

## ***A Full Circle – Movement #3 A Roller-Coaster of Emotions***

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### ***Abstract***

*A Full Circle is a three part collection of short films exploring the dark and visceral human emotions through the language of contemporary dance. **Movement #3** exposes two characters, the Siblings, to an intense emotional journey in three distinct stages – Rivalry, Clash and Reconciliation. From a tightly connected duo to complete polar opposites the Siblings weave through a downward spiral, vying for dominance until they reach the bottom. How will they make it back to the light?*

*This article examines the creative process, from story concept to finished work, exposing key parts and aspects of video production that supports, first and foremost, the storytelling. With verbal dialog replaced by movement, visuals and music, the article aims to emphasize the idea of integration and symbioses that connect dance with the various parts of filmmaking in order to fully express the choreography experience.*

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### ***Biography***

*As an educator in Canadian and American film schools, Rodrigo Rocha-Campos has been teaching the art and technique of camera and lighting for over 12 years. He believes that aesthetics and technology are aspects of a supportive web that is at the service of character, emotion and story, working hand in hand to create a new world, a new experience. For Rodrigo, creativity, rather than technology, propels the storytelling. A few years ago, Rodrigo decided to diversify his career and found screen dance videos as a perfect medium to express his creative voice. To date, he has directed and produced 4 short dance films that enjoyed modest international exposure at screen dance and experimental film festivals. His next piece is currently in development.*

## Introduction

### *The Concept of A Full Circle – Movement #3*



**Fig. 1 – Erika Mitsuhashi and Michael Ethan Kong as the Siblings in Movement #3**

*The central concept of Movement #3 revolves around the story of two Siblings caught in an emotional rollercoaster as they clash and negotiate their similarities and differences. The story begins in the aftermath of one of their fights, the tenuous calm after the storm (Fig. 1). The video unfolds in a non-linear fashion in three distinct key sections – Rivalry, Clash and Reconciliation. For Rivalry, the Siblings compete for dominance. Even though they seem strong and confident, the Sister takes the upper hand using ingenuity and strategy. She uses magnetism as a weapon to control the dynamic. However, as tempers flare up both Siblings become increasingly aggressive towards each other as they descend into the darkness of their own personal hell. For the second section, the Clash, neither takes the lead, and no one wins. They confront each other through aggression, exposing their vulnerability; and, to heighten their agony, their heads are wrapped in a ribbon-like material closing them off from each other, and their world. Their fears confined to their own beasts within, experiencing events in a way closely resembling nightmares. This is when the Siblings hit their deepest bottom, seemingly lost forever. The third and last part of the video is Reconciliation. In this section, the Brother takes the lead in extricating them from their poisonous situation (Fig. 2). It takes a mountain of strength, courage and determination from both of them to pull through with*

*dark thoughts coming and going, taunting their healing process. But, they are each other's cornerstone. Bound and part of the same essence, they manage to pull through. In the end, peace is achieved, but at the great price of scars that will follow them for life.*



**Fig. 2 – The Brother takes the lead in the Reconciliation section of the video**

## **Choreography and Movement: from Dancers to Post-Production**

### ***The Choreography***

*The choreography and movement of A Full Circle - Movement #3 is a blend of formal and textural dance, with the latter playing a more dominant role.*

*Inspired by the works of the Gaga Movement developed by renowned dancer and choreographer Ohad Naharin, the dancers found fitting to use this textural approach for the video. Gaga is considered a movement language rather than a movement technique and it embraces, among other things, imagination, improvisation and a liberation of the body from preconceived dance moves (Gittings, 2013). Works of this internationally acclaimed artist can be seen in the documentary entitled Mr. Gaga written and directed by Tomer Heymann (Heymann, 2015). One of the best examples of this approach in Movement #3 is the sequence where the two Siblings struggle to dialog with one another, while separated by a wall (Fig. 3). So close to each other, and yet so far apart. In this scene, the decaying relationship crumbles and spirals downward to the point of no return. Here, the textural nature of the dance speaks volumes to their non-verbal dialog. It feels spontaneous and unrehearsed. Indeed, improvisation was*

