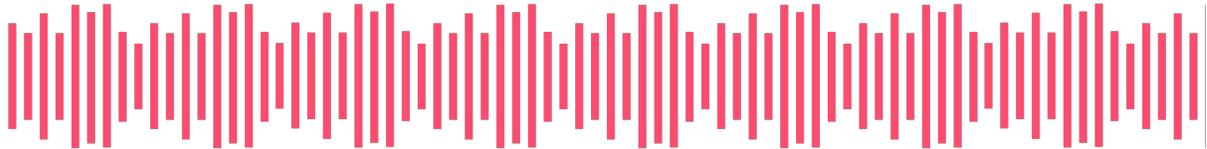


TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

Money Matters **S02 / E05**

Episode Description

In this episode we talk to **Jeanfer Jean-Charles** and **Lou Cope** about money matters. Money is always an awkward thing to talk about and when what we do is what we love it can feel even harder. But as we navigate our way within a business where we are constantly having to put a price tag on either ourselves – consultancy or advice perhaps – or the artistic work we make, we have to get better at talking about and asking for money.

Jeanfer and Lou talk us through the way they think about themselves, the values they hold and express through their work and art as well as the value they place on themselves. Both share their secrets for pricing up their time – including useful tools and techniques from imaginary assistants to the use of real ones – day rates to annual budgeting. They talk about the benefits of having a portfolio freelance career with financial resilience in mind but also in the loneliness and isolation that comes when working alone or as a temporary guest in an established team.

Together we pondered value in its broader sense: in crediting, having our voices heard and being included. And of course in the drive to do an excellent job as, in a freelance world, we are only ever as good as the last one...

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Talking Moves is a Greenwich Dance production

Presented by Melanie Precious

Production by Carmel Smith, Lucy White and Melanie Precious

Intro

Melanie:

Hello, and welcome to Talking Moves a podcast from Greenwich Dance where dance artists come together to talk about their work and practice, the things that matter and the issues which move them. I'm Melanie Precious. And in this episode I'll be talking to two artists about money matters. Money is always an awkward thing to talk about, at least it seems that way. And when what we do is what we love, it can feel even harder. And yet, by the same token, it can also be very insulting to have our worth undervalued. This isn't just a sector thing. We're often brought up to be reluctant to talk about money or how amazing we think we are. But is this helpful as we navigate our way within a business where we're constantly having to put a price tag on either ourselves, consultancy or advice perhaps, or the artistic work we make. So today to unpick all of this, I have Lou Cope dramaturg, and founder of the Centre for Applied Dramaturgy. And Jeanefer Jean-Charles, artistic and movement director, creative consultant. And importantly for this podcast, a member of the Freelance Task Force. Thank you both for being here. So first things first, why is money so hard to talk about? Jeanefer?

Jeanefer:

Think I'm probably gonna answer the question the other way around by saying I've learned not to talk about money, because I find that as an artist, no matter how much I try to get comfortable with, it's always quite an uncomfortable place, I seem to have more success when someone talks about money on my behalf. So as much as possible, if I can, and when I have project coordinators or a producer, we will discuss how much this project is worth. But then I will get someone else to talk about it. Now, if that's not possible, because I don't always have the luxury of having a project coordinator. The next best thing is to put it in writing. And I find that so much more comfortable than doing it in terms of a conversation. So putting it in writing feels a bit more neutral. Dear so and so this is how much it's going to cost. And this is why if I need to say that, and then send the email and then fingers crossed.

Melanie:

Just puts a bit of distance between you and the thing.

Jeanefer:

Yeah.

Melanie:

But what about you Lou?

Lou:

Well, I think in answer to your question, why do we find many hard to talk about, I think it's something to do with the reason we go into this industry in the first place is because of our love of it and our belief in it and our passion for it and our belief in the contribution we hope we can make to the whole sector, we don't go into it for money. And I think we find that difficult to not talk about passion, but to talk about cold hard cash. And I think probably fair to say that if you go into investment banking, for example, it's kind of assumed you do go into it for the cold, hard cash. And so therefore, it's easier to talk about where sometimes I feel like if I'm pushing for money, I feel like I'm somehow devaluing the art or devaluing my own love of it and my belief in somebody. But actually, of course, it's not about that it's about survival. But I think we find it hard to talk about, and also because we feel replaceable. You know, we're always told that all of you don't want it. There's hundreds of others that do. And so I think that if I'm going to start asking for more money, then you know, I'm going to be chased out. And so I think those for me are the reasons why we just sort of tried to steer clear of it.

Melanie:

Fearful. It's interesting, isn't it? I do remember, you know, as a younger artist, somebody saying to me, never say what you're being paid, because someone will immediately value you at that level and put you in that box and we sort of grow up with this fear of of talking about it or letting slip or being transparent about it. And that's an interesting point that you make there, Lou, about, it's less transactional for us because our heart is so wrapped up in it, it's less about black or white. Although maybe, you know, maybe it should be maybe it shouldn't be, let's unpick that some more. So both of you are independent and freelance, both of you have numerous saleable skills which you use to make your living. And I wondered if you'd tell us a little bit about you and what you offer. So what would somebody buy you in to do? Jeanefer?

