

Choreographer interview questions

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What to expect

Choreographer interviews are rarely a straight question and answer session. They mix a conversation about your process with a look at your work, and often a practical element where you run dancers through something or respond to a brief on the spot.

- **Process and portfolio walk-through:** You will be asked to talk through how a piece moved from first idea to performance, usually with video or a showreel in front of the panel.
- **Behavioural and rehearsal room:** Questions about coaching dancers, handling conflict, running a warm-up and managing fatigue across a long rehearsal period.
- **Scenario and judgement:** A constraint is dropped on you, such as a smaller venue, a lost rehearsal week or a changed cast, and the panel listens to how you think it through.
- **Technical and screen adaptation:** For film and television work, a discussion of shot breakdowns, continuity, eyelines and how a stage phrase changes when it is framed.
- **Collaboration and client-facing:** How you work with directors, composers, designers and producers, including what happens when you disagree with a note.
- **Commercial and planning:** Freelance reality: contracts, schedules, music rights, teaching income and how you keep several short-term jobs running at once.

A first conversation with an artistic director, director or producer, sometimes by video, covering your background and your approach. That is usually followed by a workshop, audition or creative development session with dancers, where the panel watches how you speak to a room and how quickly you can build something. Screen roles often replace the workshop with a shot-by-shot discussion or a short pitch to a producer. A final meeting tends to cover schedule, fee, rights and how the engagement would sit alongside your other commitments. Panels vary from one person to a group that includes a producer, a stage manager and a representative from the cast.

1. Walk us through how you took a piece from first idea to opening night.

Why they ask

The panel wants to hear whether you have a repeatable method or whether each project is improvised. They are listening for where you make decisions and how early you bring other people in.

How to structure your answer

A chronological walk-through with clear decision points: the brief, the research or improvisation phase, creative development with dancers, collaboration with sound and design, then cleaning and repetition. Name the moment where the piece changed shape and why.

Example answer

"I start with the script or the brief and the music, and I write down what the piece has to do before I decide what it looks like. On a recent work the brief was a fifteen-minute opening sequence about a town recovering from a flood, so I spent the first week in the studio alone, generating movement from a set of physical tasks and filming everything. From there I ran two weeks of creative development with the dancers, keeping what worked and cutting anything that read as decorative. Once the structure held, I brought the composer and lighting designer in early rather than at the end, because the transitions were doing narrative work and I wanted sound and light to carry some of it. The last two weeks were about repetition and detail: cleaning unison, setting understudy tracks, and running full sequences at performance pace so the dancers could feel the stamina demands before the season opened. I kept a running document of notes from each rehearsal so nothing got lost between days, and by opening night the piece held the same shape I had sketched in week one, just far more

specific.”

2. Tell me about a time a dancer was struggling with a sequence you had set.

Why they ask

This probes how you coach under pressure and whether you protect the dancer's body and confidence as well as the work.

How to structure your answer

STAR. Situation, the task you set yourself, the action you took in the room and the change you made, then the result and what you changed in your own practice afterwards.

Example answer

“In a musical theatre season, one of the ensemble dancers was consistently late on a lift cue and it was starting to affect the whole number. My first instinct was to drill it, but that just made them tense. I asked for ten minutes with them before a rehearsal, ran the sequence at half pace, and realised the issue was the approach steps: the timing I had set gave them no room to prepare. I reset the entry so they had an extra count to get under the partner, we ran it slowly three times, then at pace, and it held from the next run. I also built a longer warm-up into that week's calls, because the whole ensemble was working with cold shoulders before the lifts and I wanted to lower the load rather than tell them to push through. It changed how I set partnering work after that. I now build preparation counts in from the first rehearsal instead of assuming the dancers will find them.”

3. You arrive for a tech rehearsal and the stage is much smaller than the plan you blocked for. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a judgement question. Almost every production has a constraint that appears late, and the panel wants to see whether you freeze, blame the venue or work the problem.

