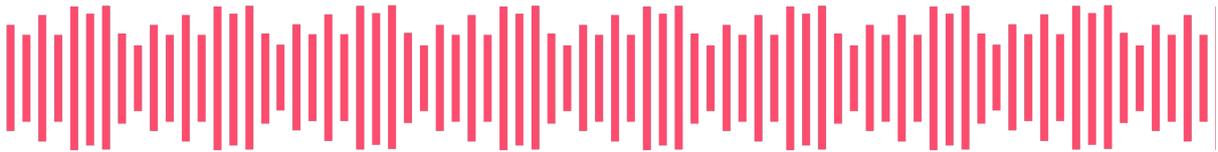


TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

Pivoting Work Online (S01/E02)

Episode Description

In this episode we talk to **Sarah Blanc** and **Mathieu Geffré** about the way they approached the task, back in April, of pivoting their touring plans online.

They discuss their immediate feelings of desperation and the subsequent "battle to find a new way and new solutions" within new conditions. They talk about the nuts and bolts of involving a community cast during lockdown: building trust and connections through Whatsapp and Zoom. We discuss the choice of title for Mathieu's lockdown film: *The Ceremony*, and Sarah's approach to working remotely with an intergenerational cast using poetry. And we speak of ever-present frustrations of technology, intellectual rights and the challenges of keeping communities comfortable within a digital world.

Sarah and Mathieu bring the conversation to a close as they consider how they now place value on their work and the need they still have to "feel like we are surviving as artists".

Prior to listening to the podcast you may enjoy watching Sarah and Mathieu's [Up My Street Online films](#) – a Greenwich Dance project conceived (pre-Covid) to be a cabaret tour to community centres.

Recording date: 4 August 2020

Intro:

Melanie:

Hello and welcome to talking moves a podcast from Greenwich Dance where dance artists come together to talk about their work and practice things that matter and the issues which moved them.

I'm Melanie Precious, and in this episode, I'm keeping it close to home and talking with two of our Greenwich Dance artistic family about pivoting work online.

Back in March 2020, Greenwich dance we're in the midst of delivering a brand-new initiative for us called up my street, designed to address cultural inequality and support social cohesion. The concept, very much inspired by the rural touring dance initiative, was to tour twice a year to community centres here in the borough with work by world-class artists, alongside and with the community surrounding those hyper local venues. For our first season, we had programmed four amazing artists to present bite-size performance, within a cabaret style setting, alongside youth groups, community groups, musicians, and choirs.

But like everyone else, our plans had to change, and we created instead four TV style episodes, which you can still find on our digital stage. Each containing interviews with the artists and an original dance for camera piece made with a community cast and all done was fully incarcerated in our homes. Back in the summer, I invited two of those artists to mull it all over Sarah Blanc performer, choreographer, comedian, and presenter. Sarah creates solo work and is also artistic director of Moxy Brawl, an all-female inclusive dance theatre company. And Mathieu Geffrés artistic director of rendezvous dance. Mathieu uses dance, choreography and performance as a vehicle to express values of inclusivity, diversity and harmony. This is our conversation recorded at the end of August 2020.

Melanie:

Hello, welcome, thank you for being here. How are you both?

Sarah:

Hello, I'm good, I mean, I'm currently in my back room and my bedroom it's quite hot, apart from that I'm good.

Mathieu:

Oh, well, I'm super lucky. I am in France. I'm really, really good because I finally got the opportunity to be back in the studio with dancers for the past two weeks. And I can say this is the most wonderful feeling.

Melanie:

Goodness me back in the studio, that's fantastic, and I wonder for how long, we're all like this aren't we wondering when the next, set of restrictions is going to come down upon us.

So, we were all about to go out on tour, we had tickets on sale. We had people booking, we had community, uh, companies ready to join us on the tour, and then COVID struck and we all got together and started thinking through what we might be able to do.

And I remember at the time going home and my phone pinging and Sarah sending me a little text saying, are we going ahead, I think this is possible? Or words to that effect. Um, and I think without that, it might not have happened.

Why, Sarah, did you think that, it was going to work? It was such a momentous change from what we had planned.

Sarah:

I think there was two things, one thing was that little bit of desperation of not wanting to lose everything, and I suppose all the conversations we'd had, like literally just before then, they were very positive, and they were looking for solutions. They were very solution focused, as you are Melanie, like very solution focused like what can we do? And so, I was feeling quite positive. And then when it starts to feel like it was slipping away, there was that kind of, no it can't, because in my head I'd imagined how it was going to be. Like, I was like, we can do this. Like I remember even saying, I'm sorry for texting you so late, but come on, I think we can do this. Yeah. So, I think it was a bit of that, but also just knowing that we could do it and that there were all, all of us artists were really wanting to something to happen and in whatever way that was going to be.