Jeanefer:

Good question. As all artists, we're always trying to think about what is really different about us what makes us unique? And I think that's a question you asked the question, and it's a question that is constantly in my head. I'm always thinking about it. So if you buy Jeanefer's services, what do you get that's different. I think it's just because of who I am and the values I bring to the work that I do my own personal values, and I carry that wherever I go. And and in terms of my work, it's the Yeah, it's the thing that I try to ensure is always part of what I'm doing, the conversations I'm having, the value I put on other people. Whatever position I'm in, I want to have a conversation on an equal level. And it's about I think when you buy Jeanefer you get someone who listens to others, allows the other creative voices into a space in a project and really happy to kind of stand back and then allow things to really grow and unfold.

Melanie:

I'm interested in how you've answered that, because I kind of expected you to say, you could get me as a choreographer, you could get me as a teacher, but actually what we could buy Jeanefer for is something very different to that. And I suppose how that plays out, or those values you talked about, might play out in those other more specific roles, but you've intentionally almost removed yourself from those...

Jeanefer:

Titles.

Melanie:

Those very specific things, those titles, and are looking at the bigger picture. And Lou, what can we get you for?

Lou:

So the way I look at it really is that all I have for sale is my time. And if you want to buy it, you can have it. And yes, I hope I bring all my values and all my experience and knowledge into that. But actually, I think I have it slightly easier than some other artists in the I'm a dramaturg. And that's all I do. So it's quite clear what my offer is, I think I'm a facilitator as well, but the two kind of merge together. So if people want to investigate their own practice, or if they want some help developing their own ideas, or their shows or whatever, then they might bring me in. And yes, in terms of values, it's my love, and my thoughtfulness and my care. And you know, 100 years of experience doing this, but really, all I've got is so many hours per day, outside of that there is nothing. So that's how I think of it is how much of my time would you like, and if you get my time, I'll give you everything I've got within that time.

Melanie:

That is really interesting. So that's your metric, actually, those are your little measuring blocks, the bits, that you're selling is your time and what you fill those with is whatever that person needs of you, but it's your full attention they're getting and the values that you're talking about. So that kind of leads me really nicely into this next question, which is about in terms of financial sustainability, and never before has that been thrown to the fore as it has done in this last year. How important is the portfolio career model to how you've been able to keep you and your families alive and well? And I wondered whether you could give us an example of where perhaps you've used one skill set as a market for another has disappeared. Now you've just said, Lou that you only have one skill? And I, I'm not sure that's true. I think you've built quite a big and wide ranging business around yourself. But I also love your clarity of thinking in terms of those metrics. But would you say that that flexibility has helped you through this tough time being able to offer one thing or another?

Lou:

Yeah, there's a few things there, I think. So when COVID all kicked off. I genuinely thought, Okay, well, that was fun. I had a nice career. It's over. I'm not going to work again. Because it just felt, I felt so, like in a hideously privileged position. And I lost all my work, everything stopped for a while. And I was thinking as a woman of a certain age, how can I be this age and not have a job? How have I let that happen? It's a ridiculous idea that I'm freelance at this point in my life. And I was really, really envious of all the people that had jobs. And then of course, time passed, and we saw people losing their jobs and people being furloughed, and that was all its own unique horror. And I realised I've got a whole different set of skills, which is I've only ever been freelance, I've always had 20-30 jobs on at once. You know, if I'm lucky. And I'm flexible, resilient, I'm able to work from home, I always have worked online. So after the period of quiet, I started to just thank my lucky stars that I had that flexibility. And also, you know, I thought what help can I do with myself. So I set up my own podcast still available now: Downtime.

Melanie:

And very beautiful. It got me through lockdown. 1.0.

Lou:

So I realised that that was a way of me using my skills and my passions, and my interest just to get myself through the day. But then the other thing that's happened is I've got international work that I would never have gotten otherwise, if it weren't for COVID. So I've got two shows opening in the Adelaide Dance Festival in March, which is purely because people suddenly decided it was okay to only have a relationship on Zoom. And so I think that the kind of flexibility and the digital nature of the work had already set me up to survive this time without having to diversify too much. I've just kept doing what it is I do. Less - but consistently, which I'm incredibly grateful for. I've weathered quite a lot of storms in my long career. And so I was eventually able to see this is one of those, I think.

Melanie:

Interesting and geography has played into that as well, opening those doors for you. Jeanefer, how's it been for you?

Jeanefer:

First of all, when lockdown happened, all my work just came to a pause because I work as a mass movement coordinator. So around that March period is when I start bringing teams together and thinking about the summer months and festivals. And of course that was just not possible. I then decided to sort of reflect and just look at what did that really mean and look at myself in a place where nothing ahead was certain. And I realised that I have been in that place. as a freelancer. There's always a period of uncertainty. I call it the wilderness and I've reflected on this before and

