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Abstract

My MFA thesis project *Savor* is an interactive event that bridges dance performance and culinary arts. Grounded in the belief that both dance and food are ephemeral, this project uses taste and movement to provide opportunities for individuals to live fully in the moment, and in their bodies. This heightened sensory journey is inspired by foods that evoke excitement, provide a delightful sensation in the mouth, or hold sentimental value for me. In this written thesis, I outline the choreographic process and offer contextual and analytical support for the themes explored in the project. Lastly, I discuss how this research will contribute to future multi-sensory choreographic endeavors.

Keywords: senses, multi-sensory, taste, dance, performance art, interactive, creative research, immersive, mindfulness

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Savor: A Multisensory Event Fusing Dance and Culinary Arts

By

Jocelyn Smith

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

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Department of Theater and Dance

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SAVOR: A MULTISENSORY EVENT FUSING DANCE AND CULINARY ARTS

A THESIS

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1. Introduction

For my MFA thesis project, I have created *Savor*, an interactive, multi-sensory event that invites patrons to live fully in their bodies by drawing awareness to their sense of taste through meaningful food pairings while being immersed in a site-specific dance performance. To merge two activities that fill me with energy and bring me immense joy— eating and dancing— I researched taste sensation, dance artists who have used food in their works, culinary artists, and mindfulness practices. The performance was produced by Wasatch Contemporary Dance Company (WCDC) and it took place on April 13, 2024 in Lehi, Utah at a wedding venue where dancers and audience members shared close proximity to each other.

Savor began with a voiceover of instructions and an invitation to the audience to participate in a grounding exercise that directed their attention to all five senses and prepared them to focus on their ability to taste throughout the event. They were guided and invited to taste twelve small, bite-sized offerings as they watched contemporary dance choreography inspired by the flavor profiles they were eating. The menu consisted of lime sorbet, grilled cheese and tomato soup, bacon-wrapped water chestnuts, spaghetti and meatballs, chocolate mousse, caprese salad skewers, limeade mocktail, jalapeño jelly cheese bites, chocolate-dipped clementines with sea salt, cheesecake bites, cotton candy, and beef jerky. The performance included three ensemble works, nine solos, a structured improvisation piece, and then ended with a brief reflection exercise that invited the audience to assess their senses and encouraged gratitude. After the performance, audience members and dancers merged to engage in conversation, enjoy the remaining petit appetizers, and celebrate the fusion of dance and food.

1.1 Rationale

I am an artist who invites my audiences to live, to feel, and to sense their value within a larger community through performance art. What it means to feel truly alive is different for each person. I feel the most alive when I am dancing full body movement, hugging my loved ones, riding a roller coaster, laughing deeply with friends, and indulging in chocolate mousse. Although each individual's preferences for *feeling alive* are idiosyncratic, the commonality is that these moments are fleeting. They exist in the moment they are experienced and then vanish. All that is left is a memory imprinted in the body and mind. Understanding that these life-saturated-moments (a term I use to describe the feeling of being alive and fully present) are ephemeral moments is essential to my creative research.

Dance is ephemeral in nature. It exists in the moment of its performance and vanishes as soon as the movement ends. Even if there are repeated performances, no singular performance is the exact same as various nuances in timing, expression, and audiences change with each performance. Culinary art is remarkably similar. It is a temporal and multisensory art form, where chefs compose flavors and textures that are experienced fleetingly but resonate in the mind and palate afterwards. Both artforms celebrate the lived experience. They invite us to live fully in the moment, observe movement, react kinesthetically, taste, indulge, and appreciate the body's sensory capabilities. In an increasingly digital world, where we rely heavily on sight to consume and process information, I am interested in exploring a fusion of these ephemeral artforms in a performance setting to provide my audience with a multi-sensory, life-saturated experience.

This thesis project underscores the importance of finding ways to disconnect from the digital world and reconnect with your body – *Savor* gives patrons the opportunity to live fully in the present moment. It encourages a *noticing* of non-verbalized or non-formalized sensations. Unlike a “dinner and a show” structure, my research is about finding and creating choreography immersed in the nuances of taste. By producing more multisensory performance art, I advocate for its potential to serve as a powerful medium through which individuals can introspectively check in with their bodies and foster a holistic and harmonious relationship between the self and the sensory world within and around them.

1.2 Scope of This Paper

My research encompasses writings about the sensing body with a focus on taste sensations; a curation of current dance artists who have created work that incorporates food into their performances; the practices of culinary artists who place a deliberate focus on performative aspects of their craft; and mindfulness practices. I share how I designed *Savor*, a multisensory event that involves dance performance and food, and then share my methodologies and discoveries made throughout the creative process. Finally, my writing includes how I will further this research into future creative works along with ideas for implementing sensory-saturated work into dance education curriculum.

2. Research

2.1 The Sensing Body: Taste

Sense is a faculty by which the body perceives an external stimulus (“Sense”). Aristotle is often the philosopher who is credited with making the distinction between the five main senses or

faculties: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch (Harris 9). Over time, a more expansive definition of what the body can sense or perceive has evolved, according to anthropologists, historians, and scientists. For example, proprioception is knowing where your limbs are in relation to space. There is a sensation or feeling that something is correct. And there is the sense that someone is watching you. All these as well as others have been included in the discourse around sense and sensing (Harris 9-10). While I recognize the importance of this broader context of the term and embodiment of sense or sensation, I chose to zero in on the sense of taste for the development and movement invention for this thesis.

Priscilla Ferguson is a scholar who has written extensively in the fields of sociology and cultural studies. Her research focus is in food studies and French cultural studies. Her journal article *The Senses of Taste* discusses how complex the sense of taste is, the historical context of the perception of taste in society, and its reliability on the other senses to generate sensation (Ferguson 371). She writes that “Taste, arguably, is the most singular of all the senses, and tasting makes the most private of connections to the material world. The tasting subject requires heightened intimacy with a taste object defined by corporeality and ephemerality” (Ferguson 371). This intimacy is challenged and changed with each person and also each bite of food. We may share the same food, but our experience of it is unique to us, based on taste receptors firing signals to the brain and of course on our preferences.

Out of the five main senses, taste and smell are often looked at as the *less noble* within Western culture and tradition (Ferguson 374). Traditionally, aspects related to the physical body,

characterized as carnal and animalistic, are often belittled, and knowledge acquired through embodied experiences is considered inferior. Ferguson explains:

The inescapable connection with the body and functions that modern societies have come to see as shameful reinforces the lowly placement of taste in the hierarchy of the senses of the Western philosophical tradition...with the corresponding distrust of the body as a source of knowledge, and the consequent depreciation of taste, touch, and smell, follows the body itself: the farther from the head, the presumed seat of reason, and the closer to the appetites, the less esteemed... Association with the intellectual knowledge of reality elevates sight and hearing (Ferguson 374).

