

# TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

## Choreographic Approaches S03 / E05

### Episode Description

In this episode we talk to **Claire Cunningham** and **Jorge Crecis** about choreographic approaches.

The life of a choreographer is a complex one and on this podcast the reliance artists have on portfolio careers has come up in conversation a number of times. So we invited two inspirational and entrepreneurial choreographers to come and talk to us who have both branched out into a myriad of directions and in doing so forged their own unique aesthetic, process and mindset.

We begin by discussing the breadth of careers both Claire and Jorge have enjoyed and as part of that discussion find out a bit more about the things that make them tick, how they get ideas and most importantly how they record and remember them given that dance is sometimes a hard thing to pin down.

Jorge and Claire then talk about aesthetic and how that has, for both of them, become a by-product of a much deeper process of the making journey. We reflect upon Jorge's work and whether or not that stretches people to their limits and he makes the ever so valid point that whilst it does, it does so within a container of safety. This is echoed by Claire who also looks imaginatively at her own body and her 'four feet' (referring to her body and crutches) and the way in which she works with those crutches in a process of care and careful attention.

Both have, coincidentally, made works called 12 (Twelve) and so we use those works to delve deeper into the processes used in making them. For Claire this was a rare opportunity to work with other dancers, rather than as solo work, and she shares the thoughtful ways in which she approached the making of that work with both disabled and non-disabled dancers. Interestingly we discover that

they both use play, rules and problem solving to create structures within which to make the works they make.

Looking beyond the making process, we then explore other areas of the dance landscape that they inhabit... we talk about Claire's [Choreography of Care](#) symposium planned for next year and Jorge's methodology [Towards Vivencia](#) which supports dancers to stay at peak performance which can now be accessed online.

Finally we touch upon the big ideas that move them, the imprint they want to leave on the world and the questions they have of it.

### **Talking Moves is a Greenwich Dance production**

Presented by Melanie Precious

Production by Carmel Smith, Lucy White and Melanie Precious

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#### **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 choreographic approaches. The life of a choreographer is a complex one, and on this podcast the reliance artists have had on portfolio careers has come up in conversation a number of times. Today I'm joined by two inspirational and entrepreneurial choreographers who have branched out into a myriad of directions and in doing so forged their own unique aesthetic, process and mindset. There is much to talk about today, as I find out a bit more about the thought process behind the choice to be an inventor of both dance movement and approach. We have with us Claire Cunningham, and Jorge Crecis. Welcome both of you.

#### **Jorge:**

Thank you Mel.

#### **Claire:**

Thank you.

#### **Melanie:**

Describing the two of you is very difficult. Your career's so varied your skills so broad, and the word choreographer is only describing one element of that very career. So recognising that just give us a really quick romp through of your portfolio. Always hit you with a big one to start with. Jorge.

**Jorge:**

I think you just hit the nail in the head with entrepreneur. That's what we need to do these days. We create adventures and ventures in order to move forward. So yes, personally, I teach, I choreograph, I create online academies, I create workshops on site, and I create training methodologies for a state of consciousness. I think everything can be summarised on Yes, is an entrepreneurial dance industry or enterprise in which we try to approach from different angles, the same ethos or the same value that for me, is the state of consciousness of the performer. And that can be approached as a teaching workshops, choreographing companies as a commissioned choreographer, creating events, training the athletes, which is something I'm doing recently. So that's probably the summary of it.

**Melanie:**

Wonderful. Lots to dip into. Claire, how about you?

**Claire:**

Yeah, haven't thought of summing up my work in that way for a while.

**Melanie:**

Strange to define ourselves, isn't it when we're asked to do so. Busy.

**Claire:**

Yes, and the hats keep changing, or the titles keep changing, depending on who you talk to, or what room you're in. Yeah, I guess I started as a singer, a classical singer. So there's still elements of that that exist within my work. But I would often describe myself actually more as a performance maker than choreographer, because there's a lot of different disciplines in the performance work that I make. I started as a professional singer, musical theatre. Devised musical theatre, not like Cats or things like that, and then moved into dance, and then really unexpectedly moved into making my own work. And started with making solo work. I've made two group pieces, but predominantly, my work has been solo performance, that integrates the singing, sometimes a lot of text, sometimes video or puppetry, whatever seems appropriate. It's a very collaborative way of working, as I self identify as a disabled artists and disabled person. And so also, I do teach as well, but not a great deal. It's not my sort of most comfortable place. The making of work is actually a vehicle to perform. So for me, the predominant thing in my life is to perform and everything else was about leading towards that. I guess, I do a lot of advocacy work, particularly around trying to support and further

the work and the presence of disabled artists in the UK, but also quite often all around the world. I often get invited as a sort of first step introduction, in a lot of countries as to professional work by disabled artists, and to sort of generate conversations and spaces for disabled makers there to get the attention of the power brokers, the arts power brokers. I do a bit of mentoring, as well, again, more often with disabled artists. Yeah, so a lot of the advocacy work comes alongside making the work and performing.

**Melanie:**

That's fascinating stuff. And so before we dig into that, making, that performance making, and the tools and techniques that you're both using to do that, I'm really interested to know what inspires you and where you find your ideas and how you perhaps capture and collect them. And I think that's stemming from some work that we're doing as an organisation, as we think a little bit more holistically about our well being and how we operate within this very creative and fast paced world. So yeah, Jorge, how do you pin down an idea, maybe something that you might not be using immediately, but want to come back to what you do?

**Jorge:**

Something that has been very inspiring, I think, throughout my career has been what make us humans. So something that I keep saying very often is sometimes I do the same piece over and over again, they're looking that they look different. So I have the feeling that I've been doing the same work for the last 20 years, it only changes what are the props that we use, or what are the music that we use, but all in all, I'm fascinated about the idea of what is behind and I think those aspects are important, the cultural background, the different abilities that we have. I think those are very important, but what is underneath all of that, that is common to all of us who are serving what we call humanity. So I work a lot with consciousness. And I really like to research or research around, what is that thing that make us realise that we are who we are. But we don't really know what that consciousness is generated or nor actually, who makes me, me, even if I am completely different I was 10 years ago. So that's what inspires me and I love to watch documentaries, read about neuroscience or read the philosophical approaches about it, and how that informs our experience, our bodily experience of that consciousness. For us to use dance as a vehicle to research deeper into that skill, that trait that is fundamental to all of us that we all share. But at the same time, we don't know how the other person experiences it, which is really strange. So that's probably my biggest inspiration, that word consciousness.

