more time to learn the movements, they are the same over years, and were pre-meditated in a traditional context. A routine as it is taught in house may be completed in one class period and is taught so fast that only those who are extremely "body literate" and trained in "catching routines" can learn them in that time. These routines must be learned "on the spot" and may never be repeated during the quarter or in another context besides that class, that day. Violet Zephyr acknowledged the "advanced" nature of being able to learn



choreography spontaneously yet noted that it is not superior to drilling the rhythms and learning to improvise:

Routines shouldn't be the reason for you to want to train more. Routines are one part of dancing. They are a different way to think about the movements. I think you're really going to find who you are with your freestyle. I feel that he's not going to do that because of the people who's taking the class. A lot of the people that are in there are not trying to learn to dance, they're just trying to boost up their GPA. I'm sure he wants to teach us more stuff. But even though it's an advanced class, not everyone really gets the essence of it. Being able to get a routine is one thing, and being able to freestyle is a different thing. Just because when you go to a club, doing a routine is not really being a moment. When you just listen to the music, even if you don't know the song and you connect to the musicality of it, you're really going somewhere. (Ignacio 2013)

Sometimes, Professor Harris improvises a routine on the spot, and the students are challenged to learn it then and there. One advantage to this type of teaching is that students are tested on their ability to pay attention. It is also an exercise in self-confidence, as students must be willing to continue drilling the routine even if there are parts they have not yet learned "in their body."

Ultimately, there is value both in learning the rhythms, in practicing them across the floor, which requires students to move with the rhythms, and perhaps in the choreography as well, which serves as a testing ground for how well one has learned the individual movements and can recall them in their own bodies:

Learning choreography was really fun too, but going across the floor was my favorite part because you could see people playing with the *riddims* that we'd learned and adjusting them to fit their own body. Potted buree; for me, it was the easiest rhythm that we'd learned, in doing it over and over across the floor. In the beginning it wasn't a hard rhythm for me, and I was doing it at the end, but at the end I had learned something deeper about it but the way it works in my own body is a little bit different from the person next to me....and be transferred on to different bodies...And that was interesting to me, that something that from the outside looks so simple, could be done in so many different ways. That's also what's exciting to me about "street dance." You should find your own rhythm and your own way of describing it. And it was exciting to me to actually see that. It looked different each time. (Danza 2013)

As indicated in the field notes above, a major part of the class, and perhaps any such class that is peopled by competitive dancers, is being willing to appear vulnerable before one's community of classmates and the professor. While Whitehouse emphasizes the importance of body awareness,

Harris notes that body consciousness can inhibit students from learning the movements, particularly during the drills, movement across the floor:

People are worried about being embarrassed; it's male and female mix, which is why I talk openly about sex. But this is the time you *wanna* look bad. A lot of the communication that's happening is gender-driven. It's not culture-specific. The idea of their culture by which they grew up with their parents. Facing down all the time, when your chest is pulled up...physical makeup. A lot of women who are top heavy are conscious of that, which holds them back from the movement. (Harris 2013)

Rennie Harris considers it his duty to check egos:

Yeah, that's the hard thing; in front of everybody. I try to help people by laughing at everybody. They'll be strong and wrong about it across the floor and then their body is doing it completely wrong. So I think it's just a matter of them growing...and how to translate that into movement. Dynamics going on; who is more confident and think they have it; the ego is stopping them from getting the movement. (Harris 2013)

Aminah asserted that, although her favorite part of the class is the rhythms, she feels that the floor work, while important, is a shortcoming of hers:

It's the constant moving. Drilling rhythms to the four walls...doing different steps. The steps themselves force you to stay on your toes and use your whole body. I see a very large advantage in that because it forces you to keep your stamina up if you're in other styles of dance. And it teaches you to listen to the music more. You do have to take care of your body though. The most challenging aspect is stamina. Keeping that up, and the floor work; I'm not comfortable with floor work; I'm not strong enough for floor work. (Todd 2013)

*Play Through the Pain: On Healing From Injury (What Doesn't Kill You Builds Your Flow)*

Harris spoke extemporaneously to the class about the early days of hip hop, in which moves were conceived in a manner that often involved physical injury. For example, when trying to execute an acrobatic breakdance movement, if a dancer hit his head, he would have to keep doing the movement in the same way until he eventually developed a method for executing the movement more safely. Through such anecdotes, Harris imparted an important lesson: while injury is sometimes difficult to avoid, such "accidents" can also be transformative and productive. Many of the informants' responses regarding injury were metaphorical and spoke to larger themes than just the physical experience, reflecting the idea that surrender is necessary in

life as well as in dance, proving Harris right when he claims time and time again that dance *is* life.

I don't think, in hip hop, you think about things consciously in a kinesthetic way. People figure out how their body works. And when you know how your anatomy works, you're a better dancer. It's just like being an athlete. Not everything applies to everybody, but it depends upon your make-up. If a person can figure out how he or she...on how to do it that safely. And so everyone's approach is different because everyone's weight is different. Everyone's height is different. So you can't assume that just because we all have the same ligament, we can all approach it the same way from a muscular theoretical based place. Where do you stand—the inside or outside of your foot; all those are specific to each individual, so in order for us to approach them safely, we need to understand where our weight is. And I think what causes the injury is that people muscle through it; we don't think about it first. Specifically in hip hop because street dance, what's the body doing, how is it aligning to do this particular movement. (Harris 2013)

Gracie's supposition about injury among dancers highlights the flaw of becoming too accustomed to learning choreography:

The whole thing about injuries too is that, it makes me think about this theory I've been developing for awhile. I feel that dancers, because they follow direction all the time, they're really individuals but when you get in the studio and you're in someone's choreography, you're basically doing what they want you to do. You're following direction. And we learn how to follow direction, really quickly. We learn how to memorize everything that you said, we learn how to watch every minute detail, so we're really good at executing something that someone else wants us to do. And I think that becomes a pattern in the sense that when we are injured, we just keep going. Because we think, well that's the way a choreographer wants it. And I'm coming to realize; okay, that's true, but you also have to take care of your body. Okay, well; that's the way they taught it, but also are you going to keep doing it and hurting yourself; you know, you have to figure out a way that works for you, or otherwise you're going to keep hurting yourself. you have to figure out what works for you as well as incorporating what other people want. It's a balance. It's not just "Okay, GO; do everything the choreographer wants you do. You know what I mean? (Danza 2013)

