

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations in the Choreographing of *Plains Daybreak*

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Erick Hawkins (1909-1994), one of the great American modern dance pioneers of the 20th century, was committed to the creation of "theater poetry," in which dance, music, and visual designs work together to create a complete theatrical work. His lifelong commitment to artistic collaboration and his unique place in the history of modern dance is understood by examining, analyzing and interpreting archival materials related to Hawkins' seminal dance, Plains Daybreak (1979). Hawkins created dances that brought together like-minded collaborators that included composers Alan Hovhaness and Lucia Dlugoszewski as well as sculptors Ralph Lee and Ralph Dorazio. Experiences with early mentors, choreographers George Balanchine and Martha Graham were important steps in the development of his creative process. His personal aesthetic grew from his immersion in the ideas of philosophers F.S.C. Northrup and D.T. Suzuki as well as the ceremonies and arts of the Pueblo and Plains Native Americans. A chronological timeline of the creation of Plains Daybreak is generated from notebooks and correspondence in The Erick Hawkins Collection in the Library of Congress, interviews with collaborating artists, and the authors' personal experiences as members of the Erick Hawkins Dance Company.



*"The dance is a ceremony
that takes place on the great
American plains
on one of the days of the
beginning of the world."*

Program note for Plains Daybreak

Video still capture, author's collection

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Erick Hawkins (1909-1994) was one of the great American modern dance pioneers of the 20th century. Called “the contemplative poet of modern dance” by *The New York Times* dance critic Jennifer Dunning (1992), his choreography was distinguished by the collaborations that brought together like-minded artists. Hawkins was inspired to study dance after seeing a performance by the German dancers Harald Kreutzberg and Yvonne Georgi while on vacation from his studies at Harvard University, where he studied Greek Civilization. After studying with Kreutzberg in Austria for a summer, he moved to New York City and became the first student at the fledgling School of the American Ballet (Holt, 2010). Hawkins participated in many historic collaborations: early works for the new American Ballet choreographed by George Balanchine accompanied by the works of composer Igor Stravinsky; Lincoln Kirstein’s Ballet Caravan, which brought together young choreographers and composers; and Martha Graham, notably with Aaron Copland and sculptor Isamu Noguchi. After dancing in Graham’s company from 1938-51, Hawkins’ emerging personal aesthetic catalyzed an unprecedented direction of choreography. After a few years of creating and performing solos with music by composer Lucia Dlugoszewski, Hawkins formed his own company in 1957 (Kisselgoff, 1994) to create larger works and present his growing repertory. Already passionate about partnering with contemporary artists, he was opposed to using music such as Mozart or Bach who were already hailed as consummate composers, or dance created from codified steps like formal ballet. Rather, the excitement of risking all with new art, new music, and new dance emboldened Hawkins to develop a lifelong commitment to collaboration and a new genre of dance.

At Hawkins’ memorial service in 1994, Charles Reinhart, longtime director of the American Dance Festival, reflected: “I think of Erick’s work and I think of a Zen garden. I think of virtuosity without effort. I think of ancient, perhaps lost connections. (1996)” This statement captures Hawkins’ life and work in three important ways: awareness of “now,” harmony within the human form, and man’s ceremonial relationship to the worlds of time and place. Hawkins’ artistic achievements have been acknowledged by receipt of a Guggenheim Fellowship (1978), the Dance Magazine Award (1983), the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement in Modern Dance (1988), and the Presidential Medal for the Arts (1994).

Erick Hawkins holds a unique place in the pantheon of modern dance choreographers, yet his life and work have rarely been chronicled in scholarly literature with any depth. The research presented here will demonstrate his lifelong commitment to artistic collaboration by examining, analyzing and interpreting archival materials related to Hawkins’ seminal dance, *Plains Daybreak*. Hawkins’ use of “free flow” movement, a Laban Movement Analysis phrase denoting lack of resistance, and subject matter that included the non-representational (Hawkins’

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preferred term to “abstract”), metaphorical and thematic, are clearly distinguished from Martha Graham’s strong and dramatic presentation of mythology or Merce Cunningham’s playful use of chance to determine compositional relationships. Existing writing most often notes Hawkins’ use of nature metaphors, Zen Buddhist concepts of “suchness” and inspirations from Native Americans. A few collections of essays by and about him have been published by small presses and are now out of print (Hawkins, 1992; Lorber, 1979; Norton, 1973). Renata Celichowska (2000) published a comprehensive volume describing Hawkins’ technique accompanied by two videos that illustrated his principles of movement. Previews and reviews from more than 50 years of company performances are found in a wide range of newspapers and periodicals. Hawkins is mentioned in general dance history texts primarily in the context of his work with Martha Graham, (McDonough, 1970, 1976); general references to his technique can be found in publications on modern dance techniques, and somatics and imagery (Legg, 2011; Bainbridge Cohen, 1993; Olsen (1999), and imagery (Franklin, 1996). Mark Franko’s book, *Martha Graham in Love and War* (2012) is a notable exception. Unlike most treatises about Graham’s life and work which downplay Hawkins’ role in her company, Franko’s excellent research unearths their shared love of delving into the depths of mythology and psychology by way of long letters and diary entries during their time together as dancers and lovers. Clearly there is much to be discovered about Hawkins’ unique place in dance history, his deeply embodied aesthetic, and his commitment to collaboration.

Dance is necessarily a collaborative art form. At the very least, the choreographer’s work is developed in collaboration with a dancing body, whether self or other, and its possibilities. A look through any dance history text will show that choreographers through time and across cultures have worked collaboratively with visual artists, composers, musicians, lighting designers, poets and, of course, dancers. This collaboration takes place along a spectrum of exchanges that include various models of communicating and idea sharing. Vera John-Steiner’s book, *Creative Collaboration* (2000), is an extraordinary look into the many models of partnership in the arts and sciences. She purports that cooperative effort in the form of collaboration, whether through friendship, direct conversational exchange or community involvement play a vital role in the development of creative ideas. Additional texts present overviews of contemporary choreographers’ collaborations (e.g. Teck, 2011; Brown, 1979) while books on the collaborative processes of particular choreographers cover a wide range, from George Balanchine (Joseph, 2002) to Bill T. Jones (Jones, et al., 1989).

Of particular note is Selma Jeanne Cohen’s collection of essays, *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief* (1965) by American modern dance choreographers, which illustrates different ways of approaching collaboration in the creation of a dance on the theme of The Prodigal Son. Anna Sokolow imagines,

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“I think I would do it in modern dress. I would use music of today.” (p. 37) Erick Hawkins relies on “the principle that everything used on the stage must be beautiful in its own materials ...” (p. 50). In addition, he states that he would choreograph the dance first and then commission the score. Pauline Koner is very specific. Her description begins with the following: “Music: Lukas Foss, Set: Peter Larkin, Narration: Archibald MacLeish” (p. 87). Hawkins’ response is uniquely based on a principle: the creation of beauty. The fact that Hawkins commissioned new scores that were always played by live musicians is noted in many reviews; however, his creative process and the years of research he poured into each dance has not yet been discussed in any scholarly writings.

In keeping with many modern choreographers of the mid-20th century, worked intimately with contemporary artists to create a complete theatrical work of art. His unique development as an artist drew from his relentless search for philosophic and aesthetic truth in art as well as in life. Sharing his passion for complex, existential and spiritual ideas, the collaborating artists would then express a poetic vision that seamlessly integrated the various media into one sensibility. Two artists who were frequent collaborators were composer Lucia Dlugoszewski (1931-2000) and sculptor Ralph Dorazio (1922-2005). A preview of an upcoming Hawkins performance appeared in the *Stanford Daily* (1971). “Hawkins, recognized as one of the leading figures in American dance, has combined with sculptor Ralph Dorazio and composer Lucia Dlugoszewski to create a new concept in ‘theater poetry.’ ... The three have worked closely together for 13 years trying for an effective relation of sound to movement to design.” Writing about Hawkins’ dance *Cantilever II* (1988) Jamake Highwater states: “In this exquisite collaboration between composer and choreographer, Hawkins once again proves capable of giving dance its own inner momentum as well as an astonishing kinship with Dlugoszewski's music -- a score of fantastic energies.” (1990). Critic Alan Kriegsman describes the collaborations in the production of Hawkins’ dance *Summer Clouds People* in wonderful detail. “Artist Ralph Dorazio's startling suspended shapes – combining the dreaminess of Miro and the playful dimensionality of Calder – perfectly complemented Mamiya's piquantly spicy soundscape as a backdrop to the balmy elegance of the choreography” (1991). The essence of a Hawkins dance is brought forth by living artists, including numerous exceptional conductors and musicians, and deeply committed dancers.

Hawkins guided collaborators to greater and greater refinement and artistry, and responded fully to their creations until the dance hummed with vibrancy. Dorazio spoke for them both when he said: “To experience the immediate, to experience the sensuous as a direct, pure, clear contact with what is – this, I think, is what art is all about” (1962). Enlivening the senses was a hallmark of Hawkins’ approach to creativity. The wonder of being, or “suchness,” was elucidated by each collaborating artist who captured chimera and gave it form in subtle yet distinctive

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evocations. Many Hawkins dances follow this paradigm, but *Plains Daybreak*, which will be studied here, is a prime example of utmost fluency between collaborators in the creation of one potent work.

Methods

To investigate the collaborative process of Erick Hawkins in the creation of his works, our research focused primarily on his evocative dance *Plains Daybreak* (1979), which critic Anna Kisselgoff in *The New York Times* (1983) describes as “one of Erick Hawkins's most beautiful dance works.” The authors were long-time members of the company and deeply integrated into Hawkins' creative processes. Hawkins exhaustively researched the idea for *Plains Daybreak* over many decades and this process is fully documented in The Erick Hawkins Collection in the Library of Congress. This rich cache of primary source material includes letters to and from dozens of collaborating artists involved in the creation of this dance. Fortunately, Hawkins kept carbon copies of all of his outgoing letters, so complete conversations can be studied. Communications between Hawkins, composer Alan Hovhaness, and mask-maker Ralph Lee reveal the detailed back and forth of creative ideas. Notebooks, scenarios, simple notation of movement ideas and annotated scores are additional windows into his creative process.

The Jerome Robbins Performing Arts Library in New York City provided recordings of oral and video interviews along with additional literature and scores. Interviews with collaborating artists have been conducted by the authors in two time periods: 1990-91 (for Pettibone Wright's master's thesis) and 2014-the present (ongoing research); these are in the collections of the authors and have not been formally transcribed. Interviews were also conducted by Caroline Sutton Clark in 2010 at the 100th Anniversary of Erick Hawkins Symposium at the 92nd Street YMHA, NYC; these recordings (without transcriptions) are held at the Performing Arts Library. Collections of essays by and about Hawkins, including *The Body is a Clear Place* (Hawkins, 1992), *5 essays on the dance of erick hawkins* (Norton, 1972), and *Erick Hawkins: Theory and Training* (Lorber, 1979) yield his aesthetic and philosophical foundations. Information from these sources will provide the basis for tracing the roots of Hawkins' commitment to collaboration and understanding his unique aesthetic output. As a totality, the research will reveal Hawkins' vision of “dance as a voyage of discovery” (1992, p. 12), imbuing his dances, dancers and audiences with philosophic, aesthetic and kinesthetic awareness.

Analysis of Hawkins creative process is facilitated by potential titles, quotes from literature, scenarios, cast lists, and sketches that appear and reappear in his notebooks over the course of many years, evolving with his avid and ongoing

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acquisition of knowledge. Cross-referencing Hawkins' personal writings with related letters and interviews illuminates the common threads and begins to answer important questions: Why did he choose these artists? What drew these artists together? In what ways did they communicate? How did they affect each other's work? Interpretation of Hawkins' creative process and collaboration is facilitated by the wealth of materials referring to the creation of *Plains Daybreak* and the resulting dance itself. Seen together, Hawkins' collaborative process is revealed and unpacked.

Analysis of the primary sources presented here show what Hawkins shared with each collaborating artist: his far-reaching thoughts and influences, his transcendent understanding of the purpose of the dance, and his vision for artistic components with each collaborating artist. His approaches to collaboration viewed through the lenses of composers, visual designers and dancers provide different perspectives of his methods and different pieces of Hawkins' creative process.

Experiences with Collaboration

Erick Hawkins' development as a choreographer can be traced through several essential experiences that left an indelible mark on Hawkins' creative process. At the beginning of his career, he danced with two of the most celebrated and noted choreographers of the 20th century, George Balanchine and Martha Graham, both of whom frequently collaborated with contemporary artists. While Hawkins ultimately broke with his mentors on several fronts, primarily his growing interest in using poetic subject matter and an effortless movement style, their influences on his creative process was profound.

