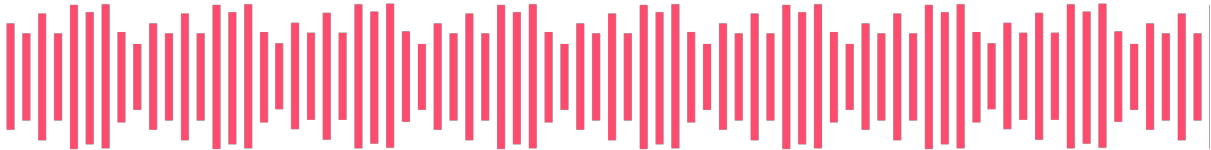


TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

Dancing Differently (S01/E04)

Episode Description

In this episode we talk to **Katie Green** and **Ivan Blackstock** about the ways in which they have been breaking from the conventional and working in exciting new ways... creating new partnerships, new audiences and new platforms for their work. Has their need to challenge the status quo been conscious and deliberate or simply accidental?

Ivan talks about his love and admiration for the music, fashion and technology industries and how these have opened his eyes to a new way of being and working, and Katie talks of the rich source of choreographic stimuli working with museums and heritage has given her. They both reflect on the things that have made them who they are and the challenges they have encountered along the way – not fitting the aesthetic, doors shutting, imposter syndrome and language barriers... but also enthuse about the opportunities they have seized within new worlds which have given them both the ability to keep creating.

Together they discuss the skills needed to create relationships, the care and consideration they give their colleagues and friends, audiences and themselves and the desperate need to adapt to survive. Now more than ever.

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Talking Moves is a Greenwich Dance production

Presented by Melanie Precious

Production by Carmel Smith, Lucy White and Melanie Precious

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, the things that matter and the issues that move them. I'm Melanie precious, and in this episode, I'm talking with two artists about dancing differently.

There's never been a better time to look at, how we do what we do, to think not just outside of the box, but around it, underneath it. In fact, why not kick the box out of the way altogether, but even before our worlds changed, thanks to the global pandemic, artists were already moving away from the conventional and working in exciting new ways, creating new partnerships, new audiences, and new platforms for their work.

The two innovative artists here today, have been challenging the status quo for some time, as well as in theaters, you're just as likely to see their work in museums, hotels, galleries, schools, caves, festivals, TV talent shows, music videos and in the post. We have with us, Katie Green director of made by Katie Green and the imagination museum, a choreographer, teacher and mentor. She describes the work of her company is using dance, text and music to respond to places where you would not usually find dance. Her work has included large-scale commissions for specific sites and participation projects for children. But most recently, Katie has been interested in exploring heritage through her work and presentation often in a prominent format.

And we have Ivan Blackstock, a multidisciplinary artists, choreographer and curator who has risen up through the urban dance ranks breaking ground, on the way, has forged an independent commercial career, dancing and working with brand campaigns and music videos. He's performed with Boy Blue, ZooNation, Breaking Convention, co-founded Bird Gang dance company, and founded Cross-platform, an organization celebrating the underground creative scene.

Ivan, Katie, welcome, its lovely to have you here.

So first let's find out a little bit more about you and how you've been working of late, what you've been up to. Ivan what's been going on artistically for you?

Ivan:

Whoa. A lot has been going on, especially, um, the past kind of year and a half. So, I've been working on a, um, I wouldn't say a production. It's kind of like a, a dream I've been working on.

Melanie:

A dream, there we go! Doing things differently, right from the bat.

Ivan:

Yeah

Melanie:

Tell us about this dream.

Ivan:

This dream started awhile back, just before, I'll say 2015, and it was looking at mental health, especially within the black experience and it kind of manifested into a stage play, and it's a working title at the moment, I'm still kind of building it, but it's called, Trap Lord of the flies. And um, at this current stage I'm working with two amazing partners, which I can't say at the moment, but we're looking to present the work in autumn 21. And basically, the piece works with professional dancers and young dancers that are not in education, employment or training. And, um, from 2015, I've kind of taken this kind of concept or this, this work in different places. So, I've taken it to Paris La Villette, performed it at Sadlers Wells Breaking Convention, performed it at Latitude Festival. Um, so it's kind of done arounds and also outside of my choreographic work, I've recently taken a new position at the one 80 strands as artists director of one 80 studios, so that's really exciting. And artistically and creatively. Um, I have been just trying to help people. That's kind of majority of my kind of work stands and kind of how can I say, um, that's where I really get excited about, you know, helping people, So I've been helping people get to where they want to get to and helping them manifest their dreams.