One graduate student in House, who is in his forties, mused about how he was able to squat all the way down in one movement that I had decided not to even try, feeling intimidated just by the *looks* of the move: "I hurt myself trying to execute that move in the last class, and I was sore for three days" (Informal anonymous interview, 2013). Racy also discusses the importance of prevention in preparing the artist to acquire *saltanah*, a term which he describes as an ecstatic state achieved by artists in Middle Eastern performing traditions: "Physically, the musician must be rested, comfortable, and in good health" (2004: 129). Gracie talked at length about

experiencing injury:

It's been a hard thing for me, for sure. I mean, I have had injuries, and I've tried everything. I've taken time off, I've tried pushing through it...I've done physical therapy; you know, just as a dancer, at a certain point, you do sustain injuries, and it does happen. The first time it happened to me, I was scared to death and thought I would never dance again. It was very traumatic. And then I learned that this is just part of pushing your body physically; you're going to at some point have injuries and you have to learn how to deal with them. I think I'm at the point now where it's more about prevention, you know; you have to take good care of yourself; getting enough sleep, eating well, stretching, so that you don't get to that point. And when you do have an injury, I feel like I'm not so dramatic about it now. And actually; I mean, it does suck; like a lot; it's hard, and it makes you dance not like you would want to, but I think there's something humbling about it because it makes you figure out other ways to move your body and it makes you really, really appreciative of your body and the things that you *can* do with it. Because when you're injured and you come *back* from that, you're stronger, cause you're like, that was crazy, I never want to go through that again. And you come back really strong, you know? I think it can actually teach you a lesson. But it's hard; I mean, you just have to keep dancing. And sometimes you have a show, and it hurts, and you just keep going. That's not an ideal situation, but if they had free health care for dancers, I'd be on it (laughs)! (Danza 2013)

Mary Whitehouse's theory of authentic movement is key here because the dance that occurs in House, a rehearsal of creatively designed movement reflecting the experiences of African American urban youth, provokes and inspires change within the mind, heart, and, thus, attitude of the individual according to the interview data. Thus, as movement reveals deep-seated feelings that the individual may or may not be consciously aware of, it is a process of self-discovery and regaining of clarity. Therein lies the potential to heal from injury even when one is still working through the physical pain. As Cydney, Gracie, and Benjamin affirm, the physical state very often reflects the mental state:

My knees are really bad and my ankle's messed up. So sometimes I wouldn't do stuff because the pain is legitimate. I'll go last [in line when "crossing the floor"] because I'm worried about how I'm gonna look or whatever. And then I'll snap out of it. That's kinda silly. You're already here. Just go for it. You just have to remember what you wanna get out of the class or out of the experience. (Harper 2013)

Mary Whitehouse espoused, "Body and psyche are a totality and the physical condition is analogous to the psychological one" (Whitehouse 2000a: 39). Thus, "the psyche changes in the course of working with the body" (39). "Usually for me, injury happens during fatigue. You are

physically spent to a point that you're out of control. Most injuries happen at the beginning or end of the day because you're fatigued. Muscles hold your joints in place" (Isreal 2013).

Similarly, "the body is the physical aspect of the personality and movement is the personality and movement is the personality made visible" (2000: 52). Allowing one's self to internalize a new movement, temporarily adopting a new body position, redistributing one's weight, or shifting one's balance can represent a powerful release of old ways of thinking and usher in the acceptance of new thought patterns and ideas. Here, the healing power of surrender is invoked. Accordingly, one student invoked spirituality through gaining "peace of mind" as a form of medicine that she uses to treat mental forms of injury:

Sickness comes from blockages of energy; so you can heal yourself with your mind. That is my belief. So what dancing does for my mind and my peace of mind is invaluable. Because there were times when I felt like I was losing my mind. And I had to turn to dance. I had to just dance. I had to just dance. And, you know, I came out of that. You know, a lot of people don't talk about that. I've gone through depression, just different things that have happened in my life. And I really feel like I've maintained my peace of mind because I have dance in my life. I don't know if I would have come through those things in the same way. (Banner 2013)

### *Communication Through Silence*

Silence among dancers during the class represents a yielding to music and to the unknown as the most important voices in a room. I call this the "hush" of worship. As spiritual seekers turn within to meditate, peering into the darkness of their closed eyes and willing their minds to silent the errant voices that dance inside their heads, a great hush takes over and ushers them into the upper room of their subconscious, which is a meeting place with a higher power. Even in the presence of music, this hush halts idle chatter and noise to allow for sound to fill the space. Even when a vocalist is added "to the mix," the silences of her first breath and the breaths that she takes between words and phrases are examples of the "hush" that happens, the space for silence that must be honored as a creative moment and sign of life. The dancer takes this hush to

another level, as he wordlessly adds another level to the music. Of course, silence is such a class is also invaluable because it allows communication between the instructor and the students to be clear. This is the sort of class where every student has to very actively participate and thus has to pay attention, putting his or her best foot forward, so to speak, and at least trying to follow the instructor's directions. If a student has not been paying attention, it is obvious and could be embarrassing for the student and dampen the vibe.<sup>47</sup> As the dancer organizes the sound into physical manifestation, the silence is both comfortable and comforting:

I've never been –I've always been comfortable enough to just speak my mind; I never really thought of myself as really shy like that. I'm definitely a shy person at times but I've always been good at hiding it. I've just always been that person who didn't have a whole lot to say, I'll say what I have to say, but if I don't have anything to say, I don't say anything. To be a rapper or singer, I think you need to be a vocal person. And that's why I was attracted to dance and even just producing music, because I can express myself without saying anything. And I'm pretty down with that. Especially with dance, when people incorporate vocal performance into it, whether it be singing or spoken word. Maybe down the line, it would be pretty cool to experiment with that. (Harper 2013)

Such examples reveal that movement is “a kind of non-verbal language” that reveals our deepest feelings to ourselves (Whitehouse 2000a:37). “For me, it's a way for me to express myself rather than just talking. I express myself easily when I'm dancing. It's in my soul; I love dancing; I've been dancing since I was listening. And then listening to different types of music, you're constantly moving” (Todd 2013). Whitehouse notes that Western culture is “highly verbal” and does not call for sensitivity to “gesture and movement” (Whitehouse 2000a:34). “We don't do a lot of talking in that class. It's all happening though; communication, body language... There's not a lot of talking but there's so much being said. Rennie can talk but

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<sup>47</sup> “Vibe carries a culture-specific meaning as a term of African American Vernacular English that refers to both energy and atmosphere” (Fikentscher 2000: 81-82).

chooses not to” (Danza 2013).<sup>48</sup> Mary Whitehouse notes that as children, before we can talk, our movements speak for us (2000a:34). Gracie’s experience choreographing a piece based on house movements that she had learned in Harris’ class provided catharsis and confirmed her own belief that movement is healing and provides a mode of communication that transcends speech:

I learned when putting the piece together [that] I could speak with my body in a way that I could not talk about with my mouth, in a language that makes sense to me. And I’m a pretty articulate person. I was able to say things that I couldn’t say to people, and articulate things through my body that I didn’t want to say and wasn’t able to say aloud. So I absolutely believe in the healing power of the arts, and especially of dance. That’s something that I really support. (Danza 2013)

Victor Turner discusses the role of silence among initiates who are undergoing rites of passage, citing characteristics like submissiveness and silence as common as they “have to submit to an authority that is nothing less than that of the total community” (1969: 99). Communication in the silence allows the spirituality of the experience of dancing in sync in the liminal setting to take over:

The most healing for me comes from the times when nobody’s talking for two hours straight, and everybody’s just moving their bodies, and everybody’s sweaty and tired and just pushing your body to that level where sometimes you don’t even *know* what you’re doing. It’s on this spiritual level where your body just takes over. And there’s a lot of healing in that. (Danza 2013)

In a nod to the importance of community in building a sense of self-love (and thus self-knowledge), Whitehouse points to the power or recognizing the Other as Self. “We assume that what we are responding to exists objectively, separate from ourselves” (Whitehouse 2000e: 63). Thus, one sees reflections of him/herself in another. “If we can discover even a little bit of what seems to belong to the other person and recognize it for our own, by that much have we retrieved part of the contents projected, part of ourselves” (Ibid.).

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<sup>48</sup> Like Ladzekpo, Harris is known for his storytelling abilities, in which he imparts life lessons and philosophies on dance and life in general, tickling the class on a daily basis during breathers. Benjamin and Gracie both noted, however, that Harris chooses when to talk, often allowing students to silently work through the movements and letting the music take over.

Aminah is a physics major and tap dancer who comes from Los Angeles. She performed professionally as a child tap dancer for Michael Jackson and gospel group Mary Mary on an awards show, has continued dancing and recently won an award that will send her to a tap dance workshop in Brazil. In her future, she sees herself continuing to teach, developing tappers into better teachers, create projects with other professional tap dancers, and put more of who she is into her dancing, including grooving to soul music from the late 90's to the early 2000s. Aminah has been dancing since she was two years old:

I was first exposed to mainly tap and ballet. I was probably around 7 when I learned jazz, modern, hip hop. Tap is my main genre. I didn't come in dancing. When I applied, I wasn't dancing at the time. I was more of a dance major. I wanted something to balance my courses so I took a dance class. I learned about house from some friends, from Benjamin. And then seeing Cydney Banner when she came and taught here. She subbed one of Rennie's classes for a whole quarter and taught us history of hip hop. Not everyone talked to everyone, but everyone seemed to enjoy it. So it was a nice vibe. (Todd 2013)

Aminah likened house to the cipher culture of tap dance, in which tappers quote each other's steps (while adding their own unique style or perspective to them), and communicating through the dance using body language, which she said can help her to know how a person is feeling at the moment and how she should approach that person. "My personality dictates how I attack a step compared to another girl in the same group" (Todd 2013). Further, "Rhythmically, tap will make you wanna just start clappin' beats and stuff like that" (2013). Aminah's statements reflect Whitehouse's theory, "The body is the physical aspect of the personality and movement is the personality and movement is the personality made visible" (Whitehouse 2000c:52). The sharing that occurs in the cipher, while providing a sense of transcendence and catharsis, also provides knowledge of self, in a very immediate manner:

It brings another perspective on the world and people and you can find yourself through dance. It brings comfort definitely. A specific example would be here, when I first came to tap, it forces me to be more courageous and more open to sharing. Even within different styles of dancing just



the way you attack a step or something. Depending on who you are, you may attack a dance differently. It helps me understand why I attack a step a certain way. (Todd 2013)

Aminah further illuminated the relationship between tap and house movement:

I guess it would be just the rhythm patterns that are done in house, specifically in steps involving using your heels, and fast movements, that always require that you come back on the One. As long as you know where the one is. We always preach in tap dance, oh know where the One is. Know where the downbeat is. Know where the next phrase is. Even taking Rennie's class, I know he mentioned something about not caring where the phrasing is, but it would throw me off, learning a step and then not completing the phrase of the music. Like we would finish in the six bar and start over. But yeah, the relationship between tap and house is definitely the footwork, the rhythm patterns, the one, and even with house although you're not making a sound, you're still just doing a rhythm pattern. And if you had taps on, you would be making a tap sound. (Todd 2013)

As professional tap dancers, Aminah and Benjamin speak of house as a new frontier of sorts, which is totally informed by their foundational understanding of dance and its vocabulary and rhythmic textures. This adds an intensity of movement because they are already literate in the language of house and bring their style and relationship to music *to* house:

As I really started learning about the house footwork; it's just like tap but it's making rhythms with the body, which allows me to express myself musically. That's what dance is supposed to be about. There are just different elements of each style that can take your attention away from that. House is funky, in the sense that it just is what it is. With ballet, you need all this other stuff; whether it's lighting or costumes. (Harper 2013)

Tap dancer Benjamin trained at Debbie Allen Dance Studio, commuting from Long Beach, California, all throughout high school since sixth grade. He notes that, because he trained in an academy, he learned to do all sorts of dance technique, including jazz, ballet, and African.

Benjamin also discussed understanding house as a vibe or feeling:

Taking Rennie's hip hop history class and seeing different house dancers from around the world, and then seeing Rennie's style and just learning that, and learning it in a way to where after Rennie left, I would be able to continue that process, I was very excited about that, just being given that foundation of the house vocabulary and the knowledge behind some of the movement. I could be in my room or in the studio by myself; I don't even have to be with other dancers. He does other styles of dance, but you can see it cause it's the feeling. Even like Rennie was saying, you can take breaking movement, I can take tap, I can take the little African that I remember, and try to play with that in terms of keeping the house feeling, and even being able to understand the feeling of house, what the essence of house is. (Harper 2013)

As dance scholar Omofolabi Ajayi notes, “The potency of dance in communication is further enhanced by the fact that it functions as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, codifying experience in several channels simultaneously. Dance conveys messages through the visual, aural, olfactory, tactile, proxemics, and kinesthetic channels” (1998: 22). Thus, although the dancer is not speaking, the music speaks and the body speaks in myriad ways, while conditioning the individual in myriad ways, all combining to heal him or her and simultaneously influencing those who are part of the community and those who are receiving the performance of the individual and of the class. “If the creative energy is given any chance to be displayed through the body or the psyche, this in itself is healing” (Sullwold 1995:46).