In 1934, Hawkins became the first student at the new School of American Ballet and danced in several of George Balanchine's first works created in America (Holt, 2010). Hawkins literally sat at the Balanchine's feet, closely observing the artistic exchanges between choreographer and composer during the creation of *Jeu de Cartes*, *Le Baiser de la Fée* and the revival of *Apollo* for a Stravinsky Festival in 1937 [Rogosin, 1979]. Balanchine's affinity for music and his partnership with composers, especially Igor Stravinsky, is legendary. Like Balanchine, Hawkins was adept at reading and analyzing musical scores; both of their dancers were also known for their musicality. Like Stravinsky, composer Dlugoszewski created new music that pushed the boundaries of conventional



George Balanchine and Igor Stravinsky

Photo uncredited

Retrieved from

<http://www.nycballet.com>

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compositions. These creative pairings sparked innovative relationships between dance and music, sharing the spotlight equally and enriching the whole.

Fellow dancer Ruthanna Boris recalls Balanchine's swift improvisations that "... day after day, became a never-ending discovery of new ways to dance." (Gottlieb, 2004, p. 79). Hawkins absorbed Balanchine's quest for new movement, breaking from ballet traditions, and applied this experience to his own creative process as he searched for a new way to move and a new area of choreography. Improvisation was also an important first step of movement invention for Hawkins, experienced with his dancers in the studio. Short phrases followed by variation, elaboration and evaluation of motifs became Hawkins practice as he pursued a "confluence of nature and spirit." (Hawkins, *The Body is a Clear Place*, p. viii) When speaking of his choreographic journey, Hawkins remarks, "A voyage of discovery is not travel in a well-worn, well-known path. It's more like a direction somewhere. Modern dance is a direction, maybe several directions, ahead to somewhere we have never quite been before. (Hawkins, *The Body is a Clear Place, Modern Dance as a Voyage of Discovery* 1992, p. 13).

Hawkins choreographed his first dances as a member of Lincoln Kirstein's Ballet Caravan, an off-shoot of Balanchine's American Ballet, which produced works with American themes and American music. James Steichen (2015) discovered in Lincoln Kirstein's diaries that it was Balanchine who first encouraged Hawkins to use contemporary music to accompany his choreography, suggesting Weber rather than Debussy. Hawkins took this one step further with his own company, choosing to commission works for a small chamber orchestra that could tour with the company. The use of live music for every performance became a hallmark of Hawkins' performances.

Hawkins joined Martha Graham's company in 1938 and lengthy letters between the two, held in the Library of Congress, detail their deep connection in formulating paradigms for art and life. Hawkins joined her research into philosophy, psychology and Greek mythology, creating detailed choreographic scenarios, and commissioning music and sets from relatively unknown, but sympathetic and talented, artists. These formative experiences emphasized iconic characters, authenticity, and collaborative theater. The Los Angeles Times writer Zan Dubin (1991) quoted Hawkins shortly after Graham died, "Martha taught me to live with courage. ... She had a vision and she went after it with imagination and with courage." For Graham's *Appalachian Spring* (1944), Hawkins was responsible for the commission of Aaron Copland's Pulitzer Prize-winning music, the choice of its instrumentation for live performance, and for raising the



Graham and Hawkins in *American Document*.
Courtesy of the Music
Division, Library of
Congress

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funds. Several of the artists with whom Hawkins worked in Graham's company collaborated with Hawkins as he branched out on his own, including composers Robert McBride and Hunter Johnson as well as set designers Isamu Noguchi and Arch Lauterer. Like Graham, Hawkins never diverged from the practice of collaboration with contemporary artists.

A deep well of inspiration was developed during the time in which Hawkins spent in the Martha Graham Dance Company. His role in Graham's *American Document* was the first of many in which he portrayed archetypal masculine characters. Writer Mark Franco submits that in this dance, "[t]he audience coalesces its desire for community later in the work around Hawkins as One Man, a portrayal of the Common Man. The idea of one man representing all; First Man [in Hawkins' *Plains Daybreak*] represents ideal man in a primal relationship with animal" (2012). Even after leaving her company, Hawkins remained impressed by her strong sense of presence on-stage and her all-consuming dedication to her art.

Lucia Dlugoszewski, a ground-breaking composer in her own right, explored the immediacy of sound similarly to the way Hawkins explored kinesthetic perception of movement. For a dozen years, Hawkins choreographed his dances prior to her composition of the music, claiming that the movement must speak to him rather than being guided by the music. Dlugoszewski understood and



respected this approach to art-making. She was a keen observer of movement and spent many hours in the studio studying the creation of the dances noting and memorizing each turn of phrase. When it was time to compose, Dlugoszewski stayed true to the needs of the dance while creating a score that could stand on its own. Hawkins and Dlugoszewski collaborated on several seminal works such as *Here and Now with Watchers* (1957), *Cantilever* (1963) and *Black Lake* (1969). Author Mark Woodworth (n.d.), in *on the dance of erick hawkins*, notes:

Of this unique and synergistically productive collaboration Hawkins has been termed the intuitive one, Dlugoszewski the intellectual, but the reverse seems happily as apt. ... [They have] blended in a receptivity to the non-intellective tradition of Zen and to the Oriental notion that the artist's function is to present ideas of enlightenment."

Hawkins' and Dlugoszewski's long collaboration produced startling duets of sound and movement. They wrought a new paradigm in contemporary form of art.

Hawkins was developing his personal aesthetic through encounters with resonant ideas, especially in the works of philosopher F.S.C. Northrop, studies of Zen Buddhism through writers like D. T. Suzuki, and the ceremonies of several Native American tribes, as witnessed by him and elucidated by writer Jamake

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Highwater. Several threads run through these different perspectives, although approached in very different fashions, that can be read in Hawkins' writings: beauty, "suchness," and immediacy.

Perhaps the strongest influence on Hawkins' aesthetic comes from philosopher F. S. C. Northrop (1893-1992). Hawkins garnered foundational principles pertaining to the creation and performance of his art by studying and adapting Northrop's scientific methodology to develop his own belief systems, or "trapped universals" (1946, 1947). According to Northrop, by following cultural or familial assumptions to their irreducible source, one can then make conscious choices based on new facts and experiences. In another important vein, Northrop posits two functions of art: the first function is the apprehension of the beauty of the materials themselves; the second function suggest that the materials express an idea. Northrop's clear descriptions of the functions of art are echoed in many of Hawkins' writings and talks as cornerstones for creating and evaluating art.

D. T. Suzuki and other writers on Zen Buddhism introduced Hawkins to concepts of mindfulness and acceptance, which he applied to his life as well his art. Collaborating with composer Lucia Dlugoszewski, they delved into the areas of immediacy and direct apprehension by creating ground-breaking works such as *Here and Now, with Watchers* (1957) and *8 Clear Places* (1960). Both of these dances challenged audiences to see their synergistic arts with fresh eyes and ears, without "naive realism" or dramatic storyline (Hawkins, 1992).

Born in the small town of Trinidad, Colorado, Hawkins felt a kinship with that part of the United States. "I think it is not insignificant that I was born on the exact geographical dividing line between the Plains Indians and those of the southwest Pueblo cultures," Hawkins wrote in an early Plains Daybreak notebook (1977, December 12. Notes Book #3). Perhaps it was this connection that led him, later in life, to return to the southwestern United States, to study the dance, art and spirituality of the Native American tribes in that area. The Pueblo Indian ceremonies that he witnessed demonstrated concurrent aesthetic and animistic principles, beautiful both in the materials themselves, or art in its first function, and its meaning, art in its second function. Writer and friend, Jamake Highwater explained "Primal people are remote from Western man's artistic self-consciousness. In primal societies, the arts are aspects of public life which bring together dancing, poetry, and music into a single function: ritual, an all-embracing, often singular, expressive act of a people" (p. 20). Hawkins felt an affinity for a conception of the universe in which people, animals and plants were all significant. This feeling of "home," both physically and spiritually, became the location for exploring the themes of *Plains Daybreak*. Hawkins saw the dance as a "metaphor of existence" (1992), an idealized world of nature where man fits snugly and unobtrusively; all creatures living communally with man.

Approaches to Collaboration

Collaborations are complicated; ways must be found to communicate particular and elemental needs in both aesthetic and practical frameworks. As philosopher, poet, social commentator, and aesthetic arbiter, Hawkins guided and mentored the collaborating artists both in person and in letters. He treated each artist with equal respect and, in turn, his collaborators appreciated his pure aesthetic and his desire for the highest quality in all media of theater (1990, Lee; Dorazio; interviews with author). By finding collaborators of similar spirit, he stimulated their imaginations and ultimately trusted their visions in the making of the dance (Grausam, 1974). His model of working toward artistic truth, as well as his generosity of spirit, inspired his collaborators to create rigorous works of beauty and power that were the quintessential models of purity in their respective artistic disciplines.

Hawkins shared his sources of inspiration and ruminations with the collaborating artists of like-minded aesthetic passions but working in different disciplines. He provided a structure and expected each artist to create a work of substance that could stand alone and harmonize with the theatrical whole. One entered this vision as if entering a world apart. Hawkins charged his *Plains Daybreak* collaborators, Ralph Lee, Alan Hovhaness and the company dancers, with interpreting and expanding his purpose and in the process, making it their own. He expected that their work will be beautiful in its own right, appearing side-by-side on stage with consciousness of, but not reliance on, each other. Hawkins declared that the most beautiful art takes time and cited the oft-quoted Charlie Chaplin adage: "Simplicity is no simple thing." Collaborating with Hawkins could be energizing as well as confounding with revisions and questions, holding all, including himself, to high standards of artistic truth.

Hawkins' relationship to music was intense and personal. Having studied piano as a child, Hawkins was fluent in reading scores and analyzing music, and this ability served him well when he collaborated with composers. His need to use new music was based on two philosophical premises. First, he was dedicated to choreographing to music written in his own time in order to create a cohesive form of art. As he said to Katherine Teck (1989): "The adventure is in finding the composers that are valid" (p. 21). Secondly, he felt that taped music has "no life" (Hawkins, n.d.). Thus, Hawkins only performed with live music throughout his career (1991, interview with author). Dancers could then hear the music freshly, feel the subtle shifts of expression and respond with new feeling. Critic Alan Kriegsman (1987) quotes Hawkins having said that live music is "what gives the dancing the sensation of being on the brink of now." It is an artistic risk to use untested scores, yet Hawkins felt that new works created with the same end in mind express a theatrical unity impossible to achieve otherwise.

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Hawkins chose to work with Alan Hovhaness in the creation of *Plains Daybreak*. He had worked with Hovhaness' music previously and appreciated the beautiful melodies, sensitive timings and overarching form. In addition, their respect for each other's art and personal familiarity allowed for a free exchange of ideas. These were qualities he likely felt were well-suited to the burgeoning dance, *Plains Daybreak*.

Costumes, props, and set pieces were commissioned and created before beginning to Hawkins began work in the studio with his dancers. His strong sensibility about the nature of stage design is quoted by Selma Jean Cohen (1965):

Stage objects are worse than useless, however, if they are used only to convey meaning. ... To me, the only meaningful theatre aesthetic would be one in which every object used on stage and the making of every costume must be as beautiful in its construction and material on the side never seen by the audience as on the side that is seen (pp. 49-50).

This is a profound statement about his concept of theater. It is not just a "show" being put on, there are no smoke and mirrors altering reality. Collaborating sculptor Ralph Dorazio (1962) concurs, stating that "[c]ostumes, sets, face and body masks, and other objects are not designed as properties in an additive or mechanical sense, but rather as an integral part of the dance" (pp. 42-12). Both performers and audience are partners in experiencing each moment; what the performer sees is as important as what is seen by the audience.

As Hawkins studies a newly created design, he shifts from internal visualization to external appraisal of the concrete. He needs, perforce, to see and touch the exact thing so he can experience it directly or, as F. S. C. Northrop (1947) would say, experience it as "pure fact" (p. 318). Novak (1990) also notes Hawkins' allegiance to both "science and sensuality," or knowing and feeling, in making artistic choices.

A performance preview in the *Stanford Daily* (1971) describes the ways in which Hawkins integrates the collaborating artists into the creative process:

Sculptor Dorazio works directly on the body of the dancer, using no sketches. The dancer's body becomes the sculptor's medium. Hawkins then choreographs his dance in silence. Hawkins explains the silence by saying that it is necessary for him to be able to fully investigate the subtlety of 'movement-duration' and 'movement rhythm,' which he says music, with its other preoccupations, tends to flatten out.

Except for works clothing the dancers in simple leotard costumes, choreography took place in full costume and completed props to ensure a harmonious marriage of movement and visual designs.

