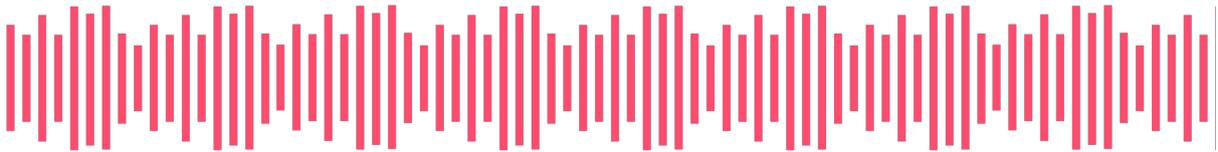


TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

Exhilarating of Exhausting: Staying Creative Through Covid (S01/E01)

Episode Description

In this episode we talk to John Darvell and Emma Houston about the challenges of staying creative through Covid. Have they relished the opportunity to rethink their work amidst changing social behaviours? Or been weighed down by the pressures of diminished finances and cancelled contracts?

Both John and Emma talk about their projects going 'Pete Tong' and how they then had to figure out, in the name of self-care, what was important. John talks of his responsibility to his community and the need to begin online classes, and Emma speaks about her harrowing experience of getting Covid herself and how she had to respect her body and its capabilities as she recovered from that.

Together they discuss managing anxiety, funding rejections, the need to learn new skills and 'positive rage' but the episode finishes on a high as they consider the renewed sense of vigour they each now have through new connections, new conversations and new possibilities.

Talking Moves is a Greenwich Dance production

Presented by Melanie Precious

Production by Carmel Smith, Lucy White and Melanie Precious

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 their issues that move them. I'm Melanie Precious and in this episode I'm talking to two artists about the challenges of staying creative through covid.

In the last eight months the world, we thought we knew has changed almost beyond recognition. Every one of us has had to adapt the way we work, the way we live, the way we shop, the way we educate, the way we consume culture and of course the ways we create it. Amidst all of this have artists been feeling exhilarated at the prospect of new behaviours and new ideas, or exhaustion at the sheer effort needed to plan amidst an ever-changing world. Just how much artistry can really be expected from artists at this time of crisis?

To answer that I'm joined by Emma Houston aka Big Girl Shortbread. She's a maker, performer and teacher and recently wrote an insightful blog for us as part of our GD Life in Lockdown series, where she talked about the harrowing experience of getting covid herself and her emotional reaction to the death of George Floyd. And John Darvell, choreographer dancer educationalist, community practitioner and innovator in participatory digital art. Within the same blog series, John wrote of the pressures and intensity of reimagining everything. Of trying to keep his communities and artists at Nocturn supported, whilst caring for himself and the need to learn new skills so quickly.

John Emma, it's a huge pleasure for us to have you here in our virtual space. Welcome.

John: Thank you.

Emma: Thank you.

Melanie: So Emma where were you artistically before all this began? So February 2020, what were you up to?

Emma: February 2020 I was performing on West End show called Message in a Bottle and that was a project I've been working on since November.

Melanie: And you were Dance Captain am I right in thinking?

Emma: Yeah, I was Dance Captain and played three parts in the show as well. So I guess for anyone that doesn't know what a Dance Captain's role is - basically every company will work definitely. Your kind of leading rehearsals when the rehearsal director or associate isn't there. Leading like the warm ups and cooldowns, like making sure like I was in charge of the female roles so like knowing who did what and where they were in space, all of those sort of things and being able to note them down and do that like simultaneously to also learning a role and then keeping one eye and then the other eye in the back of my head on the other role.

Melanie: And performing as well.

Emma: Yeah and performing. I performed six of the eight shows a week and then the other two I would usually note the shows so like be sat in the auditorium and give notes out to the dancers or like just general things or specific notes. Which is yeah,

Melanie: A busy time and very physical. But also mentally very challenging as you're saying.

And John what was your dancing life like?