thought What do I do in that place? And usually it's a place where I'm reflecting on my work. It's a place where I give myself time to pick up the phone say shall we meet for a coffee? What are you up to? This is what I'm thinking about. So that's what I realised I could still do. And I just had an extended version. In fact, in March, when lockdown happened, I was just coming out of that wilderness period and starting to wake up and ready to go. And then I was forced back into an extended wilderness. So I thought, I'll just do what I normally do, which is lie low. Thankfully, money wasn't my biggest concern, because I have a home and I'm lucky, my family, you know, I'm supported that way. So I just thought Yeah, just do what you normally do. Stop. Don't worry. Don't panic, keep picking up the phone, you can do it on Zoom now to find out how other people are. That was really important for me, how are other people, the people I've been working with? So I spent a period of time doing that. But actually, something happened to me is no, as soon as I get in into that role, Black Lives Matter came along. And then I wasn't really allowed to stop and be in the wilderness anymore. I felt I had to come out. And I had to join forces with the force that was out there, everybody who wanted to say, yeah, inequality is not okay. You know, it's time for for change. I found myself having conversations with my usual go to people. And even those people had another agenda, which is Black Lives Matter. What are we going to do, you know, I am your white friend, you know, suddenly, people were describing themselves, I am that white privilege person, Jeanefer, what are we going to do about this, or the black person would say what are we going to do so there was a very much, you know, lots of conversations about Black Lives Matter. But somehow out of that what came out was, without me realising it, then I started getting emails. Jeanefer, would you mentor me, Jeanefer, could you work as my creative consultant online, Jeanefer, I want to really think about the outdoor arts. And of course, I was already there. And lots of people are thinking of shifting from indoors to outdoors. So can you help me? So there was something about, you know, a force happening without me really even realising it was happening. And suddenly, I was on Zoom, looking at a site and a bridge and a river in a boat, you know, out just outside Birmingham for an idea that someone had and thought, God, this is really doable. So yeah, something happens there that shifted for me. And yeah.

Melanie:

It's so fascinating, isn't it? It's such a traumatic year. And I remember speaking to you Jeanefer, and you being exhausted by that barrage of you being the person that had the solution. We did that so wrong in that time. But then the way that those possibilities have opened up for both of you has been really interesting as you suddenly go, Oh, hang on, there might be a market there.

Lou:

Also, like you, Jeanefer, I've noticed lots of people have got DYCP grants or have other opportunities and ways of focusing in on their practice. And I've always done practice dramaturgy so working with artists outside of production. But I've been a lot more lately, because people have had this time just to reflect on who they are, what they're doing, and how they're going to survive this and also how they want to come out of this better, fresher, you know. And packed full of ideas as well. So it's been a really lovely time, you know, as well as not for people to kind of take stock of what

their practice is and figure out ways to go forward, obviously, in the hope that soon enough, they'll be set free. And off they'll go and make some brilliant potentially better work.

Melanie:

Developing Your Own Practice grants. Did either of you two go for that?

Jeanfer:

No.

Lou:

I did a while ago, not lately. I can't bear the idea!

Melanie:

I know, all that unpaid work, we'll get to that.

Jeanfer:

I see these grants out there. And I feel almost a bit strange about applying. Because I'm so aware that there are so many people who are just not as fortunate, and are just fighting to survive and stay in this industry. So there's something about me that's just thinking about these things that are brewing and just putting them a bit on hold, because work is coming in actually, which is great. I mean, I'm even talking about a tour of my piece this summer. So you know, how lucky am I?

Melanie:

So I'm fascinated as I talk to artists, because if we were selling products, we would be right up there guys, the best best iPhone, it does this does this got this function. But as soon as you start talking about yourself, that feels different somehow. And so what I wanted to ask you is I know you've both talked about the values you have of the world, but do you value yourself? Or how does that come into play as you consider how to price your work?

Lou:

Yeah, I do. Actually, I think I'm quite old compared to lots of people in this industry. And I feel that in a positive and sometimes negative way, but I just feel I have got a huge amount of experience. And I think that's why people hire me, and I have really clear needs to feed my family and I won't devalue myself, I just won't anymore. I think this is something that you learn. I didn't used to be like this, that's for sure. And there might be some times I'll work for a bit less because I really want to and I think I you know, like we all do that don't mean invest in something but I do that less and less because I

have proved to myself that, dare I say it across the years, that I have value and actually it can sometimes be quite significant value and sometimes I can work on a show that will then talk for 15 years, and I'll think oh Blimey, I got three grand for that. That's not very much. You know, and so it goes both ways. And I think I've learned to understand my own expertise, how long I've been doing this for how much impact I can have on a process or production, and how long a life that can have after I'm directly involved. And I just think that's worth money. And I've become comfortable with the idea that if you don't, then that's okay. Don't hire me. Because I've got enough people that will, thankfully currently. So I feel pretty, it's not that I find these conversations easy, but I have quite a clear bottom line that I won't go below. And that's that, really.

Melanie:

Yeah. Jeanefer, how about yourself?

Jeanefer:

Yeah, definitely. I think it's just so important to value myself. Otherwise, I just don't think I can really be my best out there. And I also think it's not always about money. So ideally, I would get paid what I would call properly for a job. But even when I get paid properly, I find that I often go over and above because that just seems to be the nature of the job. But yes, I do value myself. And I guess I try to make sure that I believe in myself, and I don't need to get someone else's permission to say, Jeanefer, you're great. I don't need that. I just want to feel honestly, that I am doing really great work. Yeah, definitely, there's just something about if I looked at my earnings on an annual basis, and we thought about money, then it wouldn't be massive. But when I think about richness of experience, what is clearly coming to me now, actually during lockdown, is what people are asking of me is an endorsement of how much I've given out there and how much experience I've had. And that really makes me feel very valuable. I found that I was doing my accounts, because you know, late accounts in January. And when I was just looking at one section of it, I had employed 26 people, as a freelancer, I had given 26 artists over a 12 month period, work. And I felt really proud about that. I felt that was really valuable, you know.

