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Why one variation in *The Sleeping Beauty* would have been perfect for vaudeville

by Georgia Bilodeau

Last year, I danced the role of White Cat with my partner, called “Puss in Boots,” when Professor Vitor Luiz staged some excerpts from *Sleeping Beauty* for the faculty concert at University of California, Irvine. In rehearsal, we discussed how our characters embody a “jester-like” character, and it immediately reminded me of vaudeville novelty acts. A vaudeville program, we learned in history class, could include “song, dance, comedy, acrobatics, animal acts, cross-dressing” and more. Dressing like a cat and performing ballet could easily have fit into a vaudeville program, where mixing dance, animal acts, and comedy wasn’t uncommon.

In a few different ways, I tried to apply the ideas and themes of vaudeville to one particular rehearsal. Because vaudeville acts sometimes made fun of ballet or modern dance, I tried to find areas where I could deviate from ballet norms. For instance, in one section, White Cat and Puss in Boots are supposed to be rubbing backs together, similar to how a real cat would act. In this section, I tried to use more of an “animal-like” movement or approach in the shoulders, arms, and hips. This approach to the movement actually helped me get better into character and made the steps more fun. Vaudeville also included contortion and acrobatic acts, and this reminded me of shoulder sit that we did at the end of the variation. So, in this rehearsal, I tried to play into the surprise/impressiveness of that kind of a lift, since it would have been something that made our “act” more impressive if performed in vaudeville. Finally, when I did a bourrée step backward in this dance, it heavily reminded me of Harriet Hctor and her vaudeville act signature move. So, this time in rehearsal, although unable physically or professionally to change choreography so that I was bending over backwards, like she did, I tried to embody and remember her dance act as I performed this step.

Georgia Bilodeau will be a junior at the University of California, Irvine, expecting to graduate with a BFA in Dance Performance and a BS in Cognitive Sciences in June 2028.