

# TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

## **Resilience of Body & Mind** **S02 / E02**

### **Episode Description**

In this episode we talk to Charlotte Edmonds and Andrew Gardiner about resilience.

The government told us recently that dance was not a viable career, and whilst many would strongly dispute that – we probably all acknowledge it’s a difficult, sometimes even punishing choice. So it felt like a good time to check in with some of our dancing workforce to find out how they keep optimum mental and physical health, their tools of self care and how organisations can do better to nurture those who make our art.

Andrew and Charlotte discuss what resilience means to them, how their own challenges – of anxiety and dyslexia respectively, have helped them develop greater awareness of the triggers and mechanisms for self-care. Charlotte discusses how her internal struggles find a way out through her art – works such as Sink or Swim for the charity MIND and Grit for the Junior Company of Dutch National Ballet. Andrew talks about the increased sense of responsibility he has for his own team of collaborators when working with his newly founded company Society of Strays and how the switch to making his own work as opposed to embodying the work of others has helped find equilibrium.

Both reflect upon the pressures of a dancers rigorous training and the expectations of an ever-demanding industry. Honesty, openness and the ability to sense and respond to triggers are discussed as are the responsibilities we all have to take care of those who work with, for and amongst us.

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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:**

So 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 which move them. I'm Melanie Precious. And in this episode, I'll be talking to two artists about resilience. The government told us recently that dance was not a viable career and whilst many would strongly dispute that, we probably all acknowledge it's a difficult, sometimes even punishing choice. Resilience is a word that we throw about hopefully. We want resilient organisations and we want resilient human beings within them. And that's all well and good. But how do you know if you are resilient until faced with a challenge? And given that the last year has been one of the most testing, it feels a good time to check in with some of our dancing workforce to find out how they keep optimum mental and physical health, their tools of self care, and how organisations can do better to nurture those who make our art. So today I'm joined by Charlotte Edmonds, choreographer, dancer, podcaster, and filmmaker, and Andy Gardner dancer, actor dramaturg and co-founder of Society of Strays. Hello, and welcome. Talking personally, what does resilience mean to you? How does that translate into your work and practice?

#### **Andrew:**

Resilience? Does that come from being able to adapt and adjust or have to adapt and adjust because you want to do something that you're so passionate about, but that does come with a lot of complications that you weren't expecting. Everybody's meeting deadlines. Everybody has to be at a particular point for that deadline as well. So that's companies that you're working with performers in rehearsal. How do you manage the pressure of an already very pressured career? Especially when that career seeps into your personal life so much as well, because everything seems to become a passion project. If it's not from the leader of the project, it's also from you and how much he wants to give to it as well, because you've been given an opportunity to be part of something. So with that comes a certain level of stress. You want to do a good job.

So resilience to me means me accepting that it's something that I want to be a part of. Nobody pushed me here in this direction. This is something that I very much want to do, but with that comes a lot of complications for mental health. One in four people we know now do suffer from some type of mental health. And then when you look around you in the studio, you wonder, right: Okay. So within this room, there's the potential to be up to two to three people. So how do I acknowledge, how do I work with that? And with myself, what am I putting into place before I come into the studio? Or when I'm having challenging times, do I have time outside of that? Work-life commitment to be able to give myself downtime?

#### **Melanie:**

And failure never seems to be much of an option for us in our industry, does it. Like we don't give ourselves much permission to fail. I'm talking very generally about all of us in one big

group. Charlotte, what about you? What does resilience look like to you personally? And in your practice?

**Charlotte:**

Yeah, I think you can't teach someone to be resilient. I feel like I constantly watch TED talks about resilience that inspire me and people's stories inspire me, but it's really down to your own experiences and how you navigate that. And I love the idea of constantly pushing ourselves and that presents new tasks. And I definitely feel like personally and professionally, I've had to find ways to be resilient and have a lot of grit and determination to kind of continue. And that can be mentally really damaging. And this, especially for free dancers, this time has really been hard, but I feel like you come out the other side so much stronger and you speak about how there's very little, second chances. And especially as a freelancer, when you're not necessarily working with familiar people or familiar team and working with all different people, you kind of constantly have to reflect and think, right, what am I going to take forward from that experience into this? Or even within the process, the hardest thing is always stepping out and looking in to kind of try and quickly adapt or change and in that moment. So I feel like that is huge. That's a huge building block to take forward and to kind of build that layer of skin of resilience.