Melanie:

That's incredible. A, wise portfolio, and also, I was going to ask you where it was coming from, and you've given us that.

Katie, what's been going on for you over the last couple of years, what have you been working on?

Katie:

So, I was really lucky to get some, uh, strategic touring funding from the arts council way back in 2018 is when I first found out that I'd received it. And that money was to develop a project commemorating the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower from England to America, which happened in 1620. So, we've been touring a version of a work in museums that I created in 2013 called the imagination museum. We created a special Mayflower specific version of this, and we've been taking it to communities linked to the passengers that were on board, the Mayflower ship. So, throughout 2019, we were in Lincolnshire and North Nottinghamshire. And just at the beginning of this year, we went on to Hampshire and, uh, we were due to be in Plymouth right now. So, when, uh, lockdown happens, uh, we had to put a pause on all of our activity that was due to be happening in Hampshire and Plymouth. And

really fortunately we are beginning discussions about rescheduling that for next year and rescheduling as live performance, which is kind of exhilarating to know that might still be a possibility, although it might look different to how it was originally intended. But in the meantime, I got some emergency funding from the arts council to put together a creative care package for all of the communities that we should have been working with at this time, school groups and groups of home educated children and, um, adult groups as well. So, we've put together a box which has a letter written to the recipient as if they were on board the Mayflower, and then some tasks to help them put themselves in the footsteps of the people who came before them. And we're just starting to send those out, which feels particularly given at the moment, it feels like maybe increased, locked down is maybe eminent. It feels really good to be sending that out, even though it felt like, Oh, we were a bit late so maybe we've missed the boat. But there's a pun, there's a Mayflower pun there, which always comes up, but actually the timing feels good because it's difficult now because people have sort of started to come out of things and, and then actually they're having to step back a bit. So, it's good for people to be receiving this thing, which we've designed so that it feels like a real treat I think, to receive through the post. And it comes directly into people's homes and it links with,

Melanie:

I've seen a picture of this from one of our close colleagues and it looks fantastic. And I think it's such an innovative idea and you're right. It is a funny time, isn't it? We're in that sort of kind hybrid place, of not quite knowing whether we're pushing forward or retreating. So, from the outside, looking in, you're both doing something that feels unique, obviously you're both really different in the ways that you're working, but that sense of trying to carve a new place for your work feels similar with both of you. And I described in my introduction that you were challenging the status quo, and I wondered how much of this, for you, is conscious and deliberate and how much is simply accidental and the way your careers have taken you. And when I talk about the convention, I suppose I'm talking about making dance, touring, dance, that kind of pattern that many companies find themselves in, which you, you seem to be almost consciously breaking, is that purposeful. Whoever wants to jump in, Ivan you look pensive.

Ivan:

It's a bit of both, to be honest. Um, you know, my practice is hip hop and street dance. And, um, especially in the world of theater, it's really hard to, I feel it's really hard to get that sort of work programmed or funded. And it's always kind of, I feel pushed to the side or boxed into an idea of youth project outreach. And, um, it's gone so beyond that, and we can see the power of hip hop and street dance, especially globally, especially in this current time where everyone's jumping on Tik Tok, doing hip hop moves. And, you know, we've got amazing pioneers from the UK scene, from Benji Reed to Johnsie De you know, that's really helped pave the way for artists like myself and, um, you know, something I can connect to and part of has been, um,

survival actually, you know, uh, and moving into different space to survive, trying to survive financially, you know, and trying to survive artistically.

So yes, it has been unconscious in that sense, I've been very conscious in certain areas because what I was always interested in was how music artists find really interesting ways to engage with their audience, or they find really interesting ways to put their narrative onto multiple mediums. So, one day I decided that's what I'm going to start doing. And maybe in the back of my head, what I wanted to be was a singer or a rapper, but I wasn't really vocal. Um, and obviously I studied at the Urdang Academy before I went to London Contemporary Dance School. It really, it helped a lot, but, um, how can I say, both institutions felt like that you can only go down this road, you know, and with hip hop and street culture, it has a really interesting entrepreneurial spirit and, you know, is always about, you know, finding your own way to do it yourself.

So, um, I just started kind of retreating back to my roots in that sense into the culture and looking at ways how they engage with people and, you know, build community and get their voice out. So, what I decided to do was go the other way and start presenting my work in different types of spaces, unconventional spaces, open mic nights, house parties, you know, and start to build an audience there. So, it was very conscious in that sense of, um, let me take something that I feel that works, especially within the music industry, they build independent record labels they have a lot of independent artists. Where within dance, sometimes I feel we wait to be signed by an agent, or we have to feel like we have to join a well-known company to be successful.

