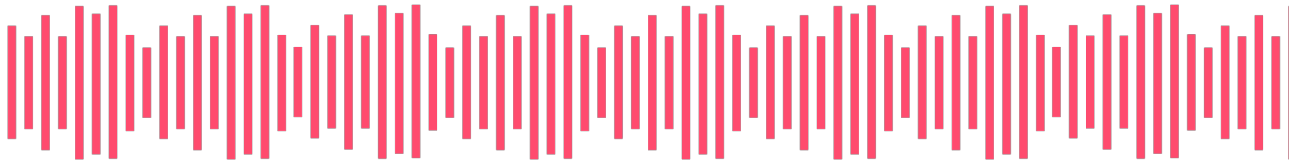


TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

The Summer of the Zoom Class (S01/E02)

Episode Description

In this episode we talk to **Maria Ghoumrassi** and **Wendy Streatham** about the ways in which they have adapted their teaching to accommodate the need to be online. They discuss their initial fears and approaches, the ways in which they have explored the functionality and played with the format, how they structure their classes: stripping back to fundamental technique or playing with open ended stimuli and the ways in which they have prioritised community and wellbeing. They drill down into some of the specifics such as camera off or on, break out rooms, playing with those 'rectangles', tackling the 'delay' as they count their dancers in and most importantly... how to deal with the rogue pet dog!

Together, Maria and Wendy muse thoughtfully about how this period may have changed us forever and what the dance class of tomorrow might look like.

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 new podcast series in which dance artists talk about their work and practice the things that matter and the issues that are concerning them.

I'm Melanie Precious, and in this episode, we're looking back on what was for us the summer of the zoom dance class with two of the artists who've been instrumental in our online offer. Within a week of the start of lockdown, Greenwich Dance started trying out what an online dance class might look and feel like, working with a talented team of artists that lead our classes. We learned about the technology, adjusting the practice and even started to reconsider what a dance class on zoom should really be, was it dancing or was it talking about dance? It was a steep learning curve for us all, and of course across the internet online classes were popping up everywhere, some free, some paid for, some live and some packages simply offering downloadable tutorials.

I'm joined today online of course, by two artists to unpick the pros and cons of all of that. Maria Grassy, a dancer, choreographer and educator work with multidisciplinary techniques, and Maria has been the artistic director of our over 55s performance company for over 10 years and also leads an adult evening class in African fusion. And Wendy Steven, a performer, choreographer, teacher, movement director, and lecturer who leads our exceedingly popular lindy hop class.

Welcome to you both. Hi, it's so good to see you. So, we were chugging away watching a virus, sweep the world, being told business as usual until suddenly it wasn't business as usual anymore, and we all dived into the swimming pool of zoom. Did you sink or swim?

Wendy:

Definitely swim with a few moments of mild panic, but no, definitely swim

Melanie:

Treading water, and Maria, how does your class on zoom look? Is there anything like a dance class in the studio?

Maria:

Uh, yes, it is still a dance class very much so because in my normal teaching of other disciplines and styles of dance, I mix quite a lot of different approaches to movement, and also how different communities or different groups less experienced in dance will be able to enjoy movement for movement's sake. So, it was very much like thinking overall of bringing life into the room. Everybody's own living rooms or bedrooms. Yes.

Melanie:

And do you structure your class in the same way? Am I right in thinking you've got one style, which has some drawing within it and another which is more of the creative dances that a difference between the way you're structuring those two?

Maria:

For this time, for the lockdown situation, I was very aware of how emotional everybody was feeling. So, anxiety being one of the emotions, quite prevalent in all of our lives. I thought that I wanted to address that. So, I've really started going deeper with how we can use breathing, for example, breathing techniques and breathing exercises in the class that could also help us during the day in our lives. So, and then from then on, I was gently going back into movement, thinking about joints and regardless of age and abilities, because being in a lockdown, all of us being very contained and confined, so it was very much a thinking as a whole human being, regardless of our age and abilities. So that changed my approach to teaching online and then with the creative side of drawing, and how can you transfer, drawing into movement was a passion that I've been pursuing for some time, and once Greenwich Dance gave me the opportunity to offer another approach to a creative class, I thought, oh, this is my opportunity to try this idea, and initially I was wondering how it would be with the dancers that I already know, thinking are we going to have people interested in this subject and feeling brave enough to experiment because it's very much about experimentation. And then I was so pleased to see that people wanted to try new things as much as for them. It was for me also a new discovery.