**Melanie:**

And then when you find something that you're interested in, you want to work with this really practical thing. But how do you record that? Do you walk around with a notebook? Are you constantly documenting what you see? Have you've got post it notes or do you just mentally retain it all? Mobile phone?

**Jorge:**

Yes, I've been trying to get funding from Google for a really long time, because I use Google Documents all the time. I have such amount of Google documents, a spreadsheet, and everything for me is in the cloud. Because wherever I am in the world, I have access to that. So even if it's quotes or images or anything like that, it's organised in my Google Drive,

**Melanie:**

How appropriate everything is recorded in the cloud. As you think about neurosciences and all those great big ideas. How about you, Claire, what inspires you? And how do you keep hold of those ideas?

**Claire:**

I hadn't thought about how I document for quite a long time, actually. I think the things that have inspired me have shifted gradually, as well over 15 years now I've been making work. And then I can really trace that at first it was very much the crutches, my own crutches themselves, that were a very fresh sort of fascination. And that sort of beginning to work in dance was a very intimate and quite personal sort of discovery of like, inspiration of like, Oh, actually, what is the potential of this body, the flesh body and the body with the crutches and was very sort of inspired by you know, I would wake up at two in the morning, and think what if I'm balanced and two crutches and then I have another two crutches here? And you know, very early on that was the thing that I just was like, What can I do with crutches and in lots of different ways and with lots of crutches or only two crutches, you know. So there's been that sort of thing of like the objects themselves and my relationship with the crutches, which I can imagine is also something that kind of crosses over into Jorge's work with object like, what is the potential between this body and this object. And from there, it began to expand out. A lot of my work is, I guess, inspired by an interest in the lived experience of disability. And I think also what I recognise in Jorge talking a lot about perceptions. I think we have a lot of shared interests, we work in very different ways to explore it. But I think there's a lot of things we're both quite equally, equally fascinated by. And I began to sort of recognise that disability wasn't this thing of how I was perceived, but actually shaped how I perceive the world and how I engage with the world through my body, whether that's about what I literally notice visually in the world, where I move in space, what I move a certain way in space, who I notice in space, all of these things are not exclusively, but I became really interested in the particularity and the specificity of how the lived experience of disability shaped that. And then how that opens up more into like Crip Perspectives, and political perspectives around crip time, etc. And I think a big thing that underpins all of that, which was something that came from working with Jess Curtis, an American choreographer, that's a long term collaborator of mine. And the person who really first got me interested in working in dance really very deeply, was an interest in attention. And an attending to our attention is really at the root of that. It's interesting, because I think you said, Jorge, that you use dance to research deeper into these things. And I think maybe I think of it the other way, and that dance becomes a way of sharing

these things that I'm noticing. And these things that I'm learning. Dance then becomes a vehicle to share it or not explain it, but sort of to show it to other people.

**Melanie:**

And when you think of those ideas, like you said, You wake up at night thinking you lie awake at night thinking about how you might do things. Is it note forms? Do you scribble? Is it pictures? Again, are you somebody that walks around with paper and books? Or is it just being held in your head and then becoming movement? I find this so fascinating because movement is a thing that's hard to document, isn't it? So ideas are just less hard to capture. So I wondered as there are other choreography is listening to this, those tools of how you capture those things might be interesting.

**Claire:**

I think what I'm also trying to recognise is how my modes of working and indeed my modes of researching have really changed over the years. I used to write a lot and the first I'd say 5/6/7 years of working, writing and free writing for example is a big part of my practice. Notebooks were a big part of how I documented ideas, and they're still a part of the process. But I don't know, the relationship to reading and writing has really dropped away for me. And I began to really panic about that quite a lot for a long time. But then I'm very fortunate also that I work with have a long term collaboration with Luke Pell, as a dramaturg is a very, very important part of my work. And we began to sort of recognise, well one mode of documenting is talking with Luke.

**Melanie:**

Right, that's really interesting.

**Claire:**

I'm very fortunate that I have long term conversations with Luke over multiple projects. And one of the things Luke documents in a lot of ways as a living, breathing human document, but also in his own notes of like, what is going on with me and what's in between what I'm seeing what I'm not seeing, and the threads that he also draws across my work. So in a way, Luke is one of the ways in which ideas are worked out, but also held over time. But also we recognise that my work has shifted from being about taking notes and researching, in certain ways to being very much about conversation. And so actually a way in which my work exists or recorded is through the conversations I have with people. And so in ways that sometimes lives in their memories, so the collaborators that I talk with, and they bring that back into the room through their own memories and stuff. There are moments where also in process, I obviously use things like video at certain points that become useful. But yeah, writing I still do, write. But it's interesting how that has...

**Melanie:**

Yeah...

**Claire:**

I was really grieving it for a while. But I'm trying to recognise it as like things change and processes change, actually.

**Melanie:**

It's really exciting. And so through the process, as I was saying, not only have you become makers, but I feel that you've both become inventors, because you both seem to have this very unique aesthetic and vocabulary. But the more I dug into some research behind you, the more I started to feel the word aesthetic is perhaps a bit too cosmetic for what you do. Because actually the vocabulary that you're both devising comes from a much deeper place within you. And it's less about what it looks like more about why you're doing it, and the look of it is actually the byproduct of why you're doing it. So I wondered whether I'm right in saying that, and whether you could put into words what you think your aesthetic is, and why and how that came about.