Melanie:

That's interesting, isn't it, because I think, I mean, my, my brain was fried I remember that night. And actually, I looked through my text to find the message. I'm not even going to repeat what I said back to you because I sound so much like I was losing the plot, but there were, I think there was a kind of section of the artistic community that didn't want to create.

How did you feel about that Mathieu? I mean, you were not, uh, not busy. You'd got a job in Sainsbury's. You were also doing loads of other projects. How did you feel about the pivot?

Mathieu:

I think there was a sense of when this all happened, there was a sense of realization that we were about to lose everything we were about to lose our freedom and our way of expressing ourselves, which is the reason why we do what we're doing. And there was this need to battle for finding a new way and, and being creative in a way that, okay, what is our new option?

So, there was almost this thing of becoming the ordeal of having to work with these new conditions. Okay. We've been taken away from the studio and from the idea of being together and what is our new way, uh, you know, first after realizing that we were all very late in terms of discovering new ways of working together, we were very eager to actually make it happen in such a short time. And, and it felt, you know, we kind of, there are two ways of considering and considering the art of dance, you know, you can say like, Oh, this is just dance. Let's not make it too important because this is just dance. But there is also this way of being like, yeah, but dance can also change lives.

Melanie:

It can.

But the challenge that that was put to you guys was not a small one, was it, it was, it was first of all, make a new piece, but in lockdown conditions. Mathieu you were going to be working with two of your professional dancers with said that we were trying to keep as many people who were going to be involved in the project, still employed as we could, so you were honouring that. Sarah, who was going to be the host of the tour was partnered up with our older people's group and our youth group to be working together. So, you both had these different briefs and also on top of that, asking you to involve this community car. So, you had your professional dancers for you Mathieu, and the community cost. And Sarah had two companies that she'd never worked with before. We put you in a WhatsApp group and then left you, what was the next step for you?

Sarah:

Well, I had chats with Roz first and at that initial idea, when I spoke to you and Roz.

Melanie:

Ross was our rehearsal director.

Sarah:

Yes.

Then you asked me, how do I want to frame it? I thought that might be nice to, have like a residency, so do as an intensive. So, we worked together for a whole week. We did like, I don't know, an hour each, the first two days separately with each of the groups. And then we all came together at the final three days, and they recorded themselves in a separate camera. Uh, so yeah, I remember like, not knowing how it was going to do if it was going to work, but it was all just, let's just try this let's come together. But that week was such a lush week. It just reminded me, there's other people out there. We all want this same connection and we all want to keep moving. So, it was a really lush time to be together.

Mathieu:

I think that's the key words are what you're saying of coming together and actually trying to find a way of being together, despite the fact that we were all isolated and that has led this whole project. I mean, for me as well, because the first thing I really wanted to do once we were introduced to the community members through the WhatsApp group, was to get to know all of them and fit from that in order to actually, um, create the movie and the dance. So, finding a way of sharing our experiences and, uh, choreograph that within a movie. So, coming together, trying to feel connected and also reassuring ourselves and each other about the fact that we were all having a very similar experience. We, we all have different coping mechanisms that could inspire a dance.

Melanie:

That's interesting too, because I think one of the things that surprised me and I don't know why I would say surprised really, was that with those same tools, WhatsApp and Zoom where you get your little rectangles, you created four because there was another two choreographers working on the product as well for completely different films with completely different aesthetics. And there's two opposites with your two, I think, which was, Sarah you really did build that community. You, you said that you, you did it in an intensive and you can see that community happening on, on screen. And Mathieu yours was about dancing on your own. So, your shots were your community cars on their own, very privately. And yet you called it the ceremony. So, I'm really interested in both that kind of polar opposite approach that you took and the naming, ceremony, and this time we'll pass for yours. Sarah. Mathieu do you want to leap in? And.

Mathieu:

Yeah, absolutely. I was interested in finding bridges in isolated experiences. So, I called it a ceremony because I feel that, we all have rituals within the day, uh, which are coming to everybody. We all wake up, we'll brush our teeth, have breakfast, go to work or not. You know, and those are little ceremonies that we forgot about because, and because it's our daily life. And then what was our daily life now that we didn't have all of those rituals, and what could be a new ritual that could link everybody together. So, starting from this experience of the ritual, I wanted to call it a ceremony because I also wanted to celebrate the individuals. Ceremony has something quite jovial in its title for me, I have the feeling celebrate something. And I just wanted to celebrate this moment of, uh, extreme freedom through the dancing on your own, in your private space, and try to turn the camera into a, a little tool that would be, uh, almost unseen, a bit of a big brother situation, except that big brother, you know, very much that there are millions of people watching behind the TV, but, um, a big brother with, without being aware of the fact that there was a camera.