This examination of taste is closely connected to the discussions and criticisms surrounding the cultural significance of dance.

In our culture, we often experience a hierarchy of the senses due to the ideology that the mind and body are divided and that intelligence (mind) ranks superior to the corporeal (body). Western society—including scholarly work—values and relies on the intellect, the written word, and things that *please the eye* (visual art) and are *soothing to the ear* (music) over anything that is perceived through kinesthetics, movement (dance), taste, or smell (culinary arts). Within the scope of the art world, dance has often been viewed as the *less noble* of the performance arts. I think of the casual conversations that come up in my personal life when well-intended persons comment on *how fun* my job is as a dance educator and performing artist, suggesting that it is not career-worthy. I've also been asked, *What kind of dancer are you?* with the intention of finding out if my work is a form of television entertainment or a form of mature entertainment providing sexual titillation. In my lived experience, dance is perceived and respected as *less noble* as it is a body-centered artform.

Traditionally, the performing arts have relied heavily on the *noble* senses of sight and sound as the main sensory input for their audiences. These two senses correspond with the ideology of valuing intelligence over bodily knowledge or awareness. Richard Schechner, one of the founders of Performance Studies, is a long-time theater scholar and professor emeritus of NYU Tisch. He sees this ideology in theater and explains that, “Smell, taste, and touch are demanding their place at the table. Thus I am making a much larger claim—and sending out a more general invitation. I am inviting an investigation into theatricality as orality, digestion, and excretion rather than, or in addition to, theatricality as something only or mostly for the eyes and ears” (Banes 25). I was intrigued by the idea of integrating the less valued senses like taste and smell into a dance performance to cultivate an awareness of bodily experiences and presence for the audience.

In my creative process, I considered Ferguson’s assertion that taste cannot exist without the other senses. “Smell makes taste possible, and touch, or in tasting terms texture, intensifies, and therefore completes, any tasting. Sight and even hearing also enter into the taste experience” (Ferguson 372). I think of my four-year-old when he sees his dinner in front of him and gives me an emphatic “*Yuck!*” without taking a bite and experiencing what it tastes like. Sight plays a critical role in our perception of what our experience of taste will be. Culinary artists and chefs compose the arrangement of food—known as plating—to have the food look appetizing and intriguing. The environment is considered to amplify the experience of taste. So even though I am trying to decenter *the visual* as the primary sense for the audience in this performance, I needed to pay attention to the visual aspects of *Savor* (performance space, costuming, food displays, viewing arrangements, movement) because taste cannot exist without the other senses informing the

sensation. Taste is an intimate and individual experience; and the cultural context around taste and corporeal knowledge helped me focus on the importance of this creative research.

2.2 Current Artists Using Food In Performances & Events

Many choreographers have incorporated food in their choreography. Currently, dance artists are “...using food not only as inspiration, but also as an avenue to explore themes around sustainability, identity, culture and heritage” (Bress). By examining four actively-making dance artists' approaches to integrating food, and identifying the role of food in their process and final work, I was able to determine and contextualize the role of food in my thesis project. The artists I have chosen are Eva Doumbia, Katarina Wong, Dawn Karlovsky, and Jay Carlon.

Eva Doumbia recently created work in New York titled *Autophagies (Self-Eater)* (2023). This show is considered “...halfway between theatre and group tasting session” (*Autophagies*). Doumbia shared memories of her childhood in her father’s restaurant while the mafé dish was prepared on stage with stories about its ingredients guiding the program. The audience participated and ate the prepared dish once completed. She recognized that by linking the origins of food with words and personal experiences, we can learn a lot about ourselves, culture, and social dynamics (*Autophagies*). Her use of food opened the opportunity for broader reflection on daily habits. Food is an essential element for her show and is the instigator for reflection. The dancing, video, and other theater elements supported the food and its origins in this work. Eva Doumbia reshaped the role of spectator into a participatory role, included personal narrative in the form of memories, and researched the origins of mafé. This fusion of multiple elements produced a work that was

thought-provoking and memorable for those who attended. Having the audience participate in eating the dish during the performance created another layer of community.

In San Francisco, Katarina Wong created her show *The Healer* to honor her recently deceased aunt, who is a registered nurse who also practiced traditional Chinese medicine. *The Healer* was originally designed to have the audience walk into the theater “...with incense blown by paper fans, and inviting viewers to take deep qigong breaths in their shared space” (Howard). However, the COVID-19 pandemic halted the premiere date and she shifted to an online rendition of the work. During the 2021 version, her patrons could order a Sensory Offerings package which had teabags, ginger candies and paper fans sent ahead of time in the mail (Howard). The performance encouraged interaction by opening up teabags, ginger candies, and using the paper fans. Amidst the chaotic times of the Covid-19 shut-down, Wong looked to engage the intimacy of the senses, including gingered candies, to create community and an opportunity to heal. In creating *Savor* I also thought about personal history. The menu for my event is food that connects me to my personal family history. My mom passed away two years ago, and experiencing the changes of sensations in her body during her last weeks of life started my journey into creating, devising and infusing the senses into my work. I look at Wong's respectful manner and the care she put into honoring her aunt and have applied the same care and tenderness in selecting the food for my project.

Karlovsky & Company Dance, a Missouri based dance company, performs an annual event named *Playful Pairings* that debuted in 2017. It is an evening of unique performances that pairs food, dance, music, and space. In an interview with Dawn Karlovsky, founder and director of the company, she shares the genesis of the event:

I started *Playful Pairings* partly because I wanted another way to explore how people can have a dance experience that was less about sitting in the theater and watching, but instead to have an immersive experience. I wanted audiences to be more involved in the experience of watching dance. By adding the element of taste, we increase the sensory experience within the performance. At the time, I noticed an increasing emphasis on ‘pairings’ happening in so many restaurants and started to think... Why not do the same with dance and taste? It began as a collaboration of movement, music, taste, and space. I created this event out of the pure interest of collaboration among multiple disciplines resulting in this performance production of site-specific and contemporary dance paired with live music and culinary treats (Karlovsky).

The role of food in this production is to engage the audience in a non-traditional setting which places them as a participant in the production rather than strictly an observer. Karlovsky continued to share in the interview the process of creating this event and how food was incorporated. The culinary chef in the collaboration watches the choreography in the space, and uses that viewing to inform the food pairings to compliment the work (Karlovsky). My creative process was a variation of that used by Karlovsky in *Playful Pairings*. Rather than setting movement and costume first, I began with tasting the food, and then created and composed based off of those sensations. The word *pairings* lingered in my mind and became a mantra I used throughout my process as I experimented with music, movement phrases, costuming, and other production elements.

