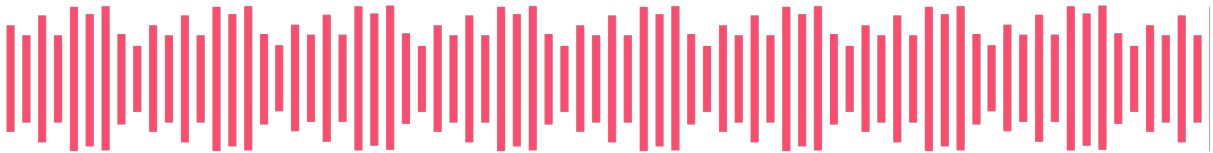


TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

Creating an Identity S04 / E01

Episode Description

In this episode, we talk to **Annie Hanauer** and **Erion Kruja** about Creating an Identity.

For many dancers it's a dream to secure a long term contract within a prestigious dance company, but there comes a time when it just feels right to move on. So what happens when you fly that nest – leaving the safety of a regular wage, daily class, regular performance opportunities and the companionship of like-minded company members? How do you build that support infrastructure for yourself – at the same time as having to find the funding, secure commissions, and rebrand as an independent?

We start off by finding out more about life with Candoco (from Annie) and with Hofesh Shechter Company (from Erion) and how they came to make the decision to leave. We discuss the support infrastructure and development opportunities they had whilst still a member of the company and what that looks like now that they are making work independently.

We talk a bit about the type of work a body wants to make when it has been a tool for other choreographers for so long and both of our guests offer suggestions for what's needed to better develop and support independent dance makers of today. As we very often do, we talk about language definitions and discuss the feeling of living across both an 'emerging' and 'established' description. We talk about the implied hierarchy of dancers and choreographers (the inaccurate expectation that everyone wants to 'graduate' to becoming a maker) and this leads us onto broader discussions about labelling where Annie shares the frustrations she experiences of being boxed up into the 'disabled dancer' category, and what it's taking for her to mentally and physically break out of that box.

And finally, we talk about the differences between the offer here in the UK and internationally and what we can be doing as dance organisations to better support the lifeblood of our art form.

Talking Moves is a Greenwich Dance production

Presented by Melanie Precious

Production by Carmel Smith, Lucy White and Melanie Precious

Recording date: Friday 23 July 2021

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'm talking with two artists about creating an identity. For many dancers, it's a dream to secure a long term contract within a prestigious dance company. But there comes a time when it just feels right to move on. So what happens when you fly that nest leaving the safety of a regular wage, daily class, regular performance opportunities and the companionship of like minded company members? How do you build that support infrastructure for yourself at the same time as having to find the funding, secure commissions, and well also rebrand. So today we have with us, Annie Hanauer, independent dance artist and ex Candoco dancer, and Erion Kruja, choreographer, and movement director and one time dancer with Hofesh Shechter Company. Welcome both of you. So Annie, tell us about life in Candoco. I think you were there between 2008 and 2014.

Annie:

Yeah, that's right.

Melanie:

What did it look and feel like and what was it that made you decide that it was time to leave?

Annie:

It was a long time ago now. I've been out of the company for longer than I was in it at this point. But yeah, it was a huge step for me, because being hired by Candoco is what brought me to the UK from the US. And I was straight out of study. So like, I finished my undergrad and I got hired, and I just came over immediately. And it was quite Yeah, like a dream come true at the time, because where I'm from nothing really exists, like a full time contract or anything like this. And also, I was really interested in Candoco for its kind of investigation into accessible working practices and disability

and stuff like this. And you know, the artists they work with. So I was just like, Oh, my God, dream job happened immediately out of study what it's going to be all downhill from here! But no, that's not been the case at all, actually. And I think because I started with them when I was quite young. And I always felt like, you know, I wanted to work with other artists in my career, it was just the beginning of things. So yeah, at one point, I met quite a lot of choreographers working there. So I was invited to work with a few of them. And finally, I decided like it was the right time to go to one of those offers. Yes. So that's how I jumped out.

Melanie:

That's how you jumped out.

Annie:

I had something to jump to.

Melanie:

That felt then like your reason for leaving was about curiosity and investigation and wanting to build some new and independent relationships. But you actually weren't with the company that long before you started on that journey. So that's interesting. I mean, it is a long time in terms of being a young dancer, getting a contract and then going actually six years on..

Annie:

Yeah

Melanie:

...I want to develop more. Erion, how about you? How long did you dance for Hofesh for and what made you decide to leave?

Erion:

I danced for Hofesh for eight and a half years or nine years, I think something like that. Yeah, I retired from dancing. I'd been dancing by that time for 20 years as professional and 30 years since I started. So I think it was time. I really wanted to choreograph. I mean, I wanted to quit dancing when I was 28 to pursue my dream of choreographing and creating not just choreographing. But yeah, Hofesh came along. And of course, I love the company. So I just joined without thinking.

Melanie:

That's interesting. So you joined just at the point where you were about to make that...

Erion:

Yeah, yeah, there was two companies that I wanted to go at that time when I was 28. I was in Switzerland in Bern. And there was two companies. One was Guttenberg. And when was Hofesh, and I met Hofesh and his class and audition. And yeah, he offered me the job. And I joined the company. Nine years later, I'm still dancing with the company, but I managed to transition. Yeah.

