Ella Harding
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Dance
IA3: Project – dance work

RIVERSIDE

YOUTH GRIEF

Performed by:
Ella Harding (Girl in Black) & Isabella Caniglia (Girl in White)

CHOREOGRAPHIC STATEMENT

'Riverside' is a contemporary duo routine embracing the concept of **youth grief**. The purpose of this piece is to provide an insight to the deep emotional difficulty of losing a loved one in the vulnerable stage of youth. The dance takes the viewpoint of an adolescent girl (Ella) who is grieving from the loss of her younger sister (Isabella).

In this piece, there are two female dancers playing the role of sisters one of which has passed away. The song choice 'Riverside' by Agnes Obel, was selected for its sombre piano tone and the symbolic lyrics which are hauntingly beautiful. The concept of this piece is enriched by lyrics such as; "Where you won't see any rising sun, Down to the river we will run" suggesting the idea that she was too young to experience the beauty of life.

The introductory scene is set by Isabella lying flat on the ground, hands crossed over her chest, and Ella standing over her. This still frame symbolizes the image of a funeral; specifically the ceremony for the younger sister's death. This is also represented through Ella's appropriate black costume attire, which is contradicted by Isabella's soft white dress, showing she is an angel at peace.

The powerful motif within the piece is the theme of water, firstly presented in the title and lyrics 'Riverside'. This concept was utilized as its gentle nature represents the concept of life, as it is ever flowing and changing within our world. This motif is what initially revives Isabella through a wave-like motion of Ella's arm extending into her chest (See 00:19-00:25). The second motif repeated throughout the piece is the concept of renewing their unreal time together. Each time Isabella begins to deteriorate and 'fade away' Ella catches her and carries her physical weight to revive Isabella. This is evident when Isabella begins to collapse, and Ella runs across the floor to catch her falling onto her back. To revive her, Ella performs a ripple-like movement with both of their arms – water motif – and they then continue dancing happily together.

The choreographic device, mirroring, is utilized throughout the dance to strengthen the concept of sister's connection, relationship, and family bond. They dance together in a canon, down the diagonal, to show their playful relationship and the idea of Isabella always staying in her big sister's shadow, even after life. The dance begins and finishes similarly to reinforce the initial concept of a funeral ceremony, the only difference is Ella collapsing over Isabella's still body. This is to communicate that Ella is accepting the reality of Isabella's death, and the grief that is yet to come.

The underlying concept within 'Riverside', is that each time Ella carries the physical weight of Isabella she also takes on the emotional weight of Isabella's death.

VIDEO ROUTINE
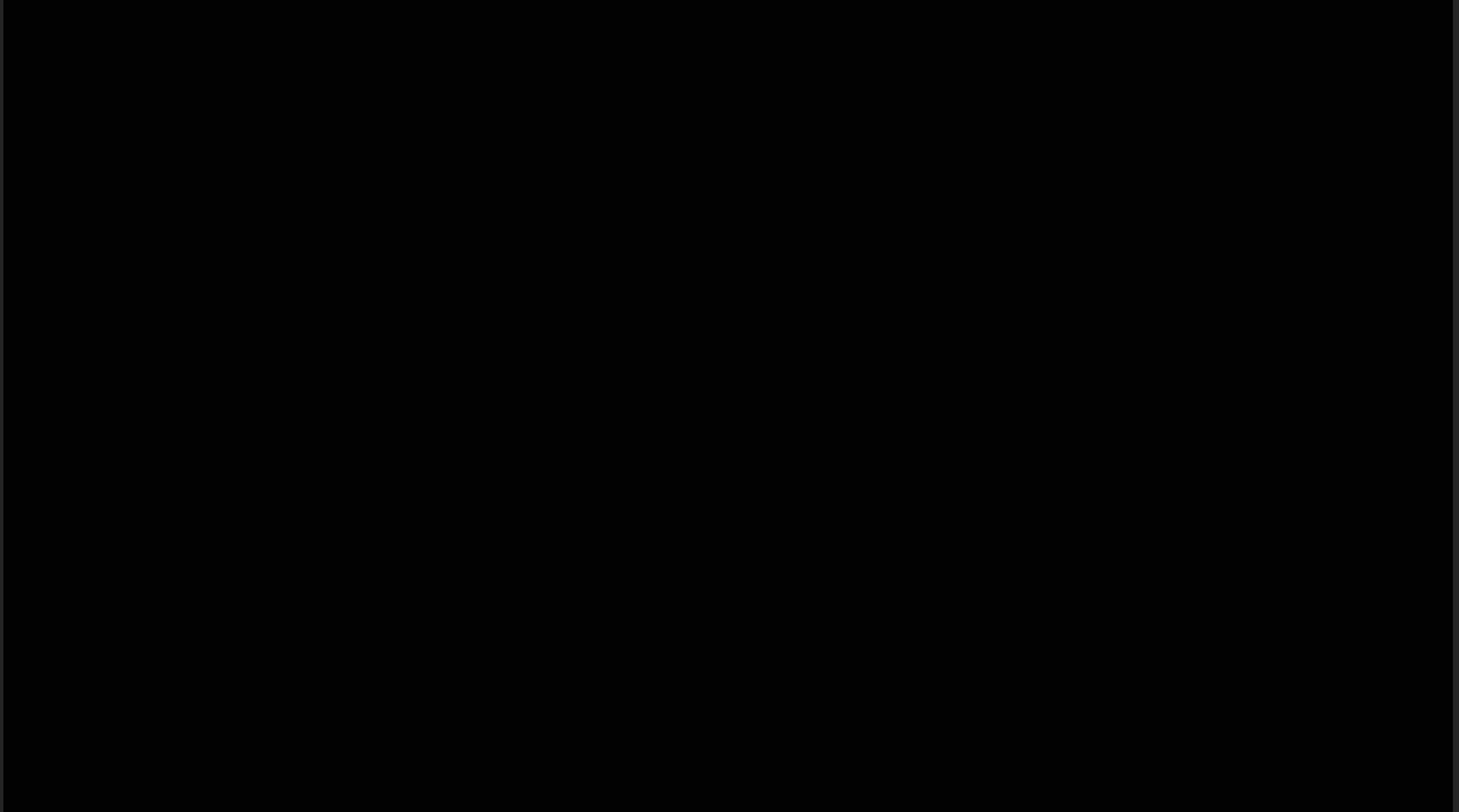
Choreographic Problem 1 – Partner Lift