Melanie:

That's really interesting, what you say about the vocational journey as well, isn't it? And that feels like there's sometimes these channels from youth dance and the private dance scene, modern, tap, ballet, you know, the conventional way to get in and then vocational schools and then, spit you out the other end. And where does your art form flourish? It's not in that trajectory, is it.

Um, Katie, what about you, why and how have you started to forge this interesting collaboration and direction for your work?

Katie:

So, in the first instance, as you describe, it was sort of accidental. I had always been making work in lots of different places. And then I was working the UCS in Ipswich, the university there, working with a group of second year students at Ipswich museum, uh, doing a site-specific choreographic module and just felt like there was really something in it, what we were doing there. And, uh, it's kind of met the different aims I have for my work, to do with just storytelling, but kind of specifically talking about a shared past or a kind of shared human experience. And museums are just incredibly rich as source material for things that connect us, things that go right back to right now. And I just started asking other museums. So, Ipswich museum are wonderful and continue to do incredible work. And I started asking other museums as

well, if I made a piece, would you have us, we're a dance company. And I'm not sure I've ever heard, no, that's probably not true, but you might be surprised that even in the beginning spaces that have these kinds of conventions that are understood about how you interact with the space and this kind of do not touch approach, everything's behind glass, which is not how museums are now necessarily, but lots of people were looking for new ways to interpret their collections or different elements of their collections. And so, it kind of built really rapidly. And as a result, I started to see, like I said, the way that this kind of matched with my choreographic ambition, but also, we were just meeting and speaking to, people who had never seen anything like this before. And still the thing that most people say about the work that I tour is that it's unexpected because it happens in spaces that are open to the general public. So people can coincidentally be in a space, a museum or a library or a gallery, and then just see a performance or see us rehearsing, which is somehow even better because we can have a conversation with them about what's going on, we can get their feedback, and that kind of directness and engagement with a new audience was really inspiring to me. And so, I think after a point, it became more and more deliberate.

And I started to realize that also there were lots of other people trying to do this or doing this as well. Um, more recently, one of the good things that's come out of locked down is that I've had an opportunity to connect more, more intensively, I guess, with that dance and heritage community through the imagination museum consortium. And we've met a couple of times, already and we're meeting again in October online. So, there were more people than just me doing this. And as we come together, we can start to just make more people aware of the possible impacts of working in this way I suppose.

Melanie:

I find that really interesting hearing, you both talk about that, you Ivan saying that you were inspired by these other sectors, these other, music industry, a comedy, and stand up and going, right. I'm going to translate that into dance. And Katie you saying, I'm just going to ask the question and let's see what they say and actually not hearing no so often, which actually, funnily enough, leads me to my question to you, Ivan, which is, I've always imagined that the commercial world of film and TV and music is difficult to get into. And I wonder, did you have the experience that Katie has just said that when you knocked on those doors, you were surprised that you heard yes. Or did you get the barrier that I've always imagined that to be actually surrounding that very commercial and high-profile world?

Ivan:

Yeah, I think it's more on, um, the type of dance that I was doing at the time when I was trying to get through the door because, they wasn't really interested in forms from the underground, dance forms from the underground. And, you know, when I

was trying to break into the commercial dance industry as a dancer and some was the choreographer and many as a dancer, aesthetically I didn't fit in, you know. And I think it, it was to do with my color, of my skin, and also the shape and size of my body. Um, cause I was never a big guy, I never had the muscles, I wasn't selling a certain idea.

Melanie:

And that's what they were looking for was it?

Ivan:

Yeah, and I was the quirky one, um, you know, with piercings, tattoos and it just didn't fit. So, I fit, I kind of booked jobs where they wanted the quirky abstract, black guy. You know, um, but I think that things got a lot easier when I stepped away from everything actually, and decided I'm going to build this little machine over here and it's taken many years to build, you know, an identity, a personal brand or, but when I started to come more into myself, you know, cause I think, I didn't know I could be a soloist, or a principal dancer. And um, you know, I think when you do look on the screen or you go to the vocational schools, you do think of yourself as being an ensemble dancer, you know, and maybe it's different when it comes to ballet where you have your soloist and your principal dancers. But yeah, you don't need kind of a space. You feel like you can be a soloist is the battle scene, you know, the underground dance battle scenes. Cause you can just be you, do your thing, but to make money, to try and, um, go into the arts in that sense within the form, I do, Um, yeah, it was very difficult. So, I had a lot of no's in many different shapes and forms.

