

## Unfinished Play Takes Stage

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# UNFINISHED PLAY TAKES STAGE

This spring Robin Suing, theatre arts department assistant, decided to pair her graduate school thesis on collaborative teaching methods with her skills as a lifelong dancer to bring something new to the Theatre Department. This led to "Unfinished," a dance performance that debuted on campus this spring that tells the story of relationship trauma, mental health, and redemption.



Robin Suing

"I really liked the idea of producing a concert in the form of a narrative—similar to a ballet like 'The Nutcracker' or 'Swan Lake,' except our concert has many different genres of dancing, and the songs are contemporary with multiple artists," Suing says.

Suing, along with theatre arts major Sommer Schaap and history and secondary education major Anna Janssen, collaborated on the choreography. They practiced a mapping process that involved dividing a song into sections, assigning students to specific sections, tasking them with coming up with the choreography for their section, and eventually putting all the pieces of the song together creating

the choreography.

For Schaap, this was one of the best parts. "It's been an incredible experience learning how to choreograph for my peers and to challenge myself to grow as an artist in a way that I have never experienced before," she says.

Both Schaap and Janssen developed skills that they will continue to use. Schaap says she gained a better understanding of collaboration, learning when to stick up for her own ideas and when to let go of control while seeing the needs of others. Janssen, also a lifelong dancer, added that "I have had to find many ways to get choreography across to students which was so educational for me after dancing for so long."

"Unfinished" consisted of 10 songs that tell about all parts of life: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Redemption very intentionally comes toward the end. "The dance on redemption is a trio of ladies that represent God's grace through positive and supportive relationships in life, the people that don't give up on you at your worst," says Suing.

Schaap and Janssen found that

"Unfinished" increased their awareness of relationship trauma, mental health, and the healing process in their own lives and in the lives of others. One goal Suing had for the project was to have each cast member make this story their story, recognizing that "we are all healing from brokenness in some way and that we are all being made new daily."

Dance is both a form of art and emotional expression that connects the mind with the whole body to glorify God, adds Suing.

"Our bodies are a gift made in the image of God," Suing says. "We should honor the gifts given to us through meaningful movement."

Theatre Arts Department Chair Laurel Koerner ('06) observes it's important to understand what story is being told through dance. "Like any form of expression, dance can be used to edify and build up, or to diminish and tear down. In the application of it to this performance, we support students' exploration and learning about themselves, one another, and God."

ANA TIMMER ('20)

