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Mark Gibson

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Origin

By

Mark Gibson

Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

Nick Erickson

Department of Music and Dramatic Arts.

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Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Abstract

Where do we come from? Where are we going? And what is this world all about? We know that we exist, and therefore must come from somewhere. We all have an origin, and it is up to us to choose what to do next. *Origin* is an original devised piece of physical theatre that draws inspiration from observable biological processes in both the micro- and macro-worlds that we live in. It attempts to create a new world on stage that captures the observable and evokes a new perspective on known science. *Origin* also delves into the concepts of our responsibility towards our world and how the consequences of actions have lasting effects beyond the view of the individual.

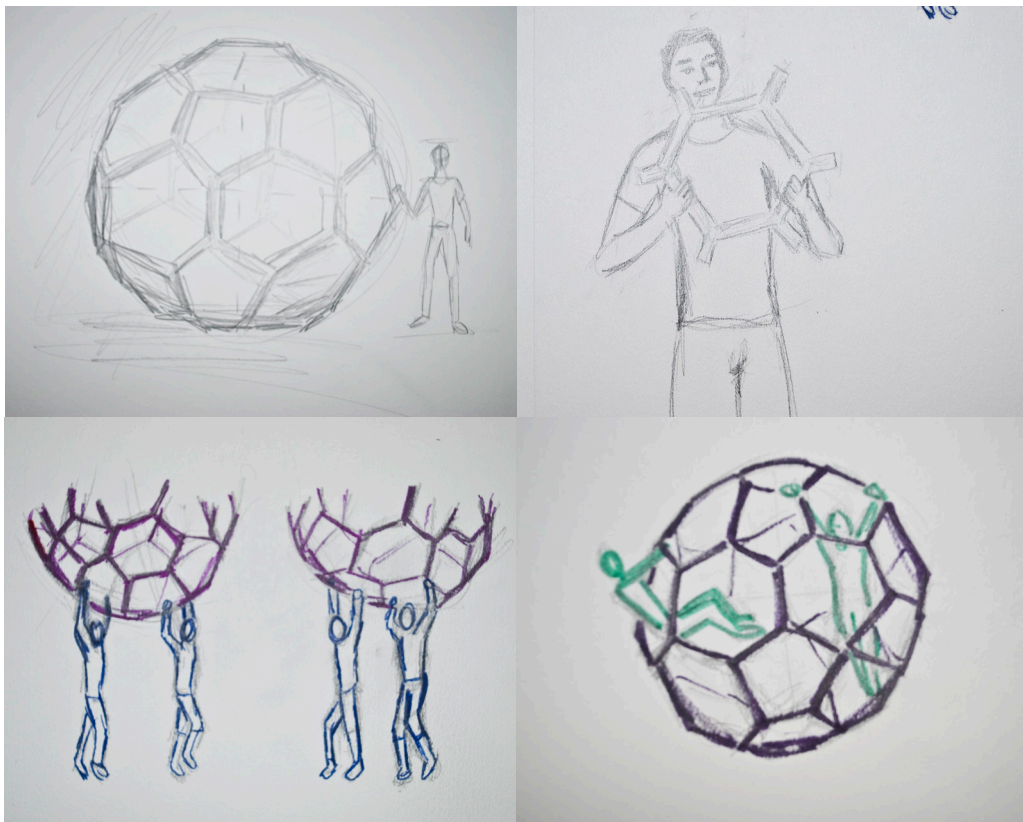
Origin is defined as the beginning or source. Quite possibly the most debated question to date is, “where do we come from?” Theologians and the religious will argue that we were created by God in his image, whereas others go as far to say that God is dead, man is the ultimate power, and science is how we discover the universe. These people argue that life came into being after an event like the big bang and we are all just the product of chance chemical reactions throughout billions of years of evolution based off Darwinian theory of natural selection and the survival of the fittest. These opposing points of view incessantly debate yielding no easy answer. My creative team is working on the premise that we come from somewhere, even though that place is illusive to our understanding. Everyone will agree to disagree on what that origin actually is. It is a mysterious ethereal place that we cannot touch. We leave the debaters to rage on their pedestals and begin exploring the potentials of origin through movement.