#### Mentorship: Dance Professor as Therapist

“A word about what this way of working with the body requires. There is necessarily an attitude of inner openness, a kind of capacity for listening to one’s self that I would call honesty. It is made possible only by concentration and patience.”

-Mary Whitehouse (Whitehouse 2000b:49)

Dance therapy founder Mary Whitehouse considered herself to be “an artist” and “never saw herself as a therapist” but as someone who would allow the movement process to happen in a creative way, thus bringing healing energy to whatever issues were there (Sullwold 1995: 47). She trusted that the body would essentially know how to heal itself, given the right circumstances” (1995:46). As a facilitator, Mary Whitehouse created a healing environment and provided a healing space for those in need of self-awareness, self-expression, and self-love.

#### *Professional Life: The Economics of Dance as a Spiritual Vocation*

As evidenced by ethnomusicologist Alex Perullo, performance can be healing in itself. However, many dancers put themselves and their bodies through incredible strain in order to maintain a youthful countenance, including heavy dieting and training. Perhaps this environment

pushed Mary Whitehouse to accentuate the positive potential for movement to help people work through their issues and be psychologically healthier. Whitehouse discusses her departure from the world of professional dance into the world of dance therapy as a willful letting go of naiveté regarding dance as a healing agent:

I had outgrown that marvelous and simple-minded missionary zeal associated with an absolute conviction that dance, and modern dance in particular, would transform the world—that if everyone knew about and participated in dance, all the ills of Man could be healed. [...] I made the transition into the relative calm and security of college teaching. (Whitehouse 2000d:58)

Rennie Harris echoed a similar sentiment regarding the commodification of street dance in the context of the academy:

[Hip hop] is supposed to be freestyle. Now some people are upset that it's codified. But it's the evolution of it. It's gonna *be* codified, the more people wanna learn it but they don't wanna learn it in context. They wanna learn it outside of the context. So then it becomes a matter of economics. "I need to make money, I can teach this house class. If I want to make money, I'm gonna teach it." Make money, or be true; don't teach it, tell 'em to go to the club. Then you see all your friends teaching the House class, getting paid, making money, and you ain't doing shit. It's like fuck it, I'm gonna teach it, cause I got bills. It's about economics a lot of times. That's what shifts what we know as house and hip hop and locking and popping; it's economics. People just start to do it, and teach, because someone was willing to pay them to do it. For whatever little knowledge they have. And you honestly can't be mad at people for wanting to survive. (Nguyen 2010)

Whitehouse exchanged the exclusivity, competition, elitism, and bodily and mental stress of modern dance for an inclusive emphasis on movement for mental health's sake and for deeper understanding of the self.

As I left dance, and I did leave it, it was not in order to do something else, find another profession, but in response to an urgent need to go beyond assumptions implicit in 'being a dancer.' It became a search for a different understanding of dance and of my commitment to it. (Whitehouse 2000d: 58)

Whitehouse felt that modern dance was "dead" but could be revived with a restructuring of purpose, in which movement could be used to bring meaning to the lives of all people, not just dancers. Whitehouse envisioned "analysis," or academic research, as a means to "combine the artistic and the human meaning" (Lewis 2007:75). Many artists, however, are so devoted to

movement that they cannot envision leaving the field entirely, viewing it as their means of daily healing. Dancer Cydney Banner teaches and choreographs after dancing professionally in companies such as Rennie Harris Pure Movement and the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre:

I've never done anything else as a career. I've had jobs here, I've waitressed, what not. For the most part, I've lived my entire career as a dancer/choreographer. And...it's not for the faint of heart. It can be very brutal; at times you question why you made that choice. But then those times where it reveals to you why you made the choice, out shadows those times that are not so great, you know. (Banner 2013)

Like *tarab* musicians of the Arab world, “The musicians’ attitudes, their work patterns, and the ways in which they learn their skills have been reflexive of broader social, economic, and political structures” while “the artists’ careers have become closely linked to the economic networks, technological media, and modes of mass consumption,” including “musical film,” radio, and studio production to fuel their livelihoods (Racy 2004: 191).

“There are a lot of people walking around afraid of being themselves. And that’s the amazing thing about being an artist. It can be rewarding and it can be financially rewarding so far depending on how you navigate through it” (Banner 2013). Harris describes his purpose for dance and his opinion on why students take his class:

Just that: to heal. And I think it’s more of a healing of the soul, more or less. Whether it’s sports or walking, movement itself releases the tensions of the day to day. Aerobically, a lot of people take dance cause they want to have fun. It’s almost like a formal fun. Their official way to have fun and release, definitely has a strong healing property. (Harris 2013)

Benjamin corroborates Harris’ theory:

I feel like I could be an example of [healing]. Just even in using my passion for dance. I wouldn’t have gone to house if I wasn’t feeling it. As much as I love Rennie, I would have just let him know what was going on and I would have dropped the class. But I looked forward to House; a lot of times, house would be the highlight of my day. I’d be like, I’m looking forward to these two classes this week. It’s a combination of the music; a lot of the movement is not something that’s impossible for your body to do. (Harper 2013)

## Community

Although there is less time for students in “House” to get to know each other or interact than there is in “Music and Dance of Ghana” due to the intense focus upon dance (with much less talk, contextualization or explanation of movements by the professor), and with no breaks during class, an atmosphere of liminality still pervades the classroom experience that brings students together even if in an imagined sense.<sup>49</sup> In “C'mon to My House”: Underground-House Dancing,” dance historian Sally Sommer links her research to that of anthropologist Victor Turner to explain the power of house: “Several aspects of Turner’s ‘*communitas*’ apply to the nature of club gatherings and the community of dancers. The phenomenon of Underground-House dance clubs and dance practices represents unique, contemporary, ‘liminoid’ rites of passage, with vivid stages of separation and liminality” (2001:72). This is interesting when considering the very unique classroom in which “House” takes place: the high-tech, picturesque Kaufman Garden Theatre, which is set apart geographically from the rest of Kaufman Hall. The dance floor is also a stage that opens up into a grassy courtyard. Professor Harris is guardian of the space, as he plays the dual roles of wise elder/instructor and “deejay,” orchestrator of the musical selections and, thus, of the dancers’ responses.