**Melanie:**

It's a really interesting point, isn't it? Because as you say, as a freelancer, you're going in separate contracts, each one of those you might not have met before. You're trying to build that relationship from scratch. You'd like them to reemploy you. And it feels like everything always hangs on this thing. And yet perhaps some of our best learning comes from those moments when we've not done the things or they haven't turned out the way we wanted to, because we've been able to navigate our way around. And in many ways, that's what this year has done to all of us, hasn't it? So that's where all of this innovation is coming from because of this insane place we find ourselves in. Particularly us as the theatre cultural sector. So both of you have been very open in talking about conditions, which are often hidden and not always talked about so much.

And I wondered whether that's been a conscious decision that you've made. So you, Charlotte, you've got a podcast all about dyslexia and the way people are handling that, you've made a number of films about mental health and depression. And I know for you, Andy, the same, I've seen posts on Facebook, just opening your heart up and saying where you are and where you're feeling at that moment. So I wondered has that helped you in being able to vocalise perhaps some of the struggles that you are navigating the way through, even if they are only momentarily and not affecting you all of the time. Andy, do you want to leap in?

**Andrew:**

Yeah, I think for me there wasn't an option anymore to hide it. It was impossible because it was in the studio. I was having to leave the studio as well, which also then you put more of a huge pressure on yourself for feeling weak or having a moment of weakness and stopping everybody's work flow, and then the Gremlin's come. So you start asking yourself all those questions. I, am I worth it. Can I do this? Am I in the right career? Am I wasting people's time? I mean, that, they're just a few questions. I mean, it's much more than that because rumination takes over as well. So it doesn't just happen in that moment. You can pick yourself back up

and go in, but then the aftermath of that and the self care at home, or on the way home or how you begin to torment yourself about this, is just continual.

So you go in the next day and...

**Melanie:**

What was happening in the studio?

**Andrew:**

I was going into complete panic attacks based on, I suppose, it's, what's being asked of you and what you're doing. And you've just mentioned before that you go into every project and there's all those feelings that you walk in with already. But then when you're asked to display those skills immediately, you're cutting yourself open. You're leaving everything you've got on the studio floor to be able to do that. But that's such a vulnerable place and where's the care after that? And who's the responsibility with as well?

**Melanie:**

Has it helped you to be open and vocal about something that perhaps internally you had been struggling with for a while?

**Andrew:**

I think there was no choice, Melanie, for me, it was, it was happening in the studio and then it was affecting me coming in the next day. I think it was more in support of other people as well, feeling, not myself. And this is in support of other people. This is happening in the studio just now. And if it's happening to you, you're not the only one. And I wonder what that is and I wonder what we can do.

**Melanie:**

And it takes a while to get there doesn't it. Because for a while, I suppose you just think it is you and then you realise everyone else... Charlotte's nodding profusely that plays out for you as well, does it Charlotte?

**Charlotte:**

Yeah, absolutely. I think just hearing you say it takes time to speak up because I would always hear even five years ago, people saying, you know, we just need to be more open about this. It's really easier said than done. It definitely has taken me five years to grow the confidence, to speak with my friends and family and colleagues. Most importantly, it comes back to what Andy was saying, which is, I don't know if you were told this at school where you leave kind of all your I'm going to say baggage. I don't know whether that's the right thing to say, but like leave anything that's on your mind at the door and come in and you kind of be this character, especially in the performing arts and yeah, actually, what if that was happening in the studio? How do you, like you kind of let that manifest if you don't speak up about it.

And I feel like, you know, we're slowly teaching people to be more open and just say what's happening internally. Otherwise it really boils over. It's so detrimental, but I feel, yeah, I think

we both love to explore this through our work or through speaking about it or even our approach in the studio. I think that's so important. It's just like all these different layers that create a much better and positive environment from learning from maybe some of the really hard times or hard moments that, that you definitely don't want to repeat. Yeah. So I can definitely empathise with that.

**Melanie:**

Well you've started an organisation called Move Beyond Words, which aims to amplify the voices of artists, doesn't it? And in particular dance artists who have dyslexia. And I wondered what coping mechanisms you've needed to develop for living with that.