*encouraged in this scene, each filmed take providing unique moves and emotional subtleties for the editor to choose from. Furthermore, the textural nature of the dance is reminiscent of gestures and movements of ordinary day-to-day life, enhancing the feeling of realism and, hopefully, resonating with the audience in a more visceral way. Textural movement makes other appearances throughout the video, as in the scenes where the characters are plunged into darkness or perched on a pew. Following the separation scene, where a wall divides them, the textural movement becomes increasingly darker, psychotic, and violent yet exposes a sense of vulnerability and despair. The decision to strip the characters of their outer garments heightens the expression of vulnerability as well as the movement that expresses it. An example of this idea is the sequence where the Siblings find themselves, one at a time, in the corner of the room. Here, all the elements on the screen, from the set design and wardrobe to the photography and editing, contribute to the impact of the performers' textural moves. On the other hand, formal movement is present mostly at the beginning and at the end of the video, book-ending the piece as a whole. At the beginning, it is used to express the idea of strength, confidence and stability these characters display, contrasting it with the parts that are erratic and chaotic. However, the presence of formal movement is brief and intercut with shots of textural dance signalling events are about to take a dark turn. At the end of the piece, formal movement helps to express the healing process the Siblings go through, illustrating their self-evaluation and self-reflection, sending the message that things will be resolved. There is also the use of symmetry in the third part's choreography, establishing their re-connection and ties to their origin.*

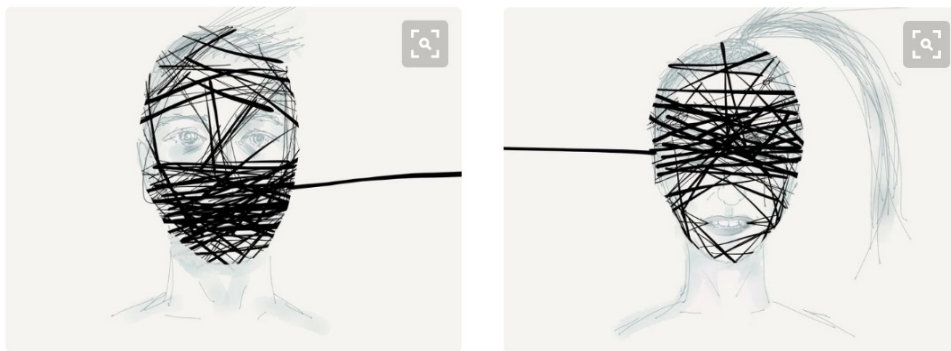


**Fig. 3 – The Clash – the Siblings so close to each other and yet so far apart in their decaying relationship**

### ***The Scenarios***

*The scenarios of Movement #3 are stark and visceral. They support the dark, nightmarish narrative with surreal overtones. One of the first settings of the story takes place in a dilapidated wooden interior. The Siblings start the scene seated on a church pew, staring at the camera. The mood is austere and eerie. The room lacks doors and windows and the lighting is sombre and unembellished. It is in this environment that the Siblings fight and heal their relationship. A surreal moment takes place in the Rivalry part with the Sister towering over the Brother and pulling a long string from his mouth. The act itself is quite eerie and it is compounded by the fact that she enjoys the process and the Brother seems powerless. The meaning of this action could be interpreted in different ways, but what is clear in this scenario is that the Sister has the upper hand and her stance towards her Brother is of control and dominance. Another telling scenario during the Clash is the sequence involving a wall separating them, mentioned earlier. They find themselves so close, yet so far apart at the same time. There are several perspectives that are very appealing in this sequence, but perhaps one the most interesting ones is the perspective from the vantage point of the camera. An experience hardly possible in real life, the ability to see both rooms side-by-side is fascinating. It is also curious to observe the way the audience reacts without questioning this “special power”; here, a suspension of disbelief takes place and no one seems to be turned off by this cinematic move. The other interesting component of this sequence is the suggestion that the side-by-side rooms really exist, yet in reality they do not. This is an editing construct, as the characters were shot at separate times on the same one area of the set. In post-production, the shots of the Brother were flipped, and at times sewn together with the Sister’s, so as to appear as connecting rooms. This is a great cinematic artifice – the ability to change not only our sensorial impressions, but also manipulate the “geography” of places we perceive. The full impact of the dancers’ movements in this scene is also achieved by integrating and pushing to the limits the exploration of camera, music, and above all, the editing. On the other hand, the scenario that follows is referred to “descending to hell”. Here, the Siblings find themselves in a black and empty background. Stripped of their clothes and*

wearing only undergarments they appear more desperate and vulnerable to their inner demons. In this part of the video the camera takes a more aggressive stance by following, stalking, and almost attacking the characters. The characters are somewhat impaired – one blinded and the other silenced. It is in this scenario that the Sister has the ability to scream her aggressions and fears, but at the same time unable to see her surroundings. Conversely, the Brother is gagged into silence, but his eyes express all the agony he witnesses and pain he goes through (Fig. 4). Distinctive wardrobe features for Brother and Sister created by Production Designer Siobhan Louise O’Keefe.