Melanie:

But you've had a very big yes, recently because you've been involved in Beyoncé's film, Black is King, which is pretty impressive. Tell us about that.

Ivan:

Yeah. That was a bit of a, a moment when I got the call. Um, I said, I'll put it on my Instagram. I cried because it was, um, I had a bad day. Um, but basically, I've been working with this, uh, director called Gender Curu, who's amazing film director from the UK and we've been having a long kind of working relationship. And um, yeah, she just literally said, Oh, are you free this month? And I was like, well I have my festival coming up cross platform. I'm not too sure I can make it work. And then she said, Oh, but babe it's for Beyoncé. And I was like, Oh, of course I will make time for that. But yeah, it's just a steppingstone. You know, I'm very blessed to work with Beyoncé and that team, but I'm an artist myself. So, you know, I'm using that experience to build myself as an artist and I feel, especially dancers or choreographers, sometimes they don't think of themselves as artists. They just stay in this dance bubble. And that's why maybe I kind of referenced the music industry and um, other kind of forms because if I'm being honest, most of my inspiration is not dance. I am dance, I do it all

the time. So, I don't really have to, uh, in a sense, keep on seeking it because I am it, I've always been dance, I always move, I'm very conscious of movement. But all my inspiration has been coming from fashion, music, technology, photography. And I see myself as a multidisciplinary artist, a creative, I have an idea in my head or in my heart. And I, I create that, I want to put it on. You know, even if it is still connected to dance because that's what I usually do, I always anchor it to movement. But you know, sometimes I want to take pictures of movement or collaborate with a fine artists or find a way to use AR or VR and find a way to put that, you know, narrative or that story or that message or that concept onto those mediums. Um,

Melanie:

Sorry to cut you off Ivan. I was just going to bring Katie in because I, again, I really see the similarity, although polar opposite worlds, but you also, Katie, you're looking at stimulates, you just said museums full of things that are inspiring you. Taking your eye away from the dance and the movement, but something else is flavoring your work. I saw you nodding the whole time that Ivan was talking, how is that manifesting in your work?

Katie:

I was nodding because more recently, I've been mindful of the fact that the majority of my partnerships are not within the dance world and the kind of longer term, the relationships that I've been really fortunate to be able to sustain throughout lockdown have come about through a long trust-building process of working with organizations or individuals who are not dance focused or maybe have dance as part of their program, but it's not the only part. And I've just been struck recently, about how that's happened?, I'm not sure, that wasn't deliberate and um, I think it is to do with the fact that the material that I make is interesting to me, because it covers all of human experience and I use movement, but I also use a lot of text. I'm really mindful of that when I'm working with the dancers, because I ask them all to speak so much and that, and working with music and sometimes live music, it's all become interwoven in a way that, enables me to hopefully tell a story, in a way that a lot of people can find a way into it. Even those who are not used to watching dance, or maybe sometimes when we ask people, they would have chosen deliberately not to come and see something because it was dance, but because they kind of happen upon it or because they see the way in which a lot of people, I think what I make now, they think of as being more like physical theater, I've just slowly started to kind of not cross over or lose sight of, because it's a massive part of what I do, but maybe in working differently, there's just so happens that I'm finding more long-term relationships with other kinds of organization.

Melanie:

It's back to that labeling again, Isn't it? You mentioned that, Ivan, when you said I am dance, I've always been at, I don't need to go down that road. And we have in this industry such a temptation to stick a label on someone and put them in a box. And I,

funny enough, just to draw from a personal experience. I remember when I was a performer, an agent saying to me, there is no v for versatile on my folders. You know, I can't put you in v for versatile. You need to tell me what you are, and you'd go in that category. Um, Katie your work with the Dulwich picture gallery really interested me. It was a promenade performance, which he called Choreographing the Collection, and a company for dancers, which were built as guides, which I love, retraced the steps, and I'm quoting here of 'the millions of visitors who've crossed the gallery's threshold over 200 years'. And I wondered if you could tell us a bit more about that particular project.

Katie:

I love that project because I had an opportunity to work with a curator at the gallery called Helen Hilliard's, uh, over a long period. So definitely more than a year of just meeting at the gallery and chatting about the collection. And specifically, we were looking at the permanent collection because it was the 200th anniversary of the gallery. And they have very well attended temporary exhibits that happen in the space. And as a result, quite a lot of people pass through the permanent collection without really taking it in. Um, we were also through rehearsing there over a period of weeks, we became really aware that lots of people in the Dulwich community, they really treat it as a kind of living room space. And they'll just come and sit on the benches and read the paper. Um,

Melanie:

So not really engaging with that collection at all, that's why they were looking to you to animate it in some way.