The first choreographic problem I faced during the creative process of this task was the partner lift with Bella kicking to the side. In the initial stages of choregraphing I knew I wanted to incorporate simple lifts that we could do together signifying the sisters bond. As we are both female and around the same height and weight we couldn't make it to difficult. This did put an obstacle in the choreographic process as I wanted it too look really impressive but was restricted with the aforementioned factors.

It was important to persist with this lift as it communicates the idea of a sisters leaning on each other for support deepening that strong bond. We decided that a simple lift where the arm is wrapped over the shoulders and the top person lifts their legs into a kick to the side was an easy yet artistic choice. The first time we tried this lift my legs tumbled underneath myself and I took Bella down to the ground with me (we weren't injured, and we had a good laugh 😊). To fix this issue, we trialled it with a bounce before where I sit into my opposite hip and lift up to push her upwards. This changed the dynamic dramatically and fixed our first issue. We practiced this a few times to ensure we had the safe motion down pat. We then decided it didn't look smooth enough which didn't suit the style of the routine. So we isolated it further to match the music, each movement had it's own count. This was a little difficult at first as it took more control, however after a few tries it became more natural and made the piece look better as a whole.

Now when you watch the video (1:45-1:48) you will see the bend is still incorporated, but looks smoother with the counts. Overall, we are very happy with how slowing down the process fixed the initial issue, which also enhanced the intent of the movement with sisters supporting each other.

Choreographic Problem 2 – Lowering to the floor

The second choreographic problem is the final movement of the piece. In the end Isabella returns to her 'real world' state and the fantasy ends. I support her weight as she leans backwards and I hold her shoulders from the front corner, three steps back. I then lift her into my arms holding her close into my body and lower her to the floor to end the way the piece started. This was important as it symbolised Ella coming to terms with the death of her sister and letting go. It represents their last unreal moment together as Ella realises she must let go of Isabella.

After watching the draft video at home, I realised the lowering looks a bit clunky and not as beautiful as I had intended for the movement to be in this piece. It is supposed to look very gentle and graceful as I accept the reality of the world and begin the 'real world' stages of grief. The reason it looks clunky is because I am lowering Isabella onto her side and she is going through her leg to her hand and then down to her side.

To improve this hiccup, I changed it so that from holding her in my arms, I lower her gently to her feet and grab her hand. From this position, facing each other on the diagonal, Isabella hinges backwards bending the knees, lowering into the floor and relaxes down onto her back with her hands crossed over her chest. This change enhanced the concept of letting go of Isabella and accepting the death of her younger sister. Then I lower down and collapse dramatically over her body grieving.

This change helped communicate my intention a lot better and is also more beautiful to watch for the final moment of the piece. I am very happy with this improvement and believe it strengthened my purpose of the piece - to provide an insight to the deep emotional difficulty of losing a loved one in the vulnerable stage of youth.