Melanie:

See you've really used that opportunity to try something new, and Wendy I've really been learning about the structure of lindy hop, familiarizing myself with that very clear, I think progression that you've been really keen to establish with your class, and you ring us up often just before a class to see if there's anybody new, just so that you can make sure that you can accommodate them because drop-ins don't work quite so well in the way lindy hops structured. Am I right in thinking that and how, how has that very clear ladder style structure to lindy hop been able to translate online in lockdown?

Wendy:

Well, lindy hop is largely a partner dance, uh, an energetic partner dance that uses a lot of space. I had to change very much, what the content of my classes was anyway, to make sure for a start, that it was doable, it was safe, accessible to all. I also was very, very aware that yeah, I could have new people dropping in. It was extremely interesting because the zoom sessions, I have to think very much about planning and it did spark a whole new development in my own teaching of lindy hop, which I'll definitely be taking forward, because I really stripped back and rather than teaching the partner work, that the footwork and then adding the turns and the twists and the variations each week. I stripped back to some of the most basic steps and really took time to understand them, develop them with everyone, building a much stronger foundation and lindy hop was influenced by and evolved from all kinds of different solo steps, which also part of the breakout of lindy hop. So, I would take those solo steps and sometimes theme the session on a solo step, really explore it, develop it, put it into a routine, play with it and talk much more about the history as well of all

those individual solo steps and have each week a slightly different focus and what that I believe is going to do and what I already know it has because just seeing the progression of the participants is when everyone is able to come back into a lindy hop class where we can rotate partners, we can dance with each other. Their technique is going to be so much stronger and they're going to be able to put the flourishes in, and they'll be able to differentiate between putting back that partner work, putting that all together, and then people that have had that much more experience building on the solo aspects, the technique the foundations will be able to add different things.

I mean, it's it's really, been such an interesting learning curve because the lessons have been very different, but it has still been lindy hop. There are so many important pioneers of lindy hop, I always talk a lot about the history of lindy hop in my classes. I think it's really important to dance and love lindy hop, you have to appreciate and acknowledge its origins, but this enabled me to do that so much more, so I would even take a pioneer like shorty George Snowden, or Norma Miller and focus on them each week. What was their particular thing that they brought? And by doing that, I think a lot of people were joining of course, solo, they were in lockdown, they didn't have a partner, we couldn't rotate partners, but they were still learning solo steps that once put together are going to build strength. And some people were in partners, they were there in locked down with their partner who they've been coming with, and I could add variations, a lot of planning, a lot of thinking, but ultimately I was able to lead all kinds of variations for whoever really joined whether they were brand new, which happened a few times or whether it was someone experienced and just find a way to weave in something new for everyone.

Melanie:

To be honest, I really did not expect such energetic and enthusiastic response to online classes. That's so exciting to hear that you've drawn out such a positive of this really strange experience, and actually you answered one of my questions, which was going to be about that partner work, because I've watched that community of your classes grow. There's lots of partners come or friends that form within the class, but you're saying that you've still been able to nurture that.

Wendy:

Yes. And I think one of the things I was really worried about was that lindy hop is a social dance style. It involves people dancing with each other rotating partners, as I say, and there's always a lot of chatting, laughing, jollity, and I was really worried, would that be lost? And people often say that they love the chatting, the social aspect of it, and I was really conscious of how to build that in. So even finding ways of sharing together or sometimes splitting the screen so that some people would dance, others would be able to watch, sometimes if people came together as a couple, being able to have planned something that they could do, and also being able to tell the people that were on their own, this is the content, this is how it's going to be when you put it back into a partner.

And we had some fun times as well, sometimes imagining a partner, you know, just pretending we're dancing with someone, and that's really nice for people that, you know, I had a few participants who were on their own, who were feeling quite lonely and it did still manage to bring that social aspect, and in fact, I even had a couple who would rehearse and record themselves and then send to WhatsApp group their rehearsals and they would put costumes on, and then there was still that feeling of community lindy hop is, is such a community. And that's what I wanted. And I really felt, I always made time at the beginning and at the end and during to check in, to talk, to ask questions, to try to get some conversation going at the beginning, just letting everyone say hi, and if they wanted to say something they could or not the partner work, indeed.