John: I suppose it was planning for summer. Great projects ahead. It was very busy with all the community and schools work and also I was in that process of getting back onto the saddle of thinking I'm going to reapply for funding for big projects. Getting ready to hit the send button for then it all to go Pete Tong really.

Melanie: All to go Pete Tong. You take me straight into that. So, crisis has a knack of distilling what the most important things in life are. What became for you John at that time covid's hit, plans halted. What were your priorities and what was important you?

John: I think as artists, I think we become really highly tuned to observe. And I think it was a prior to actually lockdown hitting, anxiety for me was like at a factor a hundred and plus because it was observing all this weird behaviour that was going on with like shops not having food in, then thinking that actually something really important and drastic and life-changing is about to happen and I think as soon as it happened for me personally, it was numbness. I was just unable to do anything, you know, it just become very basic was like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. It was: have I got food on the table? Am I in a safe place, you know, what's gonna happen at home? Is there money coming in to be able to support? Everything else just totally shut down and personally just felt as I instead of being a whole person, became a fractured person. There was many more sides like, working on two different levels, two different people going on at the same time.

Melanie: So you had a programme of classes going on before covid did you? How quickly did you switch that around because you've got a quite a library now of online tutorials haven't you?

John: Yeah actually it took a long time I think because of my background and not being coming from dance at an early age and actually being in work until I was 30 before actually trained in dance.

Melanie: Which is incredible

Emma: Yeah yeah

John: Or foolishly went into dance! It was more of a skill of knowing when to step back and just stop. So actually I most probably, well I did, take a lot more time just observing what everybody else was doing than actually jumping straight in. It felt like the dance community suddenly went we got to get all our dance classes online, you know, we got to do this, we got to be really creative and that was a big turn off for me and I didn't think at the time we were looking at it from a consumer point of view. As to is that the best way to go about it? So I cheekily just thought,

well I'll let everybody try and fail and then pick the best bits and do it for myself a little bit later.

Melanie: When I dug down into your portfolio and your blog that you wrote for us and you talked very much about Wilson. I love that you personified your video rig.

John: He's just over here. I know he's just over here looking at me.

Emma: He's always watching!

John: Always watching.

Melanie: But you are, as I said in the introduction, you've been an innovator in digital presentation. You did a whole performance on social media probably before any of us were thinking about doing work that way. I was surprised I suppose that in your blog you talked about Wilson making you cry but what was it that scared you so much?

John: Well, I don't know if Emma felt this but as soon as you start filming yourself and then knowing that it's going out it may be cry because it made me so insecure. I was thrown into this situation where 24/7 every day was looking at something that didn't talk back to me

Melanie: He's looking at it now.

John: Yeah. Evil Wilson sitting over here. And then taking that and then putting it on a computer and then having to look at yourself was: do I actually teach like that? Do I actually sound like that? You know in my head, I'm sounding like a quite nice southern well-educated person and actually what comes across is more this camp Geordie, you know, when you hear it back. You're like, okay. And just making horrible critical assumptions about your abilities put us in a real-down place. Thankfully didn't last for long because I kind of got over it after seeing it so long, so many times. But it was a real difficult place to kind of basically get out of

Melanie: Yes. Emma did you try doing did you film anything or get involved in any online classes? I know it's a bit more different to where you started from. But with your bgirling world as well was there anything that you would delving into in a video manner?

Emma: Well, I did a couple of breaking workshops online. I guess because I was recovering from covid and that took quite a while like I had requested that I'd be able to do my pre recordings in like in small chunks. But still kind of like similarly John to what you're saying like it just took me forever to actually like trim the videos and say the things properly and it took me like way longer than it would have taken to actually just deliver a session and I thought was really interesting because like yeah, it's like social media I guess this editing of yourself and putting out this version. This perfect version when in real life if your delivering a session you're in the moment with it, but I did find it kind of, it's just a new way isn't it of delivering and translating your practice to people.

Melanie: Absolutely in your blog you talked about a Zoom session that you'd undertaken which was more professional development I think, which you talked really excitedly about how that had started to enrich you in that hard time.

