Suhaila Salimpour's Phrase Development Method

Suhaila Salimpour's Phrase Development Method (PDP or Phrase Method) is outlined below. These elements may be used to create phrases or as a means to evaluate phrases created for class combinations and drills. These elements are also valuable for improvisation; the more you learn and practice, the more of these elements you can represent in your performance.

Research and Educate

- Learn all the factors (music, culture, audience, etc.) as applicable for your phrase or combination.
- Know the music. Phrases might be inspired by a certain music, but then taught or presented using a different music choice to allow the phrase to be repeated several times without concern for musical changes.

Design and Develop

- Refactor. Make small and subtle changes to a move or step without affecting its meaning or sentiment.
- Interpret. Convey the meaning and intent of the music, moves, steps, lyrics, etc. Example: to perform a choreography in a way that conveys your understanding of the choreographer''s ideas.
- Layer. Layer one step or move on to another step or move.
- Fuse. Join or blend moves and steps into an integrated phrase in a responsible way, always keeping awareness of the original elements.
- Personalize. Be aware of your own voice in the process.
- Characterize. Convey sentiments and stylizations as dictated by the music, choreographer, movements, etc.

Shape

- Riff. Repeat a phrase adding variations and nuances as you progress through the repeats.
- Refine and Enhance. Add nuance, variation, gradation, overtones, subtlety, and artistry.
- Compose. Understand the structure and composition of the phrase and how each component or feature contributes to the overall theme or message.

Jamhaila

When Suhaila's Phrase Development Method and her improvisation are applied to the Jamila Salimpour Step Vocabulary, the School nicknames that application as "Jamhaila", a blending of Suhaila's format with the Jamila vocabulary. For student learning, four types of Jamhaila combinations are used.

A. Two or three Jm-Vocab steps in one phrase of 8 counts with transitions between each step.
- ○ A1. Two Jm-Vocab steps in one phrase of 8 counts.
- ○ A2. Three Jm-Vocab steps in one phrase of 8 counts.
B. Jm-Vocab steps layered on top of Jm-Vocab steps with one dominant sentiment.
C. Layering Suhaila Format and Jm-Vocab steps.
D. Riffing with the Jm-Vocab.

Below is an excerpt (edited in May 2020 to reflect current terminology) of a document written by Abigail Keyes in 2016. She provides a background for and an explanation of "Jamhaila" concepts.

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Let's start with a little background on the development of Jamila's vocabulary and Suhaila's format.

In the Beginning...

Each step in the Jamila Salimpour vocabulary is derived from steps and movements performed by real people in or from the Middle East. When Jamila was observing dancers in films from Cairo, casual dancing at cultural gatherings, and nightclub performers in the United States, she wanted to make sense of what she was seeing.

Jamila Salimpour began her cataloging of steps in the 1930s, and essentially ceased in 1974. She organized what she observed into what she called "Step Families," which we still use today. At Suhaila added steps that she observed on her travels to the Middle East, at her mother's request. Jamila herself never traveled to the Arab world; Suhaila, however, traveled there multiple times as a teenager, and eventually spent 10 years working as a professional dancer throughout the Arab world. Suhaila, at her mother's request, added steps such as Stomp Step with a Shimmy, 3/4 Shimmy Spin, and most of the Salaam Family. Through both of their contributions, the Jamila vocabulary was, for the most part, set and codified by 1978.

Each step family has an overall sentiment or feeling; some step families are also characterized by a shared technical element. For example, the Basic Egyptian family steps feature hip twists (except for the Five Count, which has no hip work at all) and have an outward action. These are the steps that were and are performed by professional dancers. The Salaam Family is connected by the fact that these steps are all "party steps" or movements that one might see at a family gathering, wedding, or other celebration; most of them have a fulltime bounce down, driven by small demi pliés. The Arabic family features shuffling steps that mostly stay in place, the legs are kept close together, and the sentiment is demure, coy, and sweet; this family is also much more internal than the Egyptian family steps. As you learn the steps, you will noticed that some sentiments cross over between steps and families.