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Mask-maker Ralph Lee, in an interview with Sutton Clark (2010) notes that Hawkins expected Lee's designs to stand alone as well as in concert with the dance. Hawkins urged Lee to strive for elegance and simplicity to arrive at the essence of a thing using "innocent" materials such as balsa wood, paper, feathers, and horsehair. While these materials can be fragile and frustrating to work with, impractical on tour, and difficult to repair, Hawkins was unwilling to compromise by using materials that would be more durable.

Dancers were an integral part of Hawkins' creative process, but he did not hold auditions for dancers to join his company. Instead, he groomed dancers from his school, watching students as they rose through the levels and inviting a select few to join company class. Hawkins' dancers practiced subtle rhythms, shapes and qualities as much as other physical attributes such as strength and flexibility. Company class led by Hawkins was sprinkled with references to current events, performances, literature, science, and philosophy. Hawkins would often stop class to discuss what he was reading and contemplating and then ask the dancers to verbally respond. These declamations were essential to the spirit of the class since the movement Hawkins generated often subtly related. Hawkins was training the dancers to see that what one thought and how one moved were inseparable, and this necessary relationship would be useful if approached with grace and agility. Thus, a dancer was encouraged to dance and live in sensation and transparency.

In the early stages of choreographing, Hawkins created a central motif and from there developed many short variations of this motif with his dancers. He then fit these short phrases together end-to-end, thereby creating longer phrases of movement. There was much room for dancers' input. Because of their particular training, the dancers were exquisitely attuned to Hawkins, and were able to instinctively make choices in keeping with his vision. On the other hand, company member Robert Yohn (1990. Interview with author) spoke about a certain kind of "intractability" in putting movements together. The skilled Hawkins dancers found seamless transitions between phrases until there was an inevitable fluency of phrasing. Embodied participation in the creation of a dance, along with precisely felt, poetic timings, unified the dancers and kept the dance fresh in performance.

Douglas Andresen (2016) created the role of Buffalo in *Plains Daybreak*, and recalls Hawkins telling a Plains Indian story of the White Buffalo who saved the people from starvation by offering his body. This illustrated Hawkins' motivation for that duet, a relationship of gratitude and generosity between First Man and Buffalo. Hawkins also referenced the Noh master Zeami who said "at the right moment, give the audience a flower." Andresen was then primed to collaboratively develop movement vocabulary in tune with Hawkins' direction and vision rather than being taught previously determined "steps."

Dancer Kathy Ortiz captured the underlying difficulty in performing Hawkins' work. When learning a solo from *8 Clear Places* that primarily consisted

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of laying out a long rope of squash leaves, and she was asked by Hawkins to perform this simple task with unembellished honesty. Like a Japanese tea ceremony, each gesture was to be performed without hesitation or doubt. "For the first time I felt so naked, so exposed, because I knew that the audience was going to read me like an open book and I thought, 'Couldn't Erick give me a flash turn somewhere?' But no, I had the ceremony where you just accept whatever happened when it happened" (Ortiz, 1996).

The choreography of Erick Hawkins endeavored to inhabit the sensation of the moment whether that sensation expressed quick, rapid fire movements or undulations of overcurves and undercurves. "Modern dancers...do not simply perform the movements of a choreographer - they become the movements, through intense kinesthetic projection of ideas and feeling as pure bodily expression...we see this process in a work by Erick Hawkins..." (Highwater, 1978, p. 26). The choreography was the opposite of willful and the dancers, steeped in the Hawkins philosophy of "natural movement", were intellectually disposed to Hawkins' creative processes. The dancers were receptive and creative vehicles of expression.

The Making of *Plains Daybreak*: A Timeline

(Link to the opening of *Plains Daybreak*: <https://youtu.be/c2UsvcTIux8>)

This section presents a chronological sampling of documents, primarily from boxes 47 and 56, in the Erick Hawkins Collection in the Library of Congress. These boxes contain Hawkins' notebooks relating to the creation of his dance, *Plains Daybreak*. Several collaborating artists have been interviewed regarding their endeavors with Hawkins. Their personal observations and insights provide yet another dimension of understanding the process of creating *Plains Daybreak*. The author's (Laura Pettibone) experiences in the choreography, performance, and remounting of the dance also add depth to the research. Together, these resources allow the curtain to be pulled back in order to experience the birth of *Plains Daybreak*.

Plains Daybreak ceremoniously depicts mankind and his place in the natural world with a sense of wonder. Writer and friend Jamake Highwater explains that "Erick Hawkins sees the creature within us. He is able to remember our infancy among the other animals" (1978, p. 197). In this portrayal there is no war, no death, no conflict, just the gentle shifting of animal innocents with the fundamental everyman at the center. In an age before society questioned cultural appropriation, Hawkins looked from the outside at a culture he profoundly admired, digested what he saw, read widely about the southwestern tribes, and ultimately trusted that "any imitative elements will be transmuted by pure dance movements, as he explained in a letter to composer Alan Hovhaness (1976, October 13).

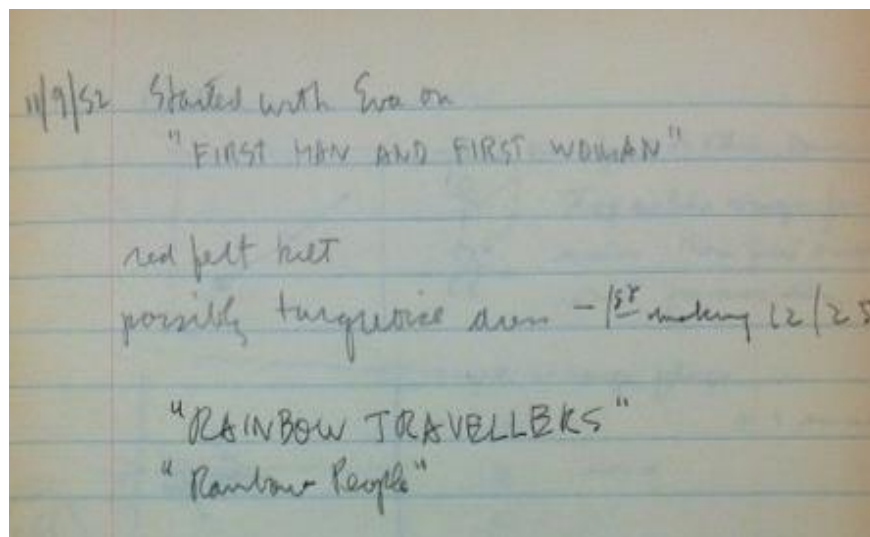
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Plains Daybreak collaborators included composer Hovhaness, mask maker/set designer Ralph Lee, lighting designer Robert Engstrom, the eight musicians of the Hawkins Chamber Orchestra, and the eight dancers of the Erick Hawkins Dance Company. Together, they brought forth an idealized world of nature where man fits snugly and unobtrusively; all creatures living communally with man.

As early as 1952, Hawkins' notebooks contain entries about a new dance with similar imagery. Poems written during important trip back to the Southwest in 1967 reveal Hawkins' deep connection to that place. He began working on the idea again in 1976, first with quotes from books, then scenarios with timings, sketches, and diagrams. Long letters to composer Hovhaness and sculptor Lee are filled with a wide variety related ideas. Movement invention and composition took nearly two years. After this copious preparation, collaboration and rehearsal, the dance was premiered in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1979.

1952: Untitled Notebook

The seeds of *Plains Daybreak* can be seen in Hawkins' notebooks as early as 1952. At that time, his working title was *First Man and First Woman*; alternate titles suggest his search for the most meaningful statement of his image. His notebook shows that he began movement exploration with Eva Raining, an early member of his company, and even made a preliminary costume: "a turquoise arm," most likely out of felt.

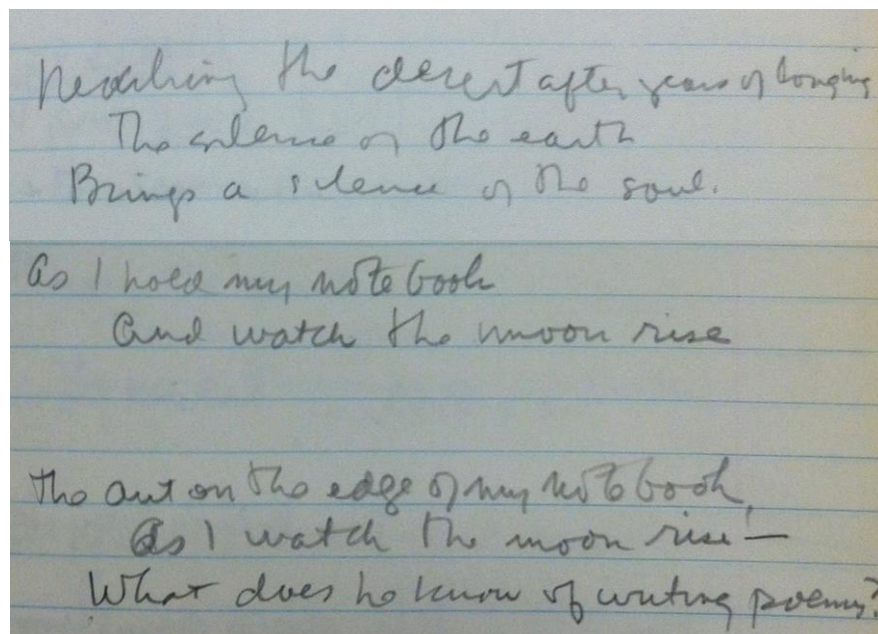
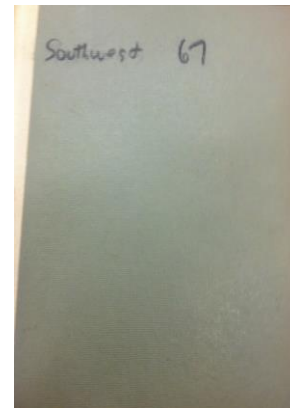


Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

This window into Hawkins' detailed creative process shows both his ongoing sense of order, dated notes, and his preliminary visualization of costuming. Hawkins' maintained his oft-repeated principal, "believe your senses," in determining whether a title, visual designs or any other aspect of his total theater was good enough. The lead character in *Plains Daybreak*, "First Man," was costumed in turquoise felt pants instead of the original idea of one turquoise sleeve.

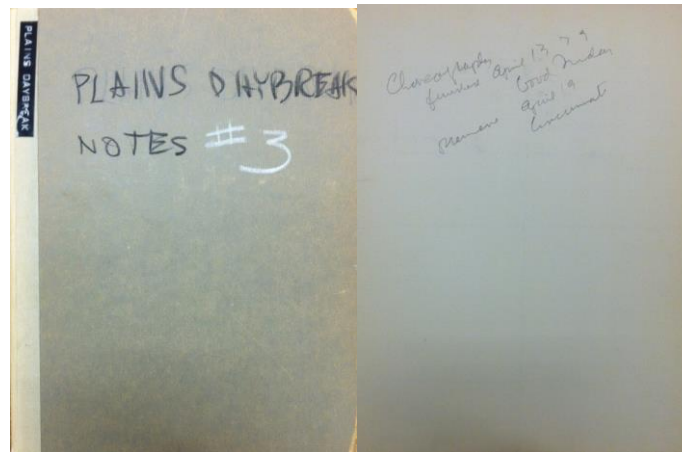
1967: Southwest 67 Notebook

As noted above, Hawkins had a strong affinity to the American Southwest. He was inspired by spiritual and aesthetic ideas of the Pueblo and southern Plains Native Americans and returned several times to observe their ceremonies and celebrations. To him, the landscape of the Southwest was profound and it stirred his imagination. This notebook contains poems and notes written during a camping trip to Monument Valley in 1967 (there are no precise dates for the following entries). They reflect many attributes of Hawkins' respect for the power of silence, awareness and moment-by-moment sense of the present, often expressed in his offbeat sense of humor.



Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

Other entries into this notebook find their way into the creation of additional works with imagery from the American Southwest, such as *Agathon* (1979), a meditation on the landscape of the place, and *Heyoka* (1981), the sacred clowns “who, through their fooling around, open the people to the immediacy and poetry of the action to come.” (Program note, personal collection) This is evidence of Hawkins’ purposeful, methodical path of observation, perception, apprehension and exploration of pioneering ideas.