Our first meeting for this adventure began in the Spring semester 2013. Unknown to myself and to my mentor, Nick Erickson, we were about to embark on a most ambitious journey. During one of our usual mentor meetings, Nick slipped me a piece of paper with the title “enOvation” on the top. “enOvation is a joint initiative of the LSU College of Music & dramatic Arts (CMDA), and the LSU College of Engineering (CoE.) Its purpose is to develop a strong positive relationship between CoE and CMDA that draws strength from and expands our mutual pursuit of innovation and creativity, through an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas and collaboration in community events, student & faculty projects, and research.”

(<http://enovation.lsu.edu>) The original concept for the structure was thought up in

2004 by Nick Erickson who has a history with structural theatre with his foundational work in Diavolo, a dance company that distinguishes itself through its use of architecture in motion. The idea was to build a free standing, modular truncated-icosahedron that was large enough to be weight bearing, but has the capacity to come apart for travel purposes. With the idea solidified, we went to an enOvation meeting where we met engineering student Josh Brown. He agreed with cautious enthusiasm. From his team-based experience building playgrounds he knew we were in for a challenge because no one had ever made a structure of this type before at LSU, and the certain requirements we needed would take all his skill. The meeting concluded with our gaining some tips on how to write our grant.

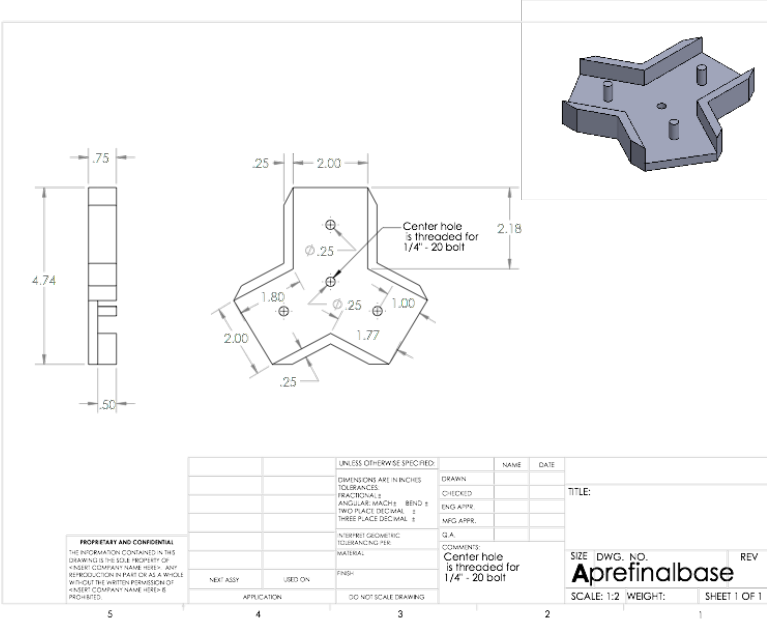
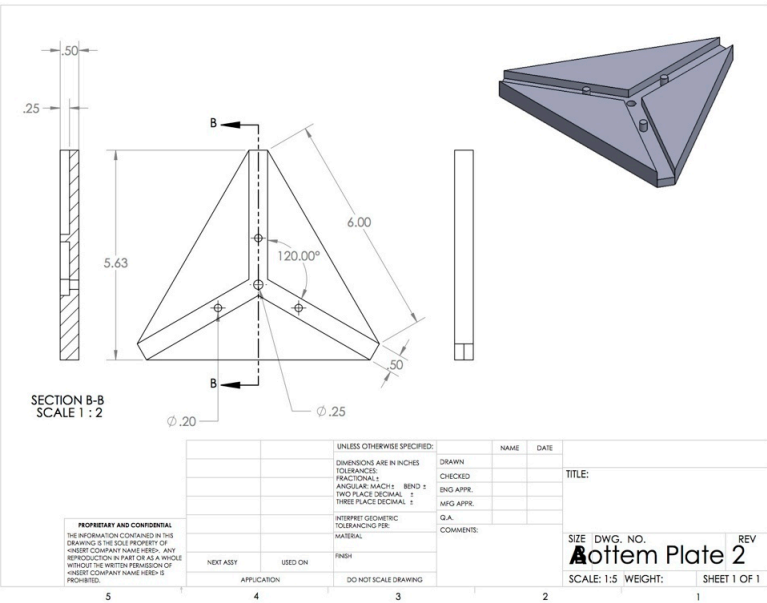
(Early renderings of what we thought the structure might be like. Originally we ambitiously hoped for modular parts that could be assembled onstage like in picture two. This was perhaps too ambitious.)



