

TALKING MOVES



A PODCAST ABOUT DANCE

Parenting in the Arts S05 / E05

Episode Description:

In this episode, we talk to **Charlotte Vincent** and **Robert Clark** about parenting in the arts.

Becoming a parent changes the lives of all who do it, but artists often need to make huge decisions about how they will balance the responsibility of caring alongside a profession that requires touring, weekend and evening work and situations where 'WFH' just can't come into play. So how best to navigate these changes?

We start off by finding out what Charlotte and Rob's dancing lives had looked like pre-children and then probe a little deeper into the considerations that came to the fore, such as touring abroad as they took on caring responsibilities. Charlotte talks us through some of the policies her company has adopted to better support parents which have come out of the need to support her own family as well as those of her workforce. We talk about the various 'stages' we go through as parents depending on whether children are pre-nursery or in school and how this might help or hinder our working schedules. Indeed the topic of scheduling is pertinent and we discuss how companies can better do this to support the needs of families.

The effects of the pandemic come into so many of our conversations on this podcast and this one is no exception. We chuckle about video-bombing during those home-schooling periods but also reflect upon how parents have become more visible during the last few years, our nurturing responsibilities no longer kept so separate from our working lives. We also compare some of the

case studies in Vincent Dance Theatre's report of 2009, A Dancers Perspective, to those of today and wondered whether we have made as much change as we would like...

The subject of power arises – between genders but also between organisations and freelances and how we can use our 'powers', when and if we have them, as a force for much-needed change. We talk about speaking up about our responsibilities within employment negotiations, of organisations taking the time to find out about their employees' infrastructures and support networks in order to understand what flexibility is there (or not there) and discuss the work that inspirational bodies in our sector such as Dance Mama and Parents & Carers In Performing Arts are doing.

And finally, we reflect on the creativity being a parent can bring and the changes it has made to the choreographic and artistic approaches of both Charlotte and Rob.

Talking Moves is a Greenwich Dance production

Presented by Melanie Precious

Production by Carmel Smith, Kajsa Sundström, Lucy White and Melanie Precious

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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 moves them. I'm Melanie Precious and in this episode I'm talking with two artists about parenting in the arts. Becoming a parent changes the lives of all who do it. But dancers often need to make huge decisions about how they'll balance the responsibility of caring alongside a profession that requires touring, weekend and evening work and situations where working from home just can't come into play. We talk to two artists to find out how they have navigated these changes. Charlotte Vincent, artistic director, choreographer and director of Vincent Dance Theatre, and Robert Clark, esteemed choreographer and performer.

Robert:

Thank you very much

Melanie:

Welcome both of you. So to kick us off, I wondered if you could just tell us a little bit about your dancing life? And what that looked like before you became a parent? And Charlotte, perhaps you could tell us first?

Charlotte:

Yes, I mean, I suppose I'm coming out to this conversation more as an artistic director and the chief executive of a company with strong strategies around parenting in the performing arts. And I'll probably err on the side of discussing that. But in terms of my role in the company's history of supporting parents, including myself

Robert:

and me, let's be transparent about that.

Charlotte:

I was about to get to that. And the other thing is that Robert and I have worked together for

Robert:

too long,

Charlotte:

far too long. Probably 12 / 15 years or something,

Robert:

I think probably 2012, I think was Motherland.

Charlotte:

Yeah, that's right. So coming on for 10 years. And before that, actually, I think I directed you in Bare Bones didn't I when David Massingham was in charge of DanceXchange. So anyway, we digress, which we probably may well do Melanie apologies for this conversation.

Melanie:

We've been well prepared for this.

Charlotte:

So I was a dancer and a performer in the company for 15 years, and then, oh crikey, I can't even remember, I haven't performed for a very long time. So when I was still performing, parenting wasn't an issue for me as such, but it was for the members of my company. And in fact, an artistic associate that I was working with at the time called TC Howard, the last piece we made together was very shortly before she became a mother. And that was a big moment in the company's career, because we'd worked together for a decade at that point. And that was when we were making Broken Chords in 2004, maybe, I think. So I had to readjust the notion of how to accommodate within the company parents and what their needs were. And we can go on I'm sure to talk about how we've done that quite successfully, I think over the last 20 years.

Melanie:

Yeah. Thanks, Charlotte. How about you, Rob, what did your dancing life look like pre parenthood?

