

“Memory”: The Choreography from an Analysis of Latin Dance Languages

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Abstract

As the art of dance continues to evolve, Latin dance, as a vibrant form of dance, has secured an important position on the world dance stage. This study aims to delve into the language of Latin dance through dance analysis methods and uses the dance piece "Memory" as a case study to explore how the artistic language of Latin dance can be transformed into concrete dance creation and performance. The researcher provides a detailed description of the creative process behind "Memory," including the piece's creative concept, structure, and prop selection, and discusses the choreography and rehearsal process. Additionally, the study offers related discussions and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Latin Dance; Dance Language; Dance Analysis; Dance Creation; Artistic Expression

Introduction

Dance, as a cultural phenomenon, develops in tandem with material and spiritual civilization. It is a physical form that people gradually form in their work and life, reflecting their social concepts (Fu, 2011: 139-140). In dance works, the physical form is the smallest unit, which is combined in sequence to develop into dance sentences and dance segments, eventually culminating into a complete dance piece. The related movements used in the piece are collectively referred to as dance language. Hence, dance language is a combination of dance movements and dance emotions, capable of expressing specific thoughts, feelings, cognitions, beliefs, and living conditions. Dance language is the foundation of dance art, including dance movements, dance sentences, and dance paragraphs.

Although many dancers, experts, and scholars have studied dance language in the past, it is inevitably difficult to describe systematically through written language, as dance language is a type of body language (Huang & Bai, 2003: 87-88). While experts wish to theoretically interpret dance language, the unique nature of dance art makes all research challenging to form into textbooks or reference books that serve as a guide. It is precisely through the use of dance language that dance art can realize many of its artistic functions, such as character shaping, internal activity expression, emotional thought expression, and theme condensation (Li, 2015: 46-47). However, for a long time, the dance and academic circles have taken a rather general approach to the study of dance language, and some misunderstandings still exist.

In light of this, the author takes his own choreographed dance piece "Memory" as an example, analyzing the dance arrangement from the perspective of Latin dance language, and analyzing the realization of its artistic functions from the significance of dance language, in order to better guide dance creation and performance.

This paper takes the author's choreographed work "Memory" as an example to explore the permeation of dance language in the process of dance choreography, and discusses the author's perception of dance language in the practice of dance choreography. The aim is to help choreographers understand the significance and role of dance language in the creation of dance works through this study, as well as how to accurately grasp and apply dance language in the creation of dance works, thereby providing reference for finding more avenues and methods to stimulate imagination and creative thinking.

Latin Dance Artistic Language Analysis

The analysis of the artistic language of Latin dance is not only crucial for the growth of individual dancers and the performance of the dance but also has a profound impact on the spread and development of the entire Latin dance culture (Liu, 2019: 96-97). Through the analysis of artistic language, dancers can gain a deeper understanding of the technical details of various dance steps and body movements, thereby improving their technical level. Artistic language analysis can help dancers learn how to convey complex emotions through movements and expressions, enhancing the infectious power of the dance.

1. Basic Technical Analysis of Latin Dance

(1) Posture and Balance

In Latin dance, a dancer's posture is the foundation of the performance. It concerns not only the aesthetics of the dance but also is an important way for dancers to express emotions and stories (Liu, 2017: 72-73). Common Latin dance postures include a slightly arched chest, relaxed and drooping shoulders, a slightly tilted pelvis, and softly bent knees, which provide the power and flexibility for the execution of dance steps. Moreover, the position of a dancer's head is also extremely important; it should generally be kept upright, and the gaze should communicate powerfully with the audience or dance partner.

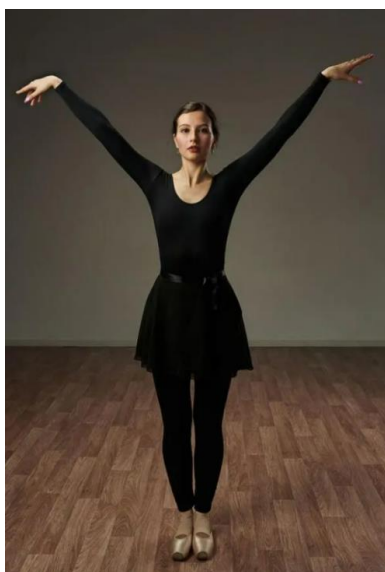


Figure 1 Latin Dance Poses
Source: Internet

Balance is crucial during execution of movements as it ensures the stability of the dancer while rapidly changing steps and direction. Good balance allows a dancer to perform more complex combinations without losing rhythm and form. Maintaining balance requires the strengthening of core muscles, which is often achieved through specialized training such as Pilates or yoga.