Over the next couple of months Josh and I continuously worked on the grant together and finalized the writing. For the grant we came up with the acronym O.R.I.G.I.N. for the structure, meaning, Operational Rolling Integrated Geometric Interlocking Nodule. In layman's terms that would be a giant rolling ball that can come apart when we so choose. Once finalized, we sent in the grant asking for three thousand dollars. By the end of the summer our grant application was successful.

Since we plan on travelling with the structure, the concept was for it to be built for travel, while light and strong enough to be weight bearing during performance. We also had to insure the safety of the performers, the floor, and the space around that would be interacting with and supporting the structure. It would be essential to not have the connections plates of the structure gouging into the stage when in motion. Once the grant was received, the design process began lasted the entire fall semester of 2013 after receiving the grant. Going through several renditions, and a prototype of a section, before the final design was agreed upon. Before fabrication, we determined the structure to have ninety fourteen inch aluminum members and sixty intersecting joints. So the finalized design used two identical plates sandwiched together in a "y" configuration at precise angles with three through bolts to create a compression fitting. The tabs protruding from each aluminum member were also angled precisely at 11.67 degrees to insure the integrity and feasibility of the final shape making a truncated-icosahedron.

(Early renditions of the plate design. Designs by Joshua Brown.)

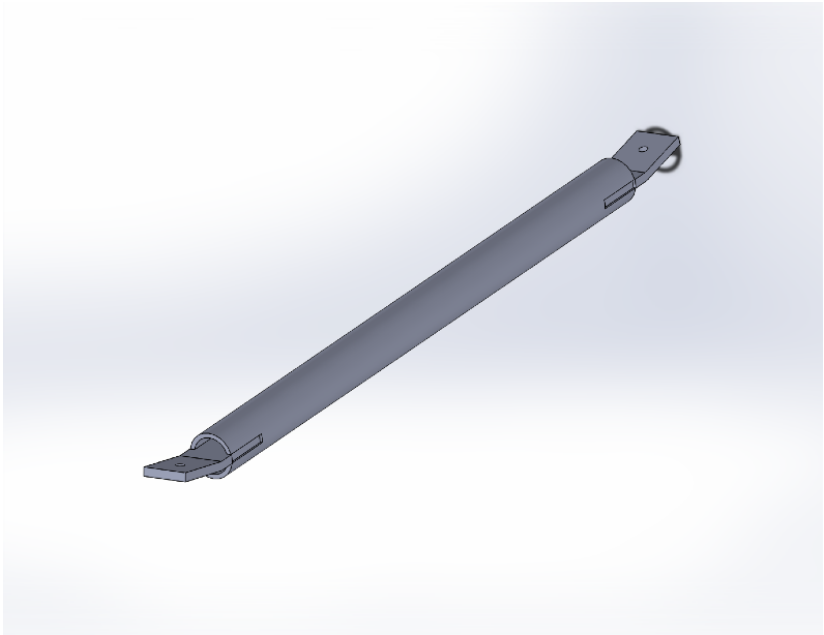
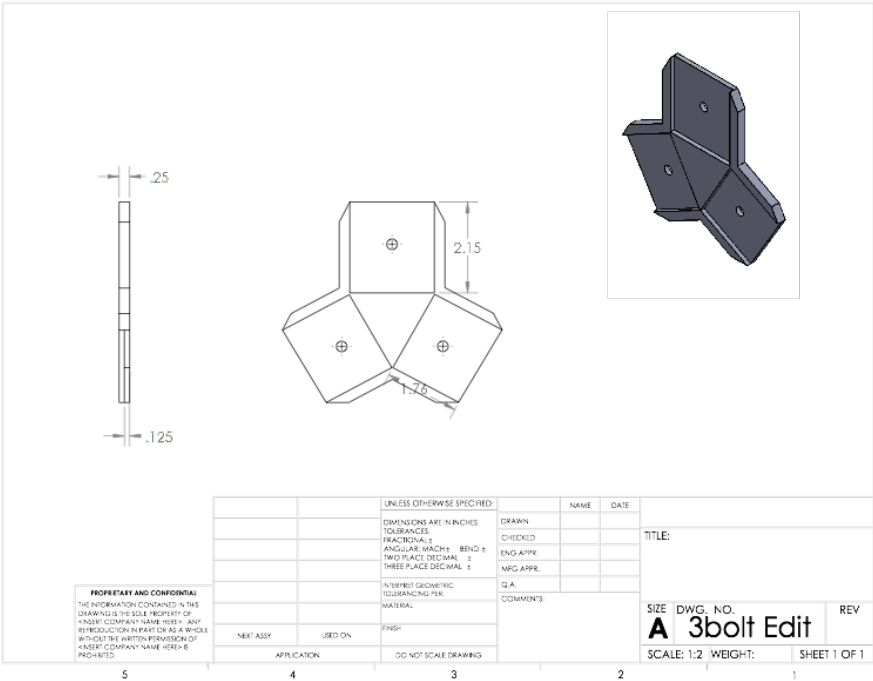


Joshua Brown with his prototype of the compression joint.

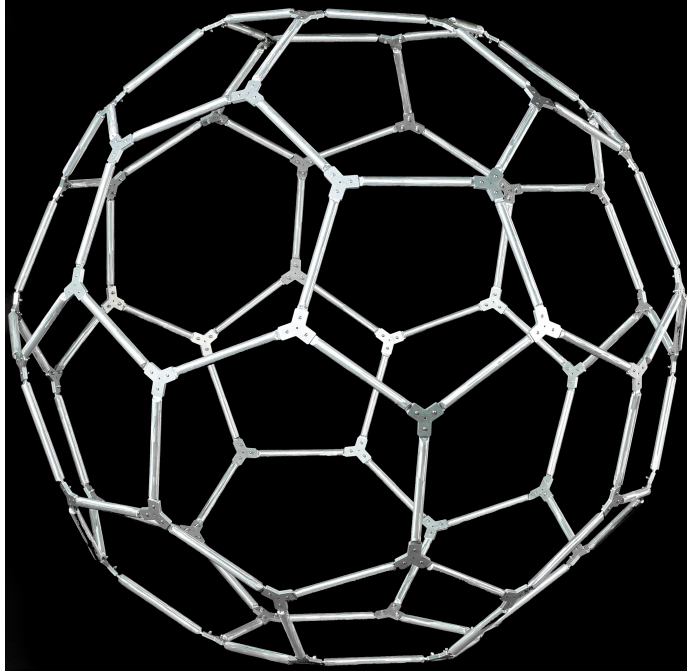


We worked in collaboration with a local fabrication company, Custom Metal Works Inc based in the city of Central Louisiana. After a few meetings and some last minute design modifications, Custom Metal Works volunteered their time, resources, and labor for our project providing that we purchased the raw materials. In the final stage fabrication, the students from the devising class volunteered their time to finish up the grinding of the members to insure a smooth and safe surface at the Custom Metal Works shop. With the grinding done we did an initial build with the entire class at the Custom Metal Work's workshop. The structure ended up weighing one hundred and eleven pounds, much lighter than anticipated.