**Charlotte:**

Um, a lot. And I think I'm still exploring the strategies as I get to know my dyslexia and Move Beyond Words, which I co-founded with Elizabeth Arifien is here to create or provide creative solutions for particularly dancers at this stage, but hopefully artists in the future, because although, you know, dyslexia is normally associated with academia and yet a lot of creatives are dyslexic and it's a great medium to express yourself the arts and whether it's singing or dancing or artwork itself, poetry, the whole film. It's a great way to express something that you may not feel like you can articulate. And so, yeah, we are providing support and more recently through our podcast and it's been fascinating hearing people's experiences, just generally hearing how inspiring their stories are and their career paths and how different they are to one another, but how they've been resilient in their education, their career path, their personal life, and just hearing how they kind of tackled situations. Honestly it was really amazing. And just makes you realise that, you know, we've all had a similar experience, but it's sort of inherent to us.

**Melanie:**

Andy did you want to say something? I think I cut you off earlier...

**Andrew:**

I think it was, uh, aimed at Charlotte and how, because she's working with many collaborators and being a choreographer as well and leading some of those experiences for dancers, how her experiences have informed the way that she might ask for something or the way that she might set up the studio or the way that she might bring something to a close. Because I think that all of those are like pretty important psychologically, now that we're figuring out for people that are suffering any mental health issues in the studio or anything related to resilience really. So how does your experience equip you? You've like, you've felt it yourself. So how do I do this for the people. How do I make it just common practice actually cause it'd be better if it was just common practice, big question, but interesting.

**Charlotte:**

Ooo yeah that is! But I think, okay, so combining the two questions. Yeah. No, no, no. It's really great. Interesting to hear your thoughts as well. So saying to someone I have dyslexia, I'm going to really struggle with retaining this information, or I'm probably going to go to the left instead of the right, when we're supposed to do this exercise and I'm going to get really upset with myself. You know, it's so hard to say that it's really such a challenge because you don't want to feel judged in any way. And unfortunately we do as people kind of label and

that's really sad. So I feel that yeah, plucking up the courage to sort of say something like that is huge. And then when you realise when you're working with other people that there might be 20 people in front of you that are going to experience this whole process differently or retain information in a different way, especially when you're working in different countries, there's different training, different language barriers.

And it's just so important. You know, I felt so like listened, if someone said, do you want five minutes just to take that in? And it's just amazing considering I know that when I was training there wasn't that space and it just creates in terms of anxiety, um, in terms of mental health, in terms of, you know, putting your best foot forward, all of that care is vital to creating, you know, not only sort of nurturing a person, but a great, great artist as well, and just a really humble and positive experience. I don't know if I've answered your question Andy!

**Andrew:**

Yeah. You were definitely on the way yeah.

**Melanie:**

It's a good answer isn't it. There's lots of tangible things that we can draw out from that. And I might dig down into that a little bit more as well, because thank you for taking us down that road. I wondered, and it sort of builds on from that and what Andy was asking you, which is whether anything feels different for you, both, as you consider your mental and physical health and resilience, when you make your own work, as opposed to creating and animating the work of someone else. Does that play into any of those studio scenarios that you were talking about, Andy?

**Andrew:**

100%. Because we're definitely taking an absolute history of experience of my own in various situations where I think that I've felt that's a trigger, that's an absolute trigger. So if that's a trigger for me, that's a trigger for other people somewhere or could be. So how do you present an idea to people? How do you enable the idea from them as well and support it whilst it's happening in the space and we're working remotely now as well. So how remotely do I do that has been a question for me over this time, but also how can I feed back and how can I say if there's anything within, cause I've been working a lot recently with writing my own material. So if there's anything within that material for you, which you just cannot say, let's talk about it because we can change that and we can probably get something better for all of us. So it's leaving a stimulus and an open dialogue. Like it's a stimulus, it's not this, I wouldn't be so precious that it would affect somebody in that way. But also afterwards, if we need to discuss or talk about anything, that's come up in the space, let's also do that and close it down. And just remember that we closed it down here in this space. So when you leave the space, you don't take it with you. And if you do, it's much less than it may have been.