Emma: Oh yeah I did a project with Adam Kammerling who's a poet and he led us through like we did maybe two, three weeks in total over lockdown of like a zoom R&D set up. That was really great because there was six of us in total and there was a couple of people I hadn't met prior to the R&D and there was a couple people I knew so it was like a nice mix of like musicians and dancers and the subject matter was really interesting. Kind of like I won't go too much into it because that's his project and it's not out yet. So I'm not divulge.

Melanie: Keep us up to date with that.

You contracted coverage which flawed me as I was reading about this, but quite early on in the pandemic didn't you? Very early March so do you want to just talk very quickly about what that was like and then how that affected your way of thinking about being a creative, what did it feel like to be a creative and have that illness?

Emma: Is this for me, I don't know everyone's situation?

Melanie: Yes. I think you're the only one out of the three of us.

Emma: I'm the only one? Oh gosh.

Well to be honest it made me realise like human fragility for sure. And the impact of stress on the body like as a contributing factor to illness and that there's always an intersection of reasons why someone may get more elder than others. And I guess like being the person that was very, very ill at that time, it was very humbling in a way. And also a kind of like what John was saying earlier about everything just being stripped away and, I guess mine was in a different way it was like everything being completely like obliterated and then I'm just there as an as an entity that is not separate from or connected to anything. So it was kind of this really weird state of being. I guess it was a very different like the acute moments of like having like severe symptoms that at one point prompted me to call an ambulance. From that point to then the months of recovery which is like a very different process, you know, you've got the immediate process of like, I don't know if I'm gonna survive at all and that went on for however long went on for. Like so there's all these different stages that I went through in that respect so it wasn't like I didn't feel I'll be honest I didn't feel a draw to do anything because I wasn't I mean, I wasn't able to do anything but also when I after about four weeks I kind of tried to get back and you saw me actually one more than you thought we did out front doing like what star jumps by the bins. Melanie and I live around the corner from each other, but like that was kind of like something that actually sent me back further because it was too soon for me to kind of even go back to like a fraction of the practice that I was doing or In the middle of doing you know I was kind of like literally at peak fitness levels and even me operating at say 20% was like way too

much for my body. So I didn't actually think I'd realised the toll that it had taken on my body so then after that point it was like there was an actual like just letting go of that desire to do any movement, and that was really like tough as well because I'm letting go of something I've done my whole life, you know. Before I started dance like I've been exercising, you know, my whole whole life, so it was the longest period in my existence of like not moving.

Melanie: And having to give yourself the permission I suppose in order to get stronger to not do what you love and what is you. Dancing is you isn't it? It's more than a job it's what you do and that's probably the same for many of us. But I think for many artists there is that sense of this is what we do and now it's been taken away. John you're nodding.

John: Yeah. I was really touched by Emma's blog entry about talking and especially that time of you sitting, just waiting to find out if you're getting an ambulance turning up. I thought I was in an incredibly brave situation to get yourself through.

Emma: Thank you.

John: And just reading also just was all my anxieties was your experience, you know, all my ifs ands but what's what it could be you just basically went through.

Emma: Those it's always that thing like there's so many levels in which anxiety manifests and I thought of it only as a mind manifestation but it's so much a body manifestation. To the point where it kind of almost I realised it was manifesting there, like it brought me a new level of consciousness to it because every time I'd get a flare up of symptoms, I would like really have to sit and go: how much can I separate the anxiety from the symptom?

John: Yeah

Emma: And then how can I sit with the symptom and be with the symptom and not add to the symptoms as soon as you kind of add a little bit of something to the symptom, it's a hundred times worse, you know, it's like okay, how can I just be with this? And then that's really hard if you can't breathe, you know, but it kind of, that was quite a profound thing that I learned through that.

Melanie: It's powerful and for you John when locked down happened I don't know a week or so, it's hard to think about time now isn't it because it all sort of washes into one you don't know something took a week or if it was just a day later that you did something. But at what point did you go through, without the covid obviously, but did you go through that same process that Emma did of going: I don't even know if I want to dance. Oh actually this is what I do. I will do lessons. Or was it different for you because you had a community of artists and participants that were looking to you for that activity and that creativity as well so you had responsibility not just for yourself but for your company, for your users, your participants your communities.