(2) Footwork and Foot Position Details

The basic footwork of Latin dance is varied and unique, with each dance having its specific steps (Jin, 2006: 54-56). For instance, in the Samba, the basic step is the “Samba Bounce,” which requires the dancer to bounce up and down while keeping the rhythm. In the Cha-cha-cha, the basic step is the quick “three-step stomp,” necessitating clear and precise foot position changes.

The correctness of foot positions is vital for the overall performance of the dance. Proper foot positions help the dancer to better control their body, maintain balance, and execute precise dance moves. Moreover, accurate foot positioning is also part of the overall form of the dance, playing an indispensable role in showcasing the dance style and emotion.

(3) Turning and Body Rotation Techniques

Turning is one of the common techniques in Latin dance, which requires the dancer to rotate the body quickly while maintaining an elegant upper body posture (Qiao Zhi, 2012: 74-75). The key to turning technique lies in the stability of the preparatory action, balance control during the rotation, and the finishing posture after the turn. During a turn, the dancer maintains core stability by contracting the abdominal muscles, while controlling the speed and direction of the turn with the toes and heels.



Figure 2 Latin Dance Rotation Movement

Source: Internet

The expressiveness of body rotation is reflected in its ability to showcase the dancer's skill level and the vitality of the dance. In competitions or performances, rotation movements often capture the audience's attention; hence, executing turns with precision and expressiveness is a focal point of practice for every Latin dancer.

In summary, by analyzing posture, balance, footwork, foot position, and the techniques of turning and body rotation, the importance of these techniques for dance performance is revealed. These techniques are not only the fundamental skills dancers must refine but also key to conveying emotion and showcasing style during their performances.

2. Body Language and Facial Expression Management in Latin Dance

(1) Facial Expressions in Dance

In Latin dance, facial expressions are an important means for dancers to express emotions and shape characters (Wang, 2016: 200-201). Facial expressions can convey the emotions of the dancers, enhancing the audience's empathy. A smile may express happiness and enthusiasm, while a furrowed brow may indicate tension or intense emotions. Through facial expressions, the audience can better understand the emotional background and storyline of the dance.



Figure 3 Latin Dance Dancers' Facial Expressions

Source: Internet

Facial expressions can transmit the plot and theme of the dance story, and also enhance the artistic expressiveness of the dance. Through professional training, dancers can improve the accuracy and richness of facial expressions, including practicing muscle control and relaxation, observing and imitating facial expressions in various emotional states, and adjusting the timing and degree of facial expressions in conjunction with the music and dance movements.

(2) Association between Body Movements and Emotions

Body movement is another important tool for conveying emotions and storytelling. Various body movements in Latin dance can convey specific emotions and sentiments, such as fast steps and spins can reflect excitement and vitality, while soft sways and twists can express grace and sensuality. Dancers need to convey inner emotions through the intensity, speed, and

extent of stretching of movements, and make the actions more expressive and deeper by controlling focus and emotional investment.



Figure 4 The Body Movements of Latin Dance Dancers

Source: Internet

There is a profound interplay between dance movements and inner emotions. Dancers must internalize the emotions of the music and story, expressing them through their body movements. This demands a high level of emotional awareness and expressive capability from the dancers, as well as technical precision.

(3) Dance Posture and Confidence

A dancer's posture often reflects their inner confidence and stability. Confident dancers tend to display a more commanding and composed dance posture, which not only makes the dance movements more robust and graceful but also leaves a lasting impression on the audience. Therefore, focusing on nurturing dancers' confidence during training not only benefits the enhancement of dance performance but also helps dancers present a better state and charm on stage.