So, I used to call myself during this process as consider the camera as a fly on the wall, consider my eye as a fly on the wall. So, you do not consider me being present with you, but trying to find the freedom that is going to allow me to know more about you as an individual. And then with everybody repeating the same process, eventually I was interested in seeing whether I could actually create bridges through the editing in between the different experiences.

Melanie:

And Sarah, did you, did you find the individual within your process, do you think?

Sarah:

I mean, that was actually one of our aims as well, but what I was wanting them to do is to, actually design what the audience saw, so it wasn't about the private things that go on, but it's actually, what do you want the audience to see of your

home, of your movement, of your body parts. But but the idea still was to give people that, you know, a little taste of what goes, what goes behind your closed door? I had gone in at thought that maybe it might end up being a bit more of a funnier, comedic kind of piece. But once we started working, I was like, we've got a week to do this. And actually, to be able to build characters, we don't have that much time. And actually, this is the kind of piece that they want to make in this week. So, ended up being, um, the piece that we made, but the title came from, words that the dancers created themselves. So, we did a bit of a poetry exercise, an exercise that I've been doing actually with another group, with a charity I've been working with, called All Change Arts, working with the poet called Cecilia Nap. So, I kind of, with her permission, asked to use that, uh, that's when the same stimuluses, and that's when we came in and they pinned each other and spoke to each other. And the question was, what do you want the other person to know right now? And I paired them up with Lotus, with a dipmot person. Dipmot being the older person in the group and they'll just be in the younger group. And that was the kind of things they want us to tell each other.

So, it was quite beautiful, and one of the lines was this, this time will pass. And that's where the title came from.

Melanie:

It was so lovely being able to witness some of those messages going across the WhatsApp group as well. So, I'm really fascinated because we were in our individual rooms, our individual spaces, trying to direct all of this. And if you had been in a room with those participants, you would have had all kinds of tools and techniques, I'm sure to make them feel comfortable, get them to know you, you to know them. How did you create that sense of enrichment for them? And how did you approach that, that aspect of it with those barriers that you had in front of you?

Sarah:

In our intensive week, we went around and, and I just made sure that at the beginning of every session, everyone spoke about how they're doing today and what they got up to. So, it just meant that everyone got heard, because then once the session officially started, it was mainly me talking, me telling people to be quiet because this person needs help, this person over here camera's not working. So, for me, especially in the two days I had with just the groups on their own, it was about letting them talk, hearing about their experiences, um, and letting them all hear each other so that everyone hears each other's voice before they start. So, it's not just about them in their room, that they're in a bigger room, bigger process was one thing that I did.

Mathieu:

Yeah, that's great. I, um, I actually worked with them one by one. I meet with them all at first in order to explain what the project was and what was my intention, because I knew that I was going to actually invite myself within a personal space and I wanted to make sure that that was okay for everybody. And once this

introduction was made, we, we met one by one and the, the session was always starting with, how are you today? Who were you? And who were you before COVID-19? Who are you now? What this event has changed in you and in your daily life. And what do we want to remember? What do we want to forget about, from the past and from the present? So after this conversation, you know, of course I was very engaged in the conversation, but I was also very much observing what was happening as we were talking and which spaces they decided to put themselves in, um, in order to kind of make decisions and try to slowly kind of invite myself within the space. There was a sense, I mean, I don't know what you think, Sarah, but I think there was a fence. Um, sometimes I felt myself a bit uncomfortable having to make decisions about their space and, you know, it's like, Oh, is it okay to actually film you're in your kitchen? Are you okay with sharing this space with the audience? I felt slightly uncomfortable sometimes. And I needed to reassure myself by asking the participants, whether they were happy with that. Did you feel that that challenge?

Sarah:

I suppose I'm more felt just responsibility that they were aware that their home was going to be on camera. I think I also knew that they, they signed up for it. So, I suppose I didn't feel that I felt responsibility to make sure that they knew what they were presenting to have a look around anything, any pictures they want to be seen, but apart from that, no.

Melanie:

It is a concern. Isn't it? It's certainly something to think about as we all look at each other and see a little bit of a space behind you, it tells a little bit more of a story about you, then you might be prepared for perhaps and yes, perhaps those participants might not have thought that through without that prompt. So how did you get around the technology? I mean, we have all struggled. I mean, at the time we planned this project, I don't think any of us had a zoom account. And now, you know, we're pros. What were the differences for you in terms of the technology and the experience your community casts and your professionals had with that technology?