John: Yeah, I think a long reliance of Emma that actually, you know, over the last five or six years I've been dealing with anxiety and I was already hidden it very well publicly. This situation meant that actually that was unable to happen. And my anxiety weirdly manifests just in physical symptoms that make me anxious. So during that process, I think looking back over it now there was that period of I just can't do anything. I can't really think then there was a real period of no. There was a lot of no and rejection, you know, every single bit of funding that was out there I was either I was uneligible for or to turned round and told no. Didn't get funding from arts council, you know, so loads of different avenues of trying to get support to help me through that period was just a shut door. And shut doors for me then become this real challenge. I think it's most probably because of being a gay man from a period where, you know, no you can't do that because of whatever is a red flag and makes me go well I'm stubborn. I'm just gonna do it. I'm gonna do it anyway. So yes, then it became a period of, well actually the community and all these people still need something. So if the venues are saying no and I'm unable to do it in a space. The thing that surprised me was we don't need a lot of stuff. We had the skills. We are creative. We just need to look around ourselves and suddenly things happen. So yes, then it became: I'll do stuff online. I'll find a new format. I'll get through this period of I'm unable to watch myself because the benefit of it is community and participation and engaging with people is way more important. And once I'm able to re-kick start that, the mental health benefit on myself and my practice, kind of refires it up and get it going again.

Melanie: And did you find that that process of reimagining and changing and shifting in response to the pandemic and the need to do so created any sparks of something new for you that might feed you as you look forwards?

John: Yeah. I don't know if this happened for you but actually one key thing that I got out of the experience was conversations with people were more authentic, more genuine and actually had more time. Nobody had an agenda as an artist thinking about their own work, because there was not much that anybody could really do. There was a better period of being able to have a conversation with somebody and that could go on for a long time without thinking that there was a product or a process or a funding application that needed to be done out of it.

Emma: Yeah

John: One great example of that for me was I reconnected with a dancer called Thomas Jung who was over in Norway. He came for an audition for one of my pieces way back and would not be able to do anything together.

So we just connected you know, just sent him and said do you fancy a chat on Zoom. Then it became like a regular weekly thing and you know, he was going through a tough time. I'm going through it tough time and it was an opportunity just to talk as individuals. To talk about this tough time. From that then lead on to more creative things about talking about us as artists. Then it became a process of he sort of goading me, me goading him of what could we do creatively with the stuff that we had. The end point of that was me with my iPhone, husband in the garage, me with just the light on the iPhone basically wafting it back up and down,

and kind of making movements to kind of see what visually would come out of it. The real benefit of all of that process is has been that actually we've got a bit of funding from Norway to take that into a completed thing. And it was just such a more rewarding process than thinking we've got to write an application about a project that we're basically imagining that we have no idea what it's going to be. We're going to come up with some marketing material and a plan for it before we've actually stepped into some kind of creative space.

Melanie: Yes, so it came from a different place as an approach, it's come from within, it's come out and then you've had to find the resources to resource that idea rather than let's find the resources and work what fits. That's really organic, exciting. So creativity I always think is the fuel artists feed themselves with. But I'm really conscious that at this time, much has been said about the way that freelancers have really suffered, almost being forgotten in the government's financial package and seeing their livelihoods: Emma for you your contracts just cancel them assuming, and I wonder with that going on in the background now being creative is what you have to do not just stay sane but to stay paid. How that's felt for you in the midst of a global crisis, so what has that felt like for you Emma?

Emma: Well that's been a tricky one because obviously my work. I wasn't at a place to be able to do that like so capacity or. I've been fortunate to have enough things come through that'll kind of help covering basic financial costs.

Melanie: And when you say things come through do you mean funding or grants come through or work come through?