Figure 5 The Confidence of Latin Dance Dancers

Source: Internet

Confidence is crucial for dance performance. A confident dancer can better connect with the audience, convey emotions, and execute techniques with greater precision. Through positive feedback and continuous practice, dancers can build and strengthen their confidence.

3. Rhythms and Musicality in Latin Dance

(1) Capturing and Applying Musical Rhythms

Latin dance music commonly features rhythmic patterns such as the "half-beat rhythm" of the Samba, the "quarter-beat rhythm" of the Cha-cha-cha, and the "slow-quick-quick" rhythm of the Rumba. Dancers capture and express these rhythms through body movement, footsteps, and the shifting of weight, often needing to synchronize with the percussion in the music. For instance, rapid changes in footwork and body sway are used to align with the musical rhythm, making the dance moves more vivid and powerful.

(2) Synergy between Dance and Music

The close integration of dance moves and music can create a strong synergy (Zhang, 2015: 56-61). Dancers interpret the melody, rhythm, and emotions of the music through their movements, translating the musical rhythms, melodies, and emotions into concrete dance actions, achieving an effect where dance and music blend and respond to each other. When dance and music are perfectly matched, it can provide audiences with a richer and more profound viewing experience.

(3) Musical Expression in Dance

This expression can be achieved by matching the intensity of the music's rhythm, the contours of its melody, and the emotional hues of the music (Zhao, 2007: 111-112). Different styles of Latin dance have unique ways of expressing musicality; for example, the Samba emphasizes rhythm and energy, while the Rumba emphasizes the flow and expression of emotions. In the Rumba, dancers can interpret the music's tenderness and depth through the extension and prolongation of dance poses. Through meticulous interpretation of musicality and the use of body language, dancers can convey the stories and emotions behind the music to the audience.

The Process of Creating the Dance Performance "Memories"

The creation of the dance performance "Memories" is an exhilarating and challenging process. This performance aims to explore and present the complexities and diversities of memory through the medium of dance. The creative process begins with a brainstorming session among the team, where members collectively discuss the theme and concepts of memory. Researchers inspire each other by sharing personal memory stories they are familiar with, extracting common emotions and meanings from these reminiscences.

During the dance creation process, researchers experiment with various dance techniques and movement elements to express different types of memories (Zhou, 2019: 1-63). Through the form of dance, the speed and strength of movements, and the posture and expressions of the body, researchers convey the emotions and perceptions associated with memories. Creators give deep thought to the choreography and rhythm within the dance, aiming to create segments that lead the audience to experience the changes and evolution of memories.

1. Creative Concept of the Work

The work "Memories" primarily narrates the recollections of a war hero, who after experiencing an unforgettable and intense period of war, reflects on his life. The story includes two time segments, encompassing the protagonist's youth and old age. Regarding the work "Memories," the main focus is on depicting, through the language of dance, a revolutionary hero's wartime experiences during his youth and his reflections on the revolutionary war in his later years.

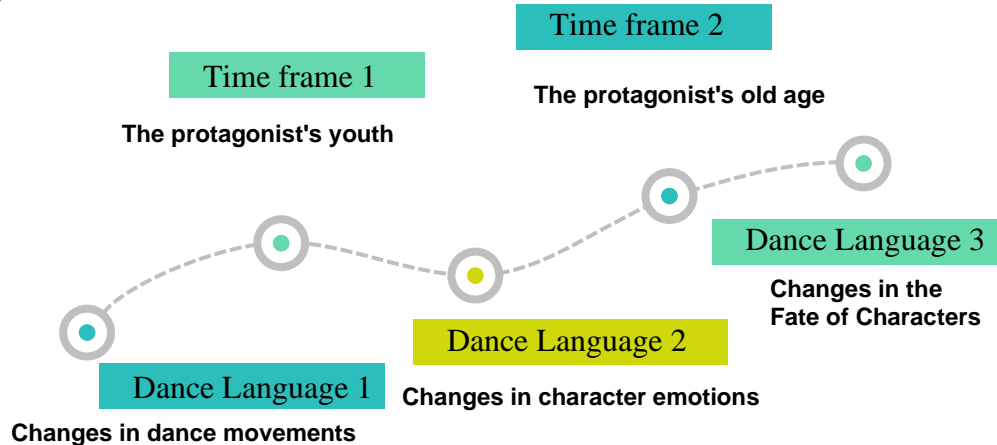


Figure 6: Creative Process Diagram for the Artwork

Source: Yuguang Wang

The creative concept for the artwork is to narrate the protagonist's life experiences in a reverse chronological recollection. The creation revolves around three aspects: changes in dance movements, shifts in character emotions, and transformations in the characters' fates.