Jay Carlon’s work *Novena* (2022) is a collaborative work with composer Micaela Tobin. Rice is the third collaborator to the work as it is the main theme and throughline of the piece. Carlon shared with *Dance Magazine* author Sophie Bress about this piece: “Rice became something that I was really obsessed with as a resource in my work,” they say. “I grew up on rice, eating rice three times a day, and I just wanted to use rice within the role of cultural identity, sustenance, colonization—rice as canvas” (Bress). In the work, Carlon carries a bag of rice around the stage and

pours it into a punching bag. He fights the bag and cuts holes in it, allowing the rice to pour over his body (Bress). In Carlon's work, food is used to incorporate identity, reflect cultural standings, and become a metaphor in expression. The menu I designed for my show is the food that draws memories from my childhood or reminds me of my mom. Through this selection, I likewise share my identity and cultural standings and highlight the family rituals of my upbringing and celebratory activities of my community. Food in my show reflects who I am, however the primary role it served was as a means of indulgence for the audience.

In addition to researching dance artists working with food, analyzing acclaimed culinary artists who encompass performative aspects into their work was important to my research. During my Dance in the United States of America course taught by Dr. Elizabeth McPherson in the Fall semester of 2023, I dove into researching culinary artists Ferran Adrià, Heston Blumental, and Grant Achatz. These three artists are considered to practice modernist cuisine also referred to as avant garde cuisine which is innovative and experimental. These chefs seek to push the boundaries of taste, texture, and presentation. Through investigating the performative elements and creative approaches in the practices of these modernist culinary artists, I found inspiration from their preparation practices and presentation of food.

Ferran Adrià is a self-taught Spanish chef who opened his Three-Michelin-Starred restaurant El Bulli (1964-2011) in Barcelona. It was open six months of the year in order for Adrià to experiment and create new dishes the other six months in his laboratory (Svejenova 542). "The global media have pronounced Adrià the Picasso and the Dali of haute cuisine... Adrià's artistry is in the contrasts (hot-cold, soft-crunchy, solid-liquid, sweet-savory), the concepts (e.g., foams), the

techniques (e.g., spherification), and creative methods (e.g., deconstruction). Adrià is a leading chef in applying science-based methods to his creations. His most common method is deconstruction which separates the necessary ingredients to a dish, and then combines them in a new way using extreme temperatures (like liquid nitrogen) or wild techniques (like whipping up savory foam) to present an outstanding and avant garde dish (Carlin). His use of deconstruction and innovative rebuilding became the inspirational anchor of my methodology in movement development for *Savor*. I and the dancers dissected the elements of the taste sensation and paired them with the dissected dance elements of body, space, time, and dynamics to then build movement and structure. Adrià's radically changed portion sizes pique the interest and curiosity of his diners. I likened his approach to presentation of size in *Savor* by offering petit appetizers. For example, grilled cheese and tomato soup is served as a thin sliver of a sandwich resting in a shot glass full of tomato soup. Adrià's use of contrast, layering, and reordering elements of his dish is reflected in my creative methods.

Heston Blumenthal is persistent in reversing long-standing traditions in British food and dining. His nouveau cuisine pushes the diners into these changes with theatricality. One of his notable dishes is a course titled *Sounds of the Sea* (2007) which, "...sits on a simulation of sand and is accompanied by an iPod stuffed in a seashell. Sounds of crashing waves accompany the dining experience so that the diner is transported into memory and recollection through a creation of an "authentic" sonic landscape" (Landis 52). This sensory-saturated dish requires active use of each of the senses. I looked to Blumenthal's dish as a map to direct my decisions for *Savor* in order to activate all of the audience members' senses in the performance. Blumenthal is known for using

molecular gastronomy, a scientific approach to cooking, to create his innovative and sensorial dishes. As a British TV personality, he has programmed *Kitchen Chemistry with Heston Blumenthal*, *Heston's Feasts*, and most recently, *Heston's Fantastical Foods* where he continues to look to historical dishes for inspiration, reimagine them in fantastical ways, and pushes them forward as a futuristic dish. This reimagining of historical dishes and the attention to nostalgia inspired me to select tastes of my childhood and home (nostalgia and historical dishes) and then to reimagine them through a presentation of choreography.

Grant Achatz spares no expense to find new and innovative ways to present his dishes. Known for collaborating with designers, his dishes are presented using futuristic servingware and no two dishes are presented the same way. A remarkable and forward-thinking dish, debuting in his restaurant Alinea, tickles the nostalgia [like chefs Adrià and Blumenthal] is the *Crystal Clear Pumpkin Pie* (2017). The pie has a traditional crust with a filling that is crystal clear but tastes of pumpkin pie. The *Edible Balloon* (2012) is a nod to nostalgia and is made from dehydrated apples and filled with helium. Executive Chef Mike Bagale invented this dish under Achatz direction and support. Diners bite into the balloon and inhale the helium for a playful experience while enjoying the sweet and fruity flavors (Odell). The presentation of food is critical in Achatz's work. Like Achatz, I designed a unique layout of performance spaces and food presentation that is innovative and interactive. For example, audience members are encouraged to stand around a table designed for a soloist to dance on, while the food is displayed in a hexagon-shaped serving sculpture.

Overall, these four dance artists and three chefs approached their projects containing food using a variety of methods which made for a rich list of options and variations for me to consider as

I created *Savor*. Themes that come from these artists' approaches that are apparent in my work are *audience participation, connection to personal narrative and memory, and experimentation in form*. The role of food in my interactive dance performance is that of both inspiration and interaction. The interaction of food coupled with viewing dance performance in a non-traditional setting is the experimentation component of my research. While the selection of food was guided by my personal metaphors, the highlighted intent of my work is to engage and encourage the audience to *notice* heightened taste sensation. As I further researched mindfulness, the centrality of noticing and awareness became solidified.

2.3 Mindfulness

Raising awareness about something typically less esteemed or less noticed in a performance setting required exploring methods and practices that would best facilitate this recognition. In the early stages of my research, I met with Donna Scro Samori who is faculty at Montclair State University as the Mental Health Consultant for the Department of Theatre and Dance. With her background as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and an accomplished performer and choreographer, Donna and I discussed the themes of my research, particularly mindfulness. She shared with me a grounding exercise used to help calm anxiety and bring a person back to their body, meaning, helping them recognize their bodily sensations in the present moment. The 5-4-3-2-1 Technique purposefully addresses the five senses and asks the participant to take in the details of their surroundings. It asks the participant (in this order) to *see* five things, to *feel* four things, to *hear* three things, to *smell* two things, and to *taste* one thing. Looking further into this method, I found Woody Schuldt's work. Part of the dialogue in the exercise is to, "Strive to notice

small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object” (Schuldt). Because focusing on the sensations our brains have been trained to tune out is the essence of this project. I determined I needed a way for the audience to enter into a mindful embodied state. I wrote a script of instructions, and using a pre-recorded voiceover, I extended an invitation to the audience to participate in the 5-4-3-2-1 Technique at the very beginning of *Savor*. This recording also played ambient and calming music which set the tone of the event.