Melanie:

That's more than some organisations!

Jeanefer:

Yeah, and I mean, it might have been one day here. And it could have been 10 days here. So it was a mixture. But I saw that as I felt valued. I felt something special looking at that and realise how important my contribution to the industry was. I think it's very, very valuable. And I'm needed. So there was something a bit of an aha moment when I looked at that.

Melanie:

And both of you have talked a little bit about age in this conversation and whether age brings with it a higher price tag. And I wondered what you felt about that there's been a lot talked about younger artists in these COVID times. And Jeanefer, you've talked about feeling lucky that you've got support network around the that you've probably got some sense of maturity and longevity of your career. But I wondered in an industry that seems to place that high value on youth, how do we sell the idea that experience should command a price? Lou, do you have a thought about that?

Lou:

Well, it does and it doesn't, you know, there are lots of jobs that tend to be given to younger people, you know, dancing works specifically that of course, I'm not in the running for never was. I know in Europe, they pay people more, the older you are. And I first hit that when I was quite young, and I was a bit like, oy! But actually I get that now I understand that experience is worth something and that there is something about expertise, or at least I got that before COVID, let's say and I think quite rightly now, there has been a shift in noticing, you know, the situation that young artists find themselves. What is considered tolerable is ridiculous. You know, we've always known that. But now there's more public discourse about that. The lack of value that the arts have inherently in society. I don't know, I think that does need shifted, but I think that I have a certain currency now I'm aware that that will dwindle potentially quite soon. And that's something I'm mindful of. But yeah, I think right now, my main concern, which is a sign of privilege, I guess is about young people, and how the hell we get them through this and how they stay. And artists stay well and stay as artists and how they come through this, you know, with all the opportunities that we had, and I've set up a few of my own bursaries. And I was funded by Surf The Wave to do a couple more, just because you know, what the hell else can I do? I think there's a crisis, but it's for young people. That's not for me. Anyway, currently. I'll get back to you when it is.

Melanie:

And how about you, Jeanefer? You said that you've had quite a lot of people emailing you is that people seeking out that experience from you?

Jeanefer:

Yeah. And I think I suppose the main point is, when I think about asking more, it comes with age and experience, but actually more significantly is that the more experience I get, the more I realise how much I need to invest in my work in order to bring a greater value to the one day that you employ me for. So that I think is the experience that I'm asking for more money for. A higher daily rate is because by the time you've employed me at this certain rate, what I have paid for in order to give a greater offer to you has been more expensive. And I think that for me is key. And I think one can decide to do that at any age, because I really see the value in investing in me in having the business coach and having the project assistant, when the project is too big for one person to just go look, take a cut in your daily rate, and just give someone else a job. So you're creating opportunities, but

also you're learning a lot, this young person, for example, will come with so much more knowledge on you know, social media and, you know, software, and that will add value to that day rate that I'm charging to that customer. So for me, that's the most important bit. So I find older artists who won't necessarily want to ask for the price idea, because I've seen that they haven't spent that investment, they haven't spent that money, they've gone on a different journey. And I just have chosen that one.

Melanie:

Yes. I wanted to ask you very practically both of you how you do charge for your time just for those listeners, that might be a bit of a loss of where to start. And it's interesting, Jeanefer, that you say there that there are occasions when your day rate actually might not be for just your time, but for the package you might be bringing the team that you might be bringing however big or small they might be. Do you both operate day rates? Is there other ways that you price your time is, you know, do you move into a sort of weekly rate or a project rate any tips for anyone listening about how you charge?

Lou:

For me, it's either my day rate, or I tend to sell two hours at a time. And I have packages of that. So like 8, 12 and 16 hours. What happened to me was I found that I've often got lots of jobs on and if people were asking me for like a day, or four hours, I end up with 40 jobs on and I'm not necessarily making a decent living, but I'm definitely going out of my mind. So I realised they had to stop that and had to sort of minimum chunks of work. And I tried to change my fee according to who it is that I'm working for. So if I'm working with a big ballet company, I charge a lot more than I would for an independent artist. And as I say, I don't have a huge amount of flexibility within those ranges. But I have some.

Melanie:

Do those go with your gut? Or have you sort of got a little rate card for yourself?

Lou:

I have a rate card. It changes. You know, I have to say that I'm not very good at this stuff. I you know, I feel like I understand my value. And I do have a bottom rate. But I'm not great at negotiating. I could often negotiate royalties, and I don't because I don't know how to. So I don't want to set myself up as someone who knows what they're doing here. But that is what I do. I have packages of time available. There are eight hours in a working day. But I can't do four Zooms in a working day because I can't go from one person's world to another person's world a minute later. I get quite deeply into these worlds. So I need to recharge afterwards and clear the palace and start again the most I can do two working days three. I'm not good at it so it's taken me a long time to figure this out. And I'm sure the work that Jeanefer's been doing with the task force. I wish that that had happened 20 years ago, and we would have helped me be clearer about this.

Melanie:

I'd say that you're undervaluing yourself.

Lou:

Am I quite a tough bargainer Mel?