(1) The piece begins with an opening video. The video depicts an elderly person in a wheelchair reminiscing about their life. The individual has lived through two wars, the first being the War of Resistance against Japan, and the second, the Chinese Civil War. Scenes of the wars emerge in the elder's mind. As the sound of recollection fades, the video concludes.

(2) The first dance commences. Accompanied by the background sound of a telegraph machine, a young man is seen strategizing a battle plan. He exudes a contemplative demeanor, meticulously arranging the combat strategy. His dance incorporates stage props such as a table, a baton, and a map of operations. With his back to the audience, he performs a series of realistic commanding gestures. Throughout the dance, there is a full interaction between the movements and the props, including designing battle routes, selecting weapons, and sending telegrams to summon troops. The background music, enhanced with sounds of battle, weaponry, and tank movements, complements the dance which includes movements like the Samba Left Turn and the Strong Army dance steps to complete the piece.

(3) A second video interlude follows. This segment shows footage of marching troops during war and intense combat scenes between opposing sides.

(4) The second dance unfolds. The performer, through dance movements, captures the dynamic actions of combat. The dance form is used to depict the intense struggle, with realistic actions such as crawling, dodging, and evading bullets to represent the movements of dodging during battle. Bullfighting moves are utilized to convey the rigid posture during combat. Towards the end, the sound of gunfire is employed to express the sorrow over the sacrifice of comrades, with slow kneeling movements to mourn and honor the fallen revolutionaries. Finally, the big screen lights up displaying the white flag of the Japanese army, signifying their surrender.

(5) A third video intercut appears. Footage of the founding of New China is shown, celebrating the victory of the Liberation War and the cheers of the Chinese people.

(6) The third dance begins. Performers run onto the stage waving the national flag, interacting with it through dance to express the feeling of victory in the war of resistance. It conveys the performers' admiration for the greatness of the Communist Party, culminating the final piece with the Rumba movements as body language.

(7) A fourth video segment is inserted. The entire dance is presented using a reverse chronological narrative technique.

2. Structure of the Work

The structure of a dance is a crucial artistic means for displaying the content of the dance, shaping artistic imagery, and creating the ambiance of the work. This includes character shaping, expressing emotions, and organizing and arranging the plot. Dance structures generally follow these basic principles: adherence to the requirements for expressing the theme and shaping the dance image; meeting the demands of various dance genres; ensuring diversity while maintaining unity and completeness; respecting the habits of dance art appreciation and adapting to the continuously evolving aesthetic requirements.

The work "Memories" was created by the author based on research and interviews with experts. It mainly narrates the recollections of love by a couple in love. In its creation, the structure of the work has the following characteristics:

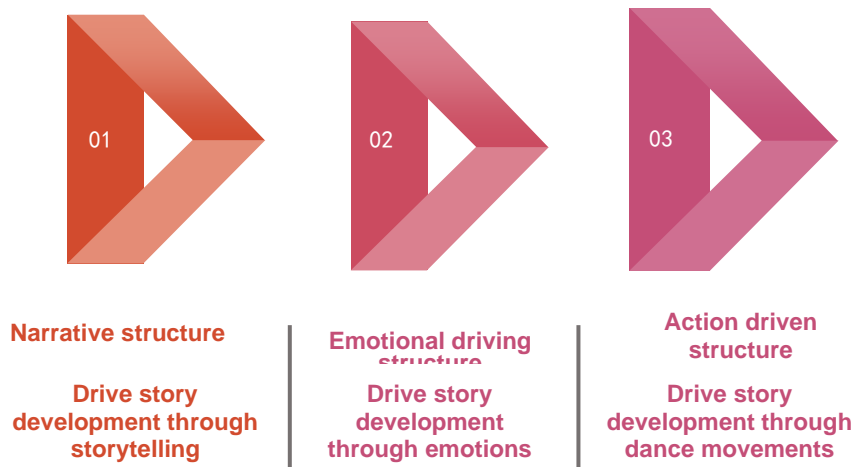


Figure 7 Characteristics of the Work's Structure
 Source: Yuguang Wang

Firstly, it has a narrative structure that propels the story's development through narration.