It was a difficult one. I was worried about how it would work and I cannot wait to be able to get back altogether, but people have loved the solo aspect and the seeing and understanding how it's going to feed back into the partner work, and they're going to fly. I mean, once they get into partners, I don't think they realize how much these solo sessions are going to have helped them, and what they'll be able to do. Their technique has developed so much.

Melanie:

Fantastic. It's funny for us as an organization, classes have always been incredibly important to what we've offered, but I don't think we realized quite how important that social aspect was until it was taken away from us, and it was the first thing that we put back in, and it's been one of the most successful elements of our lockdown program if you like. Maria, you've been instrumental in part of that as well. There's obviously been a lot of concern about older people being isolated at this time. How have you kept that social connection going, do you think similarly to Wendy?

Maria:

Yes, definitely, and I had not realized how important that had been because as soon as the lockdown happened, I felt fine, I felt like, okay, let's see what I want to focus on for the next month or so. And zoom was not part of it. And it was so interesting. They offer the opportunity to do the testing, and I was really freezing. It was really cold feet for me. I felt like scary and feeling disconnection that was maybe in my mind, that is going to be forced by this technology bringing us together. However, after we did the two testing's, I felt so humbled to see what that connection of the face to face, even if it's just, you know, on the screen and how important it was for the participants, as much as it was for me, to keep me active, to keep me creative and to feel like I'm giving and I'm receiving.

And I feel this is really what lockdown in general has been feeling for lots of people. How important is to give and to receive and how valuable and important the two sides. If you just give nothing comes back to you, if you just receive is not good enough either. So that relationship was really important, and it kept on growing the structure is there, of course, from the breathing exercise into the warmup in terms of content, the subject that is going to inform the movement we were going to explore.

So, for example, today is about change. Change can affect your life or your life today in your space. And so, what I was trying to do was not to use too much of techniques of zoom, for example, working in pairs, you can use zoom techniques for that. And I was trying as much as possible not to use that and just allow people to be free and welcomed in their own spaces.

I wanted people to think that that's their space, that sacred space, the welcoming space that they knew so well. And this was becoming a new space, a space where they did so many other things as much as dancing. So, I was encouraging them to leave the screen. So, for example, they would go to the corner of the room or be away from the screen and still feel confident with their own personal individual exploration. Very much like, Wendy just said that's the positive aspect of being in your own space, a familiar space, and you were able to explore things that, even if you want to switch off the camera, no one can see what you're doing. You have that really relaxed space and I can do whatever I like.

Melanie:

That's really interesting because I was going to ask you about how you use the space, and there is definitely something about assuming that all makes us focus in on that square, that camera, shoulders hunch, you know, we all get a bit closer to the, to the screen, but, but you're saying you've almost freed people from that rectangle and said maybe a bit, like it brings me onto my next question really, which was about, um, whether, uh, pre-recorded tutorials or live class. I haven't done a dance class online, although I've been in watching. Um, but I have done exercise class since, and there's something about you having the freedom of the space, you put your phone there and you just use your space as you might do, if you were doing any kind of exercise. Zoom sort of makes you feel like you've got to get into that rectangle, and I wondered what both of your feelings have been about that, and was there a reason that you thought I want to keep this live rather than do recordings and tutorials or have, or have you played with both? Yeah. How, how have you both dealt with space and rectangles?

Maria:

Yeah, for me, it's really allowing them to see their space in a different way, even allowing them to think, for example, uh, let's now go all the way to the lower corner, to the far end, even to look at their furniture, to dance, to do a duet with their piece of furniture in front of them, to look at the textures in the room. So that for me was important to then energize and see things in a different way. And also, I think what I want to go back, in according to what you asked, I would like to also be able to go back to these filming techniques or using the idea of the screen of approaching from stage right to stage left, you know, those kinds of ideas. It's also interesting.

Melanie:

How about you, Wendy?

Wendy:

It's really interesting listening to what Maria's saying. I'd love to see some of those classes that you did I must join. I think I've been doing a range of different teaching. The lindy hop is very much, I'm teaching them some footwork or a concept or an idea. I do give space for them to go away and work on it, but it's very much coming back and forth to the screen. Definitely and using that live interaction and times for me to check them and be able to watch what they are doing, if they're struggling with anything, certainly for other projects and other classes, especially some of the creative work I've been doing in education and remote sessions for schools.