**Melanie:**

That's really interesting, isn't it? Because I'm sure we don't think about that as we go into a studio and just make what might seem like a jovial piece of artwork, dance work. You might not think that there has to be some sort of circle moment where we will come together and talk about how the day has been for us. But actually if that's embedded in practice for whatever you're making, when you then do start to tackle, perhaps more issue based stuff

that has the potential to trigger. And actually who knows what things trigger, you know, you could be making a family show and someone could be in bits because they've got all kinds of things that play into that. Charlotte, you created that beautiful film for Mind, could sink or swim. How did that come about?

**Charlotte:**

Do you know what it was made in 2017, which was like ages ago now. And I did watch it the other day, cause I don't know. It's good to look back and see if you've got the same sort of feeling as you did when you created it. But at the time I was reflecting on my time at school and the challenges I'd faced and I really wanted to create a piece about mental health and the work is inspired by Ian Cumberland's portrait Sink or Swim. And he was speaking about his experience with depression and how he just felt completely like he'd hit rock bottom at this point in his life. And he created this artwork to kind of illustrate that. And I think we can have variations of depression. I definitely personally have had a whole escalation of anxiety attacks or feeling like I really have hit rock bottom or just a day where I feel quite low, you know?

And I think we all in some capacity can relate to that at various points in our life. So this was created underwater with a director Louis Jack and Francesca Hayward was starring in it. And it's really looking at various metaphors associated with mental health. So feeling heavy, feeling like you can't keep your head above the water, drowning all those associations with it and trying to kind of portray that. And it was amazing. The response was fantastic. And just like on YouTube, just seeing the various comments, just hoping that it inspires someone, but the main reason for creating it, it was just a really try and get into someone's mind. Who's experiencing that because the end scene is gasping for ads like you do in a dream. You know, you wake up in an absolute panic and the amazing thing is you're watching it and it's like speaking to someone you wouldn't know that that is happening inside their mind. And essentially we were kind of saying this, this could be happening to anyone and no one knows that. So the aim was to hopefully encourage people to kind of speak up and start a dialogue.

**Melanie:**

Yes and so appropriate for now. So you have both touched on this too. So let's dig into this a little bit more. I said in my introduction that we used the word resilience, hopefully, and I've been really thinking about this because it feels like such a throwaway word, doesn't it? Let's all be resilient. I mean, it sounds so good. Wouldn't it be great if we all could be, it's asking so much of us all to be resilient. Just seems so optimistic. And yet as dancers and particularly artists, we put them through such a rigorous training programme from such a young age often, not always, but often and into such an uncertain working world. And I wondered, you know, I'd love to find out more about what you think about the ways that we train our dancers and the world that we then put them in. And whether that's had any bearing on your own personal experience of being resilient. Baggage, you said earlier, Charlotte, do you have that with you still, from your years in training?

**Charlotte:**

I feel hopefully with a great mindset where kind of using the baggage, essentially with the difficult experiences and being artists at this time has taught us something. You can change things, you can implement things that will help others. And just trying to communicate that with maybe slightly bigger voices as well. I think there are still more friendlier ways of doing

things that can, in terms of like an audition process or even just the way in which you manage a room. I think people nowadays are being more conscious of that, but there's still a way to go. I don't think there's ever a kind of polished or finished product. So I would say it has definitely made me think about how to move forward. And I think we're all kind of being inspired by one another and, and understanding or learning from each other or even I think sort of highlighting actually this made me feel this way, or I think it's really important to do that.

**Melanie:**

Andy, what do you think has your training had any bearing, do you think on the anxiety that you've experienced, or does it come from somewhere else?

**Andrew:**

Yeah, I think it comes from your experience and your home life experiences of where you've put yourself in social circles as well. But I think that, it is definitely a major player within the mix. It just is because you stood in a room of mirrors facing all your other peers that are also doing the same. And that in itself is enough, especially when you get corrections in front of all those people, despite it being there to support you, all of a sudden the rooms need areas of improvement. I'm going to call it type of language that's used. And given the correction could be so different in that space, in front of all your peers and other people that you're trying to stay at the level at with for that journey. That's a lot for three years. So you are stood in front of a mirror, criticizing yourself for the majority of your year.