**Jorge:**

Once again, I think you did your research really well, in my case, because I think I've written somewhere in my PhD or one of the interviews that the aesthetics of my work are the byproduct of the action. So what I tried to put or create when I make work is actually when I teach as well as to create a scenario that somehow it leads to the performer or to the participant of the workshop to a very specific state of mind or similar, because through the laboratory time, by trial and error, I tried different experiences in order to tap into different aspects of that consciousness. So once that has been researched previously, or as part of the research, I put the performance in the situation. So for those who are not familiar with my work, normally, as Claire was saying before, there's always, almost always, an object to relate to. One of my first works is 36 bottles of 1.5 litres of water being thrown in caught between 12 dancers with different ways, different combinations. The performers don't know which role they're gonna play every night. So we play with chance as well so they need to know 36 roles as well, because they are 12 dancers that they change roles three times within the piece. So yes the situation is quite... I loved what Claire was saying about the attending to the attention. So it's tapping into that awareness that whatever is happening on a stage it portrays a situation a scenario. And what it becomes for the audience's aesthetic is the byproduct of that action. Another work I have is myself skipping on the road for 45 minutes. So that's the object, the rope. So the aesthetic of exhaustion or motivation drive comes from the action of skipping for a really long time. I have another piece in which I built a five metres pyramid with bamboo poles first for Kingdom and then with steel for NCCA, National Centre for Circus Arts and how they relate without the structure and how they wave in and out. And so therefore I think I have a very strong sense of aesthetics. I like things that are beautiful and beautiful means something that is appealing to the eye, the senses, whatever beautiful, beauty means. So I pay a lot of attention to that as the first member of the audience. But what is happening on stage is a scenario. Then as a choreographer I'm shaping in a

way that also makes sense from outside. So it creates something that visually is appealing as well. So I said that comes as a byproduct of the action. But then there's another layer, which also takes care of how this looks like.

**Melanie:**

And it feels like you are stretching to the limit all the time. You know that bottle thing you haven't thought yourself, let's make this easy. You've gone. How can I make this as hard as possible? The marathon that you do and the skipping everything is like push, push, push, it feels like it's pushing you to your absolute limit. Is that fair to say?

**Jorge:**

Yes or no because I think it's fantastic that you're asking me that nowadays because we are talking a lot about safe spaces as well. I'm leading a training for trainers programme of mind presence methodology that we might talk about later. And we realised that in the 80s and 90s, when I was a performer, and I went to Belgium and I was with Ultima Vez, it was all about this, pushing the limits, pushing the limits to a place that I really wanted to work with Ultima Vez. And I respect their work a lot. And I love it. But as soon as I arrived to Belgium, and I started taking work, they're like, you know what, I really liked my body. I'd prefer just to take workshops, but not to be part of the company. I was never invited, to be honest. But if it would case, the case, I would choose very carefully, what was the practice that safeguard me first. So I think for me, it's really important to create the safest space. I came also from a sport science. So when I push the limits physically, it's because it's been a well researched process of how to skip on the road for 45 minutes. So it took me two years.

**Melanie:**

Sure, within a structure of safety, yes.

**Jorge:**

Always.

**Melanie:**

Okay.

**Jorge:**

And I prefer not to go to the 80s or 90s, in which everything was possible, and we broke bodies and minds. But also, I have to say that it's very important for me to not only stay in the idea of the safe container, once you've created how you push forward, which I have the feeling that in the last 5/10

years, it's a very difficult area to navigate because we are playing in the safe side as well. Yes, most of the time,

**Melanie:**

So trying to find that place between pushing, but safety,

**Jorge:**

I would say first create the container and then push

**Melanie:**

Yeah, okay. And perhaps in many ways, that's also what you're doing, Claire, because you're stretching the possibilities of body, but also looking at what's safe and comfortable. How would you say that your aesthetic has come about?

**Claire:**

Yeah, I also appreciate this realisation, that aesthetic is not simply about what we see. And perhaps it goes a lot deeper than that. And that possibly being very much what both of us are particularly interested in. And also like what is being considered as aesthetics and shifting that generally, as part of the work that we do. I think, again, my aesthetic has really been shaped initially by my work and my relationship with my own crutches, and that the sort of formation of my own movement vocabulary with the crutches, which very much sort of came out of very quiet sort of solo exploration that had been shaped by training with Bill Shannon in America, and also from learning contact improvisation from Jess. And sort of a combination of these techniques with my own sort of curiosity developed a way of working with the crutches, that has this sort of combination of being very functional, and being really interested in the actual physics of moving. And combined with this in story that came from really learning about dance through contact improvisation. So learning from the inside out, I can't be able to work in studios with mirrors, they're always covered and in workshops, etc. Like it's never about, of course, there is a point at which you start to consider how something looks in terms of how an audience will visually experience the work. But it's never made from that place, initially. It's made from how it feels and how it works, and what the intention is behind that task and that movement. So yeah, the movement language that I think I created first, for my own body has this very practical sort of... and yeah, came from that way that I talked earlier of like, if I put a crutch here, what can I do, and then they literally are, you're working with pivot points, and counterweight and torque, and being really sort of fascinated by that. And I think that very much shapes, everything that kind of grows out of it. So that, again, in a similar way to what Jorge's doing like this task driven way of working for me, it's this attending to my attention, like this way of working with the crutches and this way that comes from contact improvisation. For me, it's about listening through the body, it's a tuning of attention. What moving through the world on crutches requires this very high level of attending all the time to where they're going, and that my visual field is correlated always, to my feet,

all four of them, you know. And so how that sort of expands out? Sorry, I've gone off on a tangent and lost my thread a little bit there. But...

**Melanie:**

...no, not at all. Because I think you're talking about that invention of vocabulary and the link then it has to visual and there's a couple of things that I wondered about. One was you're not from a dance background, you found your way into dance, where you talked about being a singer at the beginning. So how much of that has come from a need to devise your own choreography and movement material for that, but also I remember reading or hearing you talk about the way you use your crutches with where you were talking about treating them almost like a person with the same care that you would if you were dancing with someone and so therefore treating that choreography almost as a duet will actually would be a...