Robert:

I think the kind of key characteristic of my work as a performer and also as a makers that prior to becoming a parent, and definitely the first year into the second year of being a parent, I was very, very much spread around different countries in my work. So very quickly, after graduating, well, immediately after graduating, I worked in Germany, I then worked in the US for a bit and then I was kind of then mixing jobs. So I'd be bouncing between various countries. And actually, when my son was born, I was living in Denmark, which had also come about through work and life, my partner's also Danish. So I think the key characteristic of my career up until the point that I was becoming a parent was that I was trying to be everywhere all the time doing everything. Yeah, that would be in a nutshell a thing.

Melanie:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Charlotte:

Actually, if I may interject as well, that in terms of the International life that Rob was leading, I think what happened for me personally, as the artistic director, because I was no longer performing, when I became a parent was that the last tour that I think we did was in America and Canada. And at that point, I was very clear in my head that becoming a parent, I didn't want that lifestyle anymore.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

And then I took some parental leave, which was an interesting point of discussion in itself for someone that's as driven I suppose, as perhaps both of us are to find our voices artistically. And to practice our craft very odd to take a break. You know, I had a failed sabbatical about 10 years before that. Someone broke their leg, so had to come back from my retreat in Greece as I remember it. But the idea of stopping for a bit is a bit of a threat, actually. And I think that's a common experience of dancers, performers, other choreographers and artistic directors of like, what happens to your company or your practice, when you stop for a bit, whether it's nine months or a year. I took nine months off, and then came back part time for three months, and then was just back in the flow of being full time again. It's a bit of a shock, but in terms of the adjustment to what the company was doing, there was a very conscious strategic decision, because by that point, several other people in the company had children as well, to stop that international reach really.

Melanie:

That's interesting.

Charlotte:

Yeah, I mean, it really has radically altered the last eight, nine years of Vincent Dance Theatre's practice, if you like and methodology has changed to accommodate parenting a lot. And so we make work on film and online as well as onstage and that's not because I want to become a filmmaker, although I really enjoy that process. It's because it allows us the work to continue having a life.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

So the form of my work has changed radically

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

Since I became a parent, and that was my strategic and creative response to me and others in the company, as Rob said, not wanting necessarily to be hither and thither all the time.

Melanie:

Yeah,

Charlotte:

and never at home.

Melanie:

That's really interesting. Taking that step to just sort of say, right international touring, That's no longer part of what we're doing. Rather than let's find a way of making international touring work and dragging all of our children along with because I've had pop stars talking about this. And I was thinking, how on earth and I suppose difference there being probably entourage and lots of money and can put quite a lot of infrastructure around. But

Charlotte:

no, actually,

Robert:

no, because we did do it.

Charlotte:

Yeah, we did.

Robert:

I'm not saying it was an unmitigated success in any sense. But that's why I say that first year. And then going into the second year, we did kind of make that possible. I mean, our situation was quite peculiar in that because we were initially based in Denmark, and my partner was working, actually just over into Sweden, her maternity leave was, by our standards, ridiculously good. She was on not quite full pay, but close to for almost a year. And even after that was allowed to kind of filter a way back into the workspace in a very positively negotiated way.

Melanie:

Right.

Robert:

So immediately, we just had an extra stability. And she was able to travel with me because of that. And so we did, my son still talks about places he's lived

Melanie:

Oh lovely

Robert:

Which he includes, you know, places, where we were probably only there for three weeks or so. And also, when we then moved back to the UK, she still had her maternity leave over in Sweden. So we were going back to Sweden as work, we went to Austria for work, I think Germany as well, France. So we were doing that thing. And it didn't always work at all, it was often the will to do it, versus the actual reality of doing it. You can make it work, but making it work, sometimes for some of those jobs, in hindsight, we would have been better off not doing it.

Melanie:

Right.

Robert:

But we had the luxury of being able to do it. So we did

Melanie:

You had the choice.

Robert:

And then what changed that was going into the nursery system. And kind of like as soon as you start going into systems around the child,

Melanie:

Yes.

Robert:

then that's definitely for me the next stage.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

Yes, that's worth mentioning, actually. Because the other thing, Melanie that I think it's important to say is that, sorry to pick you up on the language, but I don't think Rob was dragging his child around. And certainly what I mean, he might have been. But also on the flip side, I've worked with Polish performers for a very long time, and their families came on tour with us. So for me personally, as the driver, I didn't want to displace my child too much in the early... It's interesting, Rob's talk about the first year or two, because you're slightly in shock from becoming a parent anyway. And then you're trying to, frankly, provide a secure base for that child. And my son also talks about trips to Glasgow, where we stayed in a hotel with a swimming pool. And that was really exciting. And I would take him and my then partner with me in those early few years. But on the flip side, Aurora Lubos who's worked with me, her whole family came over from Poland with the father and two children and made Motherland with Robert in Eastleigh. We all stayed in a flat and nearly went mad in The Point in Eastleigh for 10 weeks, you know, so there are models that we have. And we paid for all of that. And in fact, then we also had a Costa Rican family with us who had a very new two year old child. And she did go into the nursery system in Eastleigh. And bless her was in there every day, five days a week, and that will have formed her independence and her way of being as a child, I'm sure. So what I've tried to do with the company and how we structure projects is to find a bespoke solution for whoever I'm working with. And in fact, even with Rob, there's been times where you and your son and Anna have come to Brighton for a few days and sort of stayed in the family accommodation in order to work in if it's a in half term, because it's not okay to always be separate from your family. And they might need to come with you as you described. So we have in fact travelled a lot with people's families a lot and VDT has paid for that.