And that has got to seep in psychologically physiologically into other areas of your life because you're so used to doing it. And I think this is why dancers particularly can be so hard on themselves in other areas of their life, if they don't achieve something immediately. And then I think that, that also, if you choose to leave dance and go into dance administration or leadership roles, that this is also a thing, it comes from that place of constantly being critical and being critical is also a part of our learning and development. How can we support and change the vernacular and the way in which we do things that supports equality that supports mental health, especially just knowing how many people must leave damaged already. I can't tell you how many times I've taught somewhere where the person goes at the end of the third year. Oh, I'm just going to leave dance for a few years because I can't do this. And I just think, wow, you've not had a career yet. Wait till you get there because you are up against the time pressure and there's money involved and you've been paid. So sometimes people don't have the time, money and patience for you as well. So yeah, it's interesting.

**Melanie:**

It's about striving for perfection, isn't it? That's what dance is about. It's about an aesthetic often and we are moving away from that now. And I'm pretty sure now that the cohorts of students that are going through our programmes in our schools now are getting a very different experience to the one that perhaps you, me and Charlotte have gone through. I know we know that they are changing the way that they nurture those young dancers. I've got the greatest confidence in that.

But I certainly know that my dance training as well, nobody talked about mental health. Nobody talked about how you felt it was about whether you got the star role, whether you

got placed in the, in the piece, auditioned, cast away, you know, all of that thing. And then years of standing in a line, right. For a handful of jobs. Yeah. It's a hard old career. Charlotte, you know this better than many, your piece for the junior company of Dutch National Ballet was called Grit. So, you were saying something there, I think for those young people.

**Charlotte:**

Yeah. I feel like now I'm saying this hearing both of you speak about grit and resilience. It was definitely something that was important for everyone in the room and something that I wanted to investigate with them. And the process was just as vital as the product. These dancers were 15, 16, maybe 18 tops and in a junior company.

So kind of almost got fast-tracked to being in like a company setting. And, um, I just felt like that anyway, I think training or being young, and Andy you said you sort of have to rein in the criticism when you're kind of analysing yourself by like when you're in the mirror or dancing or receiving corrections. And I feel like these young dancers was, it, it was great to explore this with them and it opens up a whole dialogue to discuss how they were feeding. And I really wanted to just create that space and feel all this information into the choreography and essentially get them to physicalize that because that's what we do. We take something that really inspires us to something that we're really interested in and then try and physicalize our portray that in through dance. So I really enjoyed that. And I suppose it was just really looking at what does resilience physically look like and kind of what scenarios can we create.

And so I think actually it's like when someone says to you write something down on a piece of paper, screw it up and actually throw it away, like the physical action of doing that. So I kind of want to apply the same thing into the studio. And if you create a task or scenario, you know, how do you approach that? And then hopefully they can take those things away from the creation into their own lives. Yeah. So that's what we're really exploring.

**Melanie:**

Grit is a great word I think. This is going slightly off tangent. I've got a little nine-year-old and he wears his heart on his sleeve and I wish I could teach him grit. And you both have said today that it's not something that's very easy to be taught, but with that in mind, I wondered what advice you might give to anyone who was feeling overwhelmed? What things can we teach ourselves as opposed to relying on others, to provide the nurturing environment for us to be in. What can we do if things are feeling too much?

**Andrew:**

For this answer, I'm going to have to maybe go to a bit of a vulnerable place. I'm not sure, but I think I need to, because it's not that I disagree with you, Melanie, but I think sometimes it can get beyond your behavioral control anymore to be able to do some things. So I think actually somebody does need to step in and there needs to be a diversion.

**Melanie:**

Yeah.

**Andrew:**

And if it gets to that point, my honest opinion would be to seek out specialist advice because I went through a high intensity, 12 weeks, cognitive behavioural therapy course this year. And I committed myself fully to it. It's actually at this point where I need to do this so I can change my behaviour so I can begin to live what we perceive to be a normal life again. So for that everything that I've put into place so far, isn't actually enough.

So I do actually need guidance there. So I'd be saying if it gets to a place where you feel like your behaviours aren't supporting anything that you've put in place anymore, then absolutely do intervene. Get intervention because it's, you do need it. And once you have those mechanisms, especially with cognitive behavioural therapy, once that's in place, you can begin to share that with other people. And if everybody, was that generous with things that they learned like that, then it could definitely support resilience. And just having that one-on-one with somebody this year for me changed absolutely everything. So I think I would say put that in place, seek advice if you need it.

**Melanie:**

Seek advice. And before that, like a step before that moment, what are those things that you were saying that if all of those are not enough, what are those steps along the way?