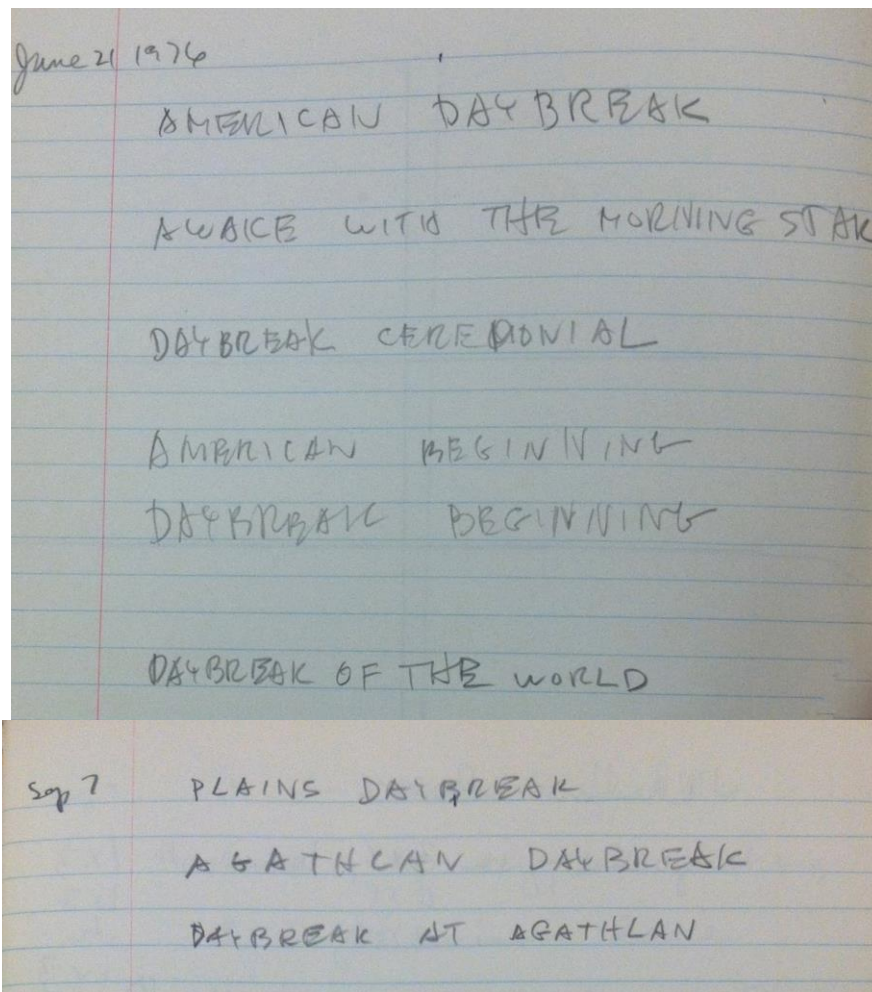


1976: *Plains Daybreak* Notes #3

Although marked #3, this book contains Hawkins’ preliminary notes as he explored ideas for *Plains Daybreak*. The excerpts below illustrate the issues with which Hawkins wrestled as he proceeded from an overarching concept to the smallest structural details.

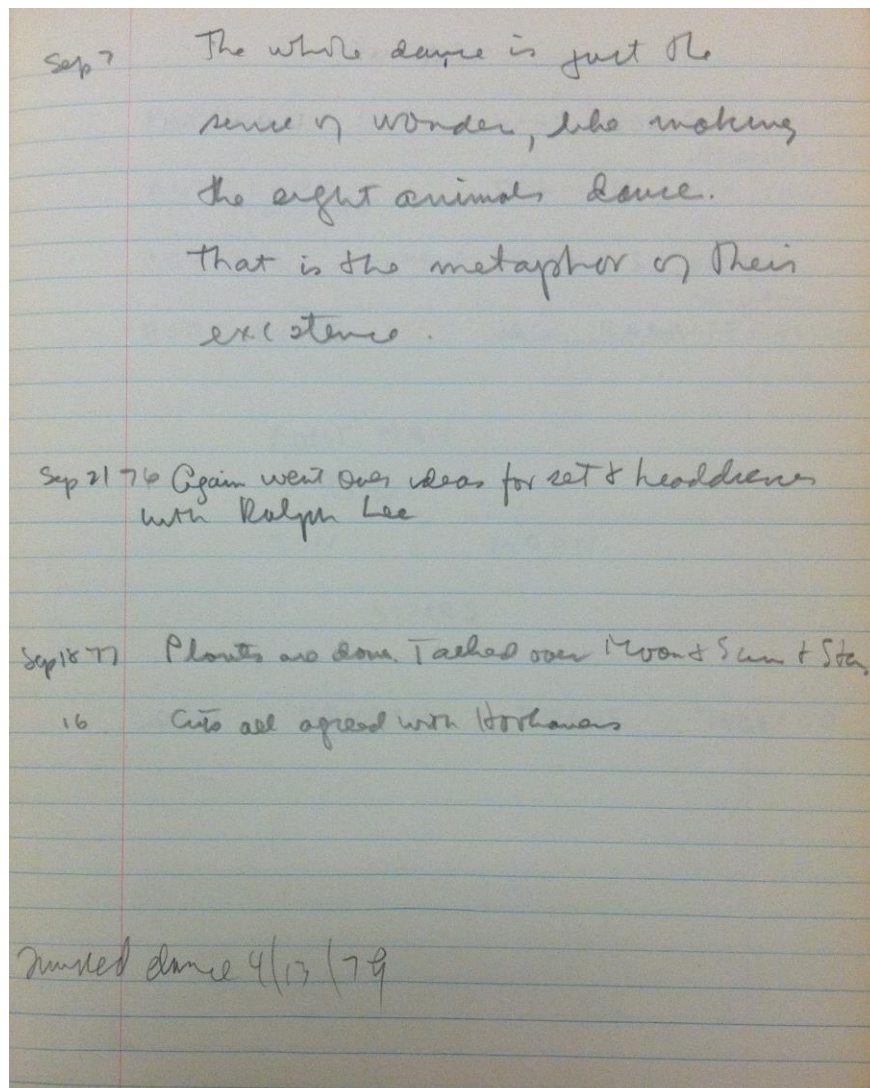
June 21, 1976. Hawkins explores possible titles seeking to metaphorically capture his primary motivation. Each potential title demonstrates Hawkins’ dedication to joining the concrete and poetic, without decoration or embellishment. One can see his wheels turning as he weighs the fundamental concepts of America, morning, and ceremony.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations



September 7, 1976. Hawkins pens a concise statement of the premise of *Plains Daybreak* that encompasses both his poetic aesthetic, “suchness,” and his demand for immediacy, “livingness.” This sentence, as seen in the document below, will eventually find it’s way into the program notes that help guide the audience into the ceremonial dance: “*The dance is a ceremony that takes place on the great American plains on one of the days of the beginning of the world*” (Program notes. Author’s personal collection.)

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

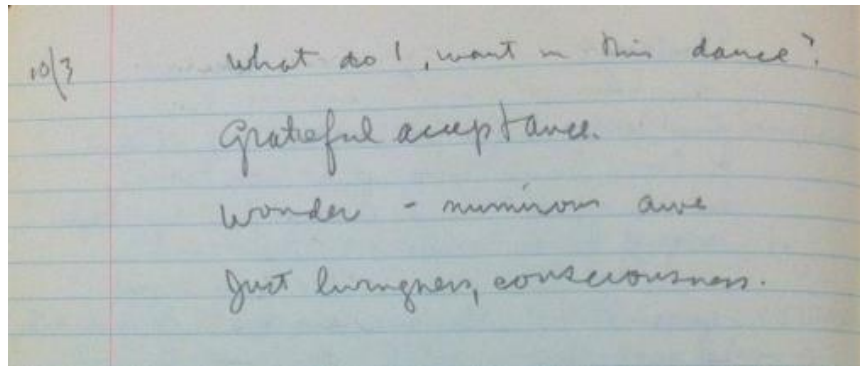


The dates on this page are confusing. It appears that the top two entries are from 1976 and the bottom three are written bottom-to-top, as in Labanotation. September 21, 1976 notes a meeting with Ralph Lee about the set; September 18, 1977, the "plants," four sculptures representing four crops from the Southwest, are completed and work continues on the rest of the set. Hawkins also notes the completion of music revisions on September 16, 1977. The final entry notes the completion of the dance on April 13, 1979, even though by this time he has moved on to additional notebooks. This page is followed by lists of the characters and set pieces. At this point the animals he envisions are Buffalo, Antelope, Coyote and Porcupine, which all remain the same in the final version. The others show alternate names under consideration: Wild Goose/Hawk/Hovering Hawk,

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

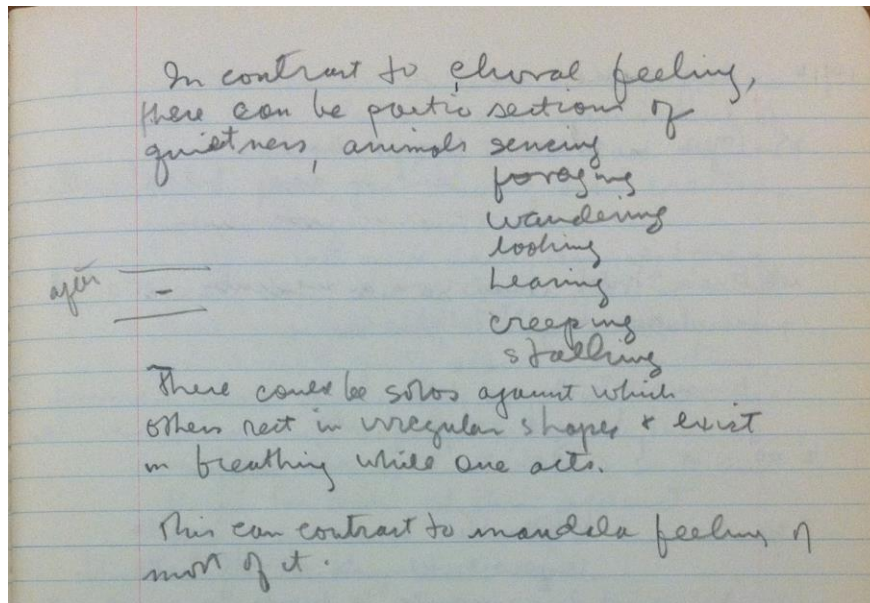
Salmon/Fish/Trout, Snakes/Crossing Snakes/Rattlers, and Jackrabbit/Raccoon. A first draft of the scenario is sketched out, delineating the sections and a variety of spatial designs. He will make several more drafts with increasing detail before sending written versions to both Hovhanness and Lee.

October 3, 1976. Hawkins questions his purpose in creating this dance, and finds answers that focus his motivation and intent with honest simplicity. Previous notes have covered this same idea, indicating that he continues to search for the essence of the dance or at least remind himself of the desired goal.



It is interesting to note that there is nothing in these lines about the more obvious type of content: no reference to the animals, the landscape, or their relationship to man. Hawkins clearly was not developing a dramatic storyline. Rather, he presented fundamental principles for living life as well as producing art. He does, however, explore general movement ideas of Plains animals, in contrast to the more ceremonial movements of the Plains Native Americans, as shown below.

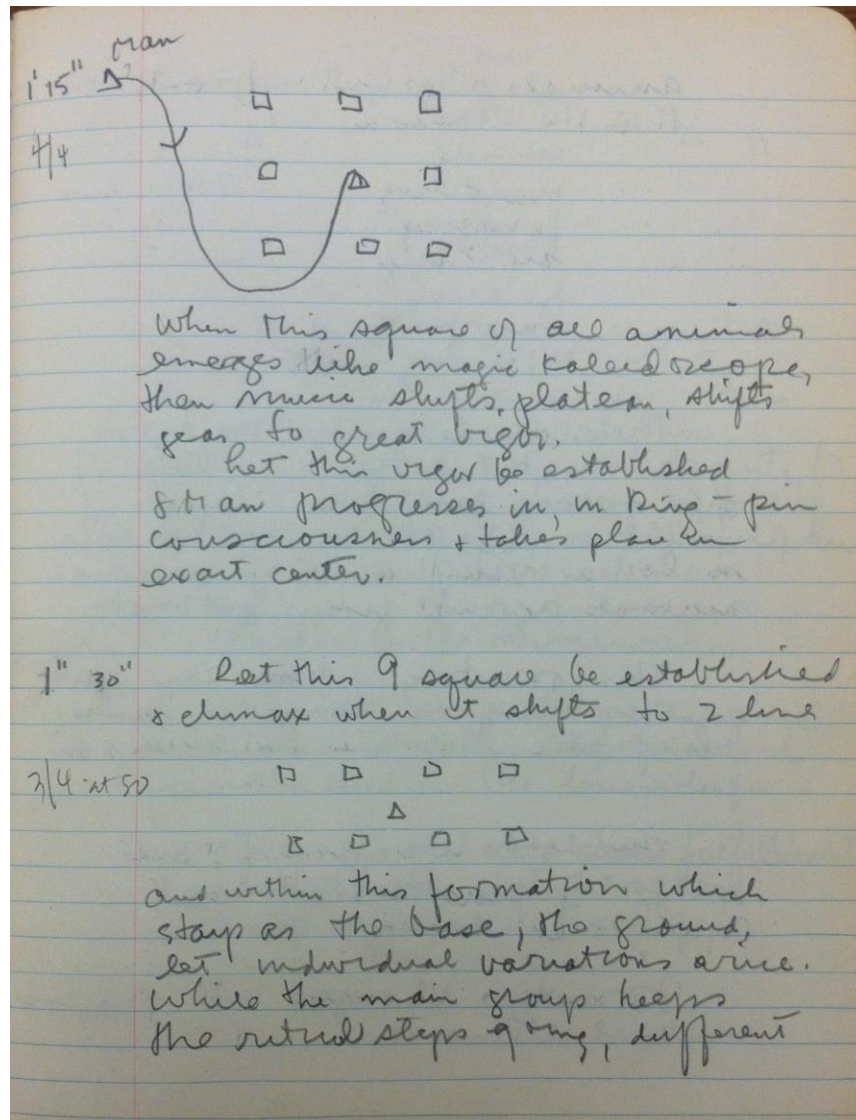
Erick Hawkins' Collaborations



This is a wonderful look at the reasoning behind some of Hawkins' choices. "Choral feeling" is contrasted with quietness, the quietness of the existence of animals; "mandala feeling" is contrasted with solos while the other animals "exist in breathing." This imagery is kinesthetically vivid, even in written form, yet the complete embodiment of it is still years away.