Melanie:

I think you're undervaluing yourself. No, I think that business like way you've carved up your day and understanding that you have about you've got to somehow make that day fee, even if you're chopping it up into three. I think that's a really businesslike way of doing it. And actually, going back to what Jeanifer said right at the beginning of preferring not to maybe speak about money, it's maybe a tool, isn't it to be able to say, Well, this is my rate card as if the rate card itself is speaking. Kind of de-personalise it in a way.

Lou:

Can I just tell a little story about that? So, my friend, the filmmaker Becky Edmonds told me this story once. She told me about an artist. Actually, I don't know who that was. So this is a genius idea of someone I don't know. And what this artist did, he pretended he had an assistant called Jeanette, and he created an email for Jeanette. And basically, whenever anybody said to him, you know how much you want for this. He said, Oh, I'm sorry, I can't talk to you. You need to talk to Jeanette. And then when he spoke through Jeanette's voice, he was really firm and really good at asking for a really good rate. And I was really inspired by that. I think it's brilliant. And I haven't done that. But I do channel Jeanette, and I do think what would Jeanette say now? She would say no way! I want such and such! But it's like you said at the beginning Jeanifer about people doing it for you. You know, I've never had that. So I channel Jeanette. Who whoever.

Melanie:

That's a for really good tip. Jeanifer, how do you charge your time? Do you have any tricks like that?

Jeanifer:

Yeah, I mean, I think that one's great. And I have found myself having a project coordinator because it's all project based. And then when they come off the project, there's an email that still exists with their name. And I might reply to a new inquiry with that project coordinators email. That's not one that I want to publicise because sometimes you just have to do it but yeah, I've done it now. But again, it's taken a while and it's through coaching sessions and and investing in me and looking at what this is all about. And that going back to value. The way I've worked it out over the years is

looking at what do I need to survive on what do I need in a year before I even work, to pay my mortgage, to have my holidays, to do the things that I think I deserve, like what do I deserve? How much does that come to? How much is it if you divide it by 12 months? What does that mean I need to earn per month? And then what else do I need to do to get better at what I'm doing, which is the project coordinator, the courses, add that on, then divide that into 12 months, what does that look like? And then think, well, realistically, just what Lou is saying you can't work seven days a week, because you need the time away, to do the job brilliantly. So realistically, real full on work is about three days a week, so then I take the whole total. And it realistically, I don't get three days a week of work 52 weeks in the year, it's more if I'm lucky, 40 weeks in the year. So can you see what I'm doing. I'm calculating what I need, plus what I want to spend on personal professional development, dividing that by 40, and then taking that 40 and dividing that by three days a week and looking at what that rate looks like. And each year I do that review. And so when I say this is my fee, and someone goes oh really? Well, this is what I need if you want the best of me. I start with my values, again, what I think I deserve, if I'm going to take myself seriously that I really am an artist working then I need to be able to you know not be scrimping and scraping all the time.

Melanie:

That's brilliant. That's another amazing tip. And I love the way that you've built in your personal development there as well. But not just as an add on luxury. No, this is a fundamental part of what you need to be you, you know. I think that that's genius and really helpful. So, Jeanefer, I'm gonna fire this one at you. And I'm really interested in your opinion on this one from being within the Task Force. We're reading so much about freelancers and the precariousness of that job choice at the moment. And I just wanted to ask a blunt question, which is, if somebody offered either of you a PAYE position, would you take it?

Jeanefer:

No.

Melanie:

And I asked this question, because sometimes the narrative that's coming across from journalists seems to be we need to turn more freelancers into PAYE and I don't ever feel that's what's needed. It feels to me that we choose and I was once freelance as well to be freelance because of the work life balance it offers because of the flexibility in terms of the different jobs, different artists, the challenges, the creativity. There's a lifestyle there that you're opting for, which has its pros and its cons. And there's a lifestyle that comes with a sort of PAYE. I was interested in unpicking that. Lou, would you have said the same as Jeanefer, which was very clear! We know exactly where you are!

Jeanefer:

I have got a reason why.

Melanie:

Tell me, tell me.

Jeanfer:

Well, the reason why is what you've just said, is the flexibility and the freedom. And I feel as if I can get a wider understanding of my industry by being in that world. And there are no limits, there are no barriers, no boundaries. Whereas if I'm paid, I'm working on a specific thing. But having said that, I have done PAYE say two days a week. And that hasn't happened for a long time. And that was how I used to do it part PAYE part freelance, in order to know that there was some sort of stability in terms of paying bills, but as soon as I could, I've moved away from that. And I do think, oh, should I be getting a proper job? Proper job! Paid, you know, knowing you've got a salary coming in each month. And yeah, I'm just not attracted to that.

Melanie:

Yes, interesting.

Lou:

I think it's the same for me, every now and again, I think, oh, gosh, it'd be really nice to have a job. But it's the same thing. Every time I get even near to thinking that I think, oh, but then I couldn't do this. And I couldn't do this. And oh, look that's about to kick off. And that's really exciting. So I think I'm sort of addicted to this lifestyle. But at the same time, there is something about loneliness, actually, as a freelancer, and I really would like to belong somewhere. I do find it when the turnover is like mine. I feel like I'm constantly saying goodbye to people. Therefore, I'm constantly saying hello to people. But that's not really how it feels. I feel like I'm constantly saying goodbye. And so Truthfully, I wouldn't mind a bit of a balance so that it wasn't quite so yeah, though, I didn't have quite so many plates spinning and I did have somewhere to call home. I think actually, that would be quite a nice thing. But in terms of doing that full time. No, I can't imagine that that would ever fit back into my life. But for lots of positive reasons, like you say, you know, the shape of the work and the opportunities and also the childcare and you know, all of it really.