Mathieu:

I think there were too different, uh, I would say challenges, which sometimes turn into frustrations according to who I was working with. So, I'm someone who works very much from the physical inputs. I am very physical in the studio with my, uh, professional collaborators, because I need to feel, you know. I've stopped, I've stopped performing very recently. And, um, I trust my experience as, as a performer in order to share with my collaborators and, and sometimes this sharing and this invitation to actually share a, an artistic journey comes from a physical perspective, which I need to, you know, I need to communicate through touching through doing with the person within the same studio. And that I found that very

challenging because you know, living in the London little apartment, I don't necessarily have all the space I require, you know, in order to show or to transmit or make someone feel an energy. So that was the first challenge, you know, being behind the camera. So, you know, you place the camera somewhere in the room, but then it doesn't catch your whole body. So, you need to place it somewhere else. And it takes already a good 30 seconds before you actually can show, a movement and energy.

Melanie:

Where you specific about those shots that you wanted Mathieu. Did you, I mean your film, you know, there was a moment when it came right down into the eye? Did you know that you wanted that? Is that what you asked for, or did people just send you what they had you knitted it together?

Mathieu:

So, um, that was the second challenge I was actually going to talk about, which was the actual decision making in terms of where the camera is. I would have loved to just hold the camera and be able to turn around, uh, my collaborators and be able to make really clear decision because what's great with the movies and cinema in general, is that additionally to what we usually do as choreographers, we can also direct the eye of the viewer, by going into the tiny little detail. You know, I want you to actually see just the tip of the left finger of this performer and not having to make the decision of watching something else on stage. And so, I did make some decisions that precisely, in order to create a narrative, but I've also been an, uh, in the situation where something was just offered and something that I wouldn't have thought of. And I just grabbed that and made.

Melanie:

To get that, you made tasks, did you or?

Mathieu:

I gave tasks, I gave tasks. We designed together after the conversation we've been talking about, we've designed together a task that would actually match what I was looking for, for each member. So, they all have the different tasks once the task was designed and kind of made around the personality and the history of the collaborator, we would kind of visit the space where these people were and make decisions in terms of where we put the camera. Some of them had friends to film them and to follow them. Some of them did not. So, you know, we would have to make decisions in terms of okay, for you. It's going to be one still in this angel, filming this way. And if you could send me two or three shots, that'd be great and then choose from one or the other. Some others I've also directed the friends actually.

Melanie:

Wow. So, time consuming and also very specific. Yeah. I mean, you were really building a rapport with those individuals as you directed them remotely through their iPhone.

Mathieu:

Yeah, Yeah, and, and with the relatives, you know, um, one of the community members, her husband just filmed the whole thing and that's great, you know, that's great to also see that, that created some sort of relationship that goes beyond the usual relationship, through the making of this little video.

Melanie:

And how about you, Sarah? It was a very different experience. We saw a little bit of it in the film, which I loved as you're shouting through for everyone want to come in or go out to try and get it all in unison. How did all of that map out for you?

Sarah:

Yeah. I was determined to get all the material filmed whilst in session, um, in that week. So, everybody had a duet, so that was one material that was specific just to two people. And then there was three other improv's one that was really led by me. I put them into two groups, and I would call out what to do. And the other two were just a movement improv. One was looking at space, how far back you go from the camera and otherwise revealing different parts, like really simple tasks that we filmed. So, everybody had to send me the three improv's and their duet material. So, it was all kind of done in the session. I think I went in and I tried to set up a really specific framing that everyone would have the same framing. And it was quite clear the morning of the last day of filming that that was not going to happen.

So, it ended up being the, everyone was like, Sarah, stop trying to get us, get the same framing. We're not going to be able to get it. So, it was kind of a running joke in the session by the end that I was trying to be really specific, but I actually love how they're all filmed wonky. I like that it makes it more real and they were all filmed on their camera phones. And I do like that, that it looks like it's filmed with their camera phones and it makes it just a bit more, a bit more raw and real, they filmed themselves, but I had to make sure they didn't do it on a selfie camera. They did it at the camera on the back of the thing. So that was quite hard for them to be able to really get the framing because they couldn't see themselves. So that took a lot of coaxing, especially quality on the other camera. So, the selfie cameras, less quality. I don't know, I think, who knows. That's what I, I believe, um, when I do my own selfies, uh, but then I prefer to do them the other way around.

Melanie:

You are the selfie queen; it has to be said.

Sarah:

I am, thank you.

Melanie:

And did you find that Sarah, cause I'm about to step into cliché when I say this, but you had a group of young people and you had a group of older people. Were there a group that warmed more to the technology or less to the technology? You know, did they have devices all of them?