(The finalized design created by Josh Brown. The tongue of each member slides into the slot and is compressed between two plates via a bolt and nut.)



The final result is the one hundred and eleven point collapsible structure. We even acquired a green screen for promotional purposes. I would like to give a special thanks to Ronald Moore for providing the green screen and for the photo-shoot.



The design phase of the show utilized the imaginative minds of the Composition for physical theatre class in the fall to research and experiment with movement possibilities on the floor. Our research began with a mining in the realm of science in both the macro and micro worlds of our universe. We wanted the movement to emulate biological movement and development, drawing inspirations from intercellular interactions, meiosis, chemical reactions as well as intergalactic interactions with planets, stars, and galaxies.

During the fall semester in Composition, we did not have the structure, so we devoted out time to creating the floor work for the show. We concentrated our research for movement on all things biological, acquiring inspirations from processes such as cell division, and intercellular interactions. We came up with a lot of movement including two sections called “Mirrors” and “Shiver Winds.” “Mirrors” is a movement sequence in which there is a primary leader and a follower. The leader can make his follower move into any position and also has the ability to make the follower interact with other players on stage. The inspiration of this movement came from the theory of quantum entanglement, which states that entangled particles are linked and will change according to any alteration of the other particle. The movement is also a reflection on our interactions with other people. We influence others and are susceptible to being influenced. And an influence is the beginning, or origin, of something new.

The Shiver Winds section deals more with the development of life. The sequence begins with the ensemble in a mass standing with heads faced down and shivering. Periodically a head lifts straight up, but then shoots back towards the ground. As the

shivering intensifies, the ensemble looks up and explodes out, but catches each other. The product is a sticky like mass of bodies with growing tension. Something gives, and there is a readjustment of the group, another give and the group falls apart and there is an exploding outwards. The ensemble reconvenes and carries an actor across their backs to another actor and they begin doing staccato movements like the interactions of cells. The rest of the ensemble gathers together and approaches the two actors. Once close the blob moves across the stage approaching two actors interacting with each other doing contact improvisation low to the ground. As the blob approaches, one of the actors gets pulled in, much like cellular phagocytosis. The second player is also eaten. As the blob comes apart, two actors replicate a heartbeat with their bodies before exploding to their positions. Once there everyone works their way up to standing and begins moving their bodies as if there were a strong wind controlling them. The wind passes through the ensemble and then changes. Something happens and all the actors react and shoot towards the ground. We all roll down stage left into another blob where we catch a male actor jumping into the middle. We cover him with our bodies and switch him out for a female actor and lift her up out of the blob. The entire movement is demonstrative of the biological process taking imagery from the microscopic world of cellular interactions. It is also demonstrative of Origin from the view of birth and death. As a practice though, we began coming up with a movement vocabulary that we can refer back to for show creation.

In Devising we concentrated on preparing movement for the structure and creating a storyline that we could use to make a show in class. At the beginning,

when the structure was being built, we did a lot of partner exercises for potential movement inside the structure and around the structure. When we got the structure in February we quickly learned our limitations. We ambitiously attempted to have five performers on top of the structure at one time. This resulted in the crumpling of the structure and bending of several of the members. Luck favors the prepared, and we changed out the bent members for the extra ones we had made for such an occasion. From this experience we knew that we could limit the structure to a three person maximum at any given time. This led to the development of the three muses, a female trio routine on the structure, which evokes a sense of ethereal beauty and grace.

Towards the beginning of the semester, Nick Erickson and I decided that we needed some sense of storyline in order to create an actual performance. So we put our brains together and came up with a story about Origin loosely based off the epic journey of Odysseus. We wanted to portray a new species going through an epic trans-generational journey through time. The journey depicts the development of a species we have called "Origani," or the "souls of Origin." They go through several changes of metamorphosis until they reach higher levels of life. With each new development, the Origani are given the privilege and responsibility for change. The trans-generation aspect is shown by not having a main character. The lead is constantly changing from scene to scene to show that time changes, positions of power change, and in every generation, we have a responsibility towards those around us. Eventually the character dies, and through death a new character is born

to lead the Origani into the next stage of development. The following is the fourth rendition of our script outline.