You might be wondering... if the Jamila Salimpour Vocabulary includes culturally-derived steps, why do I need the Suhaila Format? Can't I just use the steps in the Jamila Vocabulary? Well, you could, but you'd be missing out on your full technical potential to interpret the rich, complex music to which dancers perform today.

The Music Changes

In the late 1970s, professional dancers in the Middle East commissioned longer, orchestrated compositions specifically for performance from well-respected composers. When recordings of these pieces reached the United States, often bootlegged from a tape recorder hidden in a patron's purse at a nightclub, dancers were struck by the complexity and changes in each piece. These compositions were often full-length sets, or included now-classic entrance pieces such as "Set El Hosen" and "Mishaal."

Before these pieces reached North America, dancers in American nightclubs mostly only improvised to folk songs with few tempo or rhythmic changes, such as "Ya Ain Moulaytin," "Salaam Allay," "Hizzy Ya Nawaem," or Turkish folk songs such as "?i?eler," or "Rompi Rompi." Sometimes Armenian and Greek pieces would be included, such as "Tamzara," (a folk dance song in 9/8 time) or "Miserlou." A set would include a fast, upbeat opening song, a slow taqsim for veilwork, followed by another upbeat or medium tempo folk song, followed by another slow taqsim to which dancers often performed floorwork, then another upbeat song, a drum solo, and a fast closing song. This is what we now refer to as the 5- or 7-part set. But these new pieces coming out of the Middle East required deeper listening and greater planning, increased technical skill, set choreography.

By this time, Suhaila, now 12 years old, had learned every step in her mother's vocabulary inside and out. She had been playing with the character, sentiment, and technique of each step the way a little girl might play with dolls.

When she heard this new music from the Middle East, she knew how she wanted to dance to it, but did not yet have the physical technical ability to execute her vision. So, she broke down each step in her mother's vocabulary into their essential elements: foot pattern, hip work, upper body, arms, and any other technical elements. From there, she was able to create new

movement that better suited the rich music composed for dancers from the Middle East. From this work came the development of Suhaila's format. Additionally, she worked with her mother on several iconic choreographies that heralded a new era in musical interpretation of belly dance music. From these collaborations came "Hayati" and "Joumana" (the first belly dance performance to ever be selected for the prestigious San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival). Some people like to separate mother from daughter, but Jamila herself wanted Suhaila to develop belly dance as a genre beyond the boilerplate steps of the Jamila vocabulary.

At this time, Suhaila also began adding movements into her belly dance performances that were not a part of her mother's vocabulary. These include the hard-contraction movements that emerged out of Suhaila's training in jazz dance as well as from her work with Boogaloo dancer Walter "Sundance" Freeman. These movements include interior hip squares, pelvic locks, arm waves from out-to-in, hard contraction arm waves in both directions, rib and pelvic pyramids and Vs.

Breaking it Down, Putting it Together

In Levels 300 and 400, students learn to manipulate the Jm-Vocab, layer Jm-Vocab movements over Jm-Vocab movements, and add Suhaila Format layers. Not only does this burst open the creative and technical possibilities inherent in belly dance as a professional performance genre, but it also gives us greater versatility in how we choose to interpret Arabic music. In the school we jokingly refer to this process as "Jamhaila": a blending of the Jm-Vocab and Suhaila Format. It is also how Suhaila began to experiment with her mother's vocabulary when she was younger, and explore the potential in the steps, while adding her own hard contraction movements and layering techniques.

What does this mean? Let's look at some examples:

8 count phrase using three steps in the Jm-Vocab.