Melanie:

That's interesting too. And I'm really interested in these stages. Because as a parent myself, I remember that, like you say the minute that you go into nursery, it feels like there's a real transition. It's the flexibility has gone in some ways, and particularly with the English system and the difficulty of getting your child into nursery, it's often not even a case that you can just go I could put them in that nursery over there for a little bit and put them in that nursery over there for a little bit. If it was anything like the nurseries that we were in, you're on a waiting list for... you sometimes don't even have flexibility around which days you're going in, let alone whether you can go to different ones. But yeah, it's a landscape to navigate.

Charlotte:

For me that was a moment of real freedom to have two and a half days of paid support, which is the government thing, isn't it? You get two and a half days of nursery for free. And then if you can find the space you top it, I found that incredibly liberating.

Melanie:

Yeah,

Charlotte:

That once my child had settled in that two and a half days, although it was like 10 til 2.30

Melanie:

Yes

Charlotte:

I suddenly became much more focused about I have got these three or four or five hours without my child where I can return to a practice or a direction or you know, running the company without, dare I say the word sort of interference, and I absolutely loved that because that felt like me again, but a different part of me than the one that would then pick him up and really enjoy being his mum again.

Melanie:

Yes

Robert:

There's something for me about that transition into parenting and some of the choices that I made in those early years on reflection that it's like trying to pick back up in my mind where I'd left off. And actually, I think it took me a long time to realise that that wasn't really the point. The point was, we were doing something different now. And so when I say like, some of those choices were perhaps not the best, they were often the choices that we're trying to just continue. And I think it's interesting what Charlotte was saying about the kind of nursery system that we have, because my experience wasn't charred. It's my experience was like, suddenly having to make some quite big changes around those hours and around the location of that nursery in that kind of schedule, which had nothing to do with my work schedule.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Robert:

Which was, as you already started off by saying, you know, quite changeable. Let's put it that way. So when that did happen, it was a prompt to check back in and say, Where am I actually in my life, as

opposed to trying to continue on from a kind of pre trajectory. And some of my biggest issues around becoming a parent were that changing the trajectory feels a lot like stepping away from something like success or ambition. And there's a big recalibration that I think has to, did happen for me, and I think happens for a lot of people around

Charlotte:

totally,

Robert:

how are you measuring yourself as an artist, as you become a parent,

Charlotte:

I think the other thing to add to that, Rob is the big difference that we haven't mentioned is that I'm on a wage because I run a company, and I'm employed, and Robert is freelance, and you've always been since your kid was born. And so the control that I have over how I manage the projects that I set up and lead it is in my control, whereas as a freelancer, I think you are invited hither and thither. And for all the right reasons, because you're a brilliant artist. But that doesn't suit as you said, the framework of two and a half days. Where as for me based in Brighton and being able to control what I did for that time, whether it was administrative work, or research or teaching or starting to make something that was more in my control. And as I said earlier, I designed the projects to suit me and the other people that had children and leaping forward 10 years or so something that Rob just said resonated, which is one of the things that VDT commit to very early on is scheduling, so that freelancers can commit to when they're going to be here making something or teaching something. And obviously, there's the odd change in the last minute this and the last bit. Generally, we want to support the freelance workforce by saying this is the period we'll try and fix it as soon as we can, so that you can organise your lives.

Melanie:

Yes.

Charlotte:

Because it's not just about the work. It's, as Rob said, there's a whole recalibration.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

And you know, even if you've got older children, Antonia Grove, who I've worked with for quite awhile, as just turned 40, something I think, and she's just had a third child, reasonably late in life. And she's now back into the nursery system. So she's still got all the same issues now that maybe some of us have moved on from

Melanie:

Yeah,

Charlotte:

but it's come back into her life. So she's, I'm sure she won't mind me saying is more, perhaps confident to ask for support?

Melanie:

Yes.

Charlotte:

Which we will try to, well, we will offer her, because she has a very young child.