Sarah:

I mean, in both groups, there was issues. I suppose, obviously in the youth group, they're more used to using their phones and their cameras. Some of the old people only ever used their cameras, you know, at Christmas to take a family photo. They didn't ever use it for video before. I mean, there was one Lotus when the youth group members and she, by the end of it, couldn't be in the film because she couldn't get her footage to me. So, every, everybody had their, uh, issues to be cliché about it. Yes, the youth group were more snazzy and snappy on their phones, but also some of the older group were, they had their own pilates classes that they were running, so they already had their zoom set up. So, it was a real mixture really, to be fair.

Melanie:

To be fair, it was actually one of our over 55, that first suggested online classes to us. I don't know. I mean, I'm sure we would've got there because everybody else got there, but she suggested it to us before we'd even gone into lockdown. So, I think you're right, best not to stereotype, but it is challenging. I mean, I remember having to do a bit of footage and, you know, I had to get out of my pyjamas for a start, which, you know, I'd spent 10 weeks in them and not brushed my hair, even that much was stressful. So, you know, I think we do have to acknowledge, we were asking people to do quite a big thing. And with that in mind, um, one of the things that kind of crossed my desk at the time was this idea of rights and signing away moral rights.

We used a BBC consent form, which has got horrible language in it. And I felt really strange about giving that to community cast, but we just didn't have the time to sort of rethink it, you know, as we look to the future, which looks like a digital future, what are your thoughts about keeping, communities comfortable in this digital world that we've been kind of occupying with heavyweights like Netflix and BBC, how do we make signing away their moral rights feel like, Oh, don't worry, It's only so we can use it on social media.

Mathieu:

Which is already such a massive thing, because already social media is a public place. It feels like it's a public place. And even if you do not have a profile, a friend will have a profile or someone that will have a profile and it goes very quick. So, um, I think, I think this is one of the new challenges that we kind of discovering

now, as you say, uh, signing moral rights for, using your image in the public place. I don't know. I feel like there is, you know, the same way that we've been talking about entering, uh, in the houses with our cameras and considering that as a way, uh, like they've been signing up for that, you know, we've all signed up for that. So, we've kind of agreed with those conditions. We knew, we knew those movies were going to be actually streamed on certain platforms and so have a certain life as we decide, but there is also such a large margin of what we cannot control, because once the movie is streamed once who knows what somebody else is doing on the other side of the world with this movie. Those challenges I think are very similar to what happens to the cinema industry or Netflix is really good at that and I don't know how much money they put into that. But you know, a very long time ago a movie would get released and then someone would film it in the cinema, and they would put it online. And that's it. That would be the beginning.

Sarah:

I also think it's quite similar to being a performer in a company when, you know, there's photographers and filming rehearsals, they're taking pictures and the company just uses like I'm guilty. Some of my dancers like Sarah, I've not done that piece in three years. Can you stop using, in adjusting way, but can you stop using my image? I'm not in that piece anymore. And my career is very different, but you know, companies use your image all over the place and the footage gets shown. I did feel a lot during lockdown, a lot of companies started livestreaming their work again, and I wonder, do the dancers get paid for their performance online to potentially millions of people? You know so.

Mathieu:

You're right ,It's really interesting that you actually bring it up because this is a massive conversation at the moment.

Sarah:

So, I suppose when you're thinking of that, but then about people who have not signed up to be performers or be on stage all the time and now suddenly their image can be used in the internet. You're right. A lot of thought needs to put into it. I don't know what the answers are, just yet for that, but that will definitely have me thinking a lot more about that.

Mathieu:

I think it comes down to, um, to the value we give to the digital.

Melanie:

What do you mean by that exactly?

Mathieu:

And that's a very open question and I do not have a definite answer to that. Um, I don't know. I'm just going to put it out there. It feels like because it's digital, then it's less precious than when it's on stage.

Melanie:

It's interesting.

Mathieu:

There is something less precious, almost less protected because it's open because it's accessible and that's great, you know, we're all looking for accessibility. Um, and it goes down to the rights of a movie that we've just made, but it also goes down to what Sarah was talking about. Livestream of performances that have been on stage in the past, you know, is the value different or is it not different? And if it's different, how is it different? And what are the rights around that?