There's definitely like Maria said that element of giving an idea and encouraging them to explore the area they're in or objects around them, or they just go away from the screen and not be watching and copying or, or listening the whole time just go away and have much more of their own creative time. I personally had never heard of zoom before lockdown. I'm sure lots of people hadn't now I feel like there's, there's so much out there and there's so much you can do with each of these platforms and exploring them every week. I was thinking, oh yes, now I know much more, and I can do much more breakout rooms, other ways of sharing, of viewing of pausing. I just felt like I was developing, and that's what we do as artists. We're constantly, we're creative. We take something, we develop it. We're flexible with what we can use and just keep expanding what we can offer, and I'm still doing that and exploring, and I certainly feel, even as I go on teaching lindy hop, there's other ideas I've got, developing in my mind of how I can deliver the session slightly differently and just keeping it all fresh, bringing new things, trying things is what it's all about. It's such an exciting opportunity, really, as much as it's very much not the same as being live, and I can't wait to be back in a studio, but the fact that it was there, we could stay connected, and there's a new challenge for us all its great. Very positive and very exciting.

Maria:

And also, Wendy, I thought it was interesting what you mentioned, the people practicing their solos at home. You know, when you were working so much individually, if they were all in the same room, people are much more self-conscious, and that's why I think it's like you said, when they go back into the space, they are perhaps still self-conscious, but it will go.

Wendy:

In fact, it's something, as we all do reflect after sessions of what happened, what worked, why things worked, and there were times when some of my dances would just be picking up steps so quickly and so confidently, and I was thinking, why, why is this? And absolutely that idea. Those were the people that were really self-conscious in class. And of course, the lindy hop class dancing with other people, you're very much on view. And actually, I could see them much more internalizing and practicing and not having anyone looking at them and really just developing themselves and

could see their confidence growing. So, like you say, once they come back in the room, another thing I was reflecting on is every now and again, I think some people, they do feel so self-conscious and they might rely on copying me or copying others and just, just hiding behind something. But they can't, it's almost, it's less and more exposed at the same time, but they had to take responsibility for themselves in space, the discipline to do it and not rely on anyone else, really, and it's just so interesting. And I think having this opportunity and the reflection that we're doing is going to long-term impact all of our teaching.

Melanie:

I'm going to pick up on that in a minuet I think and really push you on how you think it's going to develop your teaching. But just very quickly, I'm really interested to know for both of you, whether the community that you are working with now, is the community that you had here when we were at Charlton household together, both of you have had really loyal followings for Wendy. Some of yours have even followed you down to Ronnie Scott's to see you performing. And I've seen them really buying into that lindy hop culture, going onto forums, getting the shoes, you know, really feeling proud of themselves and Maria. I mean, honestly, I think he must get the prize for, um, for loyalty. I think you've had some of yours with you 10, 12 years. Are they still with you or have you seen newcomers come in because of course geography is now no longer a barrier?

Maria:

Actually, it has been a mixture, the main core of people I have at the moment. Yes, they have been with me for many years now. However, I find a few people that I had not been able to be together with one of them in times of physical difficulties, another person who had moved away from London. So, they came back. So, this is again, like, would be interesting to discover and to explore in the future. Once we go back to normal, how do we continue that relationship with those people who don't have enough physical ability to be with us?

Wendy:

That's so lovely to hear, and I think access to those people that can't leave the house or find it hard to for all kinds of reasons, whether in lockdown or not. And it's so important, even more so sometimes for those people to have that connection, that life uplifting experience and connection with others. I mean, for me, one of the things that I think I had not anticipated at all and made me really quite emotional was people coming back to me that had been learning lindy hop with me five years ago, who had moved out of London and were able to join again. And that was just so lovely to see their faces. And they were so happy to be able to come back to the classes. A couple had had a baby and the baby was sitting, watching them in the chair and really like joining in, well not joining in of course, very safely on the side, but, you know, waving his arms and they wouldn't have been able to come or they'd stopped coming. And I've had some of those people say to me, oh, I'm really nervous about you going back to doing live classes because we won't be able to come. So,

I'm thinking, okay, I need to be able to continue both somehow, ideally, and working that out. There's always benefits things that you don't anticipate that come out of these, and that's definitely a big one for me, being able to access those people and especially for you, Maria, slightly different, but that's really wonderful to hear.