October 10, 1976. Many details about the dance are taking shape in Hawkins' imagination. He lists a lengthy sequence of action that includes the precise timing of sections, musical meters, tempi, sketches of spatial arrangements and descriptions of movement ideas. It is important to keep in mind that this work is explored prior to commissioning the score and the masks, and nearly a year before movement is invented with the dancers.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations



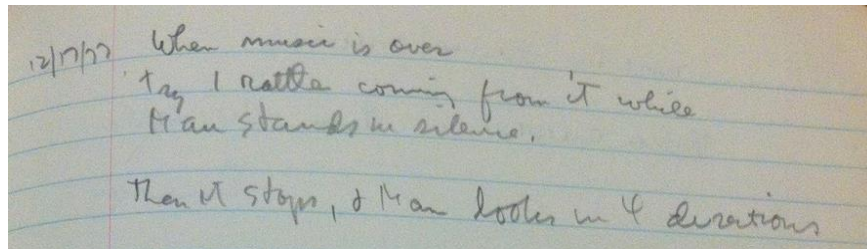
Hawkins compacts myriad detail onto one page that takes place in a time span of less than three minutes. For example, the lower half of the page diagrams double squares with First Man (the triangle symbol) at the center. The section is 1 minute, 30 seconds and the meter is $\frac{3}{4}$ at a tempo of 50 beats per minute. It is noted that particular movements are not described; rather images, swellings of energy, and relationships are captured. Ideas are now fleshed out and the vision is ready to be shared. The pages in this notebook become the basis for his communications with the collaborating artists.

December 12, 1976. Hawkins lists the final version of the animals to be used in the dance. The four men are as before: Buffalo, Antelope, Coyote and

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

Porcupine. He settles on the women's roles as Hawk, Fish, Snakes and Raccoon. Hawkins and Lee tried but failed to envision a jackrabbit mask that did not conjure the ubiquitous Bugs Bunny.

December 17, 1977. Hawkins writes a short note to himself about how to the end the dance.



While the elements of this vision are in the choreography-- rattle, silence, and facing four directions--Hawkins experimented a great deal before arriving at a conclusion that satisfied him.

1976-1977: Correspondence with composer Alan Hovhaness

These letters show the communication of ideas, discussion of revisions and personal thoughts of Hawkins and Hovhaness during their creation of *Plains Daybreak*.

October 13, 1976: Hawkins sends Hovhaness eighteen single-spaced, typewritten pages to inform and inspire him as he composes the music. Rather than stating prescriptive instructions, the communication is used to convey philosophical and poetic foundations. In this way, an artistic and intellectual relationship is built on common imagery and artistic information.

Pages 1-6 contain the "GENERAL DESCRIPTION of idea for dance with working title: PLAINS DAYBREAK." This section details many references and explanations of subject matter that Hawkins attributes to the development of his idea. His language is quite conversational, as though sharing thoughts with a friend about wide-ranging topics of current interest and related memories of the past, mulling over the meaning of things, and of course, clarity about the overall idea for the dance.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

of idea for dance with

working title: PLAINS DAYBREAK

I have just been reading a marvelous novel-story by Laurence Van Der Post "A Far Off Place about Southwest Africa. I have just lately been reading Joseph Campbell's volume, Primitive Mythology, and then lent a book on Cave Paintings of France and Spain.

One of the first solos I composed was Trickster Coyote stemming from Navaho and Apache tales of the trickster. the first animal I remember ever being conscious of was when my father took me out into the country around Trinidad, Colorado where I was born, and seeing the prairie dogs. The one picture I remember in our house there was a large engraving (brown common at the time) of an enormous buffalo.

I have watched often of course the animal dances of the pueblo peoples. Men through their history have always had to relate to the animals, and probably we ourselves are living at a time when we men now are at the furthest remove from sensing our common heritage as created things with what we call the animals, either four legged, two legged, or no-legged. Even in teaching dancing, most students come with an image essentially of being a machine and not an animal with a spine and pelvis and the same lungs and heart and bowels.

Just as in art, there is no progress (for who can draw the animals better than the cave men painters?) so in our consciousness of being alive, there is no progress. Indeed, perhaps we have deadened ourselves in this respect at the same time we have watched on television as man put his foot on the moon.

So perhaps this dance is just a reminder that we are animals, and related to other animals, that we are born, breathe and die like them. A George Dalgarno in 1661 said, "The soul can exert her powers by the ministry of any of the senses."

So perhaps this dance can reveal our human essence and consciousness by showing the dancing of eight animals and man.

There is no story, plot or sequence of any action, only a presentation of the relationship, then presented in a theatrical sequence form. Essentially the idea is an excuse to present livingness thru dance and music and visual form on the stage for sheer fun. But thru it all, by using these creatures

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

Erick Hawkins
Plains Daybreak --2

and the set, perhaps it will remind the audience of how wonderful everything is.

In the African story of van der Post, there is a bird called the honey guide. It comes to a man and sings, and the responsive Bushman follows, and somewhere along the way a honey badger hurries into the picture and goes along to where the bird leads them for the honey. Miraculously, the honey-badger goes up to the hole in whatever the bees have made the honey, backs up and lets out a gas which gasses the bees, immobilizing them, while the man reaches his arm in and breaks off pieces of honey comb. The first pieces are for the bird and the badger, and then the man takes some - but only in proportion, as in all events in their natural state. This livingness together is wondrousness, is it not?

Another influence on what I think this dance might be comes from our seeing two dances on a program from natives of the Cameroons, while we were performing in Paris in 1963.

I recall about six or eight men in a semi-circle in both dances, and they hardly varied from the spot. The drummers with big logs were over to one side. They wore elegant, fantastic costumes. But the ART was exquisite. Not that they were animals, but the image stays with me as a device for arranging the dancers in this dance.

I have called it Plains, because I know the American plains, I have wakened on them and sensed their sky after driving from New York. I have watched the water snake in a little pool in dry Southern Dakota while after breakfast, not too far from where there is one of the left herds of buffalo.

The main image is simply the innocence of the creation, that is the DAYBREAK, but I locate it on the Plains just for my sense of place and memory. Therefore I have chosen the animals as I have so that they might be a little more native to me but also perhaps a little closer to the feeling of many of the people who will watch the dance.

But it is not a question of naive literalism. I shall not be concerned to imitate the animals. But only to be ceremonially aware of them.

I have watched and learned how the Indians do their ceremonial dances, but they just do their own dance steps but with a little use of poetic metaphor, they suggest animal movements sometimes, or sometimes slightly abstract movements and certainly abstract the animals character in their costumes. I never know how far I shall go with that until I am working. Whatever imitative elements occur I am sure will be transmuted into pure dance movements.

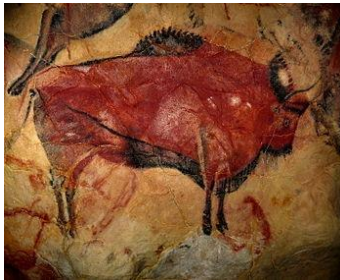
These two pages illustrate the wide ranging sources Hawkins uses in developing this dance, both for himself and for the collaborating artists. They are signposts towards the ineffable heart of the dance: "the...innocence of creation...."

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

By digesting ideas from the various sources, as conveyed in a conversational tone, each artist finds their own relationship to the core ideas in order to find expression in their particular medium.

Exploring several of the references in the above letter, one finds common themes in a variety of sources. The first theme has psychological roots. In the novel, *A Far Off Place*, Laurens van der Post (1974) uses exceptionally poetic, metaphorical and descriptive language to tell the story of a young boy living in the South African bush. Van der Post was influenced by the ideas of Carl Jung, as was Joseph Campbell, author of *Primitive Mythology* (1972). Campbell's concept of the relationship between myth and the human psyche, as taken from Jung, lead him to an understanding of symbols or metaphors found along the "hero's" journey as expressions of a spiritual truth. Hawkins was strongly influenced by Jungian concepts about the conscious and unconscious mind, mythological and religious archetypes, and symbols that reach across cultures. Jungian therapy, which Hawkins experienced first-hand, attempts to coalesce and transform the many strains of an individual's personality (thinking, feeling, sensing and intuiting) into an integrated whole.

A second theme central to understanding *Plains Daybreak* is Hawkins' profound statement: "Just as in art, there is no progress (for who can draw animals better than cave man painters?), so as in our consciousness of being alive, there is no progress." Humans, like animals, share a "common heritage" (letter above) and exist as sensing beings "with a spine and pelvis and the same lungs, heart and bowels" (letter above) simply because all creatures were created to breathe, to eat, to sleep, to die. There is no choice. In conclusion, Hawkins asks, "This livingness is wondrous, is it not?"



[photo from Google images, accessed 2014]

As written above, Hawkins saw Cameroonian dances in Paris. The percussive movement and simple spatial design captured his imagination as a device to show strength and ceremony. This performance inspired a *Plains Daybreak* section in which the semi-circular arrangement and strong rhythmic patterns without instrumental music are predominant.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations



(See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWBKJj0kFu4&feature=youtu.be>)

Hawkins was inspired by Native American culture and art. The stories, the designs, the spirituality of the tribes all excite Hawkins. Visual designs for Plains Daybreak show inspiration from Mimbres Pottery Designs including the portrayal of various animals with simple forms and geometric embellishments.



Experiences seeing the Yaqui Indian tribe's deer dance showed him how to represent animals without exactly copying their movement, but by becoming the animal itself.

On page 7, Hawkins begins to lay out the timing and structure for Hovhaness, the "Sequence of Action," described in great detail by hand in his notebook. "The visualization as I proceed to describe it is mainly a starting point for writing the music, designing the visual side, and doing the lighting etc." Again, he is most concerned with the arc of the dramatic energy as well as the timing for various sections rather than precise character and storyline development. Each part includes descriptions of entrances and exits, groupings, lighting, and so on, as he had worked it out in his notebook. When asked how he came up with these timings, he explained (1990, interview with author) that he would lie on his bed with a stopwatch visualizing the sections and noting the timing. Hawkins delineates the whole of a 40-minute dance in segments from 20 seconds to 3 minutes. Amazingly, the final dance follows this blueprint closely.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

Erick Hawkins
Plains Daybreak --8

2' 40"

In succession the 8 animals enter, probably four from each side rear with about 20" apart for each animal. I suspect I would try to use a very delicate stomp with no characteristic for any of them. As they appear, the light would brighten to show them in early dawn light, partly silhouetted, so in a sense they are heard almost before being seen. Since they are all to be different, it will be some time before it is seen which animal is which.

30"

8 in Unison grow to a vigorous climax at 20" then diminuendo and hush to pp delicate rustle sound for

45"

Entrance from stage right back wing of MAN. He makes a very slow progression from off stage to center stage about 3/4 back from curtain line, While he travels in, it is by indirection, he progresses and retreats, turns from side to side, as tho he appeared from mist. He arrives at very center with 8 animals divided 4 and 4 on each side. They have continued delicate stepping movement while attention has gone to his entrance.

1'

Once Man has centered and stopped, music could drop rhythm (that is sense of pulse) and even an equivalent of forest murmur ppp while the Man dances a solo in place, just having been created, just existing in motion. He would keep clear pulse and rhythm sense against the non-pulse of music.