**Claire:**

Trio. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. That was a really important step in that shift. That was a very specific moment in the studio early in my career, where I had discovered contact improv and there was no one to dance with. There was not many people doing it in Scotland at the time, full stop, but I was literally in the studio with just me in the crutches and so I thought, well, what if I think of them as two bodies? I think this was where I was trying to reach earlier, like the movement that I make and the scores that I make are always very task driven. I'm not making movement from an expressive place. It's just not how I think I don't dance because I love to dance, I dance because I'm curious about something, it's a much more scientific way. And there was that thought of like, oh, what if I think of them as two bodies, and I treat them in that way, and I created a game for myself. So I always have to give weight to one crutch and take the weight of the other. And this created this, I think that is another aspect of the aesthetic is that what it embeds is a layer of care, and this aspect, and this word care has become increasingly important to me and my practice over recent years. What it meant for me was this idea that if I treated them as though they were bodies, and I didn't, I'm not anthropomorphizing them, I'm not thinking of them as people as such, but I'm thinking them as bodies that are alive and need to be taken care of, and that I have a responsibility for, and therefore I can't drop them. And so it becomes really, it fits somewhere between this very functional and very censorious sort of careful way of working with something that then began to, I think, extend out. And so it grew from my own body into a way of working, that then becomes about this care and attention, not just to myself and material, but then to the space that I choose to work in. And then that has really also extended out into audience. And I think something that also is very much the aesthetic of my work is about a clear of audience, and then attending to audience experience, that has really come from an awareness of creating access to people, you know, like, how are people experiencing this work? Who have very different bodies? Who is not traditionally welcome in a space? And how do we create a space that people would come to? How might you experience or work if you're only experiencing it through sound, or only experiencing through sight? And then yeah, where that starts to cross into ideas of safe space, and permission and consent and performance. I guess one other quite important aspect of my aesthetic is humour, quite often, it's a really important, it's the thing

that kind of also connects me to people, you know, the people that I work with, and that I collaborate with a sense of care, but also a sort of shared quite dark humour, that kind of underpins a lot of the work. As a mode of connection, I think of humour as being a very important way of connecting with people and sort of breaking through formality because I think formality is a very, very problematic issue in theatres and performance. And it's something that excludes a lot of people.

**Melanie:**

Yes, interesting and fascinating to see how many similarities are coming across through your work, and I'm about to share yet another that we found in this process. So as I asked you to talk about your choreographic process and ask the question actually, about whether that is a thing, whether it's a constant for you, whether it's a process that recurs in a structure that you keep using or whether it differs depending on the commission or work, I thought perhaps you could use your pieces 12, because you've both created pieces called 12. Perhaps you could share what the process of making that piece was, and then let us know whether that is a process that would reoccur for a piece called something else. Jorge, I believe that your piece 12 was the bottle one that you've referred to already? Is that right?

**Jorge:**

It is, but it was called 36 at the very beginning, so probably you cannot play. No, I'm joking! I'm just talking about humour what Claire was saying. Yes, 12. At that time, I was right in the middle of my PhD. And I started to get to know for the very first time in my life who Grotowski was. Theatre, a Polish director who kind of like shape the idea of poor theatre, and he was very much driven a task and then I started researching about Suzuki training. So my PhD went into a lot of theatre practitioners because of what Claire was saying the task base, although it's been very much used into dance, my experience of that task base was to create something very formal. While in theatre, my approach was let's try to create a scene and a scenario, a container. So initially, I thought that those bottles were going to be kind of like ethnography or something that I don't know to be honest, I woke up one morning at two o'clock in the morning, probably Claire and I we were connected. So at that time when she woke up and I'm playing with the crutches I start juggling with, with bottles of water or something. So I brought a bunch of bottles of water to the studio. And as soon as dancers get into a studio with props with ideas, we don't have any other choice but to play with them. We just start doing things with them. We put them in shape, we throw them, we empty them, we fill them with other things. So start becoming kind of like a game and because I come from sport science immediately we start throwing and catching them. I absolutely love handball as a sport. I think it's one of the most thriving and exciting games that you can watch. I find quite boring to watch sports, but handball is one of the interesting ones. So yes, we started throwing and catching and then I was fascinated about making the task in a very minimal way, very, very complex. So we start throwing and catching. Okay. And I loved what Claire was saying before, because it made me realise that absolutely everything that I do, and I'm gonna say about me, because I don't know any other people. But most of the choreographers that I know, always start with the question, What if? And I love that! So we start throwing the bottles? And what if we do this in this way? And what about if we do this in

this way, and what about if we add this other layer just became very, very, very complex and start becoming a game around the idea of catching and throwing in a very complex way. And just to finish the whole thing, because we always work in sections as well, because you have a limited time in the space. So okay, you work in this section. And somehow it became kind of like a chapter and then you work in the other one begins a chapter. So we have three very marked sections. And in order to join all of them, luckily, I was working with Vincenzo Lamagna. And he was devising the music score while we were creating, so that was kind of like the glue that make 36, or 12 in this case, with the props, the task base and the music, he created an entity which actually was not a section section section, it was a unity. I love what Claire also said about considering the crutches as an entity as an alive body that you need to work with. And I always look at pieces as a little entity that you need to take care of. I don't have children, but I can imagine with pets or things like that, that it's something that you take care of. But it's independent of you that you can educate or you can guide, but at the end of the day, they will do whatever they need to do. So I like to think once a piece is complete, actually, while you're creating it, it's almost like its becoming alive. And it's telling you and the dancers what the piece as a independent entity arrive. And I always look at that as trying to tap into my intuition how I would be the channel for that piece to exist in the same way that dancers became the channel for that piece to exist. And the beautiful thing for me is that that piece cannot exist without the dancers, which they have my other respect. So it's that beautiful symphony that is creating between an entity that depends on the dancers to access, but at the same time, the dancers cannot fulfil the role without that entity existing.