Melanie:

That's interesting. So I wanted to ask you, not quite the same thing, but very much inspired by that thought and value and digital and being out there that the three of us and the other two choreographers as well, we're really thinking about our communities and building audiences for your work through the community centre tour. And we were listening to a podcast by a friend where Sidi Larbi talked about the unit of theatres being seats, and buying seats, is the kind of the transaction, I suppose, in the unit. And I'd never really thought of theatre like that before. And it made me think, what is the new unit in this world? And given the discussions that we've been having about people not getting paid when their work is going out, digitally and that feeling of value. I wondered whether you had a thought about, whether something, how valuable it is to you and what gives it the value. So if I were to put you out on a tour, as I was where we were, charging two pounds a ticket, does that have an effect to you on the, on the value you place on your work as to how we charge for it or whether it's, you know, we had 25,000 views of those films. Is that what the value is? Where's the value for you?

Sarah:

Well, for me in when making work, I'm more interested in work in bringing, I know the power of performance, I know how transformative it is, whether you're in it or you're watching it. Um, for me reaching people who wouldn't normally see it is what's important. And so, I suppose I was so excited about doing the tour because it we're going into places where people wouldn't necessarily go to a theatre or see live dance or performance. And that's why I was really interested in doing it. But I suppose then you could think about in terms of digital, people are more likely, I remember Niger China talking about this, once, he once said, people are more likely to watch TV in terms of arts, watch TV, read a newspaper, watch a video, go to the cinema, go to a football much, go to the theatre, not in that order, but he just, he played it really in a scale. And he was so right, like theatre people don't

normally go to the theatre that often, unless they're brought up in that world, I wasn't brought up in a world of going to the theatre, but I do know how important it is. I do know how important it was when that red cattle theatre company who was a local theatre coming to where I came from, did a performance in my school. I remember going, Whoa, I want to be like those weirdos like that, they're, they're my people, that's my tribe. So, I know how important it is. I keep saying the same thing over and over someone stop me, interrupt me. But that's the value for me anyway.

Mathieu:

I mean, I think the notion of value is very personal. And what is valuable for me is not necessarily valuable for someone else. You know, the value is something that you decide for yourself. Uh, the Eiffel Tower, it's an iconic value for someone who's never seen the Eiffel Tower. And when they see it for the first time, but for the Parisian who sees it every day, it has much less value. So, for me, the value of the work does not necessarily, cannot be translated through its economic accessibility. And the value of the work is the experience you make of the work. And almost like the experience you decide to make of the work, uh, as a performer or as a viewer. So, it does not matter how expensive the ticket is. As long as the experience of it is received with a sense of, I would almost say like a sense of dignity and accepting that this moment that we're going to share together, whether it's digital or in the theatre is a special moment. And that's something that we can try to create as makers, but this is not something we can decide for the viewers and the digital, you know, the digital, that's, what it creates. The digital is a moment, but it's a moment within your own daily life. So you can make the decision of leaving the laptop and just going to the kitchen to sort yourself, a drink, and then come back to the laptop when you're stuck in the theatre, and I think that's what makes it so special as an experience, although I'm all up for the freedom of living and coming back in terms of maybe not coming back, if you don't like it, um, it's this place in the darkness when there is nothing else, and you just have an hour to spend with a performer and, and just dive in there because there is nothing else. There's no more fun. There is no more light. There is no more, uh, outdoors that is just you and an artwork being presented.

Sarah:

He just made me feel really, Oh, are we ever going to get that back again? Am I ever going to be in the theatre watching a performance ever again?

Mathieu:

Yes, we will, I'm very hopeful. I'm very hopeful. That's something that I was writing about also like French choreographers, (insert name). He has a very strict opinion where he says that for him, the DNA of dance is not through the digital, so he does not consider that as, as a way forward. And that's an interesting debate, I think, because when we start making digital work, are we, actually making cinema

or are we still making dance, or is dance just the medium that we use through the art of cinema in order to express our ideas. And maybe we do not have to put that in a box. Maybe we did not have to talk about cinema or dance, but it's a hybrid. It's a thing.

Sarah:

I mean, a lot of people are going, I'm not going digital. There's a lot of people in that head space, but I've also seen a lot of people who, at the beginning of lockdown, like, I'm not doing anything. You can't make me. Starting to do a little bit because you have to, we have to embrace it in whatever way you embrace it, small or belong.

Mathieu:

To me, it was about survival, Sarah, I don't know how it felt, but to me, it was about, I have to do that because I need to feel that I'm surviving as an artist.

Sarah:

Yeah. Yeah. I think at the beginning, when the first after, after the first traumatic, the feelings, desperation, that started to ease, it was about, I don't know, I'm a grafter, I'm always working, and I enjoy that. I'm not someone who enjoys being still for five months, you know, I'm, I like to be doing things. That's how I relax. If, if I'm not doing anything. Yeah. I suppose it comes down to, the awful ego thing of I'm not doing anything means I'm not, I'm not anybody which we have to address as well, but it was, uh, yeah, I felt I had to be doing something. So, I was so grateful when this up my street continued as something. And I also had this one class on a Friday for an hour and a half, with all change that I had. And I just felt it was a bit of structure. I felt I was still existing, and I felt, yeah. That, yeah. But I suppose we're, we're probably the similar, but I know a lot of other people who don't think like, like us yeah. Each to their own.