It is still quite dark, animals and man hardly seen, though of course there is more light progressively. Things between being seen and not seen. During this dance by Man in place animals are very delicate and probably is pulse is dropped they stand still, and so Man keeps his own rhythm against "senza misura" feeling until a cue when the rhythm in music resumes. Let this 1' dance come to a climax at 45" and then wind down.

1'

Coda to Man's dance develops as rhythm resumes. (from senza misura, lead into hearable, but disguised cues of pulse so that all dancers know where they are and can then resume rhythmic dancing together. This Coda starts as a ritual dance with Animals all spread evenly over the stage and Man in center; and they dance in place, coming not to loudness or largeness of movement, but to magic intensity

leading into

30" continuation of coda into the exit of the Animals and Man except for the two Coyote and Jack Rabbit.

The detail expressed and the poetic imagery on this page is striking. From "climax at 20" to "center stage about 3/4 back from the curtain line," Hawkins' clarity of vision belies the fact that he has not yet set foot in the studio. Phrases like "things between being seen and not seen" and "magic intensity" keep the focus on the existential nature of this dance.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

After sixteen pages of exhaustive descriptions, Hawkins then presents guidelines regarding musical landmarks and rhythmic structures, noting that both musicians and dancers are highly capable of deciphering complex music. It is worth recalling that Hawkins' demand for living theater resulted in commissions for new music for every dance he created and for a chamber orchestra that performed live for every performance

Erick Hawkins
Plains Daybreak 17

general
Just some ~~gernal~~ considerations, Alan.

Since os much of this is unison dancing, except where I have indicated we do need to hear the pulse. However, my dancers I suspect are the best trained in the country and so it is not as though you had to be square.

Let nothing I say here offend you. I merely would like to guide you so that there is no great trouble for the orchestra sometimes at fairly short notice to rehearse, though we will never have just a pickup orchestra. But also since I am emphasizing the rhymic power most of the time we need enough landmakrs.

Hawkins entrusts a few more detailed observations of interesting rhythmic patterns to Hovhaness and Hovhaness honors Hawkins' ideas.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

YOU know I have watched pueblo dancing quite a bit and
 I used to try to follow the meters. Almost never
 succeeded. Always some unpredictable meter entered it.
 The one explanation I ever saw was that the dancers know
 the songs and so therefore follow the meters of the
 songs and in no way are counting the meters for all their
 irregularity. One device I saw as frequent was a number
 of repetitions of 8 meter and then a short one
 like 3 x 8 broken with 1 x 3
 4 x 8 1 x 2 etc

I recall one time during a Katchina dance at Hopi being
 so pleased to I see an alternation recurring often between
 a 3 and then a 4 meter.

The dancers and musicians naturally were attuned to each other; the dancers
 responding to subtle changes in tempo and phrasing and the musicians
 comprehending the kinesthetic embodiment of the music by the dancers.

While much of the letter is concrete, with drawings of spatial arrangements,
 timings and movement descriptions, Hawkins often breaks into more poetic
 language: "Accents, rhythms, patterns working up to intensity to biggest ecstatic
 paeon of praise in celebration of the mystery of the creation of the world. Pure Joy
 in the numinous (p. 13)." The dancers and musicians were keenly aware of their art
 form being whole in its own right, not one following the other, but existing in
 harmony with each other

October 25, 1976. Hovhaness replies after receiving the description and
 sequence along with the books. He continues with specific questions about the
 instrumentation of the touring chamber orchestra.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

OCT. 25, 1976
 DEAR ERICK: 2911 SOUTH 200th
 Apt.
 SEATTLE, WASH.
 98188

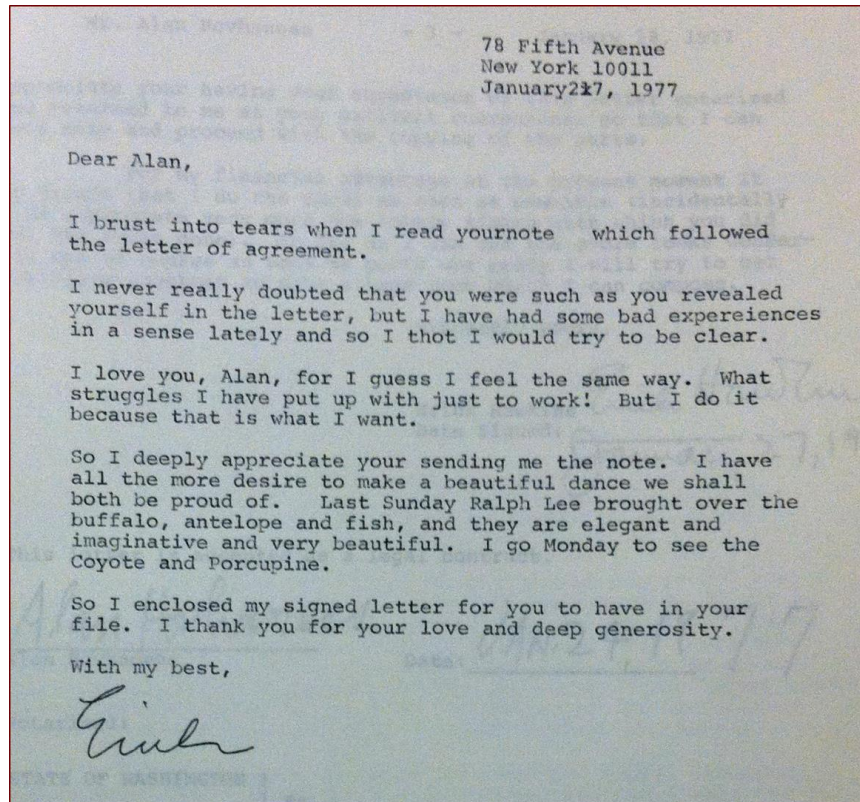
MANY THANKS FOR YOUR
 LETTER WITH LIBRETTO AND
 THOUGHTS AND PHILOSOPHY -
 YOUR WRITING IS MOST
 HELPFUL AND IS ALL I
 NEED TO BEGIN WORK ON
 THE MUSIC. ALSO I
 NOW HAVE JUST RECEIVED
 THE BEAUTIFUL SAND
 PAINTINGS AND BOOKS
 ON INDIAN RITUALS -
 I WILL STUDY ALL THIS
 ALL MY THINGS AND YOUR
 BOOKS HAD BEEN SENT
 TO STORAGE WAREHOUSE AND
 NOW I HAVE MOVED EVERYTHING

TO MY NEW ADDRESS
 (2911 SOUTH 200th - Apt. 2.)
 I AM VERY HAPPY THAT
 NOTHING IS LOST AND THAT
 I CAN STUDY AND
 COMPOSE THE MUSIC -
 PLEASE TELL ME
 RANGE (EXACT NOTES)
 OF BELLS, XYLOPHONE
 TAM-TAMS AND BONGOS
 THAT IS ALL THE INFORMATION
 THAT I NEED TO DO THE
 MUSIC - YOUR BALLET
 PLAN AND THOUGHTS ARE
 VERY BEAUTIFUL AND CLEAR
 ALL BEST WISHES
 Alan

January 27, 1977. Hovhanness asks for the instrumental parts to be copied and offers to help with the fee.

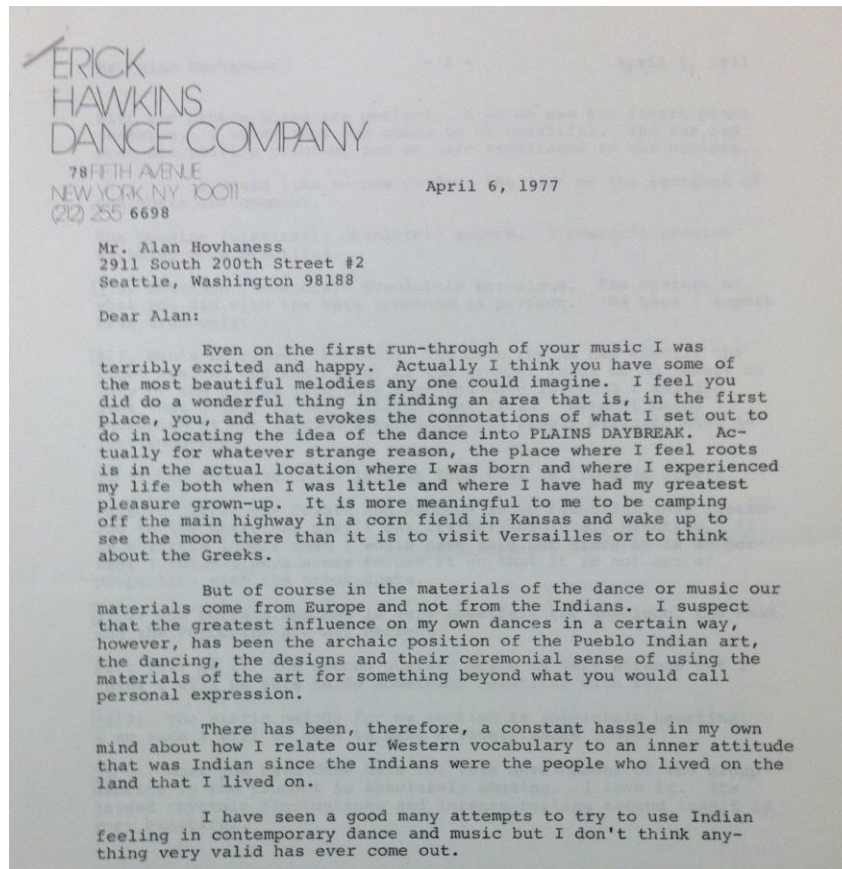
January 27, 1977. Hawkins replies with sincere gratitude. His poverty always niggled; he lived precariously. He poured whatever funds he received into his work and his company relying on grants and donations for resources. His life, due to lack of income, was uncertain.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations



April 6, 1977. After thoroughly digesting the first recording of Hovhaness' music, Hawkins sends a seven-page response. Hawkins finds most of the piece to be exquisite and he tells Hovhaness why with vivid elucidation. He continues with musings about various difficulties he is struggling with in his own creative process.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations



He carefully asks for some revisions, again explaining his reasons and trying to forestall any wounded feelings from Hovhaness. His requests are detailed, but he also shows where he is willing to change his initial plan to match Hovhaness' composition.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

I have made so many mistakes in the past in letting ideas develop too far that I am alerted now as to how I can make good programs and not have any liability from misjudgement just on the psychological reaction of an audience's attention span. All of the places where you did make sections longer than what I had sketched out I can handle except in two places. I ask you to consider altering three places but if you would give your serious consideration to my reasoning I am sure it will pay off. Regardless of how beautifully you have done something, if choreographically I can't maintain it on that level and keep the intensity high, the work as a whole would be less successful, and of course, dear Alan, I want to make this a masterpiece and one that will have a long life because it is so beautiful and complete. Since all of the sections that I have mentioned are truly so marvelous and right up my alley, I would like for you to try to accede to my suggestions for revisions in three or four places.

As you can imagine, for me to know that my idea is valid before I ever ask you to write the music I have to see it as an entity and be sure that I can fill the idea with enough deep interest and action.

There is no reason to imagine that absolutely every indication for different sections you would necessarily be able to embody at the first crack. Collaboration is not an easy thing, and I have seen so many collaborations result in works that wouldn't have a long life just because every line of the development point-by-point was not followed through so that all three aspects of the music, choreography and visual designs were all equally powerful and that no one element pulled the whole of the work away from a single line.

One of the first problems is Part III [38] 5; the section after the Porcupine, where you did get carried away in terms of length, and figuring by means of the metronome marks for the first quartet where I had thought 1:30 minutes, your section up through [44] is 3:49 minutes.

Mr. Alan Hovhaness

- 4 -

April 6, 1977

I had originally thought that that section beginning [38] 5 to [44] would be for the big four-legged animals but your rhythmic and thematic material actually is a little more delicate and so I have thought of a way of shifting the Buffalo, Antelope, Coyote and Raccoon to the second quartet, that is [44] 1 which is so beautiful and powerful.

In other words I can reverse which comes first BUT to keep a correct proportion I would need the section [38] 5 - [44] shortened as close to 1:30 minutes as possible. Some aspect of why it should be that short is that the melodic material is similar to early themes even like the Hawk.

September 20, 1977. After receiving revisions from Hawkins and then re-recording the music, Hovhaness sends enthusiastic approval for performance of the final version.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

2911 SOUTH 200TH
 APT 2
 SEATTLE, WASH, 98188
 SEPT. 20, 1977

DEAR ERICK:
 MANY THANKS
 FOR THE TAPE - THE
 PRESENT VERSION
 OF THE MUSIC SEEMS
 SPLENDID AND JUST
 RIGHT - PLEASE GO
 AHEAD AND PERFORM IT
 THAT WAY -
 ALL THE BEST WISHES
 Alan

Hovhaness' music is a masterpiece with haunting melodies, dynamic and rhythmic vitality, and a powerful connection to Hawkins' choreography. In the familiar, masterful *Plains Daybreak* (1979), Alan Hovhaness used woodwind, percussion and brass instruments emblematically, as musical equivalents to the archetypal animal costumes by Ralph Lee and the deft abstractions of animal motion that Hawkins wove into a ceremonial statement about man's oneness with nature.