How to structure your answer

Assess, prioritise, communicate, adapt, review. Start with what you do in the first ten minutes, then how you decide what can be compressed, then who you tell and when, then how you check the fix in performance conditions.

Example answer

“First I do not start re-blocking in my head before I have looked at the space. I walk the stage, mark the sightlines from the worst seats, and work out which sections genuinely depend on width and depth and which ones I blocked generously out of habit. Then I talk to the stage manager and the lighting designer, because a smaller stage usually means the lighting positions have shifted too, and a re-block might not be the only answer. In practice most group sections can lose a metre of spread and still read; the problem is usually the travelling patterns and the entrances. I protect the entrances and exits first, then compress the centre sections, then run the whole thing at performance pace with the dancers so they can feel the difference rather than just hear about it. If something still does not work, I take the director two options rather than one, and I do that before the tech ends rather than after.”

4. How do you adapt choreography when the work is going in front of a camera?

Why they ask

Screen work is a large share of freelance choreography and it demands a different set of decisions from stage work. The panel is checking you understand framing, not just movement.

How to structure your answer

A technical walk-through: the shift in thinking, the practical process with the director and camera team, an example of what you simplify, and how you support the edit.

Example answer

"On camera I stop thinking about the whole stage and start thinking about the frame. On stage the audience chooses where to look; on camera I do. So I break the sequence into shots with the director, decide what each shot needs to carry, and work out what the dancer's body is doing relative to the lens rather than to the back of the house. That often means simplifying. A phrase that reads as rich and detailed on stage can look busy and unreadable in a close-up, so I might strip the arms back and let the torso do the work. I pay close attention to continuity, because the edit will cut between takes and a hand in the wrong place is obvious. Practically that means floor marks, a shot list shared with the camera team, and running sequences for the editor's sake as much as the performer's. I have cut rehearsal footage myself in Premiere Pro, which helps me talk to the edit team in their language."

5. How do you handle a director asking for a change you think is wrong?

Why they ask

Freelance choreographers work inside someone else's vision, and the panel wants to see that you can hold a position without becoming difficult to work with.

How to structure your answer

A behavioural answer built on a test: is the note about the story or about the movement. Offer an alternative rather than a refusal, and use a concrete example of how a note was resolved.

Example answer

"It depends on whether the note is about the story or about the movement. If a director says a moment is not landing, that is their call and my job is to find a version that does. If the note asks a dancer to do something that is not physically safe, or contradicts something the piece established earlier, I say so in the room and explain why. I try to offer an alternative rather than a flat refusal: here is what I think you are after, and here is a way to get it that keeps the through-line. A director once asked me to change the ending of a duet late in a rehearsal period. I asked what specifically was not working, we ran it, and the problem turned out to be the tempo rather than the choreography. We fixed the tempo and kept the rest. Having rehearsal video to look at together helps, because then you are discussing the same thing rather than two different memories of it."

6. How do you manage your schedule and contracts across several short-term jobs?

Why they ask

Most choreographer work is contract to contract. Employers want to know you will turn up prepared and will not fall over halfway through a season because of a clashing commitment.

How to structure your answer

A practical answer: the systems you use, how you decide what to take, and one honest example of when a clash nearly happened and how you handled it.

Example answer

"I treat it like a small business. Everything goes into one calendar with contract dates, rehearsal periods, delivery deadlines and travel, and I block out recovery weeks after long seasons because the work is physical. I keep a simple budget per project covering my fee, assistant and rehearsal director costs, studio hire and music rights, and I read the contract terms before I commit: what happens if the season is extended, who owns the choreography, and what the cancellation terms are. In a busy year I might have a mainstage contract, two short film jobs and a teaching load running at once, and the thing that goes wrong fastest is overcommitting in the last two weeks before an opening. I have learned to turn down work that lands in a tech week, and to keep one ongoing teaching or workshop income stream so the quiet months have something in them."