Appendix E - **UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM**
SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: Wayles E. Stapor

College: Arts & Sciences Department: Dance

Faculty Mentor: Melinda Brown

PROJECT TITLE: Legacy

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: Melinda E. Brown, Faculty Mentor

Date: 5/7/02

General Assessment - please provide a short paragraph that highlights the most significant features of the project.

Comments (Optional):

Legacy:

Exploring the origins of a name and the significance of inherited history in constructing an identity through the creation of an original dance work

Presented to
The University of Tennessee Honors Program
For the completion of my
Senior Honors Project

Presented by
Wayles Elizabeth Stapor
May 6, 2002

I decided to do something meaningful personally and professionally for my senior project. Consequently, the work had to be related to the field of dance, as I am becoming a professional dancer/choreographer. I know that this project has helped me more fully understand my profession. I also wanted to work with a subject matter that was deeply personal and significant. To this end, I chose to explore the subject of my matriarchal history on my father's side. I have always been interested in my Great grandmother and Grandmother whom I never met and shared a name. The stories of these women as passed down from the patriarchy in oral history shaped my life; in my understanding of my name, what it is to be a woman and what defines a "Wayles".

When I first began this project, I knew nothing of what it would ultimately entail. I think this is perhaps for the best, for if I had, I may not have undertaken such a goal. I must say though, that the completion of such a monumental piece of art was deeply personally and publicly satisfying. For the first time, I really knew what it was to be a dance maker, not just a choreographer or dancer. The distinction lies in the all-encompassing nature of producing a work not just presenting one. A choreographer in a show or a dancer simply concentrates on the creation and presentation, while a dance maker must also create publicity, costumes, venue, technical aspects of a show, etc... In the area of production, I learned the most professionally through my experience. It was most significant to me as a professional to have to deal with the daily reality of incessant details to

create. The artistic blinders to the world of incorruptible creation were removed and for the first time I truly knew that art was a business like any other with all the thankless work that means. In the personal realm, it was transformative to explore my family history in depth and to relate and identify with these extraordinary women.

In pursuing this dream I choose a topic, conceptualized a project and explored its personal relevance. During the summer preceding my senior year, I would commonly think about my project and different choreographic forms I could utilize in the presentation of this story. Realistically, I did not know what I could do because I had not gathered enough information about the women to really understand their unique situation. Nor could I analysis how I wanted to present their stories without the context of situational pressure in the dance studio and knowledge of my dancers. The real work did not begin until fall semester 2001.

The first task on my journey was to cast dancers, set rehearsals and create choreography. During the last week of September, the University of Tennessee Dance Company had its audition and my mentor, Melinda Brown, gave me permission to audition for *Legacy* at this time. I had already set the main two characters, Annie Wayles and Wayles Gertrude, in the spring of the preceding year and contacted the Knoxville Swing Dance Association Exhibition Team about their involvement. This audition gave me the opportunity to cast the other dancers that I needed. I set the rehearsal time on Mondays at 5:30 in the University of Tennessee dance studio and started conducting rehearsals in the first week of September.

Throughout the duration of the project, I conducted one or two hour rehearsals every Monday night. Over the course of approximately 7 months and considering extra rehearsals around the time of the show, that translates to over 80 hours of rehearsal. The modern dancers of *Legacy* were very committed to the work. I believe this was due in part to a professional atmosphere that permeated the project and to the importance of being apart of significant art. I was very blessed in the commitment and interest of all the dancers in *Legacy*, especially considering that not one was paid nor were they receiving University credit for their work. Despite all this, my dancers continued to give 100% to the project and showed a professional dedication to creating a significant piece of art that impacted all involved.

I suspect that I should write something about the creation of choreography for *Legacy*. Although, this is the most important aspect of my work and most essential to my journey of discovery about my relations and myself to my ancestors, it is the one about which I have the least to say. I create choreography from my soul, in the context of the moment and all the emotions that are in my soul. At times it seems that my body knows much more about what I should do then my mind could ever relate. Granted, my movement styles are a combination of my technical dance influences up to this point. For example, Annie Wayles' solo has a strong Graham technique influence. In contrast, Wayles Gertrude's solo if predominantly release technique. In evaluating why I create certain levels and combinations of techniques in different areas of the dance, I can only say that it is a mystery. The choreography flows from the soul through the context of dancer's

ability and choreographic necessity. There is no real methodical planning for art and no analysis capable of understanding the process of art making.

The second task on my journey involved designing an original sound score. I knew that I wanted to create a totally unique composition that incorporated original instrumental composition, text passages from my relatives and contemporary music of my ancestors' time. In combining these different sound mediums, I intended to convey essential aspects of each Wayles' life and how those elements have affected me. The first step was to gather the oral history that had so impacted my self-concept. My father was terribly supportive of my project and consequently had planned a visit to his relatives in Florida, so that I could interview them. Around the first of October, my family flew to Florida and I conducted recorded interviews with my Grandfather Frank, Grandfather Herb, Uncle Harry and my Father, Francis Walter Stapor Jr. I had no set list of questions and really just wanted to see what would come to light in the course of our interviews. This spontaneous style was a valid method in this case, considering that all participants were very familiar with the subject matter. This trip was ultimately successful, and the first component of my sound design was complete.