**Melanie:**

Yeah, lovely. So frameworks, playing, using the dancers and then the glue of the music. Claire, how about you tell us a little bit more about your piece, 12. I think it's one of the pieces where you are using other dancers rather than solo performance, which is a bit of a shift for you, isn't it?

**Claire:**

Yeah, it's tricky to talk about that piece, because I haven't thought about it for a very, very, very long time. So 12 was a piece that was a commission from Candoco Dance Company to make a work on their repertory seven dancers plus five guest dancers. I had only made solo work. And it's either all or nothing for me, you know, I go first group work straight to 12 dancers. Interestingly, I turned it down a number of times, because I actually didn't have ambitions to make a work for a group. I didn't know how to do it. But what was really wonderful actually was that Pedro and Stine at the time, they knew that I'd never done it before. And so that invitation was made with that knowledge. And with that support of like, this is a chance to make it with a company that knows that you're learning. The older I get, the more I realise what an incredible privilege it is to be given that sort of opportunity and support. And it was a brilliant experience. And I did love it. But I guess it was also quite different from a lot of my other pieces. What I understood going into it is that my interest is very much in the individual and is in the specificity of an individual and not only who they are, but how their body moves and what their vocabulary is. And so it's interesting, because my fear, partly with the Candoco piece was that I didn't know what to do with the non disabled dancers. That was why I was sort of

refusing it for a while. And it's also why I occasionally get invitations for other companies of non disabled dancers. And I'm not particularly interested, to be honest. My interest is very much in working with disabled artists and giving space to explore those vocabularies that have not really been given attention and space to see really what is the choreographic languages here. But having said that, with 12, I went in and going okay, well, I understand my interest is in the individual. How do we reconcile that? It's a very big group. What I went in with was an understanding of like, Okay, well, what do I know, I know, crutches, let's take in the object and the thing that is special to me and the thing that I understand choreographically. And let's explore that with other people. So we worked particularly with crutches as objects, but with a real understanding from the outset politically, that I would never put anybody onto crutches in a traditional way of using them that didn't use crutches. So it was about sort of using them in every other way and sort of using them as tools for puppetry, for example, or for creating choreography of assembly and disassembly. And things like that, that were brilliant. And it was that beautiful thing of seeing the capacity of professional repertory dancers to be able to just create material really quickly and remember it. Which is not my training is not my skill. So to be clear I make material for myself that is very often not set repeatable movement, it tends to be far more about a task driven action that requires a liveness. That's what interests me about that sort of material is the liveness that it instigates already in the room and the problem solving. That's what is very engaging to witnesses, people solving problems. Yeah, I was able to do things with them, I guess, that I couldn't do myself, like they made these beautiful sort of opening sequences of assembling and disassembling crutches like rifles. All really fast and in unison and things that I can't do to save my life. You know, I can't, it was beautiful. But then also, it became interesting to me of like, how you take all the sort of standard things that are expected, like unison these things that are expected with, especially with a group and sort of questioning what that is when you have a group of very different physicalities. And sort of how you work with that in a way that is allowing everyone to be at their potential. And I think that's also where I became, you know, like, how do you create a safe space and a consensual space? How do you start those conversations about what material works with what people and who's doing what they want to do? And nobody's... I had seen work in the past. And it's still an issue for me of like, what gets termed inclusive dance disabled and non disabled dancers. Where you definitely feel like the material has been created for a non disabled body. And at times, it would feel in the past that you're seeing disabled dancers trying to keep up.

**Melanie:**

Yes, ok.

**Claire:**

Or indeed, I witnessed moments where I felt it was quite humiliating for disabled dancers. I think for me, it was more about the process and the politics of what went on behind the scenes, rather than actually what the piece became. Was more interesting, and because I knew I hadn't done it before I worked with a co director, I worked with Gail Sneddon. And so Gail was really instrumental in for me to be able to go I'm interested in this idea of crutches, but also what emotional and psychological

crutches and we took that, and then it was Gail, that was able to go Okay, well, how do we take this and break it down into a choreographic task for dancers like how might they need this information, because that's not the way that I worked. So it was an unusual project, for me in that respect its very different from most of my other projects. Yeah, it's a tricky one to talk about for me, because it's such a long time ago, and I wasn't actually expecting it so..!

**Melanie:**

Well thank you for delving into that because it's given us so much to think about, because I think that idea of going into the space with an ethic with a political idea of and setting yourself rules of what absolutely you're not going to do or are going to do. And the idea of problem solving, manifesting the creativity, which I think we've actually just lived through and embodied over this past year haven't we? You know, the fact that we all have a problem to solve has meant that we've become more creative in how we solve it. You know, when I'm thinking about the pandemic. It would be lovely to do a podcast where the word pandemic doesn't come into it. But Claire, I'm gonna go back to you because I also was listening to the podcast documentary of the piece Thank You Very Much. And there was a couple of tools you used in that that I wonder whether you would tell us a little bit more about one was that you engaged and worked with real Elvis impersonators. See, obviously, that connection to the truth, again, you use task based work, which you've talked a little bit with us already about that. But you also used a voice coach, and I wondered whether you could just talk me a little bit through those choices, and what that brought to your work. And whether you felt that you learnt anything new from that. The thing that really caught me is I remember you giving an instruction and said something like, this task will take about an hour and a half. And I thought, wow, does the task take an hour and a half, I was interested in how you set up those structures, because they're loose and creative, and you give the luxury of time. It's not just here's a five minute task. And let's see what we do with it, you're really giving some time to all of this process.