Katie:

In a way it's a great thing about that space. It was problematic for us because people who were members and therefore went there regularly, they were slightly put out by the fact we were then in the space and changing the normal pattern of behavior.

Melanie:

They didn't have their bench.

Katie:

I know, that's exactly what happened some days. And we would have to be really cautious, like watch out because you know, we are disrupting that environment. And the very fact of being there, in someone's face that they're accustomed to is in itself, something that is disruptive, even if we're doing it gently and respectfully, but you're exactly right. The gallery wanted to point to this very special collection of work and also the story of the founders of that space, who were real characters in themselves and their process of curation and selecting the work was something unlike what

would happen today in that if they selected some work and then they didn't quite like how it sat alongside each other, they would just paint in, or I assume, ask someone else to paint in details to make it line up, which is completely different to what would happen. So there was a really interesting narrative around how you tell a story through how you bring work together. And so, the dancers were guides and they told that story really, um, and ultimately led the audience outside to a temporary pavilion that had been built in the gardens there. And we had a really physical, visceral way of taking the experience from the audience, experiencing the context and the work to being reminded of themselves. And the fact that their experience of that work was the most important thing to come out of this because we were able to sort of lead them outside and into the night.

Melanie:

So exciting.

Katie:

It was, I learned a lot through working with a curator, really appreciated her support and the time she took to work with me.

Melanie:

Talking of learning, I wanted for both of you actually, have you ever found a language barrier between your world and the world that you're trying to link with?

Ivan:

Yes. Most definitely.

Melanie:

Yeah, tell me about that

Ivan:

I think it's also, yeah, because it's, um, different cultures, you know, and uh, different classes as well, you know, and, um, especially the world of hip hop and street dance, it's from the black experience, you know, and we can see how the world is treating, you know, certain ideas or black life and how they are being treated. You do feel it when you are stepping into certain institutions, that, uh, you know, when you don't really see yourself. So, if you don't see yourself, sometimes you feel like you can't be yourself. You know, and for me, like I had a hard time learning, you know, I think that the way my mind works is different. And I think maybe when I was in secondary school, I might've needed certain special needs to help me understand and learn

different things. And I'm very conscious of how I'm trying to come across. So there's a lot of times when, when I was growing up that I felt like I had to code, switch for people to understand me or people to, in a sense, respect me, you know, even today, like, you know, the arts world is like, so tell me about your work and that I can't really speak in this fluffy language, you know? And I try, you know, I, I try my best to, uh, but sometimes I feel, um, less intelligent, not just school was difficult to take in information because I feel sometimes schooling they teach you in one way, but you know, I know a lot of people that look like me, had to, trying to juggle and balance a lot of other stuff that's been thrown at you, you know,

Melanie:

But do you still feel that, because it feels like you've moved to a place where there's a lot of reverence for you and your work. Do you still feel that you're on that uphill struggle?

Ivan:

Yeah, for sure. I think it's even worse to a certain extent when you get older, because you're conscious of it. And now you're undoing all of this trauma and all of these patterns, you know, and yeah, I, I definitely feel like I go into different spaces and I'm like, I haven't explained myself well, or, um, it's not good enough, you know, because for a very long time, especially my youth, I felt like I wasn't good enough because that's what I was being told or the energy that was being projected to me. And, um, when I have conversations with other black artists is like, they feel that they can't do wrong. So sometimes they don't try, like, you know what, it's just too hard of a task or they over try to try and get it. Right. And I look at, I'm trying to prove myself, but I know that happens in different sorts of ways, you know? Like, um, I might be completely wrong here and speaking to two women in front of me, but like, you know, when I speak to my fiancé about it, she says the same thing, you know, when it comes to male and female, trying to get that point across and yeah, yeah.

Melanie:

Gosh, there's a lot to unpick there and I'm no coach, so I won't try, but imposter syndrome. Yeah. Katie, do you have that? Anything, yeah, she's nodding too.

Katie:

All the time. Yeah. And that feeling of it's absolutely not the same as what Ivan's describing, but I definitely feel most of the time, like what I'm doing, isn't good enough. And I think through lockdown, I've realized just how important it is for me to feel purposeful. And that's, I think why even when everything was being stopped and shut, I was still working. I was still working, and I know it's the same with both of you as well, because I'm driven to just try and do better and better all the time and always feel like I'm not doing the best I can. So therefore, I'm always trying to, and I think, yeah, I don't know if that's the same for everybody or, um, yeah.