**Andrew:**

I followed guided meditations. They are available everywhere now. You can get them on loads of platforms like Mind has it, the NHS. You can just type in mental health, basically anxiety training and into a Google search. And something will come up where you can follow a guided meditation, which is designed specifically to knock rumination out of your mind and start to have a present moment focus. But that's something I learned more in CBT how to actually achieve that on your own. Yeah.

**Melanie:**

How about you, Charlotte, do you have tools of self care or suggestions, guidance, tips for people that might be feeling overwhelmed?

**Charlotte:**

Andy's recommendations are great because in lockdown I had a major anxiety attack and I turned to meditation and that really helped. That was a great tool. I also found that, although it's really simple to say, like taking time to just stop because when I'm feeling really overwhelmed, it's normally an amalgamation of thoughts and I need to take a step back and give myself some time. And I think just saying that to someone they will understand. I also, I haven't actually sought out professional support, but I have spoken to friends and family and we all went through moments, especially during lockdown so that, you know, something happens. It's like, okay, this is the reason why. And, and it just kind of gives you, I get really anxious about the way, you know, especially as we're saying with which we want to be so cautious about the way that we're leading things or so when something's happened to you, it's really hard. You want to be that kind of core support, but when actually something's happening to you, it's, you've got to also be transparent just as you would hope people would be with you.

**Melanie:**

Yes.

**Charlotte:**

So yeah.

**Melanie:**

That's so true, isn't it? I very recently last week maybe phoned one of my colleagues in tears and just said, this is how I'm feeling right now. I will be all right tomorrow. I'll be okay right now I'm feeling like this.

And I think it's because of this reason, and maybe this reason, maybe this one and you know, everything piles in, but I recognise what you're saying that telling someone sheds a bit of a load and perhaps knowing it might not be forever. But then I also wonder, I think lockdown has made us all think about these kinds of issues and people that might have ever thought that they would experience a panic attack possibly did. And I certainly know that I did and didn't know what it was at first. And so I, I take your point, Andy, about seeking help and I think that's really valuable. But the thing that I do notice about you is that you've got such a heightened understanding of what you are now going through. And that understanding is power. You know, I recognise there are difficulties, but I applaud you for that because I think understanding what that all means for you can help steer the way even if on that particular day, you don't feel so powerful maybe. So both of you hold positions of responsibility in the studio. Andy, when you work with ZoieLogic, I know you're in an assistant role in a dramaturgy role. Um, and of course also managing your own company and working with dancers and collaborators and Charlotte, you're choreographing for schools and companies all over the world. So when you're not only managing your own mental and physical health, but those of others in the room, what do you do to make the experience nurturing and the environment nurturing and safe for yourself too?

**Andrew:**

So my understanding of the question is how, because I realised I'm responsible for other people. So how do I make sure I support that, but also how do I support myself within that?

**Melanie:**

Yeah.

Because you carry it don't you? on a day when you're feeling, you know, not your best. Sometimes you've still got to put on this brave face and tell the rest of the team that everything's going to be okay. And I think those are the moments where I certainly feel my weakest. I wonder how that feels for you guys?

**Andrew:**

Obviously it feels terrible and you do feel weak. But I also think that if there's a way of creating an understanding in that team, that something like that might come up or this can be acknowledged at the beginning of a process or there can be a gentle reminder every now and then that this might be a possibility through our creative process. And this might happen in the studio, or I might feel like this, that tomorrow is another day. And I do have things in place to be able to support my mind, to be able to move forward. So I will be fine. I'm feeling overwhelmed with that. So what we might do is begin to restructure the way we're doing it and compartmentalise a bit. So could we, maybe we just look at this thing today and we don't focus on everything and feel the weight of the world on our shoulders.

Let's focus on this thing for today only. And then tomorrow, we'll just focus on this thing. If we've moved forward there. And when it's for other people and their work, especially being a dramaturg, there's just a particular way that I ask how they want to receive information beforehand. For anybody that I've worked with in that sense right at the beginning, that will be a discussion before we even go into the studio. How do you want to receive feedback from me and then have options as well? Just so it's not such a big, a big responsibility on their shoulders and maybe they've never thought of it before also. So I would give options on how they might like to receive that information. One being, I can ask some various questions surrounding something that may not be reading particularly well. So I'll ask questions around that rather than say, this isn't working for me and I don't see what you're trying to say.