**Fig. 4 – The Clash – Design concept by Siobhan Louise O’Keefe for Brother and Sister for their darkest moments**

Another unsettling scenario the Siblings find themselves in is the sequence where both are veiled in a white fabric shroud. The creative team could not have anticipated the beautiful and haunting images it created. Here, the performance of both dancers, Erika and Michael, took their interpretation to a high emotional complexity, going from lyrical to a full-blown, anxious ridden desperation (Figs. 5 and 6). The trap was then set for the audience: by starting in the gloom at first, to then, at the flip of a switch, plunge into darkness, almost frightful, the beautiful contours the fabric created, left us in awe. The dancers’ movements revealed the beauty and the ugliness within; the angelic and the tortured; the soft and the skeletal. The concept for the shroud was to represent all the pain and regret endured by the Siblings in their journey. But, we never anticipated until principal photography that the characters’ journey would be much darker than expected. We also cannot overlook the efforts from the

*creative team that contributed to taking this scene to the next level. From the fabric chosen by the Wardrobe department and the stark Production Design to the Lighting and the Editing choices, they all played a key role on the impact of the end result.*



**Figs. 5 and 6– The Reconciliation – sorrow and pain expressed by the Sister (left: Erika Mitsuhashi). Agony and fear interpreted by the Brother (right: Michael Ethan Kong)**

### ***The Production Design***

*The idea for the set design was to have a somewhat surreal room of decaying appearance. This room needed to be of a simple U-shape layout with dilapidated walls and floor, similar in shape to the proscenium of a stage. Color and texture had to support the dark and anxious-ridden tone of the piece. Moreover, the room would lack doors and windows with an almost institutionalized and claustrophobic feel (Fig. 7). It would have minimal dressing in order to make the dancers stand out. But a few items were brought in such as the church pew, the weathered wooden steps and the abstracted canvas for the background painted by Production Designer Siobhan Louise O’Keefe. These items were hand picked from a design and tone stand-point. With the exception of the canvas, they were used in scenes with self-contained movement or removed to give enough open space for the dance. Another requirement for the U-shape layout was the need for “walls”, or flats, flanking each side of the set facing the camera. This allowed the characters to dance against the wall surface, and at the same time, prevented the camera from framing the back of the set. This is mostly seen during the Clash sequence.*



**Fig. 7 - The Clash – featureless room without doors or windows – minimalism design stressing a claustrophobic prison-like feel**

*The other set used was a simple black infinity space in which we see the characters in different emotional states, from contentment to agony. The studio had existing black walls, but the floor had to be made black without altering the existing surface. Rolls of black self-adhesive paper had to be installed, having in mind not only aesthetics of the piece, but the safety of the performers dancing on such a surface. The black infinity was extensively used during the Clash, where the Siblings find themselves in pure hell. It was also used in other sections such as in the Prelude opening scene where the Brother and Sister, arranged in symmetry, seem to be sleeping, or just about to wake up (Fig. 8). The black infinity also helped to prevent the main set from becoming over-used and supported the creation of parallels events.*



**Fig. 8 – Prelude – shot in the dark infinity set used for different moments of the film**  
*For the wardrobe, the idea was to create a modern and edgy look while at the same time allowing freedom of movement and a beautiful aesthetic. Each*

*Siblings' costume had to be complementary to the other but also distinct from one another, just like their personalities. A wristband with a long ribbon for each character suggested their unity and extended the reach of movement. Design and construction was executed by Levi Garcia, who understood both the aesthetic of the piece and the practical requirements of the choreography (Fig. 9). Besides the main costume, skin color undergarments were used in both the Prelude and Clash sequences, with the main objective to show the characters as vulnerable and exposed, stripped off their protective outer layer.*



**Fig. 9 – Rivalry – surreal act of Sister pulling out a black string from Brother's mouth. Costume Designer Levi Garcia created garments that provided freedom and beauty (Photo by Paula Simson)**

### ***The Photography***

*The look of Movement #3 was crafted with the idea of creating an austere world with haunting beauty. The lighting and the camera work followed the same emotional journey as the Siblings. The lighting can be sleek, but it also can be gritty and harsh depending on the scene. It was during the camera test that a look pre-set for the camera was developed stressing high contrast, desaturation of colors and a green bias overall (Fig. 10). Alternatively, set picture by photographer Paula Simson shows the Siblings in an otherwise more conventional camera look (Fig. 11).*