- **Concept**: Breaking out of the idea that Jm-Vocab is only to be used in large musical chunks.
    - Steps: CCW Pivot 1U1D [1-2], 3/4 Shimmy on the Up [3-4], Full Spin with Syncopated Pivot Shift Step [5-8].
    - Feet: L foot flat, R relevé in jazz 3rd, demi plié on "2" [1-2], step ht db R flat-footed, going F [3-4], stepping ht db R, making CW turn, going R [5-6], come up onto ball of L foot [&(7)], step R foot flat to complete full CW turn [7], touch ball of L foot in jazz 3rd [8].
    - Hips: Tw ft db L [1-2], alt 3/4 glutes dt db R [3-4], home [5-6], tw L [&(7)], tw ht db R [7-8].
    - Arms: L arm mod 5th, R mod 2nd [1-2], both mod 2nd [3-5], high 1st [6], R hand behind head, L hand at L hip [7-8].
    - Cymbals: 3-3-7 [1-4], 3-1-3-1-3 [5-8].

- Here we haven't manipulated the Jm-Vocab movements out of their default sentiments or timings; we're only breaking them up into smaller bits to fit more into one count of 8. Also notice how that if you wanted to repeat this phrase, you would have to reverse (mirror image) the entire combination, because you end with your weight on the right foot.

Jm-Vocab layered over Jm-Vocab:

- **Concept**: Layering steps and step families in the Jm-Vocab, choosing a dominant sentiment.
    - Steps: Algerian Shimmy with the upper body and sentiment of Arabic 1.
    - Feet: Touch-step ht db R in relevé
    - Hips: Alt glutes dt db L
    - Torso: Und U-D ft db UB
    - Arms: Back of R hand over mouth, palm facing out, L arm in mod 2nd.
    - Cymbals: Running 4s and 5s.
- Notice how the arms emphasize the coy, shy feeling of the Arabic 1 step, even though the lower body is performing the Algerian Shimmy. Here we are also layering the Arabic Family over the Shimmy Family.

Suhaila Format layered over Jm-Vocab:

- **Concept**: Combining the steps of Jm-Vocab with the technical elements of Suhaila Format.
    - Overview: Five Count with alternating interior hip squares and optional rib cage locks.
    - Feet: Stepping ht db R in relevé: cross R behind L, step L in place [1-2], step in place in releve, 3/4 timing ft db R [3-4], reverse [5-8].
    - Hips: Alt int sq CW ht db F [1-8].
    - Arms: Mod 2nd [1-8].
    - Cymbals: 4-4-10
    - Optional Layer: Rib locks ht db F [1-8].
- The Five Count is a Jm-Vocab movement, and by default, it does not feature hip work. The interior hip square is a distinctly Suhaila Format movement, refined and codified by Suhaila in the 1980s, after the 1978 Jm-Vocab cut-off. The rib locks are a true layer, as codified by Suhaila within the context of the Suhaila Format.

One Vocabulary, One Format, One Vision

As you work in both the Suhaila Format and the Jamila Vocabulary, remember to keep the two clearly separated in your head. The Suhaila Format refers to base technical movements divided up in the body; the Jm-Vocab refers to steps and step names that encompass the whole body. We must also understand that there are movements that we do in the Suhaila Format that are not Jm-Vocab. While it is true that the Jm-Vocab came first, we use our Suhaila Format

technical foundations to do the steps in the Jm-Vocab. The Format and Vocabulary feed into one another, weaving back and forth.

It is also important that when you are learning the steps of the Jm-Vocab that you aren't approaching them as though they were drills. Each step comes with a built-in cultural context and origin. Sometimes the origin is right there in the step name: Basic Egyptian, Algerian Shimmy, Turkish Walk, Turkish Backwalk, Basic Taqsim. Practice physicalizing and embodying the character of each step. Pretend to dance like Samia Gamal when doing your Walk With Pivot on an Angle. Embody the archetypal matriarch when doing your 4/4 Shimmy. Channel a coy sister at a family house party when dancing your Arabic 1.

If you are in the Salimpour School, it is essential that you train simultaneously in Suhaila's format and Jamila's vocabulary. Doing so will make you a strong technical dancer with fantastic musicality and a wealth of historical and cultural context on which to draw from when composing dances, either in improvisation or choreography.