Melanie:

And so your choice to leave Hofesh was reconnecting with that feeling that you had when you were 28 was it and going actually, now is the time I want to be a maker.

Erion:

Yeah, it was natural choice. For me. This is a story that I keep it really close to me. It was in November, we were somewhere in France. And before the performance for the first time in my life as a dancer, I said to myself, I don't feel like doing the show. And that was like 20 years later, since I started dancing. And yeah, it was the first time ever, I was always really excited to go on stage. It was the place for me to feel comfortable to spend all my energy and get out of there after the show and just have a drink and have some food, like really relaxed. It was really, really nice. But for the first time I said I don't feel like doing the show. And that was the trigger for me. I said, Okay, this is enough. Enough. It's enough. It's time to move on and to stop dancing. So yeah.

Melanie:

Okay, that's it.

Erion:

Yeah, that was it. I did transition during the time I did workshops since I joined the company. I remember having a chat with Hofesh and saying that I would like to teach workshops. I would like to choreograph. I would like to continue that side of me and my career parallel to the company and they facilitated a lot. He was really supportive in that.

Melanie:

I was going to ask both of you that actually, it led me beautifully into my next question, which is about how those institutions, those companies are supporting dancers to spread their wings and fly, which is actually a very tricky thing. I think when they've got great dancers like yourselves, I'm sure they're wanting to keep you but it's a bit like having children, isn't it, you've got to let them grow up and go their own way. And I wondered how they did that. And having worked with Hofesh, for a little while myself, I knew that there was a scheme they had in place called In Good Company where they

used to encourage dancers to make their work. And I wondered, Annie did Candoco have anything similar? How were you support it to become independent or were you?

Annie:

Oh, yeah, I guess when I look back, I feel like they were supportive of me transitioning into working outside the company, because, you know, it's quite a full time role. And I think they could feel that I was like, on the edge of leaving, and they kind of like, gave me some slack to start doing other work, which maybe normally they wouldn't have, which I really, really appreciated. Because that made that transition a lot easier. Because jumping from something that feels secure into just like unknown, you know, freedom, which is wonderful and terrifying at the same time. Yeah, it was really nice to be able to do that. And yeah, I think from the beginning, I was like, I want to make stuff too. I was really like young and ambitious when I came to them. And yeah, they I think made space for dancers, you know, we did a lot of teaching work and stuff like this to like lead things in workshops, which was great. But when I was there, there wasn't like an official thing, like In Good Company, there probably could be more of that. So I think actually, in those situations, when you give people space to explore their own research, and not everyone necessarily wants to do that. Some people just want to do their job. And that's fine. But I think people are more fulfilled, and they do their work better. So then maybe they end up staying longer, or just being more invested in general.

Erion:

That was certainly the feeling I had during the In Good Company that it was very much about keeping dancers longer, even though they were getting a longer leash if you like, because they were able to explore themselves. But I'm really interested in what you said Erion about you having a chat with Hofesh and being open about your aspirations. And I'm thinking about listeners that might be in similar situations to you. And would you recommend that honesty of going actually, I'd really like to do more teaching or I'd really like to do more choreography... or? Yeah? Definitely, definitely the best way to go forward with any choreographers, any director is just sitting down having a chat, because each director will have their idea or choreographer will have their idea where to go. They want to bring the company with you involved in it as a dancer. But I believe you have to have you are already where do you want to go as a performer as a dancer, but also in your career. If you want to create you have to talk. I'm not saying it's easy. I was lucky enough that Hofesh was supportive from day one. But also I think he appreciated that I was straightforward. I didn't go around or think I just went sat down. And also you establish a relationship like that from the beginning. And it's really helpful. For me, it has been helpful for nine years, for example, I was in Amsterdam, and I was going to choreograph. And we had one rule I couldn't miss any show. So that's what I promised to him. And also it was in my way of working as well, since nine years in Hofesh. I only missed four shows. And that was because I had a surgery on my knee. So it was my rule never miss a show no matter what. So that was also our rule. We'll never miss a show. So I went to Amsterdam, and then did a two week choreography there and woke up at five took a plane then arrived in London and by surprise meet Hofesh in the train. We had a train journey together from London to Plymouth directly gone on stage, do lights and tech rehearsal and then shows and then I was dead into the hotel, because I

[inaudible]... but he was so supportive. We met at the train and he's like, you can do this. It's fine. You know, it's your dream, you should follow your dream. And it's your job and your dream as well. Because he knew I loved the company a lot.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Erion:

And so yeah, I would suggest to everybody to have a chat. And if it doesn't happen, then...

Melanie:

Perhaps then you know that you're not in the right place.

Erion:

Exactly.

Melanie:

So Annie going back to you when you first left, then how did that feel? And what was the first thing you felt that you had to do to establish yourself as an independent?

Annie:

Oh,

Melanie:

Indeed, were you an independent. Did you go to another company?