Mathieu:

Yeah that's great!

Melanie:

It's interesting Isn't it, and I wonder if you said something then we'll both of, you said it's about survival and perhaps there's a bit of this, which is about us all, trying to keep that theatre world surviving. And perhaps we haven't got it right. As you said, Mathieu, there's an argument, are we trying to put dance into cinema? Are we trying to put it in a box? Is it in the wrong space? But we tried and we tried very quickly, and we're learning and thank god we did. But what do you think, you know, as, as an organization, as artists and us working collaboratively, have you any thoughts about where we go to keep this sense of building culturally quality and those places that are forgotten? It would be so easy to just walk away from those small community centres, now that everyone's focusing on whether the theatres are going to get open again. Have you got any thoughts or anything pulling at

your gut about the role of organizations and artists and how we work together to navigate our way through this unknown? Just a small question for you.

Mathieu:

Yeah. My gut feeling, my it's not a small question. My gut feeling is that we need to, we need to be, you know, I value hugely the physical connection and we need to be there. We need to be in those spaces. We need to go and meet and exchange. And for us get inspired because we very much stay at home. So, the digital, and as much as it's great, as much as it's great with everything, it does, it doesn't replace the experience of meeting the audience and making our work accessible to them. In what I was talking about, you know, this focus time of we have one hour, we're going to create this amazing experience, which we do not have any other choice. This is, this is the choice that we've made of all being together in this space at this specific time. And something special is going to happen just because we made this call. So, my opinion is pretty radical. I have to say. And I do think, I do think it's crucial that we still travel to those community centres and, um, offer the experience that we can offer.

Sarah:

Yeah. I was going to say, they're the people that need to not be forgotten about because they're generally the people who are alone or segregated or, you know, are not thought about by the government. Those spaces need to be kept alive because they're the first spaces that would be sold off to make, to make apartment blocks or to be, to make car parks. So, they need to be kept alive and kept in use. And if we're thinking about, you know, community centres and stuff like that, obviously keep the theatres alive too. If you're listening.

Melanie:

I've got a final question for you about that digital world versus real world, and it's actually inspired by something that you said at the beginning, as you came in Mathieu about feedback and picking up on that value thing, where is the feedback for you in digital a real world, real world, you've got your applause that tells you that you've done a great job, digital, what is it likes, or shares and, you know, are you a digital or a real-world artist? You've probably answered that actually. But what would you feel about that and, and where, where is the, uh, the feedback for you in these, in these worlds?

Mathieu:

I don't think we can talk in a way of saying, am I a digital or real-world artist? Because I do think there are actually two different exercises and two different processes of creation. And specifically, for what I was talking about, you know, in terms of directing the eye of the audience, um, I will not lie. And I have been looking into, um, how many views and you know, whether it's been shared. And I've been curious about that because I, it informs me about how much attention I can get through the digital, how much attention and how much curiosity that we create through that. And, you know, we had the wonderful Sarah being our host

and, and, and holding the Greenwich Dance Instagram in order to attract as many people as we could through the week prior to the episode. And of course, we look into that. It's important for us to actually have a first knowledge of that. I did find it difficult to actually get a feedback on the work. I don't feel that there's been a lot of comments that I would feel that from. So, I think this is something that we can start thinking about. And, um, it goes down also to the same problem with social media is, you know, you put a comment out, um, it's, it's in the public place. So of course, there are other ways you can send private messages to the choreographer. There are, of course, you know, I'm not, I'm not stupid, but I dunno, maybe it's not a way that exists yet. Maybe we're not thinking of it. Maybe we actually just watch a movie and we're not thinking, Oh, I'm going to send a message to this choreographer, to this director because I really enjoyed it, or I didn't enjoy it, and I would like to share the reasons why I didn't enjoy it. Because you go in the theatre, you enjoy the piece of work and you see the, you see the maker in the lobby having a drink and, you know, it's a relaxed environment and, and you would go to the person to just congratulate the person and eventually share a little feeling that you've been having during the performance. Would you do that online? Would you actually finish your episodes of whatever it is and then send an email to the director, I don't personally, but is that a behaviour that we would like to cultivate? I think that would be a great idea.

Sarah:

Yeah. I think, um, I have had loads of really good thoughts. They're kind of just gone now, but I'll try and get them back as I talk and somebody's going a bit backwards, but there's, so for me to answer the question, I think my cue, like I'm obsessed with graphs where, rack how you get people to places. Like I'm always looking at my insights on my Instagram's. Um, I'm always looking at, you know, behind my YouTube, like I'm, I love all of that. And, and it's always about beating the algorithm. So also, we have all these views on the videos, but also you can cheat it by boosting those posts. So, we also know that all the views and stuff that most of them may have just been, they flickered on someone's wall. Like do people actually watch the full video and they are the people that you want to get and gather. And I think what you said, Melanie, is right, it's a whole new relationship with digital and in the Instagram or YouTube world is about giving your favourite, YouTube is your favourite Instagram as the likes, because you know, that's gonna make them go high, but we don't really have go high, go, uh, boost them up. So, they're higher and the algorithms a bit more people see them, but we're not trained like that. Especially in the not-for-profit dance world. We're not trained in thinking about things like that. So, I think, yes, it's a bit, you think about our relationship with digital and how you do boost it for your choreographers, whether it is making sure everyone leaves a comment. We tried it with the tasks, didn't we to try to engage with people. I think that was a really good thing to do and try out, how successful it was is another thing. But I, but it was probably a good marker of those that engaged. And that's a good place to start from to, you know if we do it again, how we really get them.

Melanie:

Yeah, it's interesting. Isn't it, it's finding our way, because I think when we put those tasks out, we also knew that, well, did we know? We didn't know whether people would just go, yeah, sure. I'm going to, I'm going to give that a go and do it. And I think there was also a bit of a misconception that everyone was sitting around really bored, who was actually, there was a whole swag. The people that were run off their feet, home-schooling working, shifts, volunteering all the rest of it. And I think a lot of content was played at these people or imagining them look at them, you know, look at the searches for cocktails that have gone up, look at the searches for crocheting that's gone up. Um, but that didn't feel like our world very much.

Sarah:

Yeah. I was just thinking that we released the films by the end of June into July, and people are already starting to go back to work if they had been released, you know, middle of May when people were still trying to find their way. Yeah. I think you're right. People were, had already found their groove and what they were doing in lockdown, or they were already starting to go back to their own life.

Mathieu:

Yeah. And I wanted to open up also like, you know, we thinking of feedback and we're talking about feedback and the aftermath of what we put online in a digital form. We also get as artists, you know, in the, in the traditional world, the world, as we knew it, we also got our feedback from reviewers and from critics who came to, uh, experience the work. And, you know, as much as it's a very challenging process for us, it's also very informative. And that's also something that, you know, I'd like to open up as a conversation in terms of, okay, our work, whether it's digital or onstage is available for critics from professional reviewers and in what is the perspective, what is the angle? You know, I would have liked to actually offer this opportunity to someone to actually make, you know, make a comment as a professional reviewer on, on to the work. Because for me, the process is as rigorous and as important. What do you think is around Melanie?

Sarah:

I, I do agree. I'm also scared of the kind of person. If I get a review and it's bad, I'm, I'm depressed for like four weeks until I feel like I can be seen by the world again. Because I feel I'm that important that everyone has read it, and everyone is looking at bad at me. Um, but, but I, I was surprised when I started to see a dance films starting to get reviewed in the guardian and I, and one of my friends that she made her, uh, had a commission for an organization and she got reviewed in the guardian and she got four stars. So, she was happy, but she was like, I didn't want this piece to be reviewed. I did not. This was a piece I was given a little bit of money for, to make for this certain thing I did not agree to, to be reviewed. So, it's interesting, but it could have been nice actually to have had them reviewed.

Melanie:

Well, that feels like a conversation for another episode that we could really delve into about permissions for people to give you feedback, how you deal with feedback. So, I'm going to put that on the list of things that we should talk about in the future and say a huge thank you. Thank you both for doing this.

Mathieu:

I mean, that was great, thank you, thank you

Sarah:

Thank so much for asking.

Melanie:

Sarah and Mathieu films are still online, along with films, by Telligen Gill and Zoe Golding forming part of the up my street online program. You can find them on the digital stage section of our website. Do you check them out?

They're all so different, and we're really very proud of them. The artists and the community costs involved.

If you would like to hear more episodes about subjects, moving artists of today, search for talking moves, wherever you get your podcasts. And don't forget to subscribe, leave a review and spread the word. And for more information about Sarah and Mathieu, head on over to Greenwich dance.org.uk. And do remember if you know someone you think we should talk to or have a topic you'd like us to discuss, please tweet us @greenwichdance, but today that's it from us. Join us next time for more talking moves.