So let's talk about that, cause that can be very exposing to somebody and they might also may know, but just maybe need it analysed and questioned that in a different way. And I think it's super supportive to ask questions because they know exactly where you going. And my relationship with Zoie, she knows exactly where I'm going with that, but I didn't need to say it. I know now how she needs to receive information and how I would give it. So I suppose it's establishing that with somebody having options, as well as for yourself being able to give yourself options rather than biting off, more than you can chew in one day and carrying the weight of so many things in one day. Can I just achieve this today?

**Melanie:**

Yes. Really good idea, just bite sized chunks. What do you think Charlotte, does that play out for you?

**Charlotte:**

Yeah, absolutely. I completely agree. You know, Jo Malone actually says her advice is when she's feeling slightly down or emotional to not make any large decisions with her company or when she ran her company. And then just regroup with yourself essentially or have a meeting with yourself and make those decisions when you're feeling more balanced. And the same thing applies. I think like in the studio, I have a conversation with myself and I kind of look at my structure for the piece that I'm creating. I'm thinking, am I on track? How is the room feeling, reading the room, reading myself. And it's just things that you can't really prepare for. You know, a dancer might come in being injured and you know, you have to really understand how that impacts your kind of process and everyone's mental health and also kind of the team around you. And so I suppose it's each day having your structure and trying to stick with that. But also I really like the way Andy says, you know, having those options and maybe essentially honing in on something that's necessarily for that day, doesn't mean that you're

losing out on anything in the long run, but it, you just sort of tailor making the process and adjusting to how, you know, what people really need in that moment, but not losing sight of the kind of bigger picture.

**Melanie:**

And given that dance is such a physical thing, but it's also what you do and get paid for. I wondered how far is physical exercise, part of your toolkit for being resilient? Do you exercise for mental health or do you only exercise because you're paid to do that?

**Andrew:**

Uh, for me there is no option not to have a gym membership and to go at least five times a week, and that is completely structured towards my mental health and that feeling good thing. I'm not standing in front of a mirror, uh, even though they're everywhere, so you can check your form. There's something that I get out of it. And that's me having time with myself that isn't specific actually to necessarily dance training in the studio. So for me, it's actually an outside thing. Uh, staying physically fit in that sense, but for the studio, it's a very different thing because it's always felt like such a joint practice. You know, you're in a room with loads of other people, not right now in lockdown. It's not been that maybe it's happened on Zoom and remotely, but for me, absolutely the gym is my time where I get to see my personal achievements and people have it with yoga. People have it with pilates. And I would just say, find your thing that supports you as a dancer. And I know that I'm building a frame, that's not necessarily specific to this ideological idea of a dancer, but I'm also helping break that stereotype that you need to be also a particular way and just remember to stretch as well as lift. But there's something about it that I definitely get from it and a release. And that's something I've put in place for myself.

**Melanie:**

Yeah. How about you Charlotte?

**Charlotte:**

Yeah. I wish I could say I was really made to go to the gym five times a week! Unfortunately I cancelled my membership after not really going there as much as I should have, but I then found a couple of other solutions, which, um, I started actually, um, playing football in an all-women's girls Academy. And I loved it because similarly to Andy, it's kind of away from dancing, you know, it's something completely different. And I just loved working in a team with these other women at something completely different learning, kind of like a new craft or a new skill and just kind of getting my teeth into it. And, and it feels really great. And obviously it's like an activity, but it's something physical that I really love. So, um, I'm definitely not an expert in it, but it's just something to enjoy, you know, without putting the pressure on yourself and, and just to do that with other people is great.

**Melanie:**

That's an interesting one isn't it? Enjoyment, because when we've come from a dance background and I was a dancer for 10 years as well, and I cannot dance for enjoyment. Unless it's in a, you know, at a party or something, but people will be surprised that I don't do our own classes at Greenwich Dance. And I'm like, no, because I used to dance and I used to be quite good and now I'd be terrible. So I'm not gonna stand in front of that mirror and look at myself and think I once was able to do that and now I can't. That would do my head in. I'm

going to go and run. You need to find the enjoyment in the physical, in whatever you're doing physically, don't you in order to free yourself.