Melanie:

So as well as the language that we sometimes feel that we need to learn when we're breaking into other sectors and that sense of intelligence and knowledge that you touched on Ivan about whether you're feeling like you're qualified enough to be speaking in these rooms or at these meetings or with these people, what other skills might you need as an artist, as you navigate the world of heritage, Katie, is there anything different, would you say that an artist needs to skill themselves up with?

Katie:

I don't think it's very different really, except that you're dealing with other kinds of spaces where there are conservation concerns, but I guess my approach would be the same wherever I was working and skills of being able to help people to understand and to trust, I think are probably the same wherever I would be working. And it's just in my nature also to be very organized and clear, we'll try to be. And I found that being able to work effectively in the heritage industry environment is a lot to do with just being really clear about what you need from the space and really attentive and trying to understand what that space needs of you. And so, there's a kind of mutual respect and being prepared for that and having a risk assessment in place that you can just pull out as soon as they ask for it or even before. That's what I tend to do. And also, things like being able to work with the whole team, at an organization instead of maybe just the person you're liaising with directly. So, I usually create a briefing sheet for the museum, for the whole staff, including the volunteers, so that the whole community there, who we've probably come into contact with, through the rehearsal process. But if everyone understands what it is that's happening, and I've made myself available to answer any questions. And I guess I try to be as flexible as I can whilst not wanting to compromise the thing that I'm ultimately trying to do. There's a point at which she can't bend anymore, but I find that my dancers, especially who are just incredible because the work that I tour, we adapt it every single time to every single new site, whether that's a cave or a museum or a library, and they have just developed this understanding of how they can do that and how they can continually adapt. And they work so hard at it. And they kind of understand that, but I genuinely think that if I was making work in theaters, I would strive to be like that as well. So, I'm not sure if it's a different set of requirements that you're trying to respond to, but.

Melanie:

And you're being very conscious aren't you of the priorities of those people that are bringing you in the space, the artifacts, I can only, um, understand that a little bit from Greenwich Dance being based at Charlton House actually, and, you know that sense of, I mean, you would care for any building, but that sense of conservation. So, we have talked a little bit about this as we've gone through the conversation today about audiences and understanding who we're making the work for. But Ivan, I'm really interested to know, particularly with cross-platform, which is your own organization,

that you've set up, who you were making that work for, who is that audience and what do you think they want from you and what are you giving them?

Ivan:

It started off as I want my friends to be seen. I want my peers to be seen as I felt like I had an amazing group of artists around me, but I couldn't understand why they're not superstars like this confuses me. And, uh, you know, developing the company over time, I realized a lot of people feel like they're not seen or heard. And I looked at artists who are Muslim or LGBTQ community or, other people from other areas and different parts of the world. So, um, to be honest, it changes. Um, sometimes we focus on a group of people, like, okay, this production or this project we're focusing on this group. But, um, I would say it's like, it's gonna sound really weird, but I'm doing it for Ivan. And what I mean by that is, um, I'm not here to save the world. You know, I don't know all, I feel that I am, I am a channel. And there was a question you asked Katie about the skills. And I think there's only one skill is communication. I feel. And I feel that me curating and doing that sort of work, what that's helped me do is instead of saying, is listen. You know, so I've learned to listen a lot more and give people a platform so other people can say and listen, and it's very much, I tried to make the artists make their work on their own terms. So, some artists are saying something, uh, that might not understand. And they might be saying it for a particular audience. So, for me, sorry, I'm not making sense at all, but maybe I'm in a place where, um, I wanted to save the world many moons ago, but I'm in a place where I need to save myself, you know? So, me saving myself and listening to people, I give them the opportunity to, I can't get the words right, at the moment, but, um.

Melanie:

I think what you are saying is hugely powerful and you're yeah, you're underestimating quite how articulate, articulately, you're putting that position. And it's interesting now isn't it, in this global pandemic, when artists, freelancers, the theatrical world, the cultural sector is so fragile and yet so fundamental to saving the world, you know, who didn't watch TV during lockdown, who didn't listen to a podcast who didn't listen to music, you need this to keep sane, and yet, so you saying, this is about me fighting for survival. I read you completely.

Ivan:

Yeah. Cause I feel that for a very long time, I was doing stuff for other people all the time.

Melanie:

Yeah. Yeah.

Ivan:

You know, trying to please people. And now that no, I'm gonna start doing this work for myself.