Jeanfer:

You know, what Lou just said about loneliness is a real big issue for freelancers. I think that's the one that you want to get the balance right. I find I feel so much better when I'm working with at least someone and I'm always excited about the project that brings together a team rather than something that relies on just me to make this thing amazing.

Melanie:

That's a really interesting thing to have drawn out from this actually because I think as an organisation, you certainly, the value you get in employing a freelancer is the rich knowledge and the sector wide offer knowledge that they bring to the job, all of those contacts, ideas from other things. It's just constantly refreshing. But that's so interesting. It's the loneliness and the home that we need to try and give freelancers and not necessarily the Do you want five days a week job which puts a can on all of the creativity that you've actually spent a long time building into your lifestyle and your work. That's something for me to take away.

Lou:

Yeah, it might sound silly, but I worked with South East Dance for many years. And I got invited to their Christmas parties, which was just amazing for me, because I've never had anything like and I used to spend, you know, six months a year looking forward to it. But that is how it is when you have a high turnover of clients. But I do think it's an interesting thing for organisations like Greenwich Dance, to wonder what else you can offer, not just space, not just money, but some sort of validation, some sort of listening, some sort of care, that actually freelancers really rarely have, I think.

Melanie:

Which again, slides me straight into my next question, which is about those other ways of valuing? And actually, you've just mentioned some of them. Being part of a team seems to feel like it's one. I wondered whether crediting you know, you mentioned, suppose it was more to do with salary, but I can completely understand where you come from when you mentioned seeing a tour fly and then realising that maybe the value that was placed on you in that part has been overlooked a little. What else do you draw on in terms of how you feel valued by someone that might be buying in your skills?

Lou:

For me, I don't mean to mean to sound bitter but there's just no question that I'm airbrushed across time. And if a show tours for a long time, I get airbrushed and even my name falls down the credit list. There is a particular sort of pain of going on an artist's website or a festival or a venue or something other than seeing myself not credited when I should have been. And I can't tell you how often that happens. If I had a pound. Twice this week, let's put it that way. And so that is painful. And it really de-motivates me. Because I feel like I'm busting my gut over here. And I know I'm having impact that matters to me, that really, really matters to me. And then yes, it's really wonderful when people remember to invite you to things, and they show you the new programme, they just let you know. And I don't need too much. But it's amazing the effect, a little bit of care there can have. And I've worked on a couple of really big shows, where I've stood in the bar afterwards and basically had no one to talk to, because the artistic director was busy being adored. And I'm just like there paralytically alone. And it's really uncomfortable. And I've learned to say that and to say to people, you know what, tell them to come and introduce themselves because I don't know who anyone is

here. And that's the kind of thing that actually then a few times people have really gone out their way to look after me. And that means the world to me, that kind of thing.

Melanie:

That's really interesting. Jeanefer, you are nodding a lot there.

Jeanefer:

Yeah, no, I'm echoing what Lou says about just when you've worked so hard and you felt that you've been working as a team. And then it's time for that great moment. And then you notice that you're just standing there alone. I suppose what I have done is just ensure that that doesn't happen. Getting in there and just saying hi. And again, it's about investment. Sometimes I try to anticipate that that's going to happen. And then I get someone you know, my project coordinator or whoever, and they're paid and they need to be there. And it's to help me pick up those conversations. Because really, it's conversations that leads from one job to another. So I really can't afford to be missing in a conversation. So the most important thing for me, and what makes me feel valued is when I'm invited into a conversation and that the process is transparent. I really hate it when I'm you know, supposed to be working on a project. And I feel by the time I come to do a day that so many conversations that has happened that I'm catching up on just because no one can be bothered to pay me to be at those conversations. And you know, just bring the movement director in here, the choreographer in at this point. I remember that being quite frustrating. Again, with time, I've tried to ensure that I'm not in these situations anymore. But yeah, that's really been an issue.

Melanie:

So that's another really great point. I can't remember who said this, I heard this phrase. It had something to do with gender imbalance and working with your elbows out, you know, trying to make bigger space for yourself. And we shouldn't be making our freelancers work that way, should we when we are reliant so much on the skills they bring? These are all really interesting things to take on board, I think. So we've been talking about you and your work and the products that you make. And so part of that that comes with that is the selling of yourself. And I wondered how you felt about being that commodity and what proportion of your time is spent in the selling? And have you found any good ways of doing that? Are you proficient on your website, social media? Or is that all just horrendous? Can you afford to pay anyone to do it for you? How do you treat the selling of yourself? The marketing of yourself? Lou, how about you because you built a whole website and organisation around yourself which I find fascinating.