The second component in the sound design involved the original instrumental composition. I enlisted the help of Brandon Beavers an accomplished modern composer, to create the musical score for the first half of the dance. I was very pleased with what he created. The process was unique, in that I created the movement first and he later, to video, composed the music. The method left me free to experiment with structure and tone. This can most easily be seen in the

Annie Wayles, Harry Wood duet where the music starts as a tango and morphs to a waltz. I was wonderful to be able to discern exactly how many counts I wanted for each form. Realistically, most of the music was countless and at one point the sound designer and I had to create beats for the dancers. In the course of creative discussion Brandon Beavers studied the movement and my directions in terms of tone and created a score to the exact specifications of the dance.

As much as a choreographer loves this form of creation, it is taxing to the dancers in that they cannot rehearse with music until much later in the process. Subsequently, in the second portion of the program, I chose previously recorded songs that were contemporary to my Grandmother, Wayles Gertrude's time and fit the tone of the dance. This more traditional method was easier on the dancers, although it somewhat limited my choreographic options. Alternatively, this method also presents a clearer connection between music and dance, in that the movement is constrained by the music instead of vice versa. As a result it is now the choreographers responsibility to create musicality. Ultimately, it is important to know what factors are driving your art, conceptual, practical, or in the context of form. The music for the second half was chosen to suit the context of Wayles Gertrude's life and to fulfill the tone of *Legacy.*

I had some issues with the execution of my concept due to extenuating circumstances and the creation of the text passages and compilation of the score almost never happened. My first sound designer decided quit the project and neglected to inform me. Fortunately, another wonderful engineer but the name of Seva, volunteered his work for free. This was a godsend, for I did not have the

money to pay anyone or the expertise or resources to complete the work myself. Seva donated over 40 hours of studio time and his awesome expertise to *Legacy*. We worked in his studio for over two weeks to complete the importing, editing and mastering of this work. The creation of the text score was one of the most interesting aspects of the sound design. The power to draw different segments from each interview and create a tapestry of text to convey meaning was extraordinary. This element of the score was used most effectively to draw together the story line and to give added layers of meaning to the dance. Despite the minor drama, I am awed by the excellence of the created score and feel that it truly matches the intent and level of expertise in the choreography. I will be continuously grateful to all of the people who helped me and contributed to *Legacy*.

The third task on my journey involved actually producing *Legacy* for the public. I had now created the dance and would have to explore the world of dance production. Fortunately, I am rather well known in the dance community and have formed some essential connections. I was able to consult several experienced dancers as to the best ways to create a show. I decided that the best venue for the work at the cheapest rate was Austin-East High School performing arts auditorium. In addition to this theater having a history of providing inexpensive service for community groups, it also boasts a large stage with adequate lighting and full auditorium seating. I also had connections with the dance department at the school, which facilitated arrangements for the space. The head of the department helped guide me through the process and I learned

about the proper paths to gaining approval to present works in the government supported, public arena. This was a complex process that involved gaining approval from unreachable administrators and issues of liability insurance. I feel that I found the best venue for my budget and learned much about the processes of bureaucracy and the required mazes of red tape.

Another aspect of production explored was lighting design. *Legacy* does not require anything more than a blank stage and creative lighting. The technical director at the theatre, David Galaska, was very helpful in assisting me create the lighting design. Through the process of several meetings, I learned about the various aspects of light and for the first time had hands on experience in lighting a piece. Costuming *Legacy* was the last issue in the production of the work. I decided, mostly through the necessity of lack of funds, that the costumes would be very simple. I created a color theme for each Wayles, and bought leotards and had skirts made by a local seamstress. The main male characters wore their own clothing, as did the core in the second section of the work. The first set of costuming for the core, consisted of nude leotards, found from the cast, and varying shades of tan pants compiled from past costumes and thrift stores. I was comfortable with the choice of simple costumes, due to the rich and detailed choreography and sound score. I truly feel that complex costumes could have clouded the intent of the work.

The last task in the journey of completing *Legacy* involves publicity and financial support of art. In both of these areas, I feel that I could have accomplished much more. In regards to publicity, I created flyers and gave them

to the cast to distribute. I was very pleased with the experience of making the flyers and the knowledge I gained in technical programs such as Photoshop. I could only afford to make approximately 100 copies. I created programs for the performance on a home computer. This is another opportunity lost, for I could have sold adds to be in the program. In addition, I had the opportunity to send out a press release to the local papers about the work and would have taken out adds about the performance. I did not explore these avenues; yet know what I need to do in the future. In regards to financial support, I had great aspirations for finding grants and other sources of support. I pursued none of these goals and resultantly, had to foot the entire bill myself. This is another area where I will improve in the future.

The experience of creating *Legacy* was priceless. I gained a comprehensive understanding of how hard it is to produce a show. I learned that I really enjoy creating dance and am rather talented in this area. I created a wonderful, fully documented sample of professional choreography to use towards gaining employment. I learned about my familial history and created a bridge between generations. I documented some oral history and gave my family something to cherish for generations. I shared a creative experience with some very talented and special dancers, which I believe is one of the most intimate connections. I hope that I inspired other artists to create art and express anything, because that is what life should be about. I am grateful for the experience and will always remember this project as my first professional experience, well all except the part where I did not get paid.

Wayles E. Stapor presents

Legacy

the premier of an original dance work
Exploring the origins of her name and
the significance of inherited history
in constructing an identity.

Austin East High School
April 11th, 7:30 pm
Donations accepted