**Claire:**

Yeah, I think time is a very, very vital aspect to me in making work. And I talked earlier about this idea of care being quite important in recent years, and I've been thinking a lot about myself and my collaborators, were talking around this concept of what is a choreography of care. And I think about time as care. And so for me, that also is about a process that takes a long time, like over years, quite often to make a piece of work. And the time in between what is seen as the work is still the work but needing time away from the work to also be able to work to make the work and the importance of sort of acknowledging that but also Yeah, from working with Jess, early on, Jess was somebody that worked with timers all the time, and I really took that from him. And I do work with timers a lot in the studio, and I find it a really helpful frame. Whether that's, for example, going back to something like 12 introducing a process like a two minute check in every morning, and it doesn't matter how big the group of people is. Everybody gets two minutes and that being part of creating a safe consensual space, and that those sorts of processes are right through. So from a two minute check in to an access check in that also will happen for five minutes. And things like running tasks that take a lot of time. It's partly also why I don't teach a lot, because quite often people be like, can you give a two

hour workshop and I'm like, there's nothing I can do in two hours. I can barely do something in three hours with people, because the things that I'm interested in doing take time. And also what happens when you really allow time in a task. Like quite often, I'm really fascinated by that thing of like, if you run something for an hour, the last three minutes are often where the gold is. Like that moment where people have sort of let go of everything that they're trying to do and trying to think that they're supposed to do, and you've gone through everything. Like, especially with an improvisation space, people are trying sometimes so hard to come up with something brilliant or clever. And then when if you leave things running, people run out of trying to find the thing. And then when you've given up and people can just, I don't know, there's something in that space that I find is really an important place to get to. And so I enjoy working for quite long durations in order to see what happens in that point where people give up trying to invent or imagine trying too hard. So yeah, I do I work with long tasks or improvisation sessions. And I think that idea of time also crosses into why things like yeah, working with the Elvis tribute artists. What became really interesting to me and clear to me, I had made a show in 2014, called Guide Gods, that was about people's experiences of faith and religion, and where it intersected with disability. And that had been built on one to one interviews that I had done with a lot of people. And that became a sort of basis for how I made work from then on of like, it's really about having a one to one interaction with somebody. And then what comes from that. And what I learned from that was really this idea of what it is to give time to somebody and attention to someone and how I can find a respect for what someone believes in, or what someone does, even if it's very removed from my own beliefs, or my own interests, I can find a care and a respect for that thing, if I give them my time. And I had found that with religious interviews, and then I find it again with the Elvis tribute artist of what it was to just sit one to one with these guys. And they were well, they weren't old guys actually. And what it was then to pass that process on to my dancers and my performers. So I set them up in one to one interactions in which I'm not involved. And it then becomes this process of what did they bring back that's very specific to what the notice. Not what I've set up and what I want. But like, what did they bring back? And that's what we have to work with.

**Melanie:**

It became very personal, didn't it?

**Claire:**

And yeah, this exactly

**Melanie:**

A personal experience for those dancers.

**Claire:**

Yeah, this thing of time.

**Melanie:**

Jorge, how does time play for you? I think that's really interesting. And probably our most precious commodity that Claire's working with there. How does that apply to you and your work?

**Jorge:**

It's definitely a very precious commodity. And mostly, I barely have done my own projects. I've been always a commissioned choreographer. So the time said that you have to make a commission, it's always...

**Melanie:**

Don't have so much luxury

**Jorge:**

I was going to say ridiculously short. But sometimes it's just not ridiculous, it is what it is. And you just deal with it. And you just create almost like a way of working that it's effective. However, when I get into a position that sometimes happened with students choreography, I remembered the SEAD, Salzburg Experimental Academy of Art, which I have six weeks to make a 20 minutes piece. Normally you have three, four weeks to make that 15/20 minutes half an hour piece. So it was two, three weeks more than normally. I really liked that possibility of going deeper. That being said, I think I'm very much closer to what Claire does as well, my task normally takes between one hour and a half to two hours to three hours to complete, sometimes the whole day, because I feel that that process is not only what brings results, but it's the part of the training. So for them to be able to perform a piece at the end of it, they need to be very skilled at the use of the crutches, at the throwing and catching of the bottles, whatever the technology that we are using, it's required. I mean, I don't know any vocational school conservatoire that they use bottles of water or crutches as part of their education. So it's a huge part of that training. So yeah time is definitely important. And something that I really like with time which Claire mentioned also is I work a lot with the stopwatch as well. We're gonna do this for that long in both in rehearsals and also in performance. So you have this amount of time to solve this problem, which almost became like Indiana Jones trying to get out of the temple and it's fascinating to work when you see someone not struggling or fighting but having that opposition which is time and time for all of us runs out all the time we are racing against time. So time is a fascinating thing, we can dedicate another podcast!

**Melanie:**

Ha ha another podcast! I find that with this conversation, actually, there's so much to dig into. And I am conscious of time. So I'm going to move us to one element of both of your work, which fascinates me too. I said right at the beginning that your entrepreneurial, you're doing much more

than just making and performing. And Jorge, you have authored a methodology about performance that I wanted you to talk to us a little bit about. And Claire, you are also planning a symposium: Choreography of Care. And you've given us a little taste of some of that, and some of what you've been saying. But in lieu of being able to do that live, you've been holding that space with a series of thought provoking podcasts. And so I wanted to ask both of you to just talk a little bit about this other area of your life. So perhaps Jorge, you could start us off. So Towards Vivencia. Tell us about that.

**Jorge:**

Well, it's not very good name for marketing, because it's difficult to say. But in English, you don't find that word that explains how to experience the experience in real time. Experience that you've decided that you're going to go through, in order to have a transformation. It's a really long thing. Within Spanish it's Vivencia. So that's the idea of the consciousness. And that's why the idea we use dance, which I also love what Claire was saying, and I don't love dance, I use it as a tool as a scientific tool in order to reach some thing.

**Melanie:**

Ha ha ha that's what Claire said.

**Jorge:**

Yes. So yes, Towards Vivencia was a methodology, because through my work, I always tried to go into that state of consciousness. And because I'm a little bit of a control freak, plus and I come from sports is like, Okay, how I devise a method, a training that we can use as a base layer, as a vocabulary in order to move from there. Also, because I like the idea of training, I really like the idea of a state of consciousness and mental health, for example, not only be used in order to solve a problem that exists, which I think is very necessary, but also to enhance an optimal performance that we already are capable towards, in whatever condition it is. So I created that training, right research, I created it through 10 years PhD in order just to have a recipe to follow, and to be able to thrive having a structure. Because for me, as I work, if I have anchors that I can hold on to that give me a lot of freedom like this, I don't have to think about everything, but I have something to hold on to in order to move forward. So that methodology became a training in order to tap into that state of consciousness of peak performance and how to enhance it. And nowadays, when you were calling me entrepreneur, is the last three years, we were working online already, in order to be able to pass this methodology to any dancer or performer or civilian, who would like to train through their body, that state of consciousness and now it becomes a one year training.