Melanie:

But then also, you said Ivan just then, that it was about your friends to, the superstars around you. And that really interested me as I looked at both of you, again, another really strong similarity seems to be that you both have the support of others embedded in your practice. So, Katie you've also got an online forum that you've created through the imagination museum on your website, Ivan, you've got a whole page dedicated to listing the Instagram accounts of the artists that you're working with. And Ivan, you've told us a little bit about why that's important. Katie, tell us why that became such an important part of what the imagination museum was going to be.

Katie:

I think it's just about realizing that I have through doing this work for seven, eight years now, I have experiences about getting past the gatekeeper in these kinds of organizations that a lot of artists would like to work in. And also, museums that I speak to say, we'd like to do more of this, but we don't know where to look. We don't know where, how to go about approaching an artist. So, I saw that there was a need to link those communities. And it's not something that only I am doing. There are other people trying to integrate those two communities in different ways, but I just felt like I had a knowledge that I could pass on, but also exactly what Ivan was saying about communication and community. It feels more important than ever now. And I think the fact that we usually hold our imagination museum consortium events in-person and as a consequence, I was going to postpone the live events we had scheduled this year, but I kind of put that idea out to that community of people. And everyone came back and said, no, we still want to meet, again an example of what Ivan was saying about how more than ever I'm learning to listen, to let decision making processes take a bit longer, in order to allow me to listen to what other people would like and then moving forward. And we had two events in July in the end and both sold out they're free events, but both sold out within 24 hours. And then we've just announced one for October and yesterday, we've only got four spaces left and I only put it out on Tuesday. I know that that is a really proactive community of people across dance and heritage who wants to talk about new ways of working. And, and it felt like something that I was interested in trying to support somehow just sort of reached a bit of a limit at the moment because of lack of funding for it. And my capacity has changed a lot during our down. But I really hope I can continue to move that forward. I've seen, Ivan on your website, it looks incredible how you put other artists work front and center and you really showcase what they can do and give

them a platform for that. That's something that I aspire to be able to do better with the imagination museum as well.

Ivan:

Thank you

Melanie:

That's amazing. So, we can't talk about doing things differently. I don't think unless we refer to what we're all living through, um, with theaters unsure whether they can open again safely in the near future, the need to inhabit these spaces as artists and collaborate in different ways, seems just essential really to the survival of dance and all of us. Some people are hoping that we'll get back to normal. Others don't think normal exists, but that was then this is now, what has this period taught you about your work and how are you looking at the future now?

Ivan:

Uh, I'm going down the right direction. Yeah. Uh, I had a conversation before I started cross platform and Trap Lord and said, the world is changing. The Internet's coming, big cultural organizations will suffer if they don't start to look at diversity and integration. And you know, it's, I used to go to a lot of talks, and it was used to be the same old thing. I'm like, you're missing the wave. That's going to come. And now it's hit us, full throttle. Creatives are not in the loss, creates is always going to create, artists are always going to create art, they're always going to find a platform, it's these big machines, that are going to struggle, I can't really speak for dancers in other, you know, genres of movement or styles, but hip hop street culture is constantly moving. You know, it's kind of this weird thing that, um, finds its way, it's DIY culture. So, it's part of its heart. So, they've got the entrepreneurial spirit in there and it's young, it's useful, The youth will. That's how I get all my inspiration from. I just watched kids, you know, a lot. Okay. That's the new thing, Tik Tok, Okay. Dance is transitioning into the digital space and people are like, Oh, this digital zoom thing and Tik Tok and online classes it's happened already. It's been happening. And if you don't adapt, you won't survive. Unless you create a different type of platform. If you're not creating a different type of platform, then you are just waiting. So yeah, I just think, um, the way I think it can survive is being the multidisciplinary dance artists. Yeah. What kind of confuses me is some dancers are amazing photographers. Why haven't you taken pictures of your movement and found a way to make prints of it and find another way to put your work out there? Or if you like clothing, take a picture or work with an artist and put it on a t-shirt or a jumper or a hoodie, or, you know, put it out that way, make a film. Some make music, but they don't make music for their own work. Lot of these confuse me, where I see really interesting artists do that. You know, like from Basquiat to Warhol, to whoever, like they will put their ideas, their story, the concept into these