Origin

1) The Piercing

Through the darkness, the Structure (Φ) appears lit from within, shadows casting indistinct shapes.

From above, the Φ is pierced by a figure sliding down from the silk above, folding the cover inward.

As the cover reveals the Φ , the Origani (\odot) ooze out onto the floor.

2) 3 Muses

Three Muses rise up in the Φ to conjure Alpha (A) who sleeps in the base. Muses lift A and hang him from Φ .

3) Celebration of Arms

Muses climb up the silk. Origani see A sleeping in the Φ .

A wakes and celebrates in Φ while \odot look on.

A hangs by his knees Φ , Origani begin the Arm sequence.

A emerges from Φ , solos goodbye, then is wrapped. Muses come down.

The wrapped Beta is placed in Φ , rocked up to the top and left to incubate.

4) Queen of Legs

Cocoon incubates.

Beta (B) emerges first with her legs from the wrap inside Φ , explores inside with her newfound body.

B sits forward on Φ and gives legs to the \odot . Mark and Lexi go up the silk.

B calls Gamma inside Φ . Mark and Lexi come down.

5) Procreation

Inside Φ , B and Γ begin a type of procreation involving the help of all the \odot . All the \odot mimic the procreation around the stage and on the silk while some end by wrapping B and Γ at the end. All are left spent.

6) Atlas

Out of the wrap emerges Delta (Δ). He shows off his strength in a solo inside Φ

\odot rise from the floor into frog watching Φ .

Δ exits the Φ and leads \odot in a frog march down right.

Δ rises and turns to the frogs. Epsilon (E) rises and climbs the center silk. 4

\odot hold up Φ the around E.

Δ watches E on the silk in the Φ and goes up into it.

All the \odot frog march over to watch. Φ is placed on the floor around Δ while

E leaves the silk and enters Φ above wrapping with her body the head of Δ .

Δ slowly moves E down his body to his feet all while E stays wrapped around him.

7) Family

20:30-21:20 Zeta (Z) and Eta (H) emerge through the legs of Δ while E is still wrapped around his feet. They form a family knot.

21:20-22:30 The family knot expands, separates, and reconnects as if drawn by \odot .

8) Gathering Storm

Δ and E quarrel gathering support on both sides from \odot while Z and H look on clinging to each other.

Δ and E climb opposing silks while their respective \odot square off to a height of tension.

9) Call for Peace

H hides in the Φ while Z solos in Φ .

As both sides begin to clash, Z emerges from Φ upstage center to slowly walk from upstage to downstage. H climbs up the center silk to hide. Z is mauled and torn by the feuding \odot to fall prone on the ground down center.

10) The Cry

H sees Z fall and cries out.

H and climbs onto the top of Φ

H pulls out the Φ cover from her self, covering Φ with it.

She falls onto the Φ .

11) Burial

Δ and E come down with the help of \odot , all gathering around Z.

All pick up Z and carry Z to the Φ to lay "In State" on top next to H.

Φ is rolled so that the bodies are on top of cover and Φ while all \odot hold the cover and Φ . \odot lower the bodies into Φ like a hammock/cocoon like a burial.

12) Re-Origin

All \odot drop in lamentation.

Theta (Θ) comes out of the crowd, climbs center silk to straddle back, the \odot lift Φ to Θ who holds it in his hands while the \odot salute.