**Melanie:**

And it talks you through resilience as well, doesn't it? And how you might cope perhaps with rejection? Am I right in saying that? I'm sure I heard you talking about that.

**Jorge:**

Yeah, that's very true. Because I believe we were talking about time that that change can happen after a one week workshop. Yeah you get one idea out of it, but then next Monday kicks in, and the change it is not sustainable. So resilience for me has that idea of being able to hold on to a task and to a direction and to a path for a period of time, no matter the obstacles that happen. And I don't know what's going to happen in the world. But shit will always happen. Obstacles always happen. So how we manage to have the tools to go through those obstacles and to use them as part of the learning process. So we don't have control of the the obstacles that we are encountering. But we have control over how we perceive and take advantage of those obstacles, how we deal with them. So this is a lot of what Towards Vivencia is how we deal with those obstacles. And rejection is a huge part for dancers. We know that 60 70% of the people who graduate from a Conservatoire, they're never going to work as a professional dancer, that's a lot. Or we are going to receive 10 letters of rejection for each one of them that is going to say yes, so how we deal with that constant obstacle that in our world is actually much more constant than the yeses. So that's something that we work a lot in Towards Vivencia as well. Motivation, resilience, clarity, as dancers, sometimes it's like I want something but I don't really know how or what or... so we work a lot of unpacking all those layers to go into the ethos of the identity, which I love. Just to finish, I can talk forever about this, it fascinates me. By the end of the training, something that is fascinating is everyone goes more or less through the same task and through the same path applying in very different ways because they are all different lives and different ways of applying it. But at the very end there is something very common, which I feel fascinated and very humbled every time that happens that most of the people feel like now I am enough. I have a lot to work on. I still have a lot to move through. But what I am right now is I am enough. And that is.. that's a gift.

**Melanie:**

That's wonderful. And Claire, how does that resonate with your Choreography of Care? It feels like there's some synergies already, but I wonder where you're going with that?

**Claire:**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think there's definitely some very shared intentions about an ethos of creating and shifting working practices and systems and creating different models of working, I think. And also, if nothing else, empowering dancers to bring those different models of working into the places that they are, and hopefully also the institutions that are hiring or not hiring those dancers. And then also Yeah, we are that moves out just from performers into the wider... all the people that go around our work. But yeah, I think there's a lot of shared concerns and trying to find strategies, I think resilience that you mentioned Jorge is very much a sort of understood necessity in crip community, for example. For me, it's been a hugely important part of my life to have embraced and been met and know crip community and that sort of understanding of permissions and change and how to deal with change and acceptance of what different people need. And one of the most

important things and I think particularly right now, as well as how do we empower people to... Jo Fong is asking this very particularly at Battersea Arts Centre, like how do we empower people to say what they need going forward? And to be able to set their boundaries of where they feel safe, particularly going back into working environments from now on in the pandemic. That yeah, this concept, I guess, this idea of that we started calling the Choreography of Care is something that's sort of grown out of a lot of conversations and ways of working with multiple collaborators and a lot of conversations, particularly with Luke Pell and all the people in recent projects. But particularly the piece that I made that had to do with the tribute artists, Thank You Very Much. It was something that was starting to sort of formulate more in my mind and try to work out how to articulate and it became this phrase of the Choreography of Care. And I became really interested in that piece in that process as a model for like, how can we work with care? And also, how does working with care shape the work? Right down to how does it maybe even affect what the material becomes on the stage? Not how do we represent care, but how does it actually be the work itself. And so this idea, then, of recognising for us anyway, the idea of how time is care, and that that goes right down into your budget, you know, from the very start the very first funding applications of how much time this project needs. So yeah, we've been thinking about it in a lot of different ways. So this idea of time as care of design as care that being about the particular stage design or costume design, but also the design of how an audience encounters the work, how it meets the work, even for the first time, the idea of communication, as care how people are communicated with and how you empower people to ask for communication in the way that they need. Like email is really not good for a lot of people. So what are other ways that people need to be communicated with? The information of what is going to happen, or the information of what not is going to happen is also really important. How is performance itself an act of care. And also another aspect, which a colleague of mine, Julia Watts Belser, professor that I work with a lot has talked about also the complexity of care of where things meet with each other. And yeah, it's a thing that I'm really enjoying digging into, and how it manifests in very different ways, how it manifests, and how I work with my producer and my marketing person, how it manifests in a workshop, it's always been a really important aspect of teaching as well. How do people feel safe and disputing the idea that you can't take risks? If you create safe spaces, like those things are not mutually exclusive, which I think Jorge is also really exploring the thresholds of those things.

**Melanie:**

Yes, that's a good word really about where that is on the Venn diagram, in a way. I've got one last question. And yet, there's so much more I want to ask and find out about both of your work. We've sort of talked about performance, we've talked about your creation process, we've talked about ideas, and I now just want to touch a little bit on subject matter of some of the work that you've both been exploring, and also the kind of imprint that you're leaving on the world, what you're trying to say and the change you're trying to make. So Claire, you said already, that you've done a piece around religion, and God: Guide Gods. And it was developed during a research trip in Cambodia, where you met landmine survivors and in the blurb that I was reading, it was talking about how your exposure to Buddhist ideas of reincarnation meant that you started to become fascinated by attitudes that were held by some which was about disability being a punishment for sins committed

in a previous life. So I wanted to ask you a little bit about that and the weightiness of that and the ability that that's given you as you explore that to perhaps challenge those, misconceptions seems like such a small and not weighty enough word to express that, but just what you're trying to do in that exploration. But Jorge, I wondered if you could start us off. I found this tiny sentence hidden in your biog, which I was like, What hang on a minute that you co founded min tala, a pan Arab dance company that uses contemporary dance as a peacekeeping personal and professional development tool in areas of conflict in the Middle East. And again, you know, similar to Claire in terms of the weightiness of what you're trying to do with your exploration. Tell us about that. How did that come about?