Lou:

And I find it hilarious that you say that. I think that whilst I have enough work and it's sustains itself, and I'm very lucky and I'm actually very proud of that. I'm actually woeful at all of this. I don't do anything to get work. I really enjoyed hearing Jeanefer talk about her business coach that you know

that the investments she's given put into herself, which I don't do. I've done a couple of things and I've really seen how valuable they could be, but I just don't really do them. There is something about money and other things I need to spend it on. But also there's something about self worth, which is crazy, because of course, I've been my entire career encouraging artists to advocate for themselves look after themselves invest in themselves. So I need to get a lot better at that. And I'm aware of that. And in terms of No, I'm terrible at social media, like, I'm so terrible. I'm terrible at networking. I run clear every time I think there's a possible conversation that I could have that would be useful, it sends me in the opposite direction, which is pathetic. The one interesting thing that what I realised that when I did my podcast, I felt a bit more comfortable about selling that because it was a thing. It wasn't me. Of course, it was a thing I'd made, and I was in it, but I actually just suddenly found myself sending it to people that I would never have sent myself to. So that was useful. And yes, I have a website. And yes, I work quite hard on that a while ago, it needs attention. And that was a great experience for me articulating all of that in a more careful way. But really, I think I'm embarrassingly bad at it. And I'm, I'm sort of ashamed of that if I'm honest.

Melanie:

That's heartbreaking. I feel the opposite. Jeanefer, how do you feel about that? Are you good at that?

Jeanefer:

Yeah, I don't think see as selling myself or selling my work. I don't often think like that. I think I've been lucky that a lot of my work has been word of mouth, to the point where I have gone Hang on a minute, Do you realise what word of mouth career means? It means that anytime someone thinks about something that you could usefully do they call you. So what do you want to do? I've asked myself. So in terms of getting work, I think the thing I do most is ensure that every conversation I have, I leave with really hearing where things are up for this person, what their needs are, what they think of doing, what they're growing their ideas, and I talk about mine, and then I just walk away. I do have this really strong feeling of let the universe decide which you know, not everyone believes in. But I do think there is an energy that I just put out there, I use my energy. I try to create an authentic space, I try to make it as true as possible those conversations, I try to ensure that it's really clear that I'm just interested in you when we're talking. And then I want to share my ideas. And then I walk away knowing that the conversation I've had makes it possible for me to work with you because of what you're doing. But it may not happen for whatever reason. And then I just trust basically. So that's how I sell myself if you'd say that. Yeah, maybe it's a privilege thing as well, that I have been lucky. It's word of mouth often, and then being busy with the investing in myself. And also knowing that you got to spend money to make money. So that's what I do. Just focus on what I need, what is it I need to do to just make my work stronger? And then I just go, right, okay, so when you you know, when we have a conversation, it will be obvious that I'm the right person for this job. And if it's not, then it wasn't right. And then you know, hey ho. Hey, ho!

Melanie:

I was gonna ask both of you how true you found that mantra that you're only as good as your last job. And I think it's so true that the way you get ahead in this business is by building up a good reputation, because it is so much about that following and that word of mouth. How does that feel for you, Lou? Does that feel true for you?

Lou:

Yeah, it's definitely true. You know, all of my work comes from word of mouth, or they've seen my name and a programme or something or other. And actually for me, truthfully, I feel like I'm only as good as my last hour, because my job is about figuring out what my job is all of the time for each individual artists. You know, I'm not saying that I'm always stressed and always insecure. But I am always thinking, Is this it? Is this, why? Am I doing the right thing, and I can regularly - had one yesterday, have a little panic about not sure I know how to do this job. I don't know what you need. And the thing is, sometimes it doesn't work. Happily, it's rare. But if it doesn't work, then that relationship is over for me. But luckily, I have enough plates spinning and enough good relationships in my path. And so problems are rare. But sure, it feels true that there's a temporary nature to it.

Melanie:

Goes back to what we were saying earlier, isn't it A about the portfolio, the lots of spinning of the plates, that flexibility and resilience that gives you but also that thing that you said right at the beginning, Lou of feeling that there's always someone else that can take your place. So actually, you're always trying to overperform in a way and actually, I think there's a little bit of us in our sector just sprinkled in there as well, and how we all want to do the very best.

Lou:

Sorry I think I was talking about the sector then I don't. No, sounds really arrogant. But I don't necessarily think that there is somebody there in the wings waiting to take my place. It's just I think we're bred to think that in the arts and that we should be grateful to even be in this industry, which is true, because it is often a source of privilege, or luck or something.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Lou:

So yeah.

Melanie:

I agree with that. So few jobs, lots of people wanting them.

Jeanfer:

Just thinking of one really good tip I think is I find it really useful, when I'm being considered for a job that the person who is you know, making that decision has already heard about me from several different other people who they respect. And so I think that value in networking, which we all cringe about is just so, so important. And it makes all the difference if someone else can talk about you to that decision maker and endorsed the work. So I think that's really, really crucial.

Melanie:

That's a really good point. So we're almost coming to the end. But I've got a couple of very last questions. I wondered, as an immediate response to COVID, so many organisations started to put their work online for free. And I remember at the time that there was a conversation bubbling about whether artists were ever going to be able to rebuild a culture of paying for performance after this time, and very quickly, I think those very same organisations started to withdraw that free content and think about ways they could monetize it, because we realised the situation wasn't the three week lockdown, we all perhaps went into it thinking it was it was here to stay. And I wondered whether you have seen in your own work that starting to play out for you, or shifting for you or changing for you in any way, Jeanfer?