Melanie:

So if you could, both of you design the perfect class experience, money no object, technology no object, from your learning. If you've got any ideas about what that would look like?

Maria:

We have

Melanie:

You have? Well of course.

Maria:

Me and Wendy have.

Me personally, we had even began to talk about this in the session, especially of the one about drawing and movement, because this was experimenting with new things, new ideas with our bodies and with our imagination, and that, of course we could explore in our own spaces our safe spaces and you can make as much mess or less, but some people want to leave their homes quite neat. Which that was a challenge in a way. So, people even suggested that once a month could be a physical in-person session, that we could explore that in the space and with, for example, making a mess that's kind of work. So, we had already been discussing the possibility of having both. And one thing that Wendy also mentioned with different personalities, different people, focusing on her lindy hop training of solos and mentioning different names. Um, I did similar ideas. Sometimes I had like two choreographers and I actually use the share feature on zoom that I could show them directly images that I would be able to then take the, the idea further with the movement. And also, later on, I had an opportunity to, uh, give them a link to a video, a dance film so that they could explore if they wanted, away from the class and then come back the week after, and we could explore ideas from that content. So, I think it's a mixture of both for me.

Wendy:

Yeah, same I think I've really enjoyed the, these ideas of, of taking a much more specific starting point and finding all the ways of pulling out everything I can from those starting points and really developing that. And I think I could do live classes

based on that, but also pair it with something online that everyone in my lindy hop class anyway, always wants a recording of what they did in the class, so they can go away and practice, and I feel like there could be a recorded session that compliments develops or builds on, which will be useful for those people in class, but also can be accessed by people that can't come live to the classes. Uh, I mean, to be honest, I, haven't done a huge amount of thinking about what that would be. Um, not as much as Maria. Yeah. I would definitely want to include an aspect of both if possible. Um, and you know, technology is not something that I am an expert in by any means, but it's really interesting to learn what it can do, and it's incredible, and I think there's so many opportunities with technology to be explored, and as Maria said, with sharing links or videos. I had this idea, if the one thing you can do with online is bring guest teachers from all around the world. lindy hop is a global thing. Now there's so many brilliant artists across the world that I would love to bring in. And if you could bring someone in to do an online session that gets recorded and then can be used as well, stored as archived would be very exciting.

Maria:

Sounds exciting. Yes.

Wendy:

I think if technology can be used to support and enhance the live offering, that's brilliant. You're offering so much more; it's getting the balance and you're getting it right; you know.

Melanie:

It's interesting, isn't it, how necessity mother of invention. So, this, pandemic something that we had never, well, I don't know about you, but I, I didn't know that the way you deal with a pandemic is everyone gets locked in their house, so nobody knew that it was coming. Nobody knew that was what we had to do, and off we went and did it, but it makes me look back on how we used to do things and think were so one dimensional, a dance class is this, it looks like this, and it's looked like this for a hundred years and now you guys are out there reinventing the wheel. And when we come back, it feels like we need to start that conversation before we go. Right, we are all back in the studio again to say, what are we coming back with? And now what does a dance class look like? And how do we get all those elements you've just been talking about bedded in, it's more of a package. And I think your fees might change. I don't think it's it's an hour anymore, is it, you know, with all of that research and sourcing guests?

Wendy:

Yeah there is a lot to think about.

Maria:

That's wonderful. And I think because like, for example, those ideas, Wendy, even myself as a creator, I need to constantly be learning from other people. And there have been certain places in the world like the US, I mean, me as a mother of three, I mean, I feel like where I am in my stage of my life, I feel like, Oh, I will never be able to get there, but because of zoom, then I can target, you know, something that I want to tackle and learn during this time or later I can record sessions or buy courses in that sense. And then slowly use, you know, within my time then I can slowly come back into my classes and use that knowledge that I've learned because I was able to access something really remote from me. And like you say, in bringing a teacher, what all these amazing teachers you're talking about for the normal person, you know, like me, like you like anyone, and it's amazing. So, and, and I think it brings people together even more, so the community is bigger, but tighter I feel.