Anthropologist Victor Turner re-introduced the concept of liminality into anthropological discourse, taken from folklorist Arnold Van-Gennep's tripartite model of the rite of passage. Turner approached the study of culture as a constant struggle between structure and anti-structure. Interestingly, Rennie Harris also discusses the role of culture when teaching a bi-

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<sup>49</sup> Unlike in “Music and Dance of Ghana,” “Advanced Hip Hop” occurred on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the early afternoons, so most students had to rush off to their next classes or to eat lunch and thus could not stay afterward to socialize. Further, because there is not that much official collaboration between students, they were not obliged to interact the way that the “Ghana” students were.

annual course, “Hip Hop Dance History,” in which he notes on the syllabus: “Structure is a guideline, not a GOD-line” (2012:4). In other words, although structure is important, intuition should take precedence in dance and in life. Hip hop, in its charge to speak truth to power, would, in Harris’ eyes, be anti-structure, and was created as a force to be used against structural inequities of society. Van Gennep described the process of transitioning from a lower social status to a higher one in three stages: separation or disengagement, in which the individual is symbolically removed from society and his former identity; the liminal stage in which the individual is secluded from society and is under constant supervision by a wise elder; and the reunion, or post-liminal stage in which the individual is reintegrated into society with his or her new status (Turner 1969: 94). The rites of passage model can readily be applied to both “Music and Dance of Ghana” and “Advanced Hip Hop,” outlining the process of taking the class and eventually finishing the class. More broadly, it could be applied to the college experience as well, of leaving home, having an intensive experience with peers under the direction of instructors whom they must obey “implicitly,” (Ibid.) and then graduating and returning to one’s place of origin as a more mature person, as an adult. A sense of *communitas* is built during the second phase of Van Gennep’s process, the liminal phase. Turner notes that during this period of liminality, individuals who are undergoing the initiation are in a state of being constantly humbled, and are very vulnerable, or “near-naked” (1969: 95). In this setting, the “neophytes” “tend to develop intense comradeship and egalitarianism” (96). As “liminal entities,” they are in the dark, seen as possessing nothing while the instructors impart the knowledge that they need in order to progress to the next level of their own becoming-ness, so to speak (94). As students discussed ethnicity and socialization as communal aspects of their experience in “Advanced Hip

Hop,” Turner’s themes resound, although students also seem to find a sense of empowerment through the communal aspects of their “degradation” for the sake of dance.

### *Ethnicity*

For some students, ethnicity gave a sense of community that informed the background that they brought to house. Both dancers Benjamin and Aminah brought their prior knowledge of tap and other black movement styles such as African dance and hip hop into the class, creating a sense of kinship within the larger class community due to their shared movement vocabulary and relationship to the music. Violet Zephyr claimed a strong connection to house because of its Latin rhythms and steps in addition to the role of Latinos in founding early hip hop dance. As Racy notes, “Regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds the performers and their audiences must be connected to the music’s indigenous essence” (2004:126). This type of connection to the music and its origins greatly heightens students’ likelihood of truly surrendering in the dance. “The tarab experience per se has an orientation that is unmistakably urban” (Racy 2004:197). Ethnomusicologist Marina Roseman talks at length about indigenous cultures’ “musical mixes” which utilize “otherwise incomprehensible juxtapositions” of “multiple cultural codes” and “rhythmic pulsation” (Roseman 1996: 263). Indeed, the ties between Latin American music and house are strong:

There was salsa, and my first style was samba and mambo; mambo was an inspiration to house. That movement and even the rhythms of the maracas and the drums, everything really resonated with me. And being that all the footwork, *folklorico* too, I could see the connections. That even made me more confident to do it. Even though it’s not written in the books. Rennie says it all the time; this is a dance but it doesn’t mean it wasn’t inspired by other dance forms. And I see it and I feel it, and that really made me wanna stick with it even more. Same thing with Aztec dancing. There are so many connections to house because it’s the rhythm. The rhythm is just light, period. (Ignacio 2013)

The indigenous connection to house is also palpable due to the movement styles, some of which are taken directly from Native American dance (according to local house instructor Amir Isreal)

and house/hip hop dance pioneers who ascribed to indigenous ideologies and creeds. Indigenous movement in an urban space signifies the concept that house can be done in the grass or on a dance floor, to live or recorded music. Omofalabi Ajayi speaks to the differences in energy that are brought to dance based upon the space in which it takes place, noting the following:

Dance is a composite form of body attitude through which ordinary daily actions have been spatially re-arranged and encoded to convey new sets of information. Fundamental to this new structural arrangement are ‘energy’ (or force), ‘space,’ and ‘rhythm.’ (Ajayi 1998: 18)

Violet Zephyr notes, “It’s even better when you do it to live music because of the energy; you’re getting the energy; the musicians and dancers are inspired by one another” (Ignacio 2013).

Aminah, a class alumna and professional tap dancer, described Harris’ class as an oasis in the veritable cultural desert of UCLA that many “underrepresented” students perceive:

My relationship with my ethnicity is really strong. The history of people of African descent. I grew up in an Afrikan spiritual center. I feel like it’s gotten stronger since I’ve been at UCLA. Especially coming from a predominantly black high school, it was interesting getting all the stares [when I first came to UCLA]. It was interesting. And I grew up doing other activities, but just to constantly be in an environment where you’re not the majority, everywhere you go, it does take a toll. Sometimes, yeah, I am stared at. Specifically in the science stuff, there were maybe only five black people. I am the only black girl graduating in the physics department. But I just try not to let it put me down. My main support is my family and the lessons that they taught me, to stay strong. . .I was able to find friends through dance, rather than just going to class and straight to my dorms. It’s not necessarily hostile but uncomfortable. (Todd 2013)

Violet Zephyr discussed her ethnic identity as a Latina as giving her a deep connection to house, while her gender also inspires her to shine as a hip hop and house dancer:

Well, I’m Latina; I’m Mexican. And just, being a female in hip hop period and being Latina is not like a minority. . .Latinos and blacks had a lot to bring into the table. And it’s not a lot of female hip hop dancers, but there is. And those that are, are top notch. Because women bring in a different dynamic. So seeing [her house instructor, Jackie] and knowing that she is Latina, that inspired me and I connected with that. “I’d rather dance than talk. I guess because I’m not confident with my English. . .I’m more confident speaking Spanish cause that’s my first language. My vocabulary is not fancy. Because there is a lack of female in hip hop, I wanna be an inspiration for other women to do it, bring something new. (Ignacio 2013)

### *Socialization*



Gracie, a transfer student who has been dancing “about fifteen years” felt welcomed by the house community in Los Angeles, after she moved here from San Francisco. She notes that Harris’ class created its own community in which all students worked hard even if they only came to “do cardio.”