Annie:

Yeah, I was independent. I started a new project with Rachid Ouramdane, who is based in France. He's just been appointed as the new director of Chaillot in Paris. But yeah, back then he was not the director of Chaillot yet, but he was a choreographer I met in Candoco when he came to work with us. And so he offered me this project that was really clearly like, okay, I can't do that, and continue to be full time company. And it's like just a duet. So it's like, it's very personal. It's like it's gonna be you or not, if you don't want to do it, I have to find someone else like now. So it was kind of like, Okay, let's go. And yeah, that show ended up being very successful. Like when you make stuff you don't know, like, how it's going to be taken. And just like, there's so many elements involved in that. And

some of it, I feel like, it's just luck. But I think it was simple and touching and cheap. Because we're only two on stage. But that ended up being like the backbone of my dance life for like five years. And then I did a lot of other stuff around that, but I was on tour a lot. So then I was kind of trying to, like, sneak in doing my own things, developing my own practice when I was free when I was back in London. Yeah. Okay. Wait, what was the question? Yeah, establishing myself as an independent artist.

Melanie:

Yeah

Annie:

I think it just took time also because then I started establishing myself in another country, which now I feel like maybe I'm well known in France. People here are maybe like, Oh, didn't you used to dance with Candoco? And I'm like that was a thousand years ago. I've done so much other stuff, but you don't know about it.

Melanie:

I was going to talk to you about that later, that label that sort of carries with you... That's nice, still feeling like you've got that connection? Because actually, there is support there. And I'm sure they're thinking of you when they're thinking of opportunities as well, potentially. Erion, how about you? What was the first thing you did to sort of go right, okay, it's me now.

Annie:

Yeah, so like, I'm super grateful to the exposure I got in that company. Because it each opportunity I've gotten has opened other doors to other things that I would not have expected. But for a while, it was like I would be off touring like three years after leaving Candoco and I would come back and like go to professional class and people will be like, oh, how's it going with Candoco and I'm like, ha ha! I'm totes not there anymore. But also I am still connected to them as a sort of orbiting in their artists community. So it's still part of my professional world, which Yeah, I like the idea of maintaining relationships over a long time that it's not just like, okay, we're done with each other. Ciao, like this can take other shapes.

Erion:

I took four months off.

Melanie:

Okay. That wasn't what I was expecting you to say.

Erion:

You know, it was a plan of mine because I just wanted to have a break. And the last four months of still working with Hofesh I was doing choreography in Italy. I was teaching workshops. So I was quite busy with the whole year too. I transitioned so I didn't stop from Hofesh and go and do other things. I was working with Hofesh, doing workshops, teaching and choreographing around that was the last three to four years more intensively. I like to transition a lot. I prefer that. So when I stopped, I think it was June, I decided to take four months off. And it was great feeling. I had danced since I was 18. So it was a long time. Every day in the studio every day working a lot of shows. The body and mind, soul, everything needed to rest. So yeah, four months off and then I went to China. I was invited to create there for three weeks. And I did that. And then I had planned from January until July or August, I had three commissions and lots of workshops, then pandemic hit. But yeah.

Melanie:

To drop back to you then for a moment, Annie and you talked about that label of being still perceived as being in Candoco but having left. I'm thinking that the generation of dancers now have got a different set of tools around them with social media and websites from when I was dancing and not at your level, btw. But I wondered, was this something you needed to do yourself in terms of rebranding? So did you think to yourself, right, I need to build my profile? I'll get a website, I'll put these images out of myself. Was there any of that consciously? Or did you just organically move into that next stage?

Annie:

Yeah, that's stuff that I'm super bad at. And I'm still, I need to get better at. I have a website now, which feels like a good step. I need to be more proactive in updating it as most people with websites probably feel the same. But yeah, I feel like I'm still in the process of defining that. Like I don't confidently say like, I am a choreographer, I feel like a dancer who makes things or also I create from the perspective of someone who's on stage, or like, who's been performing a lot. That's the way I'm coming from it. Yeah, so it's something that I look at a lot of other people who are super good at putting their stuff up on social media, and it's like, really awesome and spectacular and shiny looking. And I'm just like, Oh my God, that's the last thing I think about I don't know, I'm someone who's really focused on what's going on right now. And I'm so invested in that and I'm so interested by it that I'm just like, Oh, I should take a picture. Oh, no, I forgot about that. I'm slowly trying...

Erion:

Sounds to get to me.

Annie:

Yeah. I'm trying to train myself that that's part of the work. Like I'm like, oh,

Erion:

It sounds good to me. And I think that's the best thing when you're in the moment and creating instead of creating for the outcome.

Annie:

Yeah, right.

Erion:

Sounds great to me. I do the same if you see my social media, just pictures of little things for painting, whatever I do like weird things, and a little bit of my work the same. I recently open a website after a lot of people telling me you have to open a website, you have to show your work, I had the same feeling. But I it sounds good to me that you're in the moment and you want to do whatever you want to do. And I think that's perfect. So with social media now... I... for me, I think sometime we lose that part of that creativity that come innocent creativity, that's what I call it.

Melanie:

Oh, that's nice,

Erion:

That it's with the back thought in your head that why am I creating this? Who's gonna like it? It's Yeah, for me it's...