3. Methodology

After analyzing taste, sensation, and mindfulness, I began to draw connections with the choreographers and chefs mentioned earlier, and started to build my performative project. I organized the project into three categories: food, ensemble work, and solo galleries. I first determined the food, then the ensemble pieces were created, and last were the nine solos. I considered the approach and intent of the various choreographers and chefs I researched and applied them in ways that best fit my project. I also built upon and further developed movement material that was created throughout my MFA program. In this section, I will explain each category of the project and the individual pieces of choreography separately and then address the methodology of the overall structure and design of the work.

3.1 Food Selection

Food is the essential ingredient to my work, serving as both the inspiration and the interactive element. It is the component that took the most time and consideration because, like Katarina Wong, I am honoring my mom through the menu choices. Carefully selecting each item

exerted grief energy as I reflected on memories we enjoyed together. This curation also reflects my identity much like rice did with Jay Carlon's work. I am presenting food that I admire, enjoy, and have personal connections with but it also displays my family dynamics and my preferences. My food preferences reflect my socio-economic and cultural upbringing; I grew up in a middle-class, single-parent household that encouraged and valued education and discovery. My religious beliefs have impacted my tasting profile as I do not drink alcohol or coffee. Nevertheless, I consider myself to have a broad taste-palette and enjoy trying new flavor profiles because of this.

Knowing I needed to collaborate with a culinary artist, I began my search almost a year ago. I was fervent in my search for the right fit for the project. I reached out to local culinary arts schools and colleges, multiple catering companies, and private chefs and shared my vision of fusing dance and food. With each polite decline (whether it be time or finance that deterred them), I refined the scope and details of the project and developed even more clarity. It wasn't until late February, when I had the majority of the food selected and dancers in the rehearsal process, that I reached out to an acquaintance of mine, Robyn Farr, whom I've worked with in my church. Robyn has an associates degree in culinary arts and runs a bakery out of her home. She was delighted and excited to help with my project and accepted the time commitment and pay. We met often to discuss food portions, displays, and details we wanted in the show. She is a talented chef and is an integral part of *Savor* in both preparation and execution.

Deciding how many taste offerings paired with choreography involved careful calculations of funding and logistics. I also kept in mind the range of flavor profiles that would neither overwhelm or underwhelm the taste buds of the audience that would attend my show. Similar to

the three chefs, I considered the overall experience of the audience, paying attention to atmosphere, presentation, and the duration of the event. Like Heston Blumenthal's approach to *Sounds of the Sea*, the traditional dish reimaged into a new presentation with a nod to nostalgia, I took the audience on a taste journey that found an ebb and flow with flavor and texture. After close consideration and a detailed examination of funding, I ultimately selected twelve taste offerings that honor my mom, honor myself as an individual, and honor the gustatory journey of the audience: lime sorbet, grilled cheese and tomato soup, bacon wrapped water chestnuts, spaghetti and meatballs, chocolate mousse, caprese salad, jalapeño jelly over cream cheese on a cracker, limeade mocktail, chocolate dipped clementines with sea salt, cotton candy, cheesecake with fresh raspberries, and beef jerky.

3.2 Developing New Movement Vocabulary

Taste is the inspiration of all movement development in the show. It is also reflected in the composition and structure of each piece. This abstraction is expressed mostly in an eclectic modern contemporary approach in movement vocabulary, technique, and style. Transferring taste-sensation into a full body kinesthetic-sensation involved imaginative work and reflection. Leaning into Priscilla Ferguson's writings that taste is one of the most private of sensations, I knew including the dancers in exploration, selection and development of movement based on their own experiences with taste was pivotal to the work.

The first thing I asked the dancers to do was to imagine their entire body as a giant taste bud. I invited them to close their eyes, savor the food, and pay attention to the entire journey of that sensation from the moment it hit the tongue to it disappearing down the throat. I asked them to notice the flavors, textures, temperatures, and try to articulate that experience in their body through

improvisation. I turned on atmospheric music and together, we individually researched how that taste sensation can be transposed into full-body movement.

After we moved and explored each taste sensation, I would stop the music, and we would then reflect on the taste sensations and the movement patterns that surfaced during the improvisation. Like Chef Ferran Adrià's attention to deconstructing his dishes in order to build them up again, I asked questions that focused on deconstructing the dancer's movement experience in the improvisation. I asked questions that focused on aspects of body shaping, approach to time, spatial infinities, and dynamics. Dancers would describe using words, hand gestures, colors, or even Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) terminology. This reflection was an open forum and often led to dancers conversing in dialogue to each other about similarities or differences they shared in the exploration. My role was to write down and facilitate the discussion.

Following each discussion, dancers were then asked to use the ideas discussed to formulate a short composition that best reflected their experience with that flavor. Using the group responses and their own movement experiences with deconstructed categories of dance, they each focused on an aspect to generate material. Once the dancers were finished, I filmed each one to preserve for future compositions and structures. I then would draw upon phrasing and gestures from these short compositions to construct longer phrases and build the piece(s).

This collaborative method was used for both ensemble and solo works for the show. It was helpful for me to organize and synthesize the qualitative and spatial choices into a chart. This way, I was able to highlight and select the things that made each taste sensation unique in comparison to the other flavors. This chart (Figure 1) is an excerpt of a spreadsheet I maintained throughout the

process of creating movement material from January-March 10, 2024. It was helpful for me to see the deconstructed aspects of the movement inspired by the food in order to highlight the contrasting and unique elements for each piece.

Figure 1

Notes on Chocolate Mousse

Chocolate Mousse - January 18, 2024	
General Sensations	It just disappears, fleeting, divine (heavenly)
Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hollow, wispy, round -Mousse felt cloudy, fluffy, and then it was dissolved into a gravelly crumble, flat with texture -Taste was central in the mouth but as it dissolved it filled the entire mouth (core distal) before it disappeared -Sustenance and then airy
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The mousse was both in and out with density and shapelessness -It was there and then it wasn't - It felt like internal and then dissipated to external (in and out) -Intentional to inward pleasure -Felt contained -Felt uncontained -It spreads to parts of your mouth like other foods don't -External and spreading
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Breath timing (inhale it stops and then exhale travels on) -The focus on time led to notice the absence rather than it being there -It was so slow at the end then you couldn't tell you had it in your mouth and then
Energy Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gentle, low-energy to eat this -Clouds are gliding -There was no effort and the shape took no effort -Soft melting -Stillness and bound sustained through other shapes -Danced with no initiation

Excerpt of larger spreadsheet that notated each taste profile in relation to dance elements

3.3 Ensemble Work

During the fall semester of 2023, I choreographed a piece called *Palate* in Professor Christian Von Howard's Special Projects course. In this piece, set on Utah Valley University students, I explored my new method of creating movement inspired by the five main taste sensations: sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and umami. For my thesis project I then used a similar approach to generating movement and developing it into three ensemble sections. There are a total of four ensemble pieces in *Savor*. Three of them reflect food that contrast in taste experiences—Chocolate Mousse, Beef Jerky, Lime Sorbet— and one is a structured improvisation based on taste-inspired nostalgia.