In the arrangement of the work "Memories," by analyzing the relationship between dance step variations and artistic expression, it is found that: (1) Dance steps are suitable for creating a tense and carefree atmosphere, shaping sensitive character images. The briskness of quick steps is distinct in style and vivid in artistry. The stability of dance steps can outline a stable relationship through-line in the work. The performance form of Latin dance allows the performers to create movements that are not abrupt and facilitate the expression of a progressive relationship. (2) The variation of dance steps is an external manifestation of the changing rhythm of emotions; conversely, the inner rhythm of emotions is the internal basis for the progressive transition of dance steps.

Secondly, the structure is driven by emotion, which propels the story forward through feelings.

In the dance "Memories," there is a segment where a soldier fights alone in war. Throughout the battle, the dancer vividly uses gestures like supporting the waist with both hands, hugging the waist, and bending over. Utilizing the strength of the waist to execute a series of difficult solo dance moves, the performance rapidly ascends to the climax of the entire piece, intensifying the excited and tense atmosphere on stage. There are also parts of the dance where the performers use unified rhythmic movements such as bending the knees, stamping the feet, and bending the waist. This harmonizes the dance movements with the innermost feelings, using the full body to express one's genuine emotions completely.

Thirdly, the structure is driven by motion, using the language of dance to convey the storyline's sequence.

The choreographers express the narrative's sequence through the language of dance. By using dance to convey the text and the stage experience that needs to be communicated to the audience, it deepens the audience's appreciation and understanding of the dance piece. For instance, in the opening sequence of "Memories," the dancers express the struggle for life with undulating limb movements and intense struggling actions, each movement being a genuine

outpouring about life. This series of actions is vivid and evocative, profoundly expressing the state of memory, engaging the audience's emotions and feelings.

3. The Role of Dance Props

In the work "Memories," the most striking props are those used to depict the war scenes, such as battle maps and batons, which are the soul of the entire piece. In the process of creating "Memories," the author sought to vividly and authentically portray the war scenes, considering both the conveyance of information on stage and the display effect of the dancers' movements in the choice of props. After repeated trials and validation, a battle map was chosen. It not only fits the symbolic meaning of "war" but also allows the audience to truly feel the unfolding of "war."

The dancers perform their movements on an authentic "battle map," using this vivid and authentic prop to express the protagonist's hardships and bravery in the face of war. It brings a shocking sensory and experiential impact to the audience, achieving a multi-layered theatrical effect.

4. Choreography and Rehearsal for "Memories"

The research into Latin dance language aids and guides the creation of "Memories." Reflections on the creative process are made through the study of Latin dance language, applying its lexicon to analyze and guide the memory-themed work, enriching the dance piece with profound meaning. The entire creative process was immensely in-depth and smooth, achieving significant progress and improvements in performance and choreography.

In the creation of "Memories," I sought out books on dance language, watched numerous renowned dance works that inspired my creativity. I interviewed multiple teachers from the Latin Dance Department of the Guangxi University College of Arts and the Guangxi Arts Institute, gathering information on Latin dance language and related dance details. The entire process of dance creation was recorded through video, capturing rehearsals and performances. Observations were made repeatedly to identify areas for improvement.



Figure 9 The "Memories" Dance Rehearsal Scene

Source: Yuguang Wang

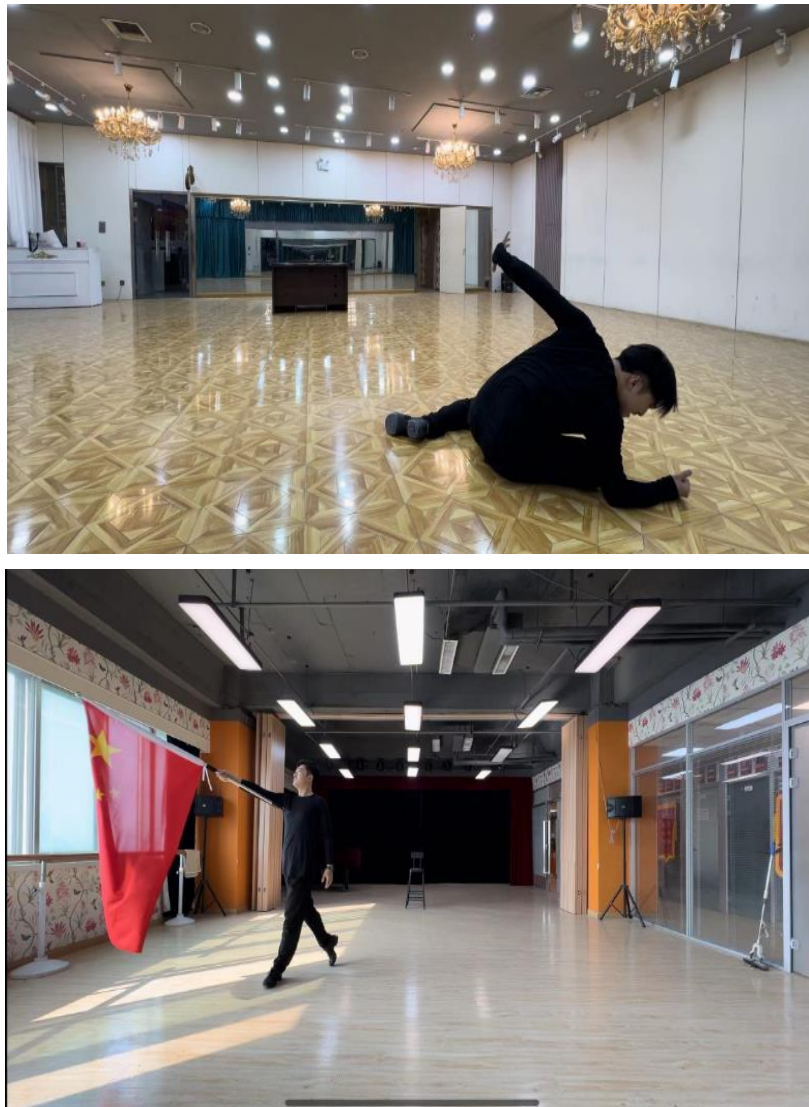


Figure 10 The "Memories" Dance Performance Live
Source: Yuguang Wang

The performer for "Memories" is the researcher herself, supported by a team of students from the Dance College of Guangxi Arts Institute. "Memories" was rehearsed multiple times in the rehearsal room of the Dance College of Guangxi Arts Institute. The rehearsal and performance process of "Memories" underwent numerous revisions and enhancements, with the help and support of many individuals. Throughout the creative process, all performers collaborated closely, exemplifying team spirit.

Conclusion

In this study, we conducted an in-depth analysis and discussion on the artistic language of Latin dance, focusing on the basic techniques of Latin dance, body language and facial expression management, as well as rhythm and musicality. By considering different aspects of Latin dance comprehensively, we can draw the following conclusions:

(1) Latin dance, as an energetic and passionate form of dance, encompasses a wide variety of dance types and characteristics, including Rumba, Cha-cha, Samba, Paso Doble, and Cowboy dance. Each dance type possesses its unique charm and expression.

(2) Dance language plays a crucial role in dance choreography; it can shape character images, express emotions and thoughts, and depict the characters' actions within their environment and atmosphere. The dynamic, rhythmic, lyrical, abstract, and symbolic nature of dance language provides a wealth of expressive means and artistic expression for dance performance.

(3) By analyzing the creative and performance process of "Memories," we find that dance creation needs to consider creative elements and background, the selection of props and music, as well as specific planning and arrangements for choreography and rehearsal. The future performance form of "Memories" can be further expanded to bring a more diverse and rich artistic experience to audiences.

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