Melanie:

That's lovely. That's spontaneous. And in the moment. There's something about the infrastructure, as well isn't there. Being an independent is exactly that you're on your own in a way. And so the job of having to update the website, think about the social media, do all of that stuff falls on your shoulders, and actually, you're also the performer and the person who's bringing home the bacon. And so a lot falls on you. And I wondered what your infrastructure might look like now? Perhaps less then. But do you feel that you have any kind of infrastructure around you in terms of support for your work? Do you have producers working with you? Do you have just like minded groups? Or are you still feeling independent?

Erion:

We're both laughing.

Melanie:

I wish I had a photo of both of your faces right now.

Annie:

I have so many staff members, it's amazing, you know?

Melanie:

Ha ha! Have you? You've got a finance manager, marketing manager.

Annie:

In my dreams... that'd be super cool.

Melanie:

Just you isn't it Annie?

Annie:

I don't know. Yeah. Hey, producers, I would love to work with you. Yeah, it's really hard. Because what we do is so fluctuating. So I also understand why it's hard to find people who are like, cool, I'll jump in and support you full time, even though you probably don't know if you can pay me like, why would anyone want to, like, you know, why would they take a risk? So yeah, it's tricky. And when you spend a lot of energy writing an application or something that means a lot to you, and you're like, this is awesome, this project needs to exist, and then you don't get it, it can be really devastating. And it...

Melanie:

And who's holding your hand at that point? Who can you moan to that have the same...

Annie:

Friends... Yeah, like other artists. I think it's starting to get better, maybe organisations starting to offer like, Hey, we can offer our producer hours to you for free, you know, stuff like that, which is like, Oh, that is super helpful, actually. But what I would love support with is like, more long term thinking about things or like developing relationships and stuff like that, because I kind of feel like I'm 100% making it up as I go, which most people probably feel...

Melanie:

Yeah, that's really interesting. I can feel your pain, I could not imagine what that might feel like, when, it's sometimes when the bad things happen rather than the good things that you need to know that you've got people that you can talk to, and just go arrgh! And share your pain. So Erion, well both of you actually, but I'm going to direct this to you Erion because I know how much the aesthetic of the work of Hofesh is ingrained within it. I wanted to ask both of you, what kind of work does your body want to do when it's been a tool for someone else's, for so long? And you know, with Hofesh's work, I know that that strong aesthetic is taught through his training and his repertoire. And I wondered how easy it was for you to break away from that style of movement when you'd been doing it for that many years, and start to form that aesthetic and vocabulary of your own.

Erion:

Wow, there is a lot of components there to come together to actually make sense. And it's connected with the question you asked before, if we have producers support and all of that. Why is connected to that. We don't have a platform any more in UK in London, for example, if you see Hofesh where he came from, no he did this festival taking place in The Place. It was a competition of choreography.

Melanie:

Yes I remember.

Erion:

Yes, The Place Prize. Yeah, it doesn't exist anymore. So therefore people like me and Annie here in UK, we have no platform to show our work. And that's where it starts from how you're going to meet producers? How are people going to see your work? How are you going to share your thoughts with people to actually see what you do, then have a chance to actually meet the producers. Like I like your work. So I would like to work with you because what I've seen it's great and I'm inspired by it, even if I get paid not so much at the beginning. I believe in your dream or in your choreography, no? It doesn't exist anymore. And therefore there is no platform. So from there on, how does it go you don't have a studio? How can you research a different body language? Coming back to the second question about being with a company for such a long time. How can you research a different way of dancing or gather everything you have done in your career, go in a studio for, let's say, two weeks and start just researching, researching and researching. And how can you do that if you don't have the infrastructure to do it, if you don't have the possibility for a week or two studio here in UK or in London, it's one of the most expensive things. I wanted to go, but I couldn't afford it to rent a studio. And there is no support on that. So therefore, what you're stuck with, is not doing a research for to shake off all these years of dancing for a choreographer for nine years, for example. And combine whatever you have done whole life. You can't take a friend and go and explore different body shape, different ways of working, so then you're stuck.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Erion:

And therefore, every time you have an opportunity to do something, especially to create something, and there is a really short time that you have to create a time limit really short. And you have to rush to create something, therefore everything that comes out of your body, it's ingrained in your brain, because you have done it. For my side, I've done it for nine years. Before that I was a ballet dancer, and then I did dance theatre and I did, neoclassical modern, I did everything. But it's harder to access those points that were far away my memory than it is now with Hofesh. Like it's easier. My buddies are there still.

Melanie:

Muscle memory is calling.

Erion:

Muscle memory. So yeah, I think whoever has the possibility is great. But I believe I'm being maybe a bit critical here of London, but it is the truth, I have a lot of friends and...

Melanie:

Annie's shaking her head and nodding!

Annie:

Totally agree.

Erion:

The truth is the truth, if we had a platform of like, this is something I've thought about, but I'm not a producer. So any producers out there who wants to collaborate with me and Annie, come and talk. But, you know, creating a festival for choreographers here in London, it's not a bad thing to showcase their work. Even if it's a 10 minute work, it doesn't have to be 20 minutes. But yeah, it would be a great idea to bring back something. A kind of a festival or a competition, like The Place Prize, to encourage choreographers to work and to showcase their work, then you make the connection.