Wendy:

Yeah, absolutely it's lockdown, being sort of stuck in one place as you say in one way and enabled us to further to do a class in America or yeah. And I think, for me, there's nothing like I keep saying, there's nothing like the live experience and there's been many things. It's a lot of work and planning going into and making sure anything online is being able to be delivered completely safely and supportively. And you know, when you're in a live class, it's different, you're there, you can see everything, people aren't the size of a tiny screen. So it's not that zoom is absolutely the way foot it's finding out how it can add, but still thinking about all those crucial things to make sure that everyone is getting the, the best safest, most wonderful experience really. But yeah, as Melanie said, you know, out of crisis can come opportunity. You have to find it and run with it really and do the best you can.

Maria:

Interesting with that actually, because, um, I've experimented, especially with African fusion in terms of, um, content of choreographic content. Um, I had a similar approach to all the classes too, because in terms of teaching choreography, for me, I don't know how it was for you Wendy, was having different abilities in the class. So, it became very much like difficult to be so specific sometimes also, how do I know my movement is being mirrored? Is it right? Is it left? As I'm doing some sessions, I realize that trying to become so specific with certain ideas became a sort of a problem because visually I could see the feedback of some of these engagements from some participants, then either the following exercise or, uh, the following session, I would kind of revert back into having an essence of something I wanted to explore as the stimulus, but then kind of leaving it a bit freer to, for the participants to use it in their own space, like we just said. But I would like to know how you dealt with

the counts because of the lateness of zoom and things like that, how was it a problem for you?

Wendy:

Yeah. I've become an expert in being able to count them in and then do it a tiny bit later. Yeah, all these challenges that you just don't realize, and then the first time you go on is, oh, there's a time delay. Ooh, interesting, when I was doing call and response rhythms, it felt weird, but yeah, I had to change, obviously for reasons I spoke of earlier about lindy hop, being a partner dance that uses a lot of space. I've had to change content, but also like I say, for safety and making sure because we can't see everyone, the whole of their body. I didn't want to do anything, for example, that involves lots of turns because if they're in a small room with a fireplace, I wasn't there to make sure they were absolutely supported. So, the way I would teach these things is steps. They would be quite simple steps that I would build up very gradually, always if I was going to develop them, giving lots of options. So if you can either stick with this, move on and try this spot, but only if, and making sure I could keep coming back and asking them and saying, right, please, can you do it, counting them in and asking them to show me so I could troubleshoot anything or took a lot for more focus for me than being in the room where people are, you know, normal size. I did try, I would count them in and know that they would be a little bit behind my counts but could still see sometimes. And I think this is certainly something I'm having to deal with, as I go back live now into some schools, it became less intensity, but more focus on certain technique that could be controlled and could be very, very monitored with what they did. And like you say, giving them an idea and boundaries and making sure that you were there, that they could come to you and ask questions. Again when lindy hop, not so much giving them a starting point and letting them go away, I was much more directing them, but keeping a very very close eye with some of my other work, giving a starting point and very, very clear structure, giving them stages to think about this and then this, and then there's something coming back and checking in with them. I don't know if I've answered your questions Maria really?

Maria:

That's perhaps how I would have dealt with things too. I felt for me a bit less, that's me personally. I felt less satisfaction in trying to, to be so precise in, in following exactly like I would do, you know what I mean? Of course, that's not what you asked either, but allowing people still to do, to do things, like you said, the premises you give them, that's quite interesting. Yeah.

Wendy:

Yeah. I think it's the necessity of zoom and doing it when you're not in the room with them. I felt personally I had to be much more specific and keeping a close eye. It's just those very subtle changes and getting to know the people as well. I think that that was more when I had very new people, it was very, very much very close monitoring and gently bringing them into steps. When you, if I had a group of people, and like Melanie asked earlier about the, the community, I have had so many people that have just stuck with me and stuck with me and seeing that progression and getting to know them like you would in a class and then letting them have much more freedom. Again, it's just the juggling, the juggling of the situation of what teaching of the people that you have in the session. You know, we do so much really. And I think because of who we are and what we teach, what our profession is, really quite good at that.