different mediums, dancers need to do that and stop waiting to be, I need to be in this company. I need to wait for this agent or in my sense, I need to win this dance battle. Is that it? No, there's so much ways in and out. And I think there's different ways and there's also different types of platforms, but there's the performance art world, which is completely different. There's the cabaret world, which is completely different. And there's so much space. You know, I remember I went to a thing a couple of years ago and it was a dance show in someone's house. You know, you can find a really interesting way to socially distance. Maybe it's one person at a time, or I don't know, it's just like be creative because even for me, what I decided to do, I wanted to do it for a while, but now I've got my own studio space, so I don't need to outsource or wait for studios to open up. So, in a second wave, I can just 10-minute walks to my studio. I found a warehouse unit with other artists in there and like, Oh, this is big enough. I can have my dance studio here over there on the second floor. I can have my office space. Oh, and over here, I can have a chill out place where I can just, you know, lounge and read a book. And I think dancers need to collaborate more. You know, like maybe it's a pool of people. Maybe it's two, three, four of you put in a bit of money, get a space and create, you know, if I wanted to, I could have performances at the warehouse I'm at, and there's tons of different artists, that are there, some of them are making sculptures, musicians working in VR. Like it's amazing. So, I think the multi-disciplinary artists is the way to go. And that's where we're at.

Melanie:

Katie, How about you?

Katie:

It's really interesting to hear Ivan talk about his experience. I feel, um, what you were saying about, you know, you've already been doing it and you, so you saw feel vindicated somehow. I feel very hopeful and I feel lucky that I've already been making work in spaces, which are opening up in the way that theaters are not opening up. So, the work is still going to look very different in the light of, you know, one-way systems, ticketed entry. We're talking about doing performances and we have to substantially limit the number of people involved because we often work with a community cast, but also watching. And those people have to be on bubble mats and the performances have to use outside spaces at the museums or galleries or at the moment, the dancing in libraries project that I've been commissioned to do by a charity called Delight. We can't bring the children into the library. So, we're making a film, but we're making that film interactive so that there are moments within it when they have to do something, which is preset in their classroom. So, I have been doing this for a while and I feel like I'm in a fortunate position because of that. And because my heritage partners tend to be longer term, um, the Mayflower project I've been talking about since 2016, which initially was a really frustrating thing when everything started to shut down because it had been so long in the making. But now I realize that those people, they really understand what I'm trying to do. And when they start to reopen, they don't put it to the back. They think, right, this is something we can use

to energize the space. So, in that sense, the future, although things may change again, but there are opportunities opening up next year to keep going. And I've had this great opportunity. Delight has, um, made it happen for us to be able to continue with the libraries project and the care package project has, after a long time of planning has come to fruition. But I guess further in the future, I'm just keen to take what I've learned now, and to keep integrating that within the work that I might do in the future, because I have ideas for projects and it was always a concern of mine around access to the work. And it, it was most keenly felt when we were working in caves and audience members had to walk down 65 steps to get to the first part of the cave. And we have people coming, buying a ticket, but then standing at the top, not able to go down for whatever reason. And so really showed me that these environments are not always accessible. And just the experience of going to see a piece of theater is still not as accessible as it could be. And all of these things that I've been learning through the care package or through taking elements of the work online or using video in different ways, they show me a way forward to continue making more fully accessible work in the future. And I have lots of ideas for, for new projects. I just want to make sure that I move those forward with all of this new information I'm gathering. And I am, have to say, I am nervous about that because, I'm nervous about the funding bids I have to write to make that happen. I feel more vulnerable now than I have ever done. Um, my resilience level has always been pretty good, but now every knock back, I feel it more deeply. So, I am nervous about starting to put new ideas out into the world, but as long as they move forward, then that's all I can do. And I'm with Ivan when he was talking about who he makes his work for, quite often, I just, I'm making things for myself really, and things that satisfy me, I think, well, that's the best that I could put out in the world if I find these things funny or engaging or moving. So, I think I just want to try and keep moving forward with integrity. And I'm also excited about the consortium and the opportunities now to move that community of artists forward as well.

Melanie:

Well, that seems like a really good place to stop. And I have to tell you, I have been so inspired to be in a virtual room with the two of you, the intelligence, the ideas, the positivity, the creativity that you've brought today is really humbling. So, thank you so much for being with us.

Katie:

Aww thank you

Ivan:

Thank you

Katie:

That was such an interesting discussion. And it was great to hear about your work and everything.

Melanie:

And thank you for listening, if you'd like to hear more episodes about subjects, moving artists of today then search for talking moves, wherever you get your podcasts, don't forget to subscribe, leave a review and spread the word. And for more information about Katie and Ivan, head on over to GreenwichDance.org.uk. And do you remember if you know someone you think we should talk to or have a topic you'd like us to talk about, please tweet us @GreenwichDance, but for today, that's it from us. So do join us next time for more talking moves.