Melanie:

And Annie you were agreeing, I think with a lot of what Erion was saying there. But I also wondered with you, and I don't know how you feel about this because as you say, you have got a longer period between when you were dancing with Candoco and what you're doing now, but the ethos for them is about challenging the idea of ideal dancer aesthetic. And I noticed in your bio that you say that you want to disrupt the idea of a normative dancing body. And so I wondered in many ways, whether you were bringing Candoco's ethos with you, or rather, perhaps you were subscribed to Candoco's ethos before even entering Candoco. Do you feel different to Erion? And the way he's talking about movement and muscle memory from working so long with Hofesh? Is that the same for you? Or different?

Annie:

Yeah, I mean, a lot of what you're saying Erion I'm massively resonating with all that. Yeah, it doesn't matter what your body is like. Everybody has layers of memory of what they've experienced. And I think, you know, because you've worked so intensively in like one very iconic movement style for you know, that's like really fresh or recent. And I think it's different, just because Candoco is a repertory company. So we had like all these different people coming in. So it was more about how you can change yourself to fit into lots of things, which was not always easy. I think the interest in accessibility or different ways of being, different ways of moving, which are maybe like considered other or like outside of what a normal quote unquote, dancing body is, has always been interesting to me because of who I am and my physicality and my experience in life. But that definitely got more refined through meeting Candoco. And also like wanting to do it in my own way, or like what it means for me and my work. Like that's an ongoing exploration. It's not something I'll ever have, like figured out or something, it's an interest that will keep going. And that goes alongside of exploring movement concepts, and, you know, physical ideas. They're interlinked for me, and it's something that never gets old. Like, it's always interesting. And it always brings up new, like, challenges and problems to solve and things that are like, Oh, I need to Okay, how can I do that thing I was mentioning then. Yeah, and exactly what Erion you're saying about places to present your work and studios. Like I realised, actually, when I came out of Candoco I also did a residency that I self funded. And I was able to do that because I kept performing. Like that's also why it's like quite hard for me to just jump to another thing because that's been my way of making money is..

Melanie:

Yeah.

Annie:

...still performing, still teaching doing all those things. And I like they influence each other. But sometimes it's like, it might be interesting just to really focus on that. I don't know what would happen.

Melanie:

I wanted to ask you about that because when we first approached you about coming onto this podcast, I used the phrase choreographic identity. And you made the valid point that there's often a hierarchy attached to the idea of being a maker. And actually, you're a performer as well and you're making your own way and you're performing. And that should have an equal status. But sometimes there's this notion, perhaps that we're pushing, wanting to be a maker or choreographer onto people. And I wondered, how is that feeling for you?

Annie:

Yeah, I think there's maybe an assumption that first you're a dancer, and then you'll graduate to being a choreographer, and that sort of like moving up the ladder, or something. And for me, I'm just like, this is a holistic thing. We are artists, and whether you are channelling somebody else's vision, as a performer, you're bringing your artistic voice and your perspective to that we're not just like, empty beings or something. I don't know. And then, you know, when you start initiating and creating your own stuff, then it's like, yeah, you take on a different responsibility. That's, like totally different from being in somebody else's work and feels very risky. They both have their own risk, actually, which are totally different. So I yeah, that also relates to what Erion you were saying about where do I present my work? Because I feel like, Okay, I'm pretty established as a performer. But I'm not known as a maker. But it's like, I have all this background of years of work and moving and it's not separate from creating your own thing. It's just that people don't know me as creating my own thing. And maybe I'm not as confident in saying like, this is my vision, or whatever. But I feel like okay, I'm experienced. So I'm not new at this. I'm not a student making my first work. It's a shift of like, into a different stream, but it's all part of who I am as an artist. So yeah.

Erion:

I had problems with that. Friends would ask or introduce with somebody and they're like, oh, what do you do? And I'll be, I don't know, I am a choreographer, I guess. Although I love choreography, have done it for some time now. It still feels like I'm just an artist. But my practice is based on movement and light and sound and putting together a show. It's a hard thing to change. But because of that, I had to change it because the transition from dancer to choreographer for me if it was for me, I wouldn't have done it. I wouldn't change like my stamp choreographer, or movement director, although I know I am. But I wouldn't have. When I opened my website, I named it the artist. That was my website, not Erion Kruja, choreographer, because I thought, you're just an artist, it's fine. But I had to change it, because that's how it works. You have to put a stamp and say, now I'm choreographing and although you might have done it on all your years as a dancer for different choreographers coming and asking, Can you do two eights and then putting it on the show. But yet, there it is, you have to change. So at that time, it's just how things work. Because if we had an opportunity, let's say, to choreograph to showcase your work, you didn't have to put a stamp on what we do, no?

Melanie:

Yeah.

Erion:

People would notice, like, Oh, yeah, that's choreographing or she's choreographing or doing that. So it's simple.

Melanie:

There's something about language isn't there that we use in the industry and we often call an artist emerging or established and I think you're both almost saying that you're living both of those things, aren't you? You're established, you've got a name, you've got years of experience, you're emerging in some areas, or you might be perceived as being emerging in some areas. As you were saying Annie that actually you are established. You're known in Paris or Zurich, or perhaps more than you are in the UK with a choreographic hat on. So it's really interesting how we seem so insistent on labelling everyone. And meanwhile, you're ducking and diving, perhaps choosing the label that might get you through whatever door it is that that label seems to be attached to whether it's, you know, funding for emerging choreographers, okay, that's what I am! That's what I'll say I am for this, to get this door open. Would you say then, in any part of that navigation, that label of Candoco, that label of Hofesh. Where does that come in for you? Is that a help or a hindrance? Does that give you kudos? Or do you have to shrug it off? Or again, do you duck and dive between feeling like sometimes you want to call yourself x this or and sometimes just going I wish you'd forget that I was with that company because I'm me. Both of you looking very pensive.