Emma: I got the Arts Council emergency response grant which was amazing and got a bit of money from Boy Blue the company, which was again really kind of them because we were meant to be recommencing with some rehearsals and then like a couple like the Zoom projects have done a couple of things here and there, you know, that I've also been like maybe I can kind of input in different ways rather than like full out dancing, you know. It's being like I've been able to kind of do things at a reduced capacity as well as having the support from HMRC self employed grant, you know, things like that that got me through that time and as well I'd been working I like I was fortunate as well to be working and had been working consistently the previous year. And kind of probably the most I'd worked consecutively back to back project wise. So I felt like I had kind of managed to keep myself stable in that regard. Which also I kind of you realise well that money what isn't necessarily for this, shouldn't necessarily be for this. This is money that, you know, as an artist like you kind of hard graft and put it aside for to save but what it does mean is that it's like well that's there the end of the day it's there. So that's kind of been my situation I guess like right now is kind of a bit of a critical time in, because it's at that point where I'm like, okay, I need to think about what I'm doing now to make money like, that's kind of come in now whereas like up until this point I was able to kind of just stay afloat, you know, I mean.

Melanie: Just get by.

Emma: Yeah.

Melanie: And how about you John has the need to be earning money influenced or affected the choices that you've made over the last couple of months in terms of your creative output?

John: Yes, I suppose it's left me with a positive rage. I class it at. Where I thought support would come from: venues, organisations, people who I've been involved with, that wasn't there. Where it did come from was actually from the communities and the schools and the work that we're doing more widely. So I think for me that has made me think that actually the focus of the energy, I'm going to put more into that than actually organisations who I would have, you know, think that I would need to go to. Because it's that scratching of backs of kind of going actually, I've helped you deliver your programme. But in the time of need, talking to people the perception was: I don't need to hear from you, that I need to make work that is about covid related things, I don't need to make work to get money to basically do stuff that is relating to elements. Or I just need money to survive. That's what I think that's what most artists were just asking for. Can I just survive?

Emma: Yeah, exactly.

John: There was more hoops and actually competition. So that positive range for me has left me into the state of: I just want to work with people who are trying to find a way that we can make art without this feeling of competitiveness. Because I think then that's we're falling back into an old trap of an old system of there's winners and losers.

Emma: Yeah

John: And if we could use this experience to rethink that funding model into a more holistic, supportive way. I don't know what that is. I've got no answers for that, but I think collectively we could find a better system.

Emma: I really love what you said and I really agree and I think that you kind of answered it earlier when you were talking about just like these genuine connections that now have space to be made and the creativity kind of blossoms like organically. Because it kind of made me really look at my process as well in that respect. And like artistic process and actually how it can easily become very separate to creativity and then it becomes this like necessity to fit in a box or fill out an application or XYZ. And like I don't know this time I think has really like made me realise: oh, wow these things can, connecting organically to that again is so fulfilling. And then it's less about anything else. It's more about actually just the making of art which is really what we all want to do, you know.

Melanie: Absolutely, I think that you mentioned the funding model John and it affects us all. It really has put a wedge hasn't it between venues, organisations and the freelancers of which they are instrumental into how an organisation or venue can operate. I mean, you can have a beautiful building but if the freelance sector has disappeared overnight, you've got nothing to put in it. And so actually the

ecology has to be supported as one but the funding model is driving those two apart. And it's been so distressing to see and you said in your blog, I've pulled this quote out this morning actually. I get a real sense of being forgotten and unprotected.

John: Yeah, I was really surprised talking with other artists, difficult stories of hearing how organisations have treated artists during that really difficult time. I'm sure there's most probably lots of examples of how transparency and just a bit of humanity could have gone a really long way in how they could have treated individuals, even though we're all in that same situation. I think just talking from other people it felt more like being excluded, not knowing what's gonna happen to their contract, having to fight for bits of their contract. You know, suddenly pulling out clauses just to feel like actually just gonna keep that money when we're in a really distressing state. And that hurt, for me, thinking this is the landscape that we're living in. When we know it's a really tough landscape, why aren't we supporting instead of going down this other route?