**Andrew:**

100%.

**Melanie:**

So, I have one last question for you, and then I'm going to thank you for your time and your honesty. You've both been so open with me today. But one thing that I really want to know as someone who heads up an organisation is what should we be doing to better protect artists like yourself that are working with us? What can you tell me about how my organisation should be set up to nurture you?

**Andrew:**

Sorry for laughing! Cause it's a big question because I really don't know how to answer that, but I've got some ideas, but also I'm just wondering if Charlotte, you could start on that?

**Charlotte:**

I'll give it a go!

**Andrew:**

Feels like a hot potato!

**Melanie:**

This podcast is always the place where I ask artists to solve the world for me. They're all a bit like, what?!

Go on Charlotte, give it your best shot.

**Charlotte:**

Uh, yeah, I'll give it a go. Um, for me at the moment as a freelancer connection and structure, I would probably bring it to those two points. I think at the moment, I feel like our industry is a bit like a Formula One race, except some of the cars don't have wheels. A couple of other people have double the engines and then can go twice the speed and so, there's this whole variation and kind of no unity. So I would kind of urge companies to really address the connection that's needed, the communication and also the structure, you know, we are, as artists used to that pace of life, and that's completely thrown us. So how to rebuild that. And I think it's fantastic. Companies have looked into the dancers that they might have and nurture their talents and skills and see kind of, you know, it brings us back to what we were saying at the beginning, how they've actually said, I'm actually, I am a dramaturg or on the side, I do create this podcast and, you know, therefore they're able to kind of lean into their strengths and kind of continue to creating new work within their companies.

I think it's fantastic. But to not neglect the artists that are also outside of those organisations, because they're really the ones that probably had only one wheel and then can't move forward in that Formula One race. So it's about rebuilding that, and not neglecting freelancers who need that support. And it's really easy for me to say that I do not run a massive organisation, but I think, um, it's so vital and necessary to create these opportunities. Even though I know at the moment it's incredibly challenging and it being such an unprecedented time to forward plan, but, but to kind of really think ahead and think about approaching those obstacles and trying to sort of get a structure, to get a plan in order to kind of connect with the industry again and try and make some progress. I don't know if that, I feel like I just try to tell really expert people how to do their jobs. And here I am.

**Melanie:**

You guys are the experts and we listen. And that's, what's been so wonderful about doing this podcast is every one of them I've listened to artists and gone, Ooh, I might do, Oh, I'll change something here. Andy what are your thoughts?

**Andrew:**

I think it's recognising inclusivity in a way as a general for many different factors, because there is many different voices and there is maybe different demographics of society. And if the idea of the company is to have an outreach, that's so inclusive, then it must be like that with the people that they're employing somehow. So I think that many of these things have come to light. And especially now during the pandemic of this year, because of the disparity that's been, so evident between organisations, freelancers, and just various different areas of the sector.

So I think, and hope that moving forward as much as it is about what type of audience are we trying to reach? What type of work are we trying to make and with what type of person? Because even when you specifically ask for a type of person on a project, how do we ask for it with, and be inclusive at the same time? Even if you're specifically looking for this is specifically looking for that being exclusive? Just for an organisation, it would be maybe a space for different types of voices to come through. And whether that's somebody that wants to start making work, that there is room for them in whatever capacity, whatever type of the arts sector they're in. To be able to put the canvas on the wall, create that sculpture, be that dancer be that multidisciplinary performer.

And I suppose how that's supported, because maybe we have just been sat on an archaic way of doing things for a long time up until this point, even though there has been shifts and changes, but now it's just more evident that they need to be in place because there is so many people that don't get to access art because of those barriers. So I don't know, be as inclusive as people want you to be with your audiences, as well as you are with the people that come through and into your company. Does that answer? I mean...

**Melanie:**

I think it does. Transparency and honesty and inclusivity, those are some good words. So I think that's probably a good place to stop. And I'd love to thank you both for your time. And as I said before for being so open with us today.

And thank you for listening, if you'd like to hear more episodes about subjects moving artists of today, search for Talking Moves where you get your podcasts, and don't forget to subscribe, leave a review and spread the word. And more information about Charlotte and Andy head on over to [greenwichdance.org.uk](http://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 ,tweet us @greenwichdance

And for today, that's it from us. Do join us next time for more Talking Moves.