**ARTE Commentary and Reflection Prompts**

*Most of the reflection prompts are imbedded in the verbal commentary in the video and in the written transcript below. Some additional prompts are included at the end of this document.*

**Introduction/Overview**

Hello! And welcome to *Dancing between Earth & Sky*, a live performance produced by the CSB/SJU Theater Department in May of 2019. My name is David DeBlieck and I teach dance in our department. I also directed the production. We are happy to provide this video version of Dancing between Earth & Sky with additional commentary from me to help you take a deeper dive into the dances and reflect upon your experience with the show.

The show itself is about an hour long and is comprised of seven individual dances. The dance styles featured include: aerial acrobatics, classical ballet, African-based modern, stepping and contemporary dance. In addition to my choreography, the show features work by two guest artists from the St Cloud area—Desiree Clark and Samantha Collen. The show also features work that was generated by the student performers in the show. A copy of the show’s program has been shared with this video so that you may see the titles for each piece as well as the names of the artists involved.

Two other shared resources you might find helpful are the Elements of Dance Organizer and the BASTE Analysis Tool. These documents were created by the Perpich Center for the Arts to help students analyze any dance on a movement level. Basically, this system breaks down the movement into 5 foundational elements—Body, Action, Space, Time and Energy, or BASTE. Observing, naming and reflecting upon details for these individual elements helps the viewer get a richer sense of the overall dance.

As you watch the first three dances in the show, see what you notice about how each of these elements are treated. What body parts are featured and what actions are they performing? Are the dancers scattered throughout the stage space or isolated in one area? Do they traverse the space with locomotor movements or do they remain more stationary with movements that are gestural in nature? How are rhythm and timing determined for each dance? Recorded music, live percussive sounds, moments of silence and stillness? And finally, what sort of energy or dynamic do the dances exude? The shared tools provide additional prompts for analyzing the elements and some vocabulary for naming your observations. Of course, none of the elements exists in isolation. Once you have gathered some details for how Body, Action, Space, Time and Energy are treated in the dance, consider how all the elements work together and inform one another.

One last thing to look for with the first three dances . . . you’ll see that I like to employ structural elements and props in my choreography. Consider how these elements influence how the dancers are able to use space or share their weight. Also consider the technical training the dancers went through to be able to navigate the various structures. Most of all, make sure to enjoy watching the dances and know that you can always go back to video to capture more detail. I’ll be back a little later in the show.

**David’s Choreography**

**Narration #2**

I’m really excited to share these next two dances in the show because they are by my dancer friends, and Desiree Clark and Samantha Collen. Residencies with each of these guest artists were supported by a grant from the Central Minnesota Arts Board. The first dance of this section was choreographed by Desiree Clark and is titled “Uraha, Ujasiri Rojo”, Swahili words meaning Joy, Courage and Soul. The dance begins with a blessing and invocation before launching into lively movement drawn from a West African dance aesthetic and the modern dance technique of Lester Horton. While working with a cast of CSB students, Desiree stressed an embodiment of the movements and a shared spirit of community and resilience.

The second dance is a classical ballet work that Samantha Collen learned while dancing professionally in Russia and then remounted with a cast of ballet dancers here at CSB/SJU. The dance is called “Les Sylphides” and is set to music by Frederic Chopin. It originally premiered in 1893 in St Petersburg Russia with later versions performed in the early 1900s. This 10 minute suite of shorter dances is a wonderful example of classic ballet vocabulary with an emphasis on an upright torso, precise form and rich musicality.

As you watch these two dances, consider how their movement styles and choreographic structures reflect their very different origins. Ballet began in the courts of Europe and was practiced daily by the aristocracy, including the King himself. The noble carriage of the dancers creates a feeling of elegant restraint and the upright dancing on the tips of the toes suggests a striving for ascension and connection with Divine order.

African dance comes from daily artistic expression by communities of people, often centered around rituals designed to benefit the community or tribe. The movement aesthetic reflects a deep connection to and reverence for the earth, exhibited by the solid stance of the barefoot dancers and a low center of gravity. The repetition of rhythms and movements reflects the cyclical nature of life,

and the circular formation at the end of the dance reveals a deep sense of shared community.

What other movement details reveal the values or beliefs of the cultures from which these dances originated?

**Desiree and Samantha’s Choreography**

**Narration #3**

As a dance educator, I am deeply committed to nurturing the creative voices and expressive capabilities of my students. I love mentoring young artists through the process of creating dances. This last section of the show features choreography that the student performers generated and composed themselves. The first dance is comprised of two short compositions by students in my Dance Studies class. These studies came from the final project in our class where students were asked to apply choreographic principles they had learned throughout the semester.

The final dance in the show was created by students with a passion for social justice. This group met throughout the semester to share their ideas and experiences about social justice and to work in small groups to generate movement to tell their stories. I helped to weave their dances into one cohesive whole. We also worked collectively to learn movement patterns from two dances of solidarity and resistance—stepping and Haitian dance. You will see patterns from each of these dance forms throughout the dance, most notably during the curtain call at the end.

You will also see the work of our student projection designer through the visual images on the screen during the dance. The “word splash” at the very end comes from the cast’s initial conversations about social justice and their hopes for a better world. Enjoy.

**Student Choreography**

**Additional Prompts for deeper reflection . . .**

What production elements are employed in each of the dances—lights, projections, set pieces or props? How do these elements enhance, intensify, contradict or impact the dance in some other way?

What dance engaged you the most, and what details of the choreography or production choices created this engaging experience?

Was there a particular performer who stood out to you or otherwise impressed you with their performance? What were they doing that grabbed your attention?

Many of the dances in this show are abstract in nature, leaving room for an audience member’s imagination to interpret meaning or “fill in the spaces” between more literal gestures and movements. What stories or images were running through your mind during one of the dances?