Melanie: And over this period, I know we've touched a little bit on this. What kind of tools of self-care have you been using in a very specifically, what sort of things have you done that have calmed you down, kept you healthy, kept you optimistic at a time of challenge?

John: Well for me: I've got three beagles. So they are fantastic thing of being able to go out and walk. What I really liked and most probably with kind of resonated with Emma's was this idea of outdoors and nature, you know, real lover of forests. So as soon as I kind of the ability to get out after lockdown and just visit nature and be in it is a really healthy for mental health and getting to a more positive creative state. And talking. I really understood that a key part of my practice is not about the making, it's about the working with people and talking with people and connecting with people. So the more I can do that, that is my self-care. Like moments like this, meeting new people, just having a conversation is like a real plus and keeps me going.

Melanie: How about you Emma?

Emma: Yeah definitely those two things. Minus the beagles! I wish I wish!

John: You can borrow them!

Emma: Oh my gosh! Can I please? Life complete.

Self-care things, well. I was meditating a lot. That was a daily practice for me and I was doing Qigong as well like that again just bringing a little bit of movement into it and that was definitely a big self-care thing to stick to. Yeah cooking as well. I found that one harder to stay consistent with. But when I was like in pockets of time, I was cooking every day I was really, that felt really like wholesome. But yeah, I would say those things and like being with myself a lot of things came to this surface. And like being a member of the LGBTQ+ community as well like the things surrounding that came up for me. And so like honouring everything that came up

was like a big part of myself care. Because like honouring all of these things that were being brought to the surface rather than kind of feeling like I have to suppress anything which is like let everything come up and like let it be painful and let it be moved through.

Melanie: Let it be painful that's it that's a really powerful motto I think to live by in this last couple of months isn't it? We realised when we were putting this podcast together asking anyone if they've been exhilarated might be a touch too far, but and exhausted or you know, letting it be painful might be might be closer to the truth but also recognising and there's something that you said John in yours that really resonated with me and what we've had to do at Greenwich Dance, you said bash your project into pieces and put it back together, fit for a new world. And there's something about that sort of smashing not just taking it apart but the anger involved in smashing up the old idea you had, the old project, the old way of living even and then reimagining it for a new world that really touched me and I think that pulls on what Emma's just said about letting it be painful. And then moving forward into whatever the new world has in store for us. With that in mind, and drawing on what we have just said about that feeling of being unprotected, a bit out at sea, a bit forgotten. What do you feel the industry expects of you now as artists? In terms of new ideas and creativity and how does that feel being someone that everyone nearly forgot?

Either one of you.

Emma: Can I say something real quick? Just a little please segway in.

Melanie: Please segway.

Emma: It's been an interesting one for me as like someone who is a bit of a floater around and does like bits of this and bits of that and isn't really tied to one company or one organisation or anything like that like, I've really felt the whole like oh I just don't matter because I'm not fitting into any of those specific niche places. So like this is kind of like just a complete non-connectivity unless through these individual conversations and things like that. Like I mean, I say this besides my kind of community work with RAD and connections here with Greenwich Dance and, you know like, kind of on a you know what I mean.

Melanie: I know what you mean.

Emma: Like just that has been definitely when asked that question about expectations, I'm like, well, does anyone expect anything of me? But at the same time there's also this to from me to engage with things I'm gonna have to mould everything into something that fits and like again go back into that pattern of moulding my project to fit something. Fit these parameters rather than it coming from that genuine place of like it having the time to maybe be nurtured and grow like organically.

Melanie: Yes, so that point John made earlier about the project that he was cooking up with Thomas and that coming right from the centre of being absolutely

something that grew from him and your fear is is not being able to do that so much. Being told that actually your thing has to fit into this box and so please can you make something for this box. Yeah that authenticity from the artist isn't drawn out so much.

Emma: Yeah

Melanie: John, how do you feel about that?