Melanie:

Well, you've got 20 years, 25 years of experience of teaching more. And it's remarkable to see,, I'm sure in that career, you've never been asked to do something like this before, but because you're so creative, and in fact actually, I was reflecting earlier this morning, the world's been creative, we've all done things differently. But as artists, you have been exceptionally creative in how you've risen to the challenge and gone, right. Okay, here we are, and let's do it. So for artists that might be listening, they might be as experienced as you, they might be less experienced as you, what would your top three tips to successfully teaching online from each of you be, top three, maybe practical, maybe artistic, but it could be as practical as having, you know, a bit of extra time to get online.

Wendy:

I think one of the things for me is very much always considering the safety and the health and safety of it and pet's, dogs, I would say to everyone, you don't know what someone has in their background. I always said at the beginning, make sure I would always talk about the space you needed around you. Make sure you have this, make sure there's not a rug or different flooring that you make sure it is a consistent floor. Make sure you have space, make sure you have some water nearby, make sure you have any pets locked away in a nice, responsible, safe way. I have a dog myself. And if they run in, when you're in the middle of something, it was just my fear that, you know, someone who's trying to really concentrate on a step and a big dog runs in and knocks them over. You know, you can't, that's not something you have to deal with in a class. Um, but even so it's still happening to suddenly see a door being nudged open and a dog, just walking through or a toddler.

Melanie:

You say that, where do you say that I was trolling through some quotes? Given that Greenwich Dance is 26 years old and somebody referred to bringing the rabbit into

professional class. So, you know, it might be rare to have a pet, but I'm not sure that it's never been done.

Wendy:

I remember that I do.

Maria:

There's a class actually from a company in the U S they have classes for pets.

Wendy:

Pet lovers, there you go. We haven't got that in our portfolio. It's another thing to think about.

Melanie:

In the new normal, reaching out to everyone. So, let me distil, so one of them is make sure that your pets are locked away. I put my children in drawers occasionally as well. Uh, what are your other two?

Wendy:

Um, goodness, put me on the spot. Uh, uh, the planning just, it does, it needs even more time. I'll always put a lot of planning time in, but thinking about everything, differentiating for all the different kinds of experience that people are going to be having in their own home. Uh, for me, I just had to think of a lot more variations. I would keep the structure of the class very much as I always would. It would definitely still be, you know, introduction, warmup, explore, developed a little sharing opportunity and cool down, but there would be so much more to think even more to think about. So, give yourself more time and I need to think of my last one. Maria, do you want to jump in with anything while I think of my last top tip.

Maria:

Yeah for me it's to go back to the group you're teaching. So, in terms of level, and again, you might have people that you don't know, is it an open class? So, a drop in, it has happened to me that I've had been exploring a routine. And then what if you have that person? So, it's about, like Wendy said differentiation. So, who are you teaching in terms of also, if it's possible to find anything about their health in terms of bodies, difficulties, and things like that? It's important to allow people to be free in their own space, I think, to be aware of that with the planning and with how you explore your session. Yeah and, and allow people again, to be free to perhaps turn off their cameras. I think that's very important. Sometimes they might even not feel that, Oh, I

want to do it, but I can't, I won't do it because they think I'm weird. So those kinds of giving people, the permission to do that, I think is important because for me even like when I try to feel I do these trainings from other places, I never feel comfortable enough in the group that I've just met and do the breakout rooms and, and share really important things. I always keep myself away from those situations because I don't feel safe also be aware that some people might not want to be in those breakout rooms and they may be, they can still continue working.

Wendy:

Yeah, absolutely. Just that awareness. And I think a top tip is really just to be as true to ourselves as we are, as artists.

Maria:

Yes definitely.

Wendy:

Which is caring and which is bringing out people to talk, you know, to make sure they can share, making that comfortable space that I was doing a lot of work on, on communication and how so much is through body language and facial expression and there's a big barrier in front of the screen.

But we, again, as artists, we're very good at still being able to have that communication and really drawing people into us, making sure they feel safe. I think definitely that I could give it top tips, practical things from checking your insurance, to making sure you have a backup internet connection, if you can, or a backup camera, all those things, the professional side of it. But most importantly, really is being us and why people come to our classes anyway, being the performer that we are as well in order just to create that safe escape. That place of escape that people just want to come to, to share and be active and fun and, and lifted and joyous, which is what we bring. And, you know, I've been so touched by some of the comments I've had no idea how much people needed it or want, you know, I think the first couple of times I would, I would end the session and think, how did that go? I hope people enjoyed it. Hope they didn't feel like they had to be there, because they didn't want to let me down. And then I'd get a text message saying, you don't realize how much this means to me. Someone saying you're completely saving my life. I was like, yeah. Okay. So it was okay. And it's just trusting in ourselves being who we are, you know, that's all a bit cliched and emotional but it is true.