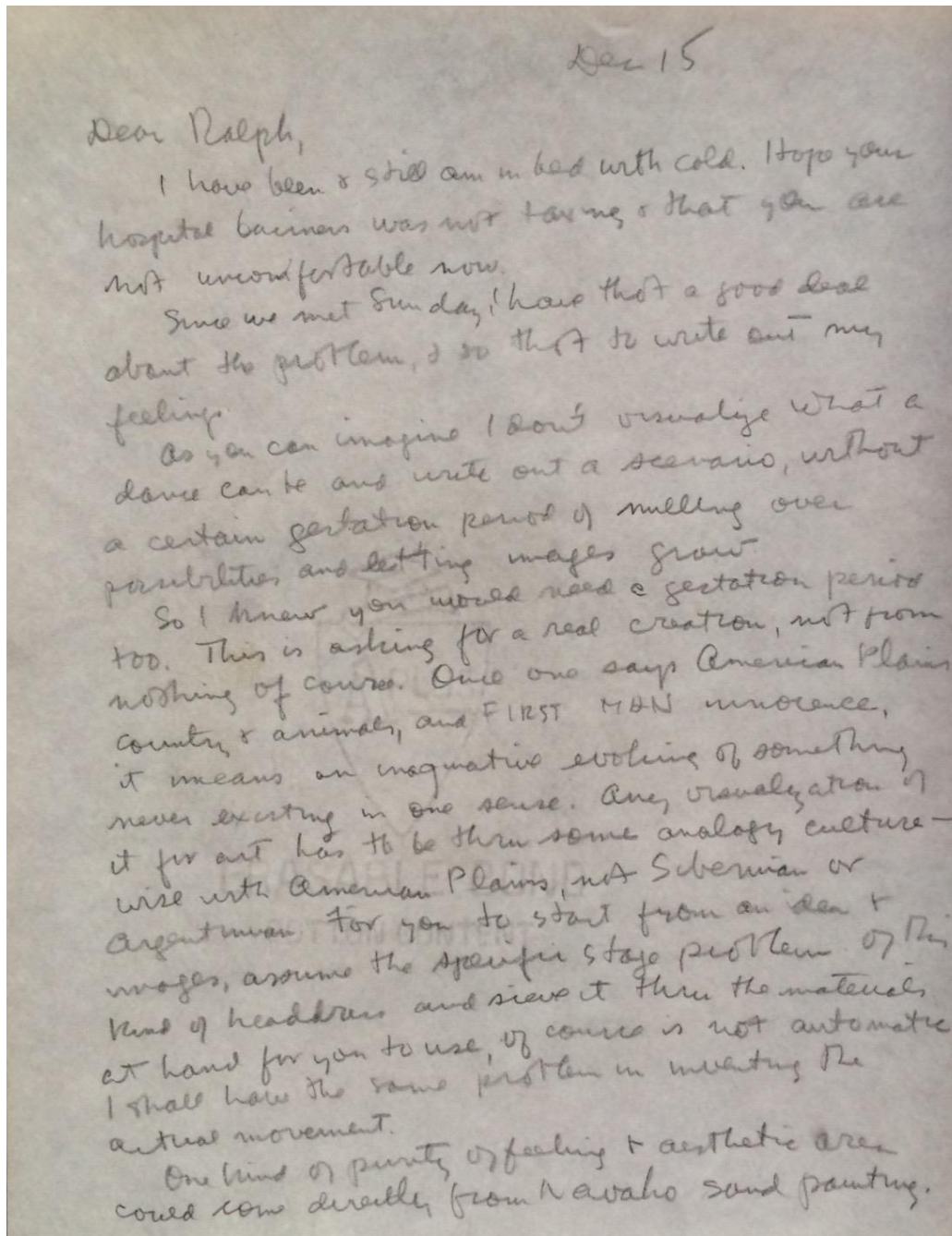
1976-1977: Correspondence with sculptor and mask-maker Ralph Lee

Hawkins collaborated with sculptor/maskmaker Ralph Lee in the creation of elaborate headdresses and elegant set pieces for *Plains Daybreak*. In an interview (2014), Lee related that he had made masks for other choreographers such as Jean Erdman and Daniel Nagrin, in addition to previous work with Hawkins. Lee enjoyed the "chameleon-like" activity of mask-maker for various artists since each project was like entering another world. Hawkins and Lee both lived in New York City, so much of their conversation was in person and thus without a record. Their process can still be traced through sketches, notes, and photographs from The Erick Hawkins Collection. Archival materials were accessed from Lee's personal collection, and are presented here with his permission. Interviews with the authors supplied important personal details.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations

December 15, 1976. In this eleven-page letter from Lee's personal files, Hawkins follows up on a preliminary conversation about the dance and the design possibilities for the masks. Elements of Hawkins' creative process are wonderfully delineated in this communication. Similarly to letters written to Hovhaness, Hawkins poses the creative problems from multiple views, from aesthetic to the practical. Lee noted that Hawkins' "generosity of spirit" (2014) allows for the gestation of images and problem-solving related to materials and ultimate staging. Hawkins' wealth of source material and the aesthetic foundation they share, lays the groundwork for discovering essential expression. With uncommon artistry, sensitivity, and skill, Lee gathered the whole together to inform his own vision through the media that connotes the American Plains: wood, leather, feathers and horsehair.

Erick Hawkins' Collaborations



Sources of inspiration shared with Lee include Navajo sand paintings and Highwater's book about North American Indians (1977). "There is no one Indian way," he writes, and he also poetically recognizes that "we are we." With a bit of

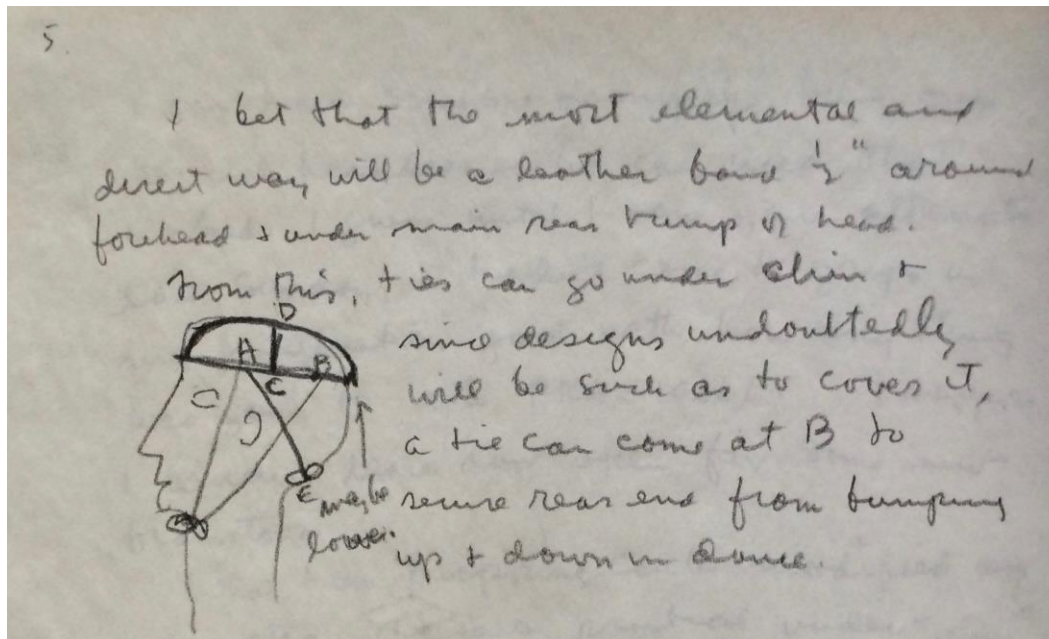
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whimsy, Hawkins encourages Lee to develop his own images and style for this dance that are analogous to the American Plains, and not "Siberia."

2
 but just to copy, step by step, their method of abstraction wouldn't be possible in our materials, & it would be too uninteresting just to try to reproduce their feeling in toto. But many abstraction devices of theirs can certainly inspire you.
 But using the word PLAINS also connotes a different area both of abstracting and of use of materials.
 But also we are we. This is all a dream seen thru our eyes. In the Highwater book, some Andean painter in talking about the early Hapi Quatawi Kiva murals said: The Kiva painters didn't "copy" Pecos. Pecos copied them.
 Seeing that book was interesting to me & can give us a clue I think in this: Both in the earlier examples of Pueblo & Plains painting, as in pottery designs, there is no one Indian way.
 So with you in thinking of these designs, I think you now can start with your materials and build up your image or "style".

The letter continues on pages 4 and 5 explaining the difficulties in designing a headdress that will be relatively balanced and stay put. Hawkins makes practical suggestions based on his experiences dancing with many types of masks created for previous dances by sculptor Ralph Drazio. The author, Laura Pettibone, attests to Lee's achievement of balance and security in moving confidently through the choreography.

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Solving the attachment issue was no easy task. The leather straps needed to be adjustable in order to fit future casts, and needed to be loose enough so as not to give the dancers headaches and deep marks. The sculpted elements needed to be light, but strong enough to survive touring. Altogether, the headdresses' stability was required to allow for a wide range of movement. As was Hawkins' common practice, the dancers wore the masks and costumes during the entire process of composing the dance; Hawkins needed to see the ways in which the visual designs effected the movement.

January 19, 1977. After viewing Lee's progress on the headdresses, Hawkins writes to Lee with words of encouragement and options to consider. Again, Hawkins' language is full of philosophical reasoning and suggestions for revision thoughtfully and purposefully explained. Additional sources are cited as examples of a direction Lee might go. Hawkins' movement invention followed the process of previous dances: creating, evaluating, revising and revising again until the whole became elegantly complete.

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January 19, 1977

Dear Ralph:

Naturally after I leave you I keep ruminating about everything and I feel that you are further along than you think you are.

I wonder if maybe in a sense you might feel better if you did try to finish off the buffalo and the antelope. Kevin is evidently still sick or I would let him come over and try on the buffalo with you. I strongly suggest that you try the black horse hair on the top of the cross piece of the horns and see if that won't do the two needs of covering the face and breaking the white crossline. I love what you did so much that I would like to be able to salvage that and I think that both you and I would feel better if you tried to get a final statement of what you've got.

Something tells me that you have arrived at the area that they are all going to be in.

The second thing is I strongly suggest you finish off the antelope. Do all in balsa wood, shorten it, try that white horse hair, try the ears and then by trying a bunch of feathers or something to the back of the head it is bound to establish how much decoration can go on everything. Something tells me I would leave the fish alone for the time being, you understand, do what you feel best - that just happens to be my feeling. In the first place it is a little harder to find an abstraction of the snakes and therefore just what elements to use (as I said last night, for all of the visualizing the changes to make I don't think it is the strongest image).

With this letter Jesse will have brought you the reed and I suggest you try on the porcupine. In this little paper book on page 76 you will see some prong-horned antelope ears.

I am sending the SEVEN ARROWS book too. There is a photograph of an Indian with an animal fur over his head and I strongly suspect that the coyote will be easier to see if you do something sort of equivalent of putting the coyote snout and head like a great big cap so that the ears are sticking up rather from the rear of the dancer's head. Then you don't have quite so much of a problem as you were talking about last night of having

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I still think it is not going to be the most powerful if the dancers' faces in all of them are not somewhat obscured, "shadowed" at least.

In this paper book on page 55 are some pictures of racoons. I think your idea of literally making a mask on the dancer's face, if it is not too far different could have a sense of variety to it, and if you had the rather small face then you would have to have some beautiful equivalent of the "raffia" and then go into the tail. You can see in the drawing the tail's almost as long as the animal and so that could be a very fantastic sticking-on thing. I realize that what to do on the top of the head that is equivalent to the body is a problem but you will solve it!

DEAR RALPH LEE -- See how fast you can work this.

Erick

erick

Thursday, n.d., (likely February, 1977). Unfortunately, the all-too-common theme of debt is reflected at the beginning of this letter. Hawkins struggled financially throughout his career and often profusely apologized to his collaborating artists. For the most part, the artists understood the problem and appreciated his insistence on championing contemporary art.

The letter continues with a heart-felt apology for particular suggestions, and then without hesitation continues with additional suggestions for revision. Hawkins remains closely connected to Lee's work as it progresses, pushing for greater refinement and at the same time, asking Lee to trust his own feeling.