John: I agree with Emma and I think actually, it could be a wake-up call for us. I think our conversations are really important. Artists to artists are really important. And the more that we nurture that and find opportunities to build stuff that we're really excited about and stop thinking that we have to go down a route that was there before. Yes, organisations are going to be there, yes organisations most probably want to get involved with us. But our priority should be thinking that we're not there. Some were not there in our time of need. So, let's drive a new path. I'm feeling very radical this morning and feeling I need a t-shirt or something a slogan!

Melanie: Emma and John have both got their arms in the air! Punching! Here's the exhilaration!

John: Just don't' ask me to do it because otherwise I'll be shy! I'm just putting the idea out there.

Emma: That's so funny! But those moments have been exhilarating. I think the moments of connection have been the exhilarating moments, you know?

John: Yeah

Emma: When you're like, oh the power is in our hands to do that, you know.

John: Yeah. I think we can do that if we put money aside and not be driven by money. We can have those conversations and we can build something and make something that all starts the process of it and then come from kind of the money perspective of going yes, we do need to be paid still.

Emma: Yeah, yeah, yeah

John: But we know we stand an awful lot of time. Yes working and then not working. So, let's use that not working time creatively together because we're in the same situation.

Emma: Totally agree. Totally agree.

Melanie: Artists do have that resilience built in don't they like you say you're used to periods of not working. It probably doesn't scare you as much as a city worker that's just lost his job. I'm sure for you you're just like yeah next job will come around soon and there's something I can do to make that happen by thinking up

new ideas and approaching new people. But you say Emma, you know, does anyone expect anything of me and sitting as someone from an organisation, personally I think that people like you hold the solution to how we can keep culture vibrant when we can't bring people into a theatre in the conventional way. I think you've got the answers not necessarily us and I think finding out how to engage our freelance community and freelance artists in a way that does resource them for us to work together because you know, the funding model is that the organisations are the ones who are the registers charities, we're the ones that can get hold of the money and often times you can't. I mean, it's great that the Arts Council have got their.... But probably the only people I think that independents can go to for funding. But if they're not your friend, you know, you're out there on your own. It's definitely about the way we work together and support each other that is going to take us forward. My personal opinion. What does the future feel like for you two as we look into 2021?

John: I think it's a mixed bag. There's fear and apprehension that another lockdown might be imminent. Which for me feels like it could be than final nail in the coffin that just goes can't get through this point. But on the other side is I've got this new bag of tools. I've been able to sit and I've been able to edit and I've been able to make stuff and I'm feeling really energised because I've got new connections with new people and my community. The people that we've been working with still want it, you know. So there's possibilities, but there's also that's scare of what's just around the corner?

Melanie: Absolutely. How about you Emma, what's 2021 feeling like for you? What's autumn feeling like for you?

Emma: Well. I don't know, um. I think yes I mean, Hmm.

Melanie: Any word from Message in a Bottle?! That's how I feel.

Emma: Well there's a potential of like, you know, I think that 2021 is everything's kind of in theory at the moment right. So like in theory we're gonna do this, this and this. I'm not kind of like... I'm just keeping that in my awareness timeline of like okay that'll probably be around like March/April maybe when things start to move again, so I'm not really thinking 2021. I'm thinking what's happening in the next six months. And again I think that there's a lot of just things for me that I can implement for me to better use my time and energy and like maintain being in a good headspace. That I think is like the most important thing for me to think about rather than maybe like having an exact idea of like what it's going to look like at this moment in time. So there's my vague response about that.

Melanie: How you feeling now Emma in terms of your health?

Emma: I'm at so much better than I was. I took myself by the sea yesterday. So I mean Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, so I could just swim in the sea. I'm like heal me, heal me sea! Heal me. So it's really great like I'm able to do a lot of things I wasn't able to do so I'm kind of going okay the basics of like being able to feel like I can exercise again and things like that. So it's good like I'm dancing in my kitchen

obviously not breaking because that is like super hardcore so I'm kind of taking and building it up again. But it feels, it feels nice and I'm feeling a lot better so yeah, thank you.