Jeanfer:

Yeah, because my work, I mean, I don't do anything unless I'm paid. So I think in fact, the lockdown has made be more conscious about ensuring that unpaid. Especially as I'm on the dance Freelance Task Force, which is all about our rights as freelancers. So from my point of view, I haven't found myself doing work for free. And in a way, it's something that I would have decided long ago that I wasn't going to do because I value what I do. But I have been aware you're absolutely right, Melanie, it seems to be something that is how we started responding to COVID. Lots of free performances. I remember when I was putting my piece Black Victorians on at a festival.org. And I was asked the question, do you mind if we film this? And then we can put it on YouTube to reach a wider audience, which sounds like a really generous thing to do? And I just said, No, it's like, no, because first of all, that is going to be one camera facing in one direction or two, there's not going to be any big investment in editing it. And my work is just going to be on a flat screen. And it's just going to have no substance at all. Plus, it's just come out of work in progress. So I don't even know how it's going to go down live yet much less filming it and having it forever on YouTube to be generous to the world. So I just said no. So I think that was really important that shift for me. And I think a lot of people came to that conclusion.

Lou:

Yeah, I guess I've seen artists come to that conclusion themselves. But I haven't really been involved in those discussions. But I just want to say something about, I'm just wary of sounding like somebody you know, of my age, who's got all these boundaries about not working for free. And I think I mean, this isn't ideal. But when I was younger I did and when I coach or when I work with younger people, I try to say that how many of these do you think you've got in you? How many times can you afford to do this for free? Or for cheap? How many times can your uncle lend you 50 quid? How many lifts can you get from your dad or these sorts of things? And I don't think that's right, necessarily. I wish that the industry didn't ask that of us. But the thing is, when you're starting out, you do have to prove your track record. And maybe there are things that people are prepared to do for free. But it's about being mindful of how long for, what the point is, or what it will get them. And when they're going to draw the line and say, do you know what, no, I'm doing well, I'm doing this properly. And this is worth money. But I just think it's a bit easy to sit here and say no, no, no, no. Because actually, it took me years to get to that point.

Jeanfer:

Yes, you're absolutely right, Lou, you're absolutely right. As a young artist, I was doing so much because I didn't even think about it is free. I thought about it as going around and getting as much experience as possible. That's how I saw it. So I didn't put a money thing to it. Because free doesn't work the same for me.

Lou:

Yeah it feels like an amazing opportunity. Oh, my God, I get to do this!

Jeanfer:

Opportunities, yes. I work them at random.

Melanie:

Networking and knowledge base.

Lou:

But I think it's the job of the agencies to try not to ask people to do that, you know, we shouldn't be asking that of people, but they can set their own boundaries.

Melanie:

Yes, I think the digital one we've explored in a couple of podcasts and we won't be over yet. I think that one's going to pop up a lot as we all grapple with, What does it mean to widen our audience and think about digital in that way? But the one bit of the question that I didn't make very clear, I

think is do you think that the audience expectation of paying for art has changed at all? And has that sort of touched your work in any way? And I'll refer to my mum again, bless her, I don't know if she'll listen so it'll be all right. Because she was happily tuning into the Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals really looking forward to it, I think I've mentioned this on a podcast previously. And then as soon as I sent her something and said, You know, this is seven pounds. She's said: I'm not paying for that. But I thought, why don't why not? You've just been enjoying it. You know, she doesn't have a lot of money, admittedly. But it is a choice about where we put our money. And yeah, so I wonder and I'm still watching those audiences now to see what culture we've started to introduce in terms of whether people pay for arts but I, I remember artists sort of going, how are we ever going to make a living now? Maybe it's not as bad as that sounds, but Jeanefer being in the Freelance Taskforce, I wondered whether that had come up at all in any of those conversations you've been having as a group.

Jeanefer:

No, that hasn't really been one of the main conversations, but just as you're talking and just thinking about your mum and what she said. And just thinking about what that might mean. Sometimes I wonder if even I who have thought about and have done paid to watch things, but actually not that much online, if I've even seen the value, not even in the artwork that I'm going to see. But maybe I'm not paying because I don't see the value in the experience for me, because I'm actually in my front room watching it. And it's not the same as getting on the tube and going to the theatre and buying that coffee or that drink. And then sitting and seeing it like that, to me is like I pay for that. But if you're going to give me everything online, but I'm in the end, I'm at home, I might just do something else.

Melanie:

I think that's an incredible point. We've got things like Netflix and iPlayer, and it's very hard to compete with those, isn't it. Which aren't free, but almost are once you've subscribed so it feels like you're not paying for them anymore. So I feel that that's quite a good place to stop. I think we've covered a lot of ground. It's so interesting. So thank you both for being with me. And if you'd like to hear more episodes about subjects moving artists of today, search for Talking Moves wherever you get your podcasts. Don't forget to subscribe, leave a review and spread the word. And for more information about Lou and Jeanefer, head on over to greenwichdance.org.uk. And do remember that if you know someone you think we should talk to or have a topic you'd like us to talk about, please tweet us @GreenwichDance. But for now, that's it from us and join us next time for more Talking Moves. Thank you both so very much. Now I'm wondering if we paid you enough!

Jeanefer:

Don't be silly. You have! We said yes. And that's it once we've said yes we don't think about it any more.

Lou:

Yes exactly. That's our responsibility.