Erion:

For me, yeah, it's a good thing. Of course, it's part of my career. It's part of my life for nine years and I love it. And I still love the company and the work that Hofesh does or they do as a company because the work it's created by a team of 12 people in the studio. Even with the chats that you have outside the studio, about the piece, the idea and with the body language that you create or the movement you create in the studio. So yeah, you're so involved in creating the work. But yeah, there is a label there. For example, I did a show in I created in Germany. And a lot of reviews were good. I'm not bragging, was good. One person was, Oh, yeah, I did good blah, blah, blah, but there was just same as Hofesh. And I said, Okay, fair enough. It's okay. It wasn't. But fair enough, it's okay. Then I see somebody else doing another choreography, totally stealing from Hofesh, from videos and workshops, and then the review is like amazing new choreographer coming out. Then it makes you think, wait a second, because maybe if I do something like Hofesh, maybe I'm entitled to do because I've worked there for nine years, and it's fine. But if somebody else does it, then it's okay. You don't notice it on stage. So it works both ways for you. The good part is that maybe you have a name out there that people know and look forward to take your workshops or choreograph or invite you, and the other side works that you might be always stamped as creating work that resembles Hofesh. But people wouldn't know that maybe before that, or after you maybe had the same ideas. That's why the first place you decided to work together, you know.

Melanie:

And how does that play out for you, Annie?

Annie:

Yeah, it's an interesting one. I think I use it sometimes, because it's like a very obvious signal about inclusivity, or like this interest in inclusivity. Because the company is known for that and doing it on a professional level, like working with disabled dancers really professional and awesome and all of this. It's quite tricky, because then I think people maybe assume things about me or like, assume I am an expert, or like, I'm claiming an expert view on all of that. And I'm like, very much not. I have my experience, and I have my thoughts, and they're my own, and they're not the right or correct way of doing stuff. It's just how I think about it. Yeah, I don't know. It is tricky. There's definitely Yeah, positive and not as great things. Yeah.

Melanie:

Do you feel with a little bit more water under the bridge between your time at Candoco and now, do you feel in a different place than you were when you first left in terms of that labelling?

Annie:

Yeah, absolutely. Actually, it's like a big answer. I don't know how much of that is going in. But I guess it was quite tricky for me being in the company in terms of the language that was sometimes used around disabled non disabled, which, because I am who I am, I guess I would qualify as a disabled dancer. And that like hard line was like, it created a lot of stuff in how we worked. And then one of the reasons why I wanted to leave is because I didn't know if I could work in a context that was not dealing with that. Like, I didn't know if anyone would want to hire me just as a dancer in their project. I was like, This is a test, I want to see if I'm just going to be a disabled person for people. Or if I'm actually a dancer. Those two things are together, they can't be separated, right. But I feel that's the way people look at it. And maybe that's like my cynicism, or like lack of trust in human beings or something. But I find it super interesting to slide between those worlds. They both have great things about them. And they both have drawbacks. And there are ways of working in each that resonate with me. Yeah, and I'm in a privileged position because I feel I can slide between those. And I have like, not everybody is able to do that or like is allowed, I will say to do that by other people. So yeah, it's a really interesting one. But when I first left, that was massively, it created some tension for me internally, I was just like, I'm not just a disabled dancer, I'm a dancer, and I am disabled, but I am a dancer. And now I'm much more calm about it.

Erion:

A really good dancer, by the way.

Annie:

Thanks

Erion:

And I really enjoyed honestly, the energy and the way of working. But I have a question for you. Sorry, I am just gonna ask. Have you had the chance to choreograph for a non disabled company because as you say, you might have that stamp that people will hire you to work with disabled? Like, why should it have a barrier in the middle?

Annie:

Yeah, I do. Absolutely. Yes, me too. I feel like anyone who wants to work with people can just work with any people. And yes, I have choreographed for groups of disabled and non disabled people. I've choreographed for groups without disabilities, or yeah non disabled dancers completely as well. And it brings up a lot of interesting questions, because it's like, yeah, the ways I want to think about movement, I want to think about it in a way that it can be for everyone. And it can be exciting and challenging for everyone involved and not create barriers for anyone. And that mostly has to do with just like being open to who you're working with and how they work and how they move and what's best for them. What's supportive for them. Yeah. And it is maybe a labelling thing that comes from the outside, which is okay. Yeah, I'm quite happy to be like invited to work with disabled dancers or non disabled dancers because I find it quite exciting. Like, the more difference and mix there is in a group, I find it very exciting because it makes me have to think about how I bring all these people together. And they're so different. When I meet a group that are sort of like all the same age, and they have the same training, and they have like, it's great, but it's also like, okay, but then yeah, I say that, and then actually, you never know what's going on for people, you never know. So like, I might have an assumption, because I'm working with a group of students, and then they come out with something that I'm just like, wow, what like, you guys are just amazing. Like you have all these layers. But you know, that was my own assumption. You know, I keep removing those.