3.31 Chocolate Mousse

I make my mom's chocolate mousse recipe for my dad and husband on their birthdays. The rich, light, and cooling sensation is enjoyed by all in my family. With a cast of six dancers, I reset the structure I used from *Palate* (2023). I used the same music and added new movement vocabulary invented by myself and with the dancers. It was helpful to have previous material to work with when we got into the studio as it jump started the dance making and introduced the dancers to how my process works. After the initial tasting rehearsal and collecting the qualitative data (as seen in Figure 1) I looked for ways to weave the elements of light, delicate, contained and uncontained, wispy, and breath-like qualities into a structure.

I examined lightness of energy, layering of sections, and the dancers' entrances in and out of the stage space piece since these are the elements that set this taste sensation and choreography apart from the other eleven sensations. The piece begins with a duet of dancers close in proximity

to each other doing different movements. They begin by softly and delicately brushing arms and upper chest. Without the first duet noticing, a second duet enters with a traveling phrase that is effortless and light. Both duets now exist in space together, continuing to move in their own worlds. A final duet comes in from the opposite side of the space and carves in between the duets in a whirling fashion. These three duets coexist and gently mix up the space until a breath-like gesture unifies them. A traveling canon sweeps them across the space and then folds back in on itself. This pattern continues for the duration of the piece: separation, unison, and canon until the dancers float away from each other, exiting the space as they dissolve the performance space into nothingness.

3.32 Beef Jerky

Beef jerky was selected to oppose the taste and texture of chocolate mousse. The genesis of this piece also came from *Palate* (2023). Using the same music and majority of the movement vocabulary from the umami section of *Palate*, I reset this on the full cast of *Savor*. However, out of the 4-month contract with the dancers, I had all nine dancers together for only 2 full rehearsals. This required a lot of planning, organizing, and layering rehearsal footage in iMovie to get an idea of how the structure of the piece was developing. After weeks of teaching movement, and helping the dancers imagine their counterparts in space, when all nine dancers finally came together in the first full cast rehearsal, the ferocity and impact was realized in the piece. All nine dancers moved with power, grit, and exerted energy like a stampede of bulls. The partnering and lifts were executed with the exact qualities and characteristics we were aiming for—tough chomping, salty waves, and an umami sensation. The powerful nine female cast moved in and out of the floor with swift and aggressive articulation.

3.33 Lime Sorbet

My mom and I enjoyed frozen limeades and lemonades in her luscious backyard. I am transported back to the shady area of her willow tree when I taste lime sorbet. The tartness and sour sensation of Lime Sorbet was central in the journey of creating this work. It was one of the most challenging of the pieces due to the split cast rehearsal schedule as well as the process of abstracting the sour sensation. It was difficult for me to decide from the list of qualities generated in the discussions with the cast how to build a structure. I felt like there was so much information on my palate but a limited pool of connections to translate it into movement. Perhaps I was overloaded from the creative exertion of setting multiple ensembles at the same time, but I did grapple with structuring this work. I had several drafts of a beginning, each draft not quite encapsulating the essence of sour tartness. Rather than being stuck on a beginning, my dancers and I continued to explore what that sour sensation feels like in the body by tasting and improvising until we had more phrases (both verbal and nonverbal) we could articulate. Collectively, we decided that the elements of quick or sudden, bound energy like a puckering face, and then a sudden release of energy, like exhaling from a long-held breath, were the elements most unique about this food.

From five still bodies, the piece explodes into chaos as all five dancers execute different phrases that punch through the space. They gather into a line that then releases and melts into a soloist against an ensemble. With a rhythmic drum sequence and a soothing saxophone overlay, the sound helps amplify the sudden sensation of tartness cooled off with relief when the sensation is over. Sourness is exciting to me. It overwhelms the mouth and dominates facial expression

(pucker). This puckered face image is performed throughout the piece as seen in the quick flutter kicks or small jumps that shimmy and shake the dancers backwards.

3.34 Improvisation Experience

This piece was designed very last as it filled a need when structuring the show order (which I will address later in this paper). I asked Jessica Heaton, Executive Director of WCDC, to design a structure that wouldn't use taste as a direct source of inspiration but would elicit nostalgia around food from the audience whose responses then informed the dancers. She devised a simple structure that required three dancers to ask audience members nostalgia-based questions such as *What was a food you despised as a child but have grown to love now? What is your favorite family recipe? What is a traditional food you have during celebrations? What is the worst thing you have ever tasted?* These dancers used the answers as inspiration and led out in a section assigned to them along with the other dancers in their grouping.

The piece was set to a calming piano score and began with the first lead dancer improvising based on the answer she received with three other dancers canonning behind, one at a time, that caused a rippling and echoing effect as they swept across the ensemble space. Next, a trio inserted improvised material, based around the audience's answers, into a series of predetermined lifts that settled them into stillness in the space. The next section of the improvisation was a soloist dancing in between the other stationary dancers using the answer she received from an audience member to inspire her movement. The soloist came to the center of the space and paused. This cue started the final section of the piece as the ensemble began flocking, a common dance improvisational tool, within their respective groupings. Dancers followed the person in the front of the group attempting

to copy the lead movement. As the person in front of the group switched directions, a new dancer was in front of the group and then led with movement. This improvisation broke away from the highly organized and intentionally designed show structure and choreography of the evening without losing the established flow. It allowed the audience to engage with food in a different way by recalling and reminiscing on their own relationship to food. Similar to the chefs I researched, and with a nod to experimentation, I utilized nostalgia in an improvisation to help support the experience of ephemerality for both the dancers and those viewing the dance.

3.4 Solo Galleries

I designed the solo galleries to underscore the ephemerality of dance and culinary arts and experiment with audience proximity and participation. There were three galleries in the event: the Savory Solo Gallery, the Spicy & Sour Solo Gallery, and the Sweet Solo Gallery. Each gallery featured three solo dance artists that were spaced in different parts of the venue. One dancer performed on the floor surrounded by windows in the southeast corner, one dancer on a 5-foot-wide circular table centered on the west side of the space, and one on a 3x4x2 foot box placed in the northeast corner. All three danced in their respective spaces and executed the movement inspired by their assigned food. They performed their solo three times to three different pieces of music. The audience was able to choose the order to view each solo making it a *once in a lifetime* moment at each station, viewing that one dancer, in a unique space, to a different song, with that particular group of viewers. The fact that the audience was in close proximity to the dancers heightened the intimacy of the experience.

The soloists were determined by giving the nine dancers an opportunity to select which food they would like to embody and represent. For all nine solos, we tasted the food, improvised the experience of the flavor, discussed what the journey was like to taste and move, and then crafted a solo on the findings of that experience. The dance artists were able to create and embody movement reflective of their unique abilities and their individual interpretation of the taste. My role shifted with each soloist, sometimes as main choreographer, sometimes as movement facilitator, or other times performance coach if they crafted the movement material themselves. This collaborative effort made for rich, dynamic movement invention and was feasible with the split rehearsal schedules.

3.41 The Savory Solo Gallery

The Savory Solo Gallery was set to three pieces of music that ranged from a punchy electric guitar, a deep velvety cello, and a driving percussion with light marimba trills. The three dancers expressed the same movement to each of these songs altering time and performance qualities that revealed a varied nuance to their assigned taste profile. The punch from the electric guitar reflected the substance of these hearty and sultry flavors, and the smooth velvety texture of the cello resonated with the satisfaction of tasting familiarity and nostalgia. The driving percussion underscored the opportunity to satiate and enjoy an abundance of these bold flavors in one sitting. I could easily consume a whole bowl or plate of grilled cheese and tomato soup, bacon-wrapped water chestnuts, and spaghetti and meatballs and not tire of the taste.

Grilled Cheese & Tomato Soup

This childhood-favorite flavor profile brings warmth and comfort. I think of my sisters huddled up to the stove as we warm our hands around the heating soup on a chilly winter's evening and melting cheese directly onto the electric griddle to prepare it for the bread. The portion during *Savor* was served in a small shot glass with a sliver of the sandwich dipped in the soup. Reflective of the homemade sourdough bread and medium cheddar cheese, the movement had smooth, elongated elements like that of stringy, melted cheese. Jessica MacDonald, performing 22 weeks pregnant, executed silk-like turns and lengthy limb extensions in her designated floor area. During the creative process, she talked about how the flavor always came back to the tomato. Even after tasting the crunch from the bread and oozing cheese from the sandwich, for her the tomato continued to pop through the palate (MacDonald). Therefore, the opening of her solo was structured as an accumulation of movement that began with upper body gestures that repeated until the movement stretched through a full-body extension which then transitioned into the rest of the piece. The movement included gestures of dipping using curving shapes with the limbs that pierced through the negative space.

Bacon-Wrapped Water Chestnuts

I enjoy this tasty treat on New Year's Eve. It is robust with a sweet and tangy flavor that rings in the new year just right. A whole water chestnut is wrapped with a small piece of bacon slathered in a mixture of brown sugar, ketchup, and worcester sauce and baked until cooked thoroughly. These glazed morsels are served with a toothpick and best eaten in one bite. Lyndsi Henretty performed this solo on the table where she captured the boldness of flavor with her strong

performance presence and full-ranged body movement. After the initial taste-inspired improvisation, Henretty focused on how the bacon has both crisp and soft parts which suggest opposing moving gestures. For her this translated into short, quick hand and arm gestures on top of the sturdy foundation of her lower body (Henretty). Wrapping herself with layers of limbs repeatedly threading through each other, she embodied the architecture of the morsel and designed her solo based on the crunchy and smooth textures she experienced when eating it.

Spaghetti & Meatballs

My mom's recipe for "Crack Spaghetti" was devoured by my family each time she made it. The blend of spices in the marinara sauce combined with the cream cheese and sausage crumbles made this a family favorite. For *Savor*, it was reimagined by serving it with the noodles spiraled on a small fork that is stabbed into a sausage meatball which sat in a small cup of the creamed marinara sauce. Kenzie Gannaway performed this free-flowing, noodle-like solo on and around the box. As we co-created this solo, both of us discussed fond memories of spaghetti dishes in our homes growing up. These memories translated into pedestrian at-the-table gestures of sitting, leaning on the table, and reaching across the table. The spiral nature of long noodles appeared as her legs spindled above her head as she supported herself on her shoulders and neck atop the box. Her controlled disarray of limbs is performed effortlessly and with contained care.

3.42 Spicy & Sour Solo Gallery

The music for this collection included: an arrangement of atonal sounds against precise staccato percussion; an upbeat elevator-music tune; and a repetitive, descending synthesized dissonance. Each song supported a particular sensation associated with the three spicy or sour

elements served. The unconventional and randomized tones used in the first sound score suggested the surprise of experiencing spicy and sour foods. The dancers embodied this music using sudden jarring movements to reflect the kick behind the jaw, the puckered face, or the heat on the tongue. The tropical elevator music reflected the joie de vivre and playfulness of sour and spicy sensations. It is a thrill, enjoyed or not, to consume food with tang and bite and the dancers' approach to their movement became noticeably more playful and quirky. Finishing off the Spicy and Sour gallery, the dissonance in the final music selection reflected the discomfort in indulging in these sensations for longer than a moment. The dancers worked with this uneasiness as they performed caprese salad, limeade mocktails, and jalapeño jelly cream cheese bites.

Caprese Salad Skewers

Eating caprese salad in the summertime under my mom's large willow tree in her backyard is a memory imprinted on my palate. Each bite of salad has a unique ratio of ingredients that, at times, fully engulfs the palate with vinegar and jumpstarts the zing from behind the jaw. For *Savor*, we served a marinated mozzarella ball, small cherry tomato, and small leaf of fresh basil skewered on a pipet syringe full of balsamic vinegar (see Appendix for image). I designed the solo, performed by Alexis Valbuena, such that those vinegar-saturated moments charged through the space with bold syncopated weight shifts and upper body circular trajectories. Valbuena performed choreography that juxtaposed sharp and angular qualities contrasted against smooth suppleness that was signature of her ballet-based training. She glided through the movement with resistance that unleashed into powerful surprises of whips and jumps. Moving through caught or still-framed moments, her solo celebrated the distinct taste journey of eating caprese salad.

Limeade Mocktail

Growing up, my family experimented with a lot of flavorful lemonades and limeades. The limeade for *Savor* represents the sense of invention in these family creations but ultimately was chosen so that the audience experienced the impact of extreme sour sensation. The limeade mocktail was rimmed with crushed, freeze-dried strawberries, sugar crystals, and crystalized lime. When dance artist Jaclyn Brown first tried this mocktail she immediately jolted back with a puckered face which was followed by a robust exclamation of the sourness she just experienced. This solo explored the sweet limeade flavor however the majority of the material reflected Brown's experience of the crystalized crumbles and strawberries at the rim of the cup. Performing on the table, she traced the edge of the circular table with her finger, brought the finger to her lips and mimicked the exact reaction described earlier with a jolt backward followed with a smooth ascendance to standing. The piece expanded this circular tracing and defining of the space into the legs, arms, and fingertips, incorporating quick flicks of the wrists and hands to support the fleeting sensation.