Maria:

Yes, yes, I love it, it is true.

Melanie:

It is funny, isn't it we've spent years trying to, to fight for why dance is important. And we often say things like dance is the power to save lives, and we know we believe it, but it's a bold and brash statement, but never before I think, has it been so proven as you've just said, Wendy, and I know the same for your group Maria, and some of the feedback about just how essential this has been. It's been the only contact they've had in some cases at all. So, a very last question, just to round this amazingly insightful conversation up, um, how do you think that organizations like Greenwich Dance can better support you as you look at extending your teaching practice in this way and making that either online experience. So, it's going to be for us at Greenwich Dance, it will be online at least for this next term, but possibly even a hybrid as we get more secure and confident living with COVID. What do you think we can do to help?

Wendy:

I certainly think that being able to talk and share, kind of like what we are doing now, I'm learning so much from Maria, I want to give Maria a ring now and actually talk further or say, let's meet in the park and talk about what the future, what artists need to come together share. So, having a forum or an opportunity to, to talk and be listened to as well, I think is really important. Having the opportunity to have our voices heard in a, in a more structured way. Perhaps.

Melanie:

That's important though. Listening really is what you're saying, listening and space to share ideas.

Wendy:

Space to share yeah.

Melanie:

Part of what this podcast is about, but I know what you're saying that there's something perhaps even more localized with perhaps that immediate creative team of teachers being able to share practice in ways.

Wendy:

But also having that sharing practice, being recognized as something that's important and not undervalued. I think as artists, we spend so much time as well thinking, planning, talking, I think it needs to be part of, of what we do of the work, because it's going to influence some better what comes out of it. And I think acknowledging that this, this needs to happen, and this is maybe a, you know, maybe, there's a session of, we all communicate together as session one, that's kind of another paid for session

where we, in our planning session to actually come together, which I think could be a massive investment as well, for all of us.

Melanie:

It's thinking about what organizations like us might have called practitioner training. It's not actually training, is it, it's not training you need it's; it's paying you to have the space to talk to each other and find out.

Maria:

To explore yes,

Melanie:

But acknowledging that that's time, that has to be resourced.

Wendy:

Yeah, as an artist that's been working for so many years. I'm realizing it even more and more that, you know, this is time, we have so much experience and so much to share and it's important to share it.

Melanie:

How about you, Maria?

Maria:

The next stage I would like really is to, is, as you're saying, we we've got the resources in terms of personnel, we've got the artists that are dealing directly with these situations and finally the creative solutions. So it's like you can, as organizations strengthen us, strengthen the work by finding ways that perhaps might be different ways of sourcing funding and how can we go then some of us that might be interested in going deeper into the communities, and then perhaps, keeps spreading that talent of finding other community leaders, small groups that can make it accessible for us to go to those areas and continue disseminating the work, is to involve the communities more. Not just us as artists, we come into the community going to teach and facilitate, but to become like embedded as a whole thing.

Wendy:

Yeah, very much so.

Yeah. And I, there has been a forum, all us artists, which is great. I think some, even more specific areas, you know, actual planning so that, you know, you have a target of what the discussion is. I think that would be the next step, making it a little bit more

targeted and specific, but it's, you know, great start and great to have that community networks. We can feel quite isolated as self-employed artists. So, it's really not. It's great to be in, in that network.

Melanie:

I could, I could talk for much, much longer about this and I am going to go away and really think about, about this. And that's what we were hoping that this podcast would do. So, thank you so much for joining me today. It's been absolutely wonderful to hear.

Wendy:

Thank you.

Maria:

Thank you.

Melanie:

I'll let you know. This is part of having our voices heard and being listened to, so yeah, no, thank you. This has been really, really enjoyable, uh, really lovely.

If you'd like to hear more episodes about subjects moving artists of today, search for talking moves wherever you get the podcast. Don't forget to subscribe, leave a review, and spread the word.

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