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Thursday

Dear Ralph,

I am in trouble for a couple of days and can't give you the 500 this minute. HOLD on.

Have been thinking from the visit the other night. I think your antelope horns are beautiful, integrating the head and horns. Forgive me for suggesting the pottery design and then saying horns too long. Dilemma of how extravagant one can go.

So make the horns in balsa wood and angle them more, and I would say shorten maybe 6 inches. Use your feeling.

I could see what what you had done that the problem is integrating all the parts. I am unsure about the pins and haning paper feathers. Look slightly docratic. Not the first time I have haggled at this problem.

I guess the first thing is to try to get the onesness of elements and then elaborate well.

Hawkins expresses excitement at the result of Lee's progress on the buffalo mask. Even when the headdress is close to "right," in Hawkins evaluation, there is still a dilemma to be solved. Hawkins states his observations in this case and asks potent questions, leaving it to Lee to find his own solutions. A delightful postscript alludes to a common practice in which Hawkins supplies simple materials that might be useful: "here are some feathers."

I still am excited by the image of the buffalo you have made. I love the boldness of the horns and the transverse element. The only trouble is that instead of just accepting the abstraction, stylization, design of the horns ~~and~~ coming across the head, I revert to seeing WATER BUFFALO which does have horns more like that. What to do? HOW to find the boldness of what you have done and make it register Plains bison horns a little more without suggesting anything else.

Another idea. On the one for the rattl snakes. Could you turn the strips on the hair from straight front-back, and sideways to 45 degree angles, SO THAT the criss crossing of teh actual snake shapes simply repeated the cròss cross of the head dress.

Here are some feathers.

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The development of the visual design of the antelope is shown with the following photographs. A close-up of a Mimbres pottery design, the one pasted inside the cover of Hawkins Notes Book #1 as shown below, presents an abstracted form elaborated with geometric designs. The horns and ears are indicated with simplicity and the whole creates a bold statement. The second picture is a sketch by Hawkins in April, 1977, also from his Note #3. The horns and ears strive for the clean, unadorned lines inspired by the Mimbres antelope, although the total design is not yet envisioned. A prototype of the antelope headdress from 1976 is held by sculptor Ralph Lee (photograph collection of the author). This was referenced in the above letters, in which Hawkins asked for shorter horns with a steeper angle. The final Antelope mask with costume is seen in performance. The addition of ears complete the identification of the animal and horsehair obscures the face of the dancer. Lee also made wooden “fetishes” for the dancers to hold in order to reduce the identification of articulated fingers, and therefore, the dancers’ “humanness.”



Photo credits: Sketch from Plains Daybreak Notes #3, n.d., likely early 1977; Lee with prototype (author, 2015); performance video still, n.d.

Lee felt a great deal of gratitude towards Hawkins for his relentless pursuit of beauty. An undated, handwritten draft of a letter from Lee to Hawkins testifies to the value of being pushed through revision after revision.

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I have never expressed to you how valuable, how important to me working with you has been to me as an artist, to my growth in that area. In practically every other situation I have pretty much done as I wished done the best I could with out any particular feed back or guidance. But you have forced me to go farther to search further to face the unknown ^{taught me} not to be satisfied with the first image that comes along to explore unknown areas to arrive at something I would not have deemed possible when I began

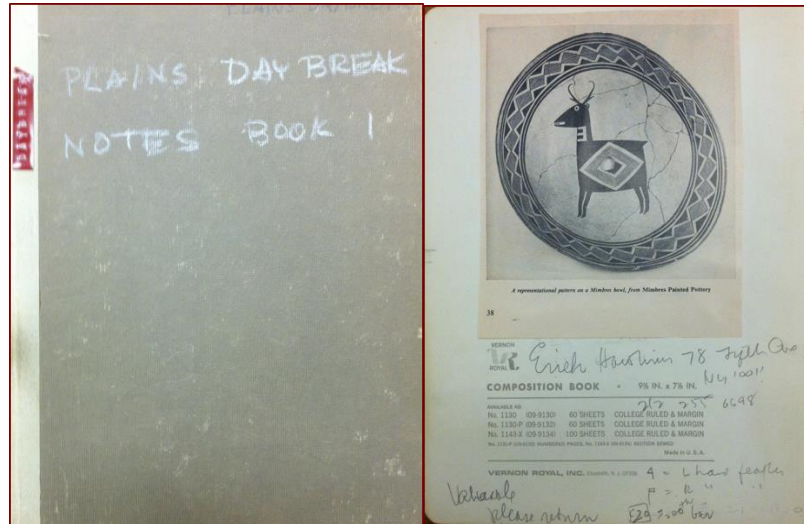
At Hawkins memorial service in 1996, Lee gave a humorous and poignant account of his work with Hawkins.

“I used to dread Erick’s calls. The phone would unexpectedly ring at one-thirty in the morning. He was in high gear. I would be staggering toward bed after a long day. Now I was captured for another hour. ... I knew that what he had in mind for me would be like going on a secret mission. All faculties had to be fully alert. I’d have to plunge into unknown territory. There was no telling how long the trip would take and where it would lead. I couldn’t refuse him.”

Other people would be delighted with whatever I made. Erick would come to my studio and look hard at the work in progress. ‘Not good enough. Not good enough.’ He’d leave and I’d be furious, mainly because I knew he was right. (p. 80)

Hawkins communications to Lee are wide-ranging, from the aesthetic to the practical, from the intellectual to the poetic. Probing and questioning, Hawkins ultimately relied on Lee’s sense of how to best express the characters with clarity and “suchness.” Their synergistic partnership produced a dance that is consistently hailed as a masterpiece.

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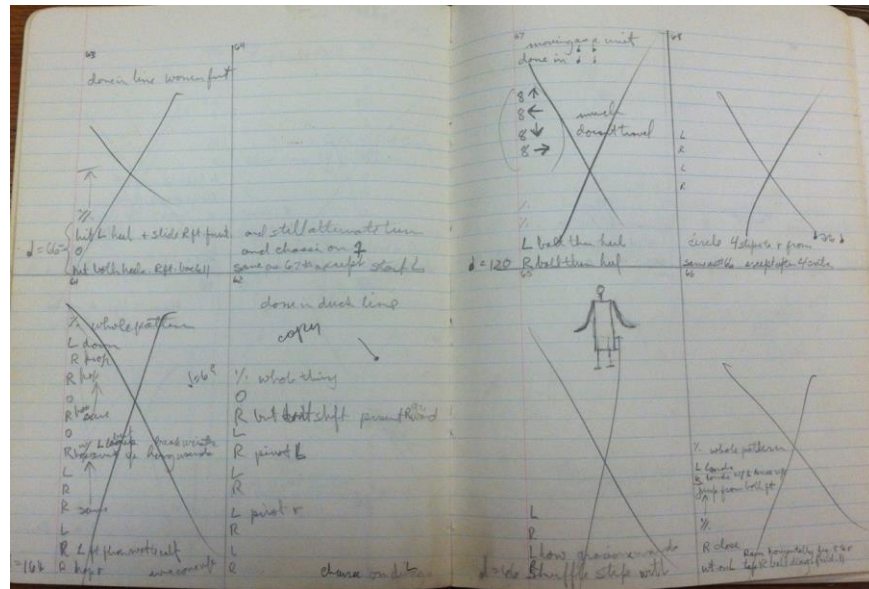
1977 (likely): Plains Daybreak Notes Book 1

Inside the cover of this notebook, Hawkins pasted a picture of a Mimbres pottery design of an antelope that inspired many of the work's visual and spatial designs. This pared-down image of the animal likely served as a touchstone for Hawkins as he toiled over creating the most essential movements to express his vision. Elements of realism and abstraction found in both the pottery design and the dance both convey vivid and bold interpretations, finding the “suchness” of the antelope.

Hawkins began inventing movement in September of 1977 after the final revisions of the music, headdresses and costumes were complete. Long tours and conflicts with the dancers delayed moving forward sooner. By the time the choreography began in earnest again during the summer of 1978, many of the original company members had left. Beginning freshly with the new cast, movement was painstakingly developed during hours of rehearsal in heavy headdresses and wool felt costumes. In an interview with Celia Ipiotis, Hawkins describes his creative process: “Good ideas come out of the unconsciousness so everything is improvisations. I just let it well up; then choose the best and narrow it down. Otherwise improvisation becomes clichés of your own movement.” This notebook contains the notation of literally hundreds of movement ideas, grouped by tempo markings. Although the music was already complete and recorded, discovering movements took place in silence. “Without any kick in the pants from the music” (1992, p. 48), as Hawkins would say, he would explore a motif by creating many subtle variations. For example, in the search for ways to enter at the beginning of the dance, Hawkins experimented with many iterations of crouches,

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indirect pathways, and ceremonial reserve using the metronome marking for that part of the music. One exit was composed using one motif which each dancer varied slightly based on their character. He would review the movements at home, choosing the ones with the most potent essence, determining the best fit with the music, and devising a sequence to test out in with the dancers.



Hawkins' long habit of notation uses some concepts and symbols of Labanotation as well as writing the movements from the bottom line up. The example above shows movements #61 to #68, with all but 2 crossed out, meaning that only 2 were used in the final choreography. Hawkins' annotated scores are occasionally marked with movement numbers at corresponding sections of the music.

The reverse is often true for the creation of solos or duets. Alone in the studio with Hawkins, images and stories might be told as a starting point to movement invention. For Buffalo, Hawkins asked Andresen for a heavy, lumbering movement for his entrance; Andresen's first attempt was just right, attuned as he was to Hawkins images. At then an uncharacteristically light and free jump at the end became the "flower" of Zeami's creative principle.

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In this example of Hawkins' personal score, shorthand indications of the choreography for the duet of First Man and Buffalo are correlated with the beats of the music. There are two lines of choreography shown, one above the trumpet staff and the other above the bass, but they are not directly reflective of either instrument. Hawkins' spare markings include "L R L R" for steps, "IV" for fourth position of the feet, and "gallop." More precise notation is found in the script books and correlates line-by-line with the score.

September, 1979. Premiered in Cincinnati, OH

An elaborate set consisting of four large and tall, carved wooden plants, that grew up from the back of the stage, were abandoned after the first performance because Hawkins felt that they cluttered the stage.

Conclusion

Erick Hawkins made an indelible mark on the many people he encountered and those who encountered his art. He was a true renaissance man who read widely and deeply, who listened to music with contemplation, and looked at art with reverence. He was a student of the human body both kinesthetically and aesthetically. These traits converged into collaborations that tilled new soil with each new beginning. *Plains Daybreak* was no exception. The Hawkins archives at the Library of Congress provide a concrete documentation of his long process of researching, imagining, collaborating and composing. Hawkins was inspired and informed by multiple sources as he developed ideas for dances.

This primary source research shows the inner workings of Hawkins' creative process in real time, from beginning to end. Looking back on his life, the information is supplemented by the personal views of this unique artist. His legacy is expressed in the words of colleagues, friends and writers who spoke at his 1994 memorial service at the Joyce Theater in New York City. These tributes were transcribed and published in *Ballet Review* (1996).

Francis Mason, editor of *Ballet Review* for three decades respectfully acknowledges Hawkins many facets: "Erick Hawkins was a towering figure, tall, of noble bearing. He was a man of character who became a dancer, a maker of dances, a philosopher, and a poet (p. 89)." Friend and sculptor, Ralph Dorazio, knew his "intense, uncompromising stubbornness, leavened by a subtle, dry, Western American humor and tenderness, this was Erick (p. 90)."

Two long-time company dancers shared great insight into Hawkins' belief in art as a transformative experience for the creators, performers and audience alike. Randy Howard explained Hawkins' relationship with the audience: "Erick told me that he never meant to impress an audience with what he could do that they couldn't do, but to show them what they could do and how they could feel in their lives, perhaps a better way to live or feel (p. 92)." The application of Hawkins' creative

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and aesthetic principles to one's own life is beautifully expressed by Kathy Ortiz. "Erick sat me down and said, 'You know, Kathy, there is this philosophy of life that one should accept every event that comes your way and see it as necessarily neither a positive nor a negative but deal with it as it is and then move on'" (p. 80). Not content to merely entertain audiences, his dances were crafted to reach the power of ceremony and ritual, yet with awareness that it takes place in the here and now. Seeking truth and beauty was Hawkins singular purpose in which life and art became undifferentiated.

In *Plains Daybreak*, Hawkins was both at the center of the artistic process and, as the dance soloist, the center of the dance, where everything revolved around him. This was not to say that Hawkins was an egoist, rather he was the generous and erudite partner who elicited the most sensitive and elegant qualities from those in concert with him. "Theater poetry," the conscious integration of the various disciplines distilled to pure expression, was the aspiration and achievement of *Plains Daybreak*.



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