Melanie: Does anybody have anything else that that you feel that I haven't asked that you would really like to say?

Emma: I mean I guess it's like this this thing we've already touched on of like we all hopefully everyone. I mean, I feel like everyone's had this time to really become more conscious of a lot of things like whether that be within themselves or within the wider world. And self-care and all of all of these things that just help keep people going and keep people connected like I guess the real I feel like this is the real like when we start to integrate back into like I mean, there's never gonna be the old way again, but like in to things that are like present themselves as the old way. Carrying that with us so that we remain really connected and that what's important remains at the centre of what we do because remembering that we are artists, I mean, I'm speaking for myself here because it means something different to everyone. But like I'm an artist to make and create and to connect first and I really like what John was saying about, you know, like investing into things first before like necessarily reaping any financial reward and like, you know, there's a point in time 2 or 3 years ago where I felt like, I was just thinking about money, money, money this money that and it. Because I think as well as a freelancer you're constantly having to negotiate your constantly having to figure out like prove why you're deserving of like not very much money and you know it kind of like it's you have to wear that hat of like businessperson and no one else is doing that for you and like it also is like this very tenuous bridge that you're on that you're like: okay am I gonna fall in? Is it gonna burn? Or like what's gonna happen? Am I gonna get to the other side? Or am I gonna have to backtrack and come back the way I am. Like this idea of like these tenuous links that you can kind of be so precariously judged to being like worth or not worthy, like. I just hope that this really also grounds artists in their power and in their voice to know that you can speak up if something's not right. And that you should speak up or something not right. And that we can all have each other's backs. Like rather than kind of going oh this is my issue, I'm gonna have to solve it myself like. Actually this is something else's issue. Aaa I help them solve that for them so they're not carrying the weight of that alone.

John: Yeah.

Emma: You know,

John: Yeah, yes Emma! I have like my wish list. My wish list from this would be that as artists we have more power, we have more say, and we feel really had more permission to challenge organisations to say no that is not right. It should be done like this. For us.

Emma: Yeah.

John: It's really heart-warming Melanie to think that actually organisations are thinking that we have the power, well the tools to help us through these challenging times as a sector. On my wish list would be seeing ways that organisations can openly say that. So it's really plain and easy to understand as artists that that is what your intention is, and not some other kind of intention that you've got. And that the organisations find a way that can support us as artists to develop without...

Emma: To do that...

John: To do that without the need of thinking that it's a product or there's an outcome. You know cause, it just feels like taking risks brings great reward.

Emma: Absolutely.

John: But it's just having that ability to fail without judgment.

Emma: And when we look at the intersections of like who in the industry can fail and who can't fail, that's a very different as well. And like this idea that you have to suddenly have the, this perfect product and when you have one opportunity to do so is ridiculous actually.

John: Yeah. And then final tick would be thinking more for more people. Not just who's on our list of, like (I hate saying this) the chosen in few. But perception wise it feels a little bit like that. There are a few chosen and actually there's a bigger wealth of artists, dance artists out there who could really support us.

Emma: And who could make and do incredible things with that bit of support, you know. It's like yes like what does that support look like from organisations. If organisations believe we do have the power and the answer like, what does their support look like to us? As well and like what is that laid out like. Yeah, so it's you know, it's going to be...

John: T-shirts on!

Emma: Yep t-shirts!

John: Let's start parade here we go. Or virtual parade!

Emma: Yeah! Let's do it!

Melanie: More for the many. Ground artists in their power. I think those are two slogans which should end this podcast on. This has been such a fantastic conversation. Thank you so much John and Emma for being with us today.

And thank you for listening. If you'd like to hear more episodes about subjects moving artists of today for Talking Moves, wherever you get your podcasts. Don't forget to subscribe, leave a review, spread the word. And for more information about John and Emma head on over to greenwichdance.org.uk and do

remember if you know someone you think we should talk to or have a topic you'd like us to talk about, please send us a tweet at @greenwichdance

For today that's it from us. So join us next time where we'll be discussing more Talking Moves.