I was introduced to the house scene through being in L.A., which is funny because it’s not a huge scene here. I mean it’s definitely here but it’s not like New York, where there are House clubs everywhere. But, I was introduced to it through being at UCLA so I feel like I gained a big community there, but definitely it’s growing but I don’t think it’s still big yet. There’s a lot of opportunities at the same time but that’s a good thing because it hasn’t gone mainstream yet. (Danza 2013)

Cydney Banner also spoke of the unspoken bond that is created among individuals who dance together, creating a communal, familial feeling, which she found very characteristic of the New York House scene:

For me, when I was introduced to house...you know, I’m from L.A. We don’t really have house culture out here. People say house out here, but you think “techno,” “electro,” or, you know, “rave” music, and it’s not that. It’s not any of that. So I came from L.A., I went to Philly. I had been to the East Coast before, my family’s from the East Coast; but I had not experienced house music and house culture. So it was something that at first was completely foreign (the steps) but the feeling of it immediately was something that I connected with. Because the people I saw dancing it, were dancing it with their soul. And to me that was, it was pure, so it spoke to me. And then I became interested in it, started studying it, going to classes. But the way I really learned it was from going to clubs. (Banner 2013)

As Benjamin was transitioning from his house background, a fellow dance major from the class taught him house movements:

Harry would show me a little bit of what he knew, but when I first met him he didn’t know that much about house. That just shows you, time is really everything. Even me, just picking up knowledge from taking peoples’ classes and the few times I’ve gone to Open House, just those steps and little vocabularies that we learn in that little one class or that one session; you know, that can carry you quite a ways, if you use it a certain way. Or if you know how to improvise or at least practice that kind of stuff. (Harper 2013)

Socialization was also cited as a factor in seeking a dance class such as “Advanced Hip Hop,” which became a community of sorts for all of the students interviewed, such as “Violet:”

Dancing has always been that for me. Especially because when I started dancing I didn't have any friends and I was really bullied in middle school and elementary school. And when I started dancing, I made friends. They were like, 'Ooh, she can dance...' There was this point when it really helped me get over...my grandparents passed away. And I remember dancing really being there for me. Because it was just me and the music and just the floor. Yeah. I would say I was able to reflect a lot. And it doesn't have to be death; it could be stress that comes from school. I do worry about my future; and sometimes it's best to let go and not think about that. I really do feel that dance is my therapy. Every time I walk in the room to dance, I walk out feeling so pure and just ready to do anything, stress free, it's amazing. I don't know what I would do without it. It's like when you breathe. You realize that you're breathing, and that feeling is so...it's like, "Okay, I'm breathing. Dancing is my breath, I feel. If I realize that I'm dancing, it's the most purifying, amazing feeling." (Ignacio 2013)

Benjamin noted that many of the students in "Advanced Hip Hop" entered the class because they were on hip hop dance teams in the UCLA community outside of the class, and came to learn with their friends (Harper 2013). Several students also noted that, as dancers, they felt little use for school; Harris' class offered a respite for that sentiment:

It's just a title. That's all it is. It is good to have a backup. But why am I looking so much into the future when I could be doing just this, ya know, dance? Sometimes I wish I had chosen a different path, but it has taught me a lot. I'm here for a reason. The arts are actually teaching your kids the most important things about being here; finding out who you are and what it is you want to be. (Ignacio 2013)

One interesting point about the above response as well as the one below is that they reflect the views of students of color at UCLA, who are considered "underrepresented" at this point in the university's history. The fact that they are not zealous about their academic experience but found a home in the dance department is telling. Further, the idea that Harris' class provides a respite from the pressures of the university also bespeaks the importance of having "culture bearer" performers on campus. Lack of motivation and having to adjust to a different style of living, learning, and—well, *dancing*, just makes matriculation more challenging for some.

Benjamin speaks on his drive and sources of inspiration while in college:

A lot of good has come from my time here at UCLA but at first I think it led to me losing some of my passion and it was hard to work through that. So that's a reason why I really enjoyed Rennie's class, because I wasn't moving like that a lot here. And you have to seek outside of UCLA for that. I didn't really want to go to college, but I was like, "If I'm gonna go, what am I gonna

study?" It would either be dance or math. I didn't like math in high school, but I was good at it. I didn't study that much but I would do well in the class. I did well enough without studying, but I never nurtured that potential. I got here and saw I was in classes with cats who were passionate about math. I don't love math, so why would I study that? I thought I really would try a dance program because I was really interested in dance by the time I finished high school. My mom has lupus, so that was one reason I didn't really want to leave; it would be too far. But I stayed out here, and that's why I stayed with the tap, the tap dancing, just because it was so much easier to focus on that. (Harper 2013)

Gracie noted that she did not feel a strong sense of competition when learning House at UCLA, which created a nurturing environment in which to grow as a dancer and as a person:

I feel like the other studios I had been to; *man*, people were so competitive, and were really superficial, fake, I wanna be a diva...and I was really turned off. So I was very happy to find a home at UCLA where people were competitive in a way that makes sense to me; like competitive to yourself almost. I wanna be better than I was yesterday, not necessarily better than the person next to me. (Danza 2013)

In fact, Gracie's favorite part about house is:

Just the feeling of community. You know, I could see somebody from the class; I could not even know their name, but I recognize them from being in class together, and I just smile. I'm like, "Oh shit, we were in that together. Bustin' our a\*\* every Tuesday and Thursday." And I think there's something really powerful about having that community. It's like even if you don't know them, you know something very deep about them from having watched them learn and grow. And that's valuable to me. (Danza 2013)

Benjamin reiterated the value of community building within house as a diasporic street dance genre, descended from African movement:

With a lot of the classical styles, when you're being trained, you're being taught a specific way of understanding how to receive the information. And I know that a lot of the hip-hop oriented styles are not approached from that way. When you're learning a step, you're not learning with counts. It's more about the communal experience...you don't have to separate yourself in a way that I feel people do in other styles. (Harper 2013)

Like Professor Ladzekpo, Harris watches and observes students, giving basic instructions and then allowing students to interpret them. Violet Zephyr related Harris to iconic film character "Mr. Miyagi," a karate student's *sensei* or mentor:

I really like his class. His approach, his way of teaching is really different from other people I've taken from. He has so much knowledge. He's old. I feel like that's good because he's going to be watching you. Kind of like Mr. Miyagi in the Karate Kid. He didn't always do the movement, but he always watched him. Which is a great way to teach, in my opinion. (Ignacio 2013)

## Conclusion

This chapter has presented voices from “Advanced Hip Hop.” These students learned to heal themselves through dance under the intense tutelage of Harris. Their voices help us to understand how house music and dance open portals of soul healing unwittingly through the use of authentic movement. The mixture of genres present in house, added to its trance-inducing potential, meditative rhythm drilling, socialization and construction of self-awareness and body literacy while building a community of the healed and the healers, makes “Advanced Hip Hop” a powerful class and a potential oasis of transformation at UCLA. More than just a gathering place for dancers who know they will receive a good workout and a challenge, for some the class is a therapeutic experience that provides a familial feeling.

## CONCLUSION

My research provides proof that healing can and does happen, through music and dance, even in classroom contexts at UCLA. The two classes that I studied are not disparate; they are connected in their relationships to people of African descent and in various aspects of their function and style. Just as African rituals often involve hours of dancing to repetitive rhythms played on drums, African American rituals of club dancing involve hours of movement, through the night. This phenomenon is mirrored in “Advanced Hip Hop” and “Music and Dance of Ghana,” which includes three hours straight of dancing weekly on Thursday nights to traditional Ghanaian drumming, as occurred in “Music and Dance of Ghana,” provided an example of engaging indirectly in indigenous healing methods that are placed in a “contemporary” setting, the university classroom. As I examined these sorts of self-contained performances of liminality and communication with the unknown, within class contexts, the function is similar and the impact on students is similar as well. Moreover, there are literal links between the two genres studied in this dissertation; for instance, African music is often incorporated into house through dancers and through house mixes that incorporate digital samples of music made famous by the likes of Nigerian Afro-Beat pioneer Fela Kuti. Further, various diasporic styles of African dance are incorporated into house, as I have mentioned, such as capoeira, mambo, and salsa. Delving deeper into the intricacies of African ritual dance and finding connections between that art form and the growing phenomenon of electronic dance music, are ideas that will form the basis of future research.

During spring of 2013 I had an experience that changed the way I looked at the concept of dancing to relieve pain. The question of relieving physical pain had been at issue in the recesses of my mind because in a recent interview with a “house head,” I was admonished that

someone who has a toothache is not going to go out to dance class in a quest to feel better. However, after awakening with intense back pain one Sunday morning, following a weekend full of lifting heavy things, I happened upon a dance class that allowed me to heal in many ways, including physically.

I took a walk in a South Los Angeles park and found myself at its recreation center, where I heard the sounds of Marvin Gaye wafting through the air. An oasis! Upon looking inside, I was greeted by the excited laughter and energetic movements of about thirty African American women (and one man) between the ages of about fifty and seventy, moving in sync. Several of the women noticed me as I peeked inside while rubbing my back. They informed me that they were taking a line dancing class. “How much is it?” I asked. “Three dollars,” one woman replied. “That threw me off!” another woman said, as she missed her turn. They were doing the electric slide, a line dance known by many African Americans as a party staple in which *everyone*, young and old, would join in, and it is found typically at wedding receptions throughout the nation. At the song’s end, I heard a lot of excited chatter. I tiptoed into the ciphers, and was immediately welcomed and embraced. I was introduced to the class leader and secretary, signed in upon being informed that the first class would be free (so I could see if I liked it) and was ushered to the front of the class so I could have a first hand view of the instructor and learn the dances.

Moving my body in rhythm was soothing my pain. The first couple of times that we did the dance, I was learning it and committing it to memory. By the third time, I was adding my style to the dance, enjoying or studying the articulation of each movement. I was smiling and I felt very happy, and focused more on the movement and its feeling every time I felt a back spasm. A lady who had a visible scar from surgery around the bottom of her face walked over to

me confidently and warmly introduced herself. Some of the ladies I met were in their eighties. One older lady, slim and otherwise frail looking, wore a matching hat and gloves with her conservative, classic skirt and blouse outfit as she danced. Others wore spandex pants or other workout clothes. One lady had a Bluetooth cell phone accessory in her ear. Some of them looked so young to be considered “senior citizens.” I felt better after taking the dance class, and the women looked like the class was helping them to age gracefully.

To write on the subject of healing is to presuppose the existence of pain, suggesting the presence of an imbalance or dis-ease. The answer to whether there is a need for healing that can be satisfied by music and dance, however, became evident as I read more and more of the literature surrounding hip hop. The social conditions in which hip hop was birthed, as recounted in gripping and sordid detail by African American music journalist Nelson George in *Hip Hop America*, make evident the need for healing to occur on a *communal* level. To look at the Bronx, New York, in 1977 as George describes it or at Compton (Los Angeles), California, during the Reagan years as described in the tales told by “gangsta rap” group NWA (Niggaz With Attitude), would not inspire one to ponder whether pain, imbalance, or dis-ease was evident. Pain was obviously present, and statistics detailing homicide rates, numbers of incarcerated African American men, and the increasing presence of crack addicts in black communities testified to that. It was in this climate that hip hop was born. The dances that emerged from hip hop and house music told a story to complement the music.