Jalapeño Jelly Cream Cheese Bites

It was Christmas time when I was introduced to the combination of jalapeño jelly on top of cream cheese over a cracker. As a teenager, the vibrant green made me unsure of the outcome, but with my mother's encouragement, I tried something that I now love and look forward to each holiday season. The spicy kick from the jalapeño coupled with the sweet jelly on a cool slab of cream cheese and the crunch of the cracker suggested a movement solo full of athleticism and grace. Brittany Henderson danced on the box by jumping on, rolling across, jumping off, and pouncing

back on top of the box. With her petite figure, she powered through an exhilarating exploration of explosive movement. The structure of the solo repeats itself but the range of the movement alters with each variation. This reflected the varied amounts of cream cheese, cracker, and jelly ratios. When the ratio of jelly is higher than cream cheese, it is like a freight train of spicy flavor, hence the movement in this solo was large, bold, and strong.

3.43 Sweet Solo Gallery

Harps dominate the first piece of music for the Sweet Solo Gallery and was selected for a common description of sweet sensations: divine or heavenly. The gentle harp strings ascend in chords with a repetitive ethereal quality. The second song for this collection was an acoustic guitar strumming a light-hearted tune that resonated warmth. Dancers mirrored the warmth in their performance qualities and dynamic accents in their choreography. For the final piece of music, I selected a piano solo with layered descending scales in both the low and high registers. This music is reminiscent of the scores my mom would play on her piano and listening to it brings comfort and peace to my mind. Each song in the Sweet Solo Gallery faded gradually just as chocolate-dipped clementines, cheesecake, and cotton candy linger in their sweet sensations on the tongue, gradually fading into nothingness.

Chocolate-dipped Clementines

This is one of the last recipes my mom shared with me before her cancer diagnosis. Clementine orange segments dipped in dark chocolate sprinkled with coarse sea salt is a flavorful textural treat. Dance artist Natalie Tolman shared that coming from a neutral palate, her mouth immediately salivated with salt being the first noticed flavor (Tolman). This immediate reaction

was evidenced by the abrupt beginning to her energetic and articulate solo. There was an incredible amount of potential energy ready to explode in the mouth as the cooled, crisp chocolate broke and the skin of the citrus fruit was punctured. Her solo embraced a sense of anticipation seen in bright and punctuated movement qualities and gestures. The solo ended with smooth and silky control as she melted to the floor and gave a final sliding push from her upper body to end fully stretched out on her side.

Cheesecake Bites

Growing up, cheesecake was made for each birthday in my household. My siblings and I would change the toppings according to our preferences, but the base was always mom's delicious recipe of traditional cheesecake. For the performance, Farr made individual bite-size cheesecakes in small cupcake liners with a graham cracker crust, thick layer of cheesecake, topped with a fresh raspberry. Rich, thick, and dense are the words described by Lily Farrar used as she tasted cheesecake to inspire her movement invention (Farrar). Her solo began by walking contemplatively around the edge of the table before gracefully getting on top and continuing to move with cyclical spirals full of tension and density. This stirring kind of motion shifted to different parts of her body. The structure of the solo was designed to repeat the material and perform a variation of it on a low level which suggested the contraction of dense creaminess in the mouth. Farrar incorporated wide shapes that spread her across the table with ease and smoothness.

Cotton Candy

As a child, my mom once placed a piece of cotton candy in my small wet (unbeknownst to her) hands. With shock and exhilaration I exclaimed, "It just disappears!" This childhood memory

makes me chuckle as I reflect on the playfulness and wonderment of cotton candy. Served on toothpicks, the display arrangement of orange cream, watermelon, and pink lemonade flavored cotton candy looked like Dr. Seuss' Truffula trees in the book *The Lorax*. Darcie Day elegantly performed a cloud-like solo on the box. Her tall figure set her even higher against the sky in this loosely-structured seemingly weightless solo. She faced away from the audience for the majority of the solo reflecting the nuances of delicacy in her moving body rather than performative connections to the face. She designed this solo to be delicate and buoyant before completely dissolving at the end where she melted her limbs over the box and then rolled off the back, disappearing from view.

3.5 Show Design

I methodically structured *Savor* to best fit 1) the palate experience of the audience; 2) the energy demands on the dancers; and 3) the timing that would seamlessly support serving and display of the food. These three things were considered simultaneously. I went through multiple drafts of show order and performance space arrangements until the final production was realized. Although I discuss the show order and space arrangement separately in this paper, it is important to know that the performance space helped determine the order of the show and the order helped to define the performance space.

3.51 Show Order

I first organized a show order based on taste profiles. Like the chefs I had researched, the order of taste experience can greatly enhance a patron's impression of the work. I interspersed the sweet, savory, and sour petite appetizers to incorporate variety. Once I established that, I labeled the

ones that were already designated to be ensemble works (Chocolate Mousse and Beef Jerky) and those I intended to become solos (Bacon Wrapped Water Chestnuts, Cotton Candy, and Limeade Mocktail). A few weeks into rehearsal the order became more clear when I decided that the solo galleries would be performed in the one main space as the ensembles rather than in separate rooms at the venue. This divided the show into three sections or three acts. Each one began with an ensemble work then moved into a solo gallery. This design eased potential dancer burnout as I could rearrange the solo galleries according to their casting, and it allowed the servers to unobtrusively display the food without distracting the audience.

Throughout the rehearsal process as I built and created choreography for the ensembles and several of the solos, I would seek input from the dancers on the most current show design and solicit ideas that would enhance the flow and each dancers' track within the show. They were generous with their ideas which gave me a lot of options to consider. When Beef Jerky was set entirely, the dancers commented on how strong they felt performing the piece and suggested it would do well to close the show. At that point, the choreography for the Lime Sorbet ensemble wasn't very strong and I wanted to end the show with a strong piece. I made the switch but doing so broke the pattern of the three acts in which the audience viewed an ensemble into a solo gallery. In addition, having two solo galleries perform back to back would be cumbersome since the food servers could not replenish the installations without being noticed. I needed one more ensemble to fulfill the established structure which would aid in the food preparation and placement. At this point, I couldn't add another appetizer to the budget and the performance date was approaching. Creating a structured improvisation section solved the dilemma.

WCDC has done structured improvisation pieces in the past. It is familiar to our dancers and our regular attendees. Using structured improvisation in this setting would maintain the structure for the audience while also introducing the dancers to a new type of food-inspired improvisational prompt. Serendipitously it also gave the taste buds a moment to rest and allowed for the audience to actively participate in a different way. The order was now finalized: four ensemble pieces with three solo galleries in between. This order established a pattern the audience picked up on which helped them physically transition between the designated performance spaces.

3.52 Arrangement in Space

My first time in the venue was January 3, 2024. I took pictures and recorded a video of me walking through the space capturing the details in order to plan the show and give context to the dancers—who would not be in the space until the day of the performance! I experimented with audience arrangement and engagement much like Dawn Karlovsky did with her *Playful Pairings*. I knew I wanted to kinesthetically engage the audience by having them leave their seats, walk around, and become active participants by moving their whole body. Therefore, I subdivided the large room into one area for the ensembles to perform which was set up in a traditional arrangement of two rows of seats facing a large open performance space, and another three smaller solo galleries. This arrangement of ensemble and solo gallery performance spaces went through three major iterations. Not until I received feedback from a showing on March 23, 2024 and then was in the space for a promotional photo and video shoot on March 25 was the final iteration realized.

The showing, held at Smash Dance Academy, was also the first time I had all nine of the dancers together. We rehearsed the two ensembles that had previously had split rehearsal schedules,

and the dancers had a chance to rehearse their solos in tandem with one another. Then, we ran the entire show in two rooms dividing the ensemble work from the solo galleries. The dancers performed for the chef of the event Robyn Farr, my husband Tyler Smith, Executive Director Jessica Heaton, and WCDC Board Member Pat Debenham. Although tentative costumes were worn at this showing, I was most interested to hear about the flow of the show and get initial impressions and insight from those unfamiliar with the show. The most profound feedback came from Pat Debenham. He shared how seeing all three soloists at once, lined up side by side for the showing, muddled the experience for him. He also suggested having instruction or guidance of some kind between pieces to help the audience understand their role in the show. Debenham's feedback helped me decide that the table, the box, and floor solos needed to be separated and distanced from each other. That way, the audience needed to select one solo and commit to watching and experiencing it fully before going to the next performance.

The promotional photo and video shoot happened two days after the showing. This was my second time in the space and the first for the chef along with three dancers participating in the photoshoot. Large windows looking over the Utah Valley are the prominent focal point of the venue. I selected the windows to be the backdrop for the ensemble pieces so that the viewers could enjoy nature and dance. This changed from my original plan of having the ensemble against the long wall. Also, there were large outlet covers in the middle of the large room, and I didn't want dancers performing on them as it would be unsafe. These two factors influenced the final design and use of the space for *Savor*.

4. Results and Implications for the Future

Savor was performed three times to a live audience at The Lodge at Traverse Mountain in Lehi, Utah on Saturday April 13, 2024. Each showing had 60 patrons making it a sold-out event. Following the performance, I informally engaged with the audience and listened to their experiences and thoughts. I also sent out a Google Forms survey to gather more feedback and data about their experience. The audience responded very positively to the work with ecstatic exclamations of: “That was so unique!”; “I loved the creativity!”; and “I would love to see this again!” The audience contained dancers, non-dancers, artistic patrons who love and support the arts, and patrons who have never experienced dance performances.

The post-performance feedback survey provided deeper insight for how the food and dance combination provided a life-saturated-moment. Responses were gathered up to three days after the event. When asked on a scale of 1 to 10, how much did the food and dance combinations impact you personally, 50% rated it a 10 (the food and dance combinations significantly impacted me and I will remember this for a long time), 23% rated it a 9, 16% rated a 8, and 11% rated a 7. I asked a followup question to explain their response. Some said:

- “It was just so unique and beautiful! I loved how the food influenced the way I saw the dance, and the movement made me consider the food in new ways, too!”
- “I was transfixed right into the present moment! My brain was challenged by the effort to correlate sense perceptions that are usually considered to not be related to each other. I was surprised and delighted to notice and understand these sense perceptions in new ways.

What else is there really more than wonder and deep attention? It is what makes moments feel both profound and energizing.”

- “I felt like the movement was as diverse as the different food options. There were times that I felt like my response to the food would have been different than what I was seeing in the movement but I was intrigued to see a visual representation of what the food tasted like to someone else.”
- “In my personal life I have been on a journey of bringing more intention, joy, and mindfulness to my life. I really enjoyed having a grounding exercise with everyone before the tasting began. It helped set the tone and experience for the rest of the night. Eating the food as the music/dance began was a fun way to be interactive with the dance, in a way I had not experienced before. I could feel the honor, authenticity, and exploration that was put into each pairing. At one point in the program I teared up. I was reminded of how overwhelmingly grateful I am that my life is filled with dance, because dance is amazing, and interesting, fulfilling, thought-provoking, and fun. Everyone who was there seemed like they were having a new and exciting experience. Additionally, it felt well thought-out in terms of flow and logistics. I never felt like I was confused or uncomfortable about what to do next. It all felt very natural and un-rushed.”

In response to “Which food and dance pairing was the most interesting to you”, *Lime Sorbet* was the clear favorite. Multiple patrons commented how the vibrancy of the flavor coupled with the energetic choreography made it a potent experience. Patrons wrote:

- “I loved all of them! One of my favorites was the lime sorbet right at the beginning. It was just a powerful taste and the music and movement all together started the show off with an exhilarating bang!”
- “The sorbet presented a single taste experience (in contrast with other food with multiple distinguishable tastes) which was mimicked in the unified elements of the dance performance.”
- “The first group ensemble struck me the most. I felt a more articulate connection of the taste experience and qualities of the foods to the way the dancers interpreted that in their movements.”

These responses made it clear that my initial goals for this project came across, and that the audience was able to experience the ephemeral nature of dance and food in a new way.

Using the senses as the creative inlet has shown me the importance of somatic-based work. Many practices that integrate mind and body help the dancer perform from an authentic place of body awareness and wholeness. I’m interested in these practices to further enhance audience participation, use as creative inspiration, and ultimately allow others to experience more life-saturated-moments.

Aside from being a personally fulfilling experience, using flavor profiles and building creative dance work around the sense of taste has proved to be an effective entry point into creative practice for dance makers. It is a universal tool for both the makers and the viewers to engage with and make impactful work as well as enriched audience experiences. Research into the senses, particularly gustatory and olfactory, will continue to fuel my new choreographic endeavors. By

completing in-depth research of sensation and the social context surrounding it, coupled with a study of current creative practices that include food, I believe these experiences can offer a unique inroad into performance art. A methodology that is grounded in sense-based research and exploration proves to be a substantial ground for choreographic inspiration and creative endeavors to help artists and patrons savor life.

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Appendix: Thesis Concert Program Poster

*Grilled cheese
Tomato Soup*

Beef Jerky

*Bacon-wrapped
water chestnuts*

*Spaghetti &
Meatballs*

Lime Sorbet

Savor

Menu & Program

*Caprese
Skewers*



*Jalapeño Jelly
Cream Cheese Bites*

*Lemonade
Mocktail*

Chocolate Mousse

Cotton Candy

Mini Cheesecake

*Chocolate Dipped
Clementines*