Melanie:

And Annie, do you think that this sort of internal struggle or this labelling situation is the same internationally as it is in the UK? Does it feel different working abroad? Do you still feel that you have that same labelling issue, whether that be non disabled or disabled, or even performer and choreographer? Actually, we've been talking about both those labels in this conversation. I know you've done a lot of work in Paris and Zurich, does that feel different for you? Or are you struggling with the same challenges wherever you go, if you like with that terminology.

Annie:

Yeah, it's very different in different places in how ready the public is to see different types of bodies, or different people or whatever on stage and accept them as dancers, like every place is in a different stage of their evolution thinking. And it's one of the reasons why I love the UK, because we have a really sophisticated way, like community of disabled artists in all kinds of art forms, we just make really great work. And that's particular to this country. So the conversation is not as evolved yet in some places. So then it can be hard because when you're maybe like, one of the first times people have seen someone who has a prosthetic arm on stage or something, it just becomes all about that. And it's like, super boring, because it's like, oh, my God, I was doing so much hard dancing, and you're just like, Wow, she has a prosthetic arm. That's maybe simplifying, but that is the reaction I've gotten sometimes. And that's also a privilege to be that person and be like, yeah, okay, think about this. There are so many possibilities out there in human beings.

Melanie:

Yeah. Yeah, gosh, I can empathise with that struggle.

Erion:

It's also inspiring for a lot of people. It's really inspiring to see somebody taking the courage to actually go on stage and work and show to people that I can do this, you know, because maybe in some other places it's not even known.

Annie:

Yeah, exactly.

Erion:

You know, it's it's really, really inspiring to see. I come from Albania, so we didn't see that in Albania. I don't see in Switzerland, I didn't see so much at that time. The first time I heard it was here in UK, which is a beautiful thing to have. So it's inspiring to see. For me, it was inspiring to see the company for the first time in the triple bill that I saw you Annie dancing. It gives you a little bit of a boost to stop complaining and be like just work more, you know, for yourself, you know, as a dancer like, well, it's inspiring to see.

Annie:

Yeah, yeah. Cool. Thank you.

Melanie:

That's amazing. As this independent artist, let's not worry about whether you're a maker or a performer right now, but as this independent artist, do you feel that you've been able to make a

stamp on that world? But do you feel your inner, both of you actually, because I know Erion for you when you say artist, you're also talking as you said earlier about music and lighting and the whole thing. Do either of you feel that you've been able to make your mark clearer where you are now in terms of what you want to say and how you say that with your dance?

Erion:

Sorry, Annie, please go ahead.

Annie:

I feel like I've been taking a lot of airspace so like...

Erion:

I feel the same. [Laughs] I don't know to be honest, I think all it's happening now. It's just a journey of creating things and and personally until I will have that time of three or four months in a studio creating with dancers and artists and having the opportunity to research more deeply into my thoughts. I think that's probably when, a stamp will come. Of course each one has their identity. Now I would say for me, I'm an energetic person. And I'd like to move a lot and my music choices and my ideas are more straightforward. I guess you can see it from the podcast today. I say things why I think or maybe the way they are I think so yeah, that would resonate in on stage to what I want to talk about. But deep down for example, I have my life story that it hasn't been touched yet to become...

Melanie:

So ok, an identity is being built but you've got so much further to go.

Erion:

I can't even begin to touch that side of my memories. Because if I want to show or share my experience, I better have time to really do it well, otherwise, it would just be snippets of these memories and not really good. So, yeah, it's time. I get invited and I go in companies and choreograph for four weeks, and these four weeks are disrupted by another show that they have or another costume fitting or something else. Therefore, you end up having two and a half weeks with amazing dancers, because what they'll dancers can do in rep companies is amazing. They are so easy to get into their brain, and they are open to get everything and just do. But two and a half weeks to create is not enough is it? That's the way of it.

Melanie:

This has come up on the podcast before actually. Claire Cunningham and Jorge Crecis were talking about the luxury of time and how it's just something in our industry that we just don't ever seem to build into the way we frame anything. So Annie over to you. And I'm going to try and do better at reframing that question in a different way. I think what I'm trying to ask is, do you feel that you are developing your identity? And is your artistic voice starting to be heard?

Annie:

That's a great question. Yeah, I think I'm starting to discover more like what I like and what I'm interested in which I don't know if that's an identity or whatever. But I also have an instinctive like, shrink away from this thing of like, being nailed down of being like, this is what I do. It's that kind of thing. Because actually, I want to stay fluid and evolving and learning and open. But if I look back on like things I've created, it's like, oh, there's something in common there. And then is it like, I'm just making the same thing over and over? Err? But yeah, I think I like things like what you said, Erion, I like to move a lot and sweat and be joyful, and work with who's in the room with me. And yeah, be a little bit. I don't know, I don't want to say punk, but like, just not care so much. I don't know, there's like the balance between things that are tender and human and delicate. And then just messy and high energy. And yeah, I like yeah, the play between that. Yeah.

Melanie:

And for my last question, I always like to end trying to find out a little bit more about how we at Greenwich Dance, and organisations like us can do better in whatever the conversation is that we're having. And in this context, it's about how can we better support independent artists like yourselves? What do artists need right now? You've touched on it, I know. Time, studio space, platforms. So anything else that you feel would help? The funding model is what it is. But is there support around that you talked about producers and being introduced? What could we do to better help people like yourselves?

Annie:

Yeah, that sharing of resources is so valuable, and not having to pay for things like producer time, studio time, all that stuff. I guess what I would love is developing relationships with artists, not just like, here's a call out anyone can do it. Like, that's also great. But having a relationship with an organisation or an institution and being like, we're actually really interested in supporting you. So actually, what do you need right now, what's useful for you. Having a conversation rather than just We're offering this! And it's like that might not actually be useful for people. Maybe I'm not so experienced at putting together grants, and etc, but these little micro things that are offered, like, Here's £200, and I'm like, that's super nice. But what am I going to do with that? That's one day for one person or something, I guess, actually figuring out the needs of independent artists and working with that more.

Melanie:

I think that's really powerful. It's about not making assumptions and putting together those hard packages of this is what we're offering, but trying to be a bit more open to a bespoke offer. We're trying to take that on board. Erion. How about you?

Erion:

I mean, this is already helpful from Greenwich Dance, and from you. It's having an opportunity to have a chat with another artist and with you and just realise that, for me realising we're all in the same pot somehow. For example, Annie was saying, oh, the application, this is the application do it. And we're not so good to write grants. Of course, we're not good to write grants, we have danced the whole life. And the grants have so many requirements that you have to write this way or that way to get the grant. We are artists, we are straightforward people. We say I want to do this, I want to create this. This is my idea. But yet you have to write in a certain way. I've done applications, and I've stopped since six months because it's not right. The way that the requirements are that you have to speak so eloquently or write so eloquently that you cannot do it. You have to ask somebody else to write it for you basically. Especially if English is not my first language, so of course it will be harder for me. But as Greenwich Dance, I think this is amazing, giving opportunities to a lot of us choreographers or artists out there to have a chat together. And I know you've been really supportive and that's great. And I would suggest on my side, it's meeting in person, I mean, forget about COVID hopefully, but creating something for example, I know Annie from the stage, but we never met, no? Yet here we are, we meet, we discuss and we realise that we're in the same boat. Having the opportunity to meet in person, for example, an evening somewhere, just to meet there and just have a chat, just talk all together and share because we do quite an individualistic work. We stay a lot in our rooms and think about the world and changing. Annie's laughing. You know what I mean! You're just there like in your head, then you meet with a fellow artist, and this world is suddenly exchanged with somebody else. And then you realise, well it's great. So yeah, I wish that could have platforms here in UK, they do exist in other places. That's my only thing. Sharing basically sharing.

Melanie:

Well, one of the things I should say to both of you is when I asks that question, what can we do to better support you, it always feels like the power balance is shifted. You've both been in touch with me with ideas, and suggestions. Erion, you sent me a grant recently, and we had 55 seconds before the deadline, but you're so sweet, and sent that over to me. And I know Annie, you've also been in touch with ideas and thoughts. And I really feel that this really lovely equilibrium between artists and organisations is starting to get there and I thank you both for thinking of us. And that feels like a good place to stop. You've given me so much of your time already. And thoughts. If you would like to hear more episodes about subjects, moving artists of today, search for Talking Moves wherever you get your podcasts. And don't forget to subscribe, leave a review and spread the word. And for more information about Annie and Erion, head on over to greenwichdance.org.uk. And do remember if you know someone you think we should talk to you, or have a topic you'd like us to talk about, please

tweet us @GreenwichDance. But for today, that's it from us and join us next time for more Talking Moves. Thank both you so much.

Annie:

Thank you. Pleasure. That was great.

Erion:

Yes.

Annie:

Hi, again. It's Annie, I just wanted to add a couple of thoughts. I don't know if you'll be able to use this separately. But I guess I was just thinking about what I was saying in terms of like, when I left Candoco and wondering if people would hire me, or would I just be a disabled person, etc. First is just to say, that's not really something I worry about anymore. Now I just do what I do. And I don't really care what other people think, in that sense. And I don't really worry as much really about how I'm perceived as much I just focus on doing what I do, whether that's as a performer or as a maker, or, you know, teaching things, all of it. And I just wanted to add that, for me working with disability or within an accessible context, all of that stuff. It's not about proving something, it's not about demonstrating that we can do it too. Or like, Look, I can live up to the standard of a non disabled performer or something. That's not at all interesting to me. It's about seeing the potential in everybody because everybody can move, everybody can move. So yeah, and when I guess I write about disruption, it's about just putting people who might not be in certain spaces in those spaces, whether that's me as a performer or the people I work with, if I'm choreographing or, you know, supporting people into a pathway to being a professional dancer through training, that's where that interest comes from. So yeah, I just wanted to add a couple of thoughts, because sometimes maybe it sounds like, Oh, I was worried I wouldn't be good enough or something. And it was more that I wasn't sure if the world would allow me to do those things. I didn't have a doubt that I was capable of it. That sounds egotistical, but yes, so if that's useful, please pop that in somewhere if not totally fine. Thanks.