The concept of healing has been written about from a number of disciplines and a variety of approaches. While scholars have discovered uses of African music and dance and even hip hop music and movement for the uses of music therapy, this particular perspective has not been explored in relation to college students receiving instruction in African descended musicking

practices. Further, the results of my research demonstrate that spirituality, self-knowledge, community, and mentorship are indicators of the occurrence of healing in university music and dance performance courses. This study set out to explore healing in several facets: its place in ethnomusicology, its role in African descended music making and dance, its existence in university instruction, and its role in the lives of college students. The dissertation answered the question, can university students experience healing through learning African descended music and dance in college courses. Based upon the results of my study, the answer is yes. Ladzekpo's actions as a mentor and as a wise elder instructor conveyed his convictions regarding the importance of music and dance in maintaining tradition and infusing joy into life by making music and dance a lifestyle, while Rennie Harris spoke to house music and dance being a form of "church." This perspective also conveys the role of the world music performance ensemble in UCLA's department of Ethnomusicology and potentially in the discipline as a whole. Thus, this dissertation adds to the small but growing body of literature on world music performance ensembles and Kobla Ladzekpo's celebrated body of work, particularly at UCLA.

Another goal of this dissertation was to take a snapshot, so to speak, of a specific time in UCLA's history. This particular period, the ten years that I was a graduate student at UCLA (2005-2015) represented the end of an era, as Kobla Ladzekpo retired in spring 2014 and Rennie Harris took a hiatus following his last class at UCLA in spring 2014. Thus, this study provides documentation of these classes that touched the lives of many over the years. This study has, indeed, provided an increased understanding and contextualization of the concept of healing not only from an ethnomusicological lens but from an overarching perspective that would contribute to any discipline in which student learning, pedagogy and instruction, and healing in the African diaspora are topics of interest. This dissertation also enhances the body of ethnomusicological



literature that examines healing and music therapy, by adding dance studies and dance/movement therapy to the academic dialogue occurring within the discipline.

This dissertation shines a light upon and restates the importance of the presence of individuals of culture bearers on the university campus while emphasizing the relevance of teaching the music and dance of Africa and its diaspora. Students of all colors need healing and, as evidenced by my work, students gain when artists of African descent teach their coping strategies for survival through the arts. This work has explored my fieldwork journey of participant observation in the classes that I felt most drawn to during my time as a graduate student at UCLA. I learned that these classes and the ensuing interaction with peers and mentorship from professors touched others' lives as well as mine.

**APPENDIX A**

**Survey, "Healing in Music and Dance of Ghana"**

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Male/Female? \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a UCLA Student? \_\_\_\_\_ Alum? \_\_\_\_\_ (If so, what year?)

If you are a current student, what is your classification? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your major/minor/concentration? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you find out about the Music and Dance of Ghana Ensemble?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Had you ever played an instrument before taking this class? If yes, please explain.  
\_\_\_\_\_

Had you ever danced professionally before taking this class? If yes, please explain.  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why are you taking the class? (Please check all that apply.)

To fulfill a course requirement (Which one?) \_\_\_\_\_

To exercise

To develop/ improve dance skills

To develop/ improve musical skills

To explore my interest in West African culture(s)

To explore the ties between African dance and my own indigenous heritage.

Other/Elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

How many quarters have you participated in the ensemble? \_\_\_\_\_

What was your primary activity in the ensemble?

(Dancer, singer, instrumentalist—what instrument) \_\_\_\_\_

What was your favorite part about participating in the ensemble? (Check one)

Learning the songs

Learning the dances

Learning the drumming

Meeting new people

Performing in shows

Other/Elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

What was your least favorite part about participating in the ensemble?

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**How has participation in the ensemble affected your life? (Check all that apply)**

**I made new friends.**

**I experienced a sense of family.**

**I am a better musician/ dancer.**

**I communicate more efficiently with those around me.**

**I am more culturally sensitive/ aware.**

**I am more confident/ outgoing.**

**I participated in a public performance for the first time in my life.**

**Other:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Had you ever been exposed to Ghanaian or West African culture before? \_\_\_\_\_**

**If yes, please explain.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you plan to continue studying Ghanaian culture/ West African music/dance in the future?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you plan to participate in this class again next year? Why/Why not? (If graduating, would you continue if you were still going to be enrolled at UCLA?)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Would you encourage someone else to take this class? Why/why not?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**What lessons from this class will you take with you as the academic year ends?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Additional Comments...*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Please indicate your willingness to be further interviewed about the healing aspects of dance and music in the context of the Ladzekpos' class on the roster coming around.*

**Thank you**

**APPENDIX B**

**Survey, “Healing in House: Advanced Hip Hop, Spring 2012”**

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_ Age:

Male /Female:

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Year In School:

Major/minor/concentration:

How did you find out about the course, “Advanced Hip Hop”?

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How many quarters have you taken this class? \_\_\_\_\_

Why are you taking *Advanced Hip Hop*?

- To improve my dance skills
- Training to dance professionally
- To gain “street cred”
- To get in shape
- To network with other dancers
- Because I enjoy it
- Other/Elaborate: Work on my old styles fundamentals, “I love house,” “It is a college course,” “requirement.”

How has participation in this class affected your life? (Check all that apply)

- I have made new friends.
- I have experienced a sense of family.
- I am a better dancer.
- I am a more competitive dancer.
- I communicate more efficiently with those around me.
- I am more culturally sensitive/ aware.
- I am more confident/ outgoing.
- I am in better shape than I was before taking the class.
- I learned about how life reflects dance and dance reflects life.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your original style of dance training and how many years trained?

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Do you dance professionally? Do you plan to dance professionally after graduating?

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Does dance have a spiritual purpose in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you (know how to) play a musical instrument? (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_

When did you first become interested in hip hop? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you study hip hop dance? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you plan to continue studying hip hop music/dance in the future? Why or why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the greatest, rate your interest in the following aspects of hip hop culture: Dance \_\_\_\_\_ Music \_\_\_\_\_ Fashion \_\_\_\_\_ Philosophy/Attitude \_\_\_\_\_ Cultural History \_\_\_\_\_

What three words describe your personal *experience of or relationship to* hip hop? \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

How did you first learn about “House?” \_\_\_\_\_

What is “House?” \_\_\_\_\_

What three words come to mind when asked to describe House dance and/or music?  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel there is a healing or spiritual aspect to House music/dance? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel like you can express yourself through dancing to House music? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of music is House music? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel a sense of freedom when you dance to House music? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel good when you leave this class? In what way?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What lessons from this class will you take with you as the academic year ends?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What was your favorite aspect of this class? \_\_\_\_\_

How effective is the professor’s teaching style in this class and why?  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Are you willing to be interviewed (individually) for Ethnomusicology PhD candidate Lara Rann’s dissertation on UCLA music and dance students’ journeys of healing through artistic expression? (Yes/No) \_\_\_\_\_*

## INTERVIEWS

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