The piercing is a depiction of the first action, the first event that started the processes of life. For some this would be God's calling light into existence, for others this would be the big bang. The opening sequence is done in complete darkness. The audience takes flight on the sounds of rockets and enters into the depths of space. Here we encounter new life, and start the epic journey of understanding where we come from. Light appears from the inside of the structure and all the performers begin to move around and casting shadows on the inside. From the central silk an aerialist slides down and begins piercing the covering of the structure and brings it into the structure. Simultaneously, as the cover is being lifted, the performers inside the structure ooze out in worm like fashion and struggle to get somewhere. This being the earliest stage, we are attempting to stay at a stage that constricts movement. The performers are encouraged to create relationships with other within the confines of the movement, which does not allow for the use of arms and legs at this point.

While the primitive worm-like Origani are interacting, the three muses emerge from inside the structure and begin doing their trio routine. The inside of the structure represents the ethereal realm of origin, the place where we all come from and where we go to when we die. The three muses are creatures of that realm, here to help the Origani to facilitate change. At the end of the routine, the muses lift Alpha up to his feet and give him arms. They then lift him up where he does a solo on the structure. The named characters, titled after the Greek alphabet, are catalysts for change and so always start on the inside of the structure before they directly influence the Origani on the outside.

The Alpha section is the depiction of the first evolutionary process. Up until this point the Origani have very limited mobility and ways to care for themselves. When Alpha

gives arms to the Origani, they now have the freedom for faster movement, the ability to obtain higher levels physically, as well as a new vocabulary for communication. The Origani explore their new limbs with a dance and Alpha comes out of the structure to join the rest. He demonstrates some abilities that the rest of the Origani try. Some are successful, while others are not, and end up falling. This is to demonstrate the learning process. Some people pick things up faster than others, and this is also inherent in nature. At the end though, Alpha gave all that he had for the Origani, and he dies. He is then wrapped up and put on the structure, which is then rolled so that he is covered on top.

When the music transitions to the next section, the figure on top of the structure moves and is revealed to be a new character. We do a switch when wrapping Alpha, so that Beta is on top of the structure for the giving of legs. Here she emerges from the wrap like a cocoon, and does her solo while all the Origani look on. She then calls to two of the Origani who climb up the silks and begin emulating her movements in the air. Once finished with her solo, Beta addresses the Origani, who all organize themselves and begin following Beta in a leg dance. Once we have legs, we begin to explore the possibilities of what having legs can do for us, but still staying low to the ground to keep the semblance of evolutionary development. We very much want to stay away from human images at this point in the show.

At the conclusion of the leg dance, Beta chooses one of the Origani as her mate and invites him into the structure. The music shifts as he enters, and the two begin an intimate duet inside the structure. Intrigued by what is going on, the Origani gather to look inside. Periodically curiosity gets the better of the Origani and they climb around the structure in order to get a better vantage of view, or even the chance to touch the performers in the

duet. Once we get the idea of what is going on, the Origani leave the structure and begin the process of precreation on their own. The movement is choreographed duets that uses the other performer's negative space. When one person moves, the other person moves to fill up the spaces around the first person, and this continues on shifting until all the Origani collapse from exhaustion.

A new figure has been wrapped and stands erect inside the structure while the Origani stay motionless on the floor. The new figure then begins to struggle against his wrap until his head is exposed. At this time the Origani have begun to stir and become curious about this new figure that has come out of the structure. After struggling to take his wrap off, Delta emerges fully formed and begins doing his solo while everyone watches. We all react to his strength, and begin to follow him when he leaves the structure in a frog formation. Walking around him, we approach with caution and curiosity, though one particular Origani wants to challenge his arrival. He overpowers her and leaves her to struggle while he leads the rest of the ensemble in the frog march down to stage right. Here he demonstrates the painful transformation into a standing being. The transformation looks painful, and we as the frog-Origani are mixed with a combination of intense curiosity and fear. When he gets to standing we approach him and see what he's all about. In response to his growth, the knocked over Origani picks herself up and begins undergoing the same painful transformation until she also stands. Excited for the competition, Delta tries to out do her accomplishment by evoking the power of the muses. They pick up the structure it is lifted into the air. In retaliation Epsilon climbs the silks, where the structure is carried under her and it is placed on Delta's shoulders. While here, Epsilon slips down into a position in aerial silks called the Brazilian Hang. The

structure spins around her and she drops down onto Delta's shoulders. She snakes her way down his body until she lays down at Delta's feet, which leads into the next section, Family. The significance of the Atlas section is to show what we can accomplish through perseverance and strength. It is also demonstrative of the Origani's final stages of physical evolution.