**Fig. 10 - The Clash - Single source lighting - broad, soft but high in contrast. A camera preset look was created during tests that emphasized deep shadows and a green cast**



**Fig. 11 - The Clash - Same scene but shot with a digital still camera by Paula Simson. Conventional look without the preset used by the production cameras**

*The video was shot in 5K resolution with a 2-camera crew. Frame guides were used in the viewfinder so the image could be cropped later as wide format and letter-boxed for delivery. Furthermore, the camera work ranged from observer to active participant. But even as an observer the camera's presence is felt, with the characters sometimes looking straight at it. There are quite few instances where the "fourth wall" is broken. The rapport between the camera and Siblings is unpredictable, but in general it tends to generate more negative situations. The camera stares uncomfortably at them; it provokes, taunts, and*

*stalks the characters in their darkest moments. It behaves as if it is a third character present with them. To achieve these moments Cinematographer Robert Riendeau used different rigs available ranging from various size tripods and hand-held devices to dollies and a jib (Fig. 12).*



**Fig. 12 - A-Camera Operator Luze Issa Rubio getting notes in between takes using the camera on a jib rig. Photo by Paula Simson**

*Robert was instrumental in refining the overall look of the photography, defined during camera tests (Fig. 13)*



**Fig. 13 - Camera & Make-up Test - the look of the video was finalized during this phase (model: Pascale Bevis O'Keefe). Preference was given to the far right screen grab. Cinematography by Robert Riendeau**

### ***The Editing & the Music***

*The editing posed many challenges, mostly due to the amount of footage available and the many possibilities at hand, which could have convoluted the final piece or thrown it off track. One of the guiding elements for the post-production work was the music, which was fully realized in pre-production. This composition became the “script” not only for the dancers but also for the editor. Some of the requirements for the music were: sense of mystery and eeriness, a complete shift in music genre towards hard rock emphasizing anger*

*at a frenetic pace, and a sombre yet regal ending. Long-time collaborator Music Composer, Will Meadows was responsible for crafting such a unique piece full of atmosphere, texture and emotion for the Siblings' journey. Likewise, Editor Arlein Perez Garcia, made the most of the unique sounds and musical structure, not only to accentuate the details of the performance but also to assemble the edit in a way that built up momentum. Once the story thread became clear and the pace right, Arlein added her personal style to the editing which at times involved manipulating the recorded footage. Shots were flipped, flopped, sewn together side-by-side, sped up, morphed, reversed, scaled up or down. However, at no moment did the use of editing manipulation feel over-used or gimmicky, nor did they supersede the original intent of the piece, but rather the manipulations enhanced the original capture to refine the expression in the service of the story. In most instances, the effects still preserve the naturalness of the movement. Movement #3 was cut in a non-linear way with a Prelude giving a glimpse of the nightmare about to happen. In other sections, parallel events were illustrated concurrently. The various events were never assembled haphazardly or as a mumbo-jumbo collection of shots. The three sections were put together in a way that feels cohesive and with purpose. The video ends by connecting the conclusion with the beginning, signaling the end of a cycle and beginning of a new one (Fig. 14).*



**Fig. 14 – The Reconciliation – peace is achieved at last but not free of scars. Editor Alein Perez Garcia ends the video by connecting with the beginning signaling a cycle**

## **Conclusions**

*Movement #3 was shot over two days with a three-month pre-production period and a roughly four-month post-production schedule. The collaboration process proved to be incredibly positive and the results very encouraging. The dance interpreted by Erika Mitsunashi and Michael Ethan Kong grew ever stronger throughout development and as elements were incrementally added by the creative team. The Siblings belonged to that setting and their journey would not be the same elsewhere, dressed differently, or photographed under different light. Their agony and pain would not be fully felt with a different music genre and their actions and thoughts would not have reverberated within on us the same way with a different unfolding of edits. Regardless of the format of a video piece, the ancillary elements not only tell a message but support the performers' interpretation. It is the synergy of all parts that make the picture complete and lacking any one of the components would weaken the whole.*

## **Acknowledgements**

*The success of the finished video would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of Erika Mitsunashi and Michael Ethan Kong from concept to principal photography. Also, from the amazing contribution of the crew working solely for the experience, credit and passion for the craft. Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge Vancouver Film School for donating the location, sets and resources. Without VFS with realization of the project would not be possible.*

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### ***Filmography***

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