**Jorge:**

It came about as a performer, initially. I had the chance to go three years in a row to that area of the world, I went to a festival that was held between Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan. And I was first with a company in Belgium, then as a dancer with Candoco and then again with another company in Belgium. And the three years in a row went to the same festival with three different companies. So I started developing a relationship with the people who are organising that festival, mainly the one in Jordan, and I continue my relationship with them. They invite me to teach a few workshops after those performances, I start creating like a relationship sending other people over there bringing people from that part of the world to mainland Europe. And then we realised there was money injected in those places in the Arab world. But it was normally for something that it was not very sustainable. You bring a huge company give a workshop for a couple of days, performances and that was it. Or a project that lasted for three months, while there was not very much resources for developing the local work and the local artists. Therefore, we started to create possibilities for those people in the Middle East and North Africa to develop themselves as artists. So we thought that the best way to do that was through a nomad pan Arab dance company. So we invited dancers from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon to gather a few times a year in those places, because normally just the idea of mobility was very difficult. Normally, people from those areas have much more easier to meet in Switzerland, than to meet in in Egypt because of the permits because even the the cost of the flights so we we made a lot of effort, thanks to the support of different Arab organisations, and also British Council. And the project lasted for a couple of years. And our aim was not only to give tools, but to give room for development for those local artists, for them to carry on developing their their work in their areas, and sparking a much more sustainable change. Unfortunately, we run out of funding and life got in the way and the project has been put on hold for the moment. Hopefully, one day we can continue, but I always am from that project also reflects the ethos of dance as a medium. We realised that dance was the vocabulary or the container that we were creating. But that helped a lot with sexual identity for women in that area. For relationships in between different countries. So it was just kind of like the breech and the container for many of the things to happen. And when you were talking about the change, or the legacy of something that I would like to live in the world, it would be that that dance is an incredible tool for those changes. It's a vehicle that facilitate lots of those changes, and using in the right way, and performing can be one of them. But now at the moment, I think we are limited also most of the time to create a performance. But using the dance technologies that we can use, we can contribute to

the evolution of human consciousness, which I think is something that we've been doing through many different things that I think dance should have autonomy, more relevant position in that contributions.

**Melanie:**

Yes, the value of it so often undervalued by others than ourselves. Us in the dance world know, but we are constantly aren't we battling and trying to make sure that others understand what we think dance we bring. Claire, I wondered whether that had any synergy with the intention you had with Guide Gods and how you approached that work and what you were trying to do in the exploration and tackling of such a subject, which must have been quite painful to explore at times.

**Claire:**

Yeah, naively, I don't think I really understood what I was taking on at the time. And to be honest, my intention with making Guide Gods was I had this realisation that this potential influence that faiths and various religions, the beliefs that they might have, might have around perspectives on disability, you know, quite a large proportion of the world's population follows some faith or another. And realising, well actually, if there are particular views on disability held within different faiths, then this is a massive influence, potentially, in the world. And my realisation was like, I don't really feel like I've seen any work made that looks at how faiths or religions, are viewing disability, there really wasn't much in existence. There's some academic papers mostly around kind of Christian perspective, because there's more dialogue around the body in Christianity and Christian theology than there was at that time with other faiths. There had been maybe a couple of films, but there wasn't really much and so my reason for making it was purely that I wanted to start a conversation. I just was like, I'm gonna make something and if it makes somebody makes something much better, great. It really was from that perspective. And what was interesting actually was that Guide Gods really was an hour long to an hour and 20 later long show, but actually what it has is a space afterwards for staying and having a cup of tea and chatting. And actually the space afterwards for conversation to me is more important than the show.

**Melanie:**

That time thing again, isn't it?

**Claire:**

My producer would dispute that slightly. From my perspective, you know, this show is important as well, in order to facilitate that conversation. But really, that's what it became. It was like, I want to create something that provokes people to talk about this and think about these questions. And that was really satisfying the fact that the space afterwards, people would stay almost 90% of an audience every night would stay. And for me, that was like, I've made a comfortable space and safe space that they feel that they can talk to strangers, because they don't feel like strangers now. Yeah,

was about trying to build a little community for anything to talk about something that I felt wasn't really being talked about. And what was important to me was it was about not sharing my own opinion about anything. Actually, it was about creating a space that acknowledged my own ignorance to an audience, my own prejudice and hypocrisy, I had realised through the research and admitting that to an audience. And then creating a space for other people's voices to share their experiences, and being very clear that it wasn't a space that was saying, well, Islam believes this and Christianity believes this. It's like, this person, who is Muslim, had this experience. And this person who is Jewish has this experience and this other Christian person, and I became a thread to join them all together. That was something we carried over into the way you look at me today. And it was like Jess Curtis, and I sharing a lot about our experiences of how we're viewed in the world and where our privilege intersects with that. But being very much about this is my experience, I am not dictating that this is how everybody else who shares certain attributes with me is but it leave space for other people. And that's become the thing of like, how do you create a space and take responsibility for that in a space I think is the most important thing. It's genuinely to understand that as makers, we have a huge responsibility for what we put on stage. Everything matters in that space.

**Melanie:**

And once again, you're drawing and a beautiful place to finish the episode on that threshold, aren't you on that safe parameter on that freedom to talk but safely and the way that dance and art has been used as a segue to open up other conversations and explorations. So I'm going to take so much from today's conversation. Thank you so much, but that feels like a good place to stop. So listeners 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 Claire and Jorge, head on over to [greenwichdance.org.uk](http://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 today, that's it from us and do join us next time for more Talking Moves. Thank you both so very much for your generosity, and your time

**Jorge:**

Thank you Melanie

**Claire:**

Thank you

**Melanie:**

That precious time.