At the stage the Origani are now fully erect, and we wanted to introduce the formation of family. Family has its own cycle, there is the start of the family at birth, and then the growth of that family. However there is always the inevitable separation of family. This means something different for each individual based on their own experiences, but familial separation is a universal that we can all relate to. So the movement depicts a pushing away from and a pulling back to the group until finally Epsilon and Delta break free and the children Zeta and Eta are left to fend for themselves inside the structure.

Quarrels occur. No matter where you are, or what you are doing, or which species you might be, quarrels happen, fights break out and something changes as a result. In "Gathering Storms," when Epsilon and Delta leave the structure, they begin to fight and argue. The Origani are gathered into two opposing sides as a result and tension builds up while the children, Zeta and Eta, are still looking on from the inside. At the peak of tension, Epsilon and Delta climb opposing silks and direct their respective armies to square off. Violent movements are seen on both sides that effect the opponent with the use of kinesthetic response. As the movements and tension level rises, there is a breaking and the two sides begin to interact.

Watching as mayhem ensues in the outside world, Zeta cannot take any more of the violence happening amongst the Origani. So he calls out to them in a marvelous physical

display inside the structure, but to no avail. The call for peace has no effect on the frenzied Origani, so Zeta decides to leave the safety of the structure. Once out, Zeta slowly proceeds downstage in passive protest against the fighting. As he walks down stage he is hit by the Origani from both sides and sustains injuries. With each blow, Zeta becomes weaker and begins to crawl, only to be kicked to the ground. Still struggling to make it to the end, Zeta makes it completely downstage before collapsing and releasing his final breath. The death of her brother sends Eta into despair and she cries out! The death of Zeta and the cry of his sister ceases the fighting amongst the Origani, and they all come together. Now joining forces, the Origani pick Zeta up as one and bring him to the structure. He is laid next to his sister and both are lifted to the pinnacle of the structure. From here they are eased down into a cocoon inside the structure. Nothing in this world is done without sacrifice. In this depiction Zeta gives his life, the ultimate sacrifice, to save the Origani from destroying themselves. Nothing in this world can be attained without sacrifice on some level. The question remains how and when do we act, if we choose to do so.

In the last scene Theta emerges from the lamenting Origani and climbs up the silk. Once in position, the Origani lift up the structure and Theta grabs hold of it. Theta and the structure are then left suspended in the air with the Origani gathered around in anticipation for what is going to happen next. This is the last image we are left with before the black out. This last section is a call to everyone that we hold the responsibility for our world and its well being. If we do not, then our world will come crashing down. Despite our past, what humanity has done before us, we have to take a stand to say this is our world, and I can influence it.

I would like to thank the Composition and Devising classes for their input and efforts towards the creation of Origin. This show would not have happened without them. The next step for this process is the continued development of the show with the new ensemble to be performed at the Shaver Theatre in the middle of July 2014. This will be in preparation for its international debut at the Edinburgh Fringe festival in Scotland. After our studies abroad, the show will be brought to the local community. During this past spring semester, we participated at the LSU Discover Research Day, where we met a representative from the University of Florida. After our presentation, we were invited to bring our show to Gainesville to collaborate with their students to create a new rendition of the show to debut at their University. It is my hope that we continue these collaborative efforts, and see how Origin develops. My dream is that I will find the origin for a new beginning and eventually will leave this particular show to continue to grow with new ideas and input, and itself emulate what we were originally trying to display; the inevitability of change. Like the characters portrayed, the responsibility of Origin will fall to the next generation of students, and with every generation the show will become more developed and display their perspectives of the meaning of Origin.