Melanie:

Yeah, yeah.

Charlotte:

But I think it's a confidence thing as well. And Rob might have a lot to say about this, that at what point in terms of measuring your success are you able to say no, I can't do that because I A can't be away for four weeks in, you know, Outer Mongolia doing that lovely project, because my child is at home, and I want to be a parent to my child. And of course, yeah, I'm repeating myself but you're kind of more in control of it, if you're leading and pushing what the projects are. Which I'm sure Robert does in his own right, as a choreographer, a maker, but when you're a freelance dancer, that's a different circumstance.

Robert:

I think that thing about measuring your success is connected to kind of having a sense of value to what you do as well. And that obviously, you can renegotiate with yourself as you become a parent. But then definitely having a sense of that, and some confidence allows you to kind of negotiate, which I think is key. If you're not prepared to say, actually, my conditions for doing this are

Charlotte:

Yeah,

Robert:

and I don't mean, you know, they have to be within a scope of reality. And sometimes that's pretty unfortunate because of the system we're in, but you can still often negotiate to a degree. Learning to do that's super important.

Charlotte:

Yeah. The other thing, Melanie, just to go back to the system thing is that when they then hit school, and they have to go to school five days a week, that's again, another real phase because then you don't have the flexibility of like, okay, well, let's go to Glasgow for a few days. It doesn't matter if you miss nursery because it's just a construct. Where as when they're in the legal construct of having to go to school, suddenly, I can't work out still, whether it's more constricting then when they're in school for you, or more freeing because then you have the schedule of the school world that you're having to adapt to. So there's a framework that you have to meet. Yes, if you're going to be, I guess, a diligent educator of your child. It's not that helpful for them to be in and out of school, I don't think all the time. But there are other models like I know that Cathy Marston for example, for a very long time, took her entire family with her to do big ballets in certain European countries. And I think that's the other option is to home-school or to have tutoring when you're away.

Robert:

I was just gonna say one of the things I should also point out is that my child's mother is still my partner. And there's a huge amount of invisible support to that in terms of because she's not in the arts her routine is more stable. Cathy as well, you know, there's going to be support there. And that kind of support network around the artist, often invisible is so valuable and under recognised and often butts up to notions of privilege and things like that in terms of what you have access to. In terms of support, do you have a family setting or do you live near family? Do you have a financial security beyond your earnings?

Melanie:

Yes,

Robert:

if you know what I mean, and stuff like that, you know, we start to get into that kind of territory, which I think is just worth being, to some degree, explicit about.

Melanie:

The infrastructure around us is a funny one, isn't it? Because as you say, we've all got very different systems support networks. I, myself, all of my family, and my husband's family, are outside of London, so all of our childcare has had to be paid for so totally reliant on either nursery or school or after school clubs and occasional friends. And you've already talked about some of the things we can do as a sector to support each other. But I wondered if perhaps you might talk to that a little bit more. And well, you've mentioned scheduling already, Charlotte, and actually, we were about to work with somebody. And she was very specific about the hours and days that we could utilise her and her company because of this very reason. And I just wondered if you could talk through any tips or things that you do as a company or individuals that have helped you support each other through that development of an infrastructure and network around yourselves?

Robert:

I've got two points to make. They're related, but they're slightly off from kind of personal experience, but they're kind of like a wish list.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Robert:

And they come from having lived in other places in other countries.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Robert:

One in Sweden, they have a kind of legal requirement for dads to take paternity leave and a percentage of paternity leave. And I know that's outside of the sector, we're looking more towards kind of government level decision making

Melanie:

governmental policy, yeah

Robert:

something like that would be a game changer, in terms of not only shoring up parental leave across the board, but also in couples, which are male or female, ensuring that dads, there's not question. There's just like dad's involvement is assumed. And work has to deal with that. Because

Melanie:

yeah,

Robert:

certainly, as an employer of people as well, I'm very keen to kind of check out that situation a bit. When I'm meeting people, if they're talking about becoming parents, or just recently being parents, male or female, you know, just to kind of get a sense of like, how much decision making or how much agency in the decision making of being back at work and being you here right now.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Robert:

And the notion that you're now out to earn money for a family, like, where are we at with that, because sometimes, it's a point where people are invited to default back into kind of behaviours, which are very gendered, and very specific around that. So I mean, that's one thing I wanted to flag. And then the other thing, which also has kind of come up for me, in Belgium, they have a system and it is a little bit controversial, but where all pay for performers is done on a sliding scale. And they've got various categories around that in terms of what would equate to your earnings when you join a company. Unlike here, not everybody on stage, doing the same job gets the same money. And there's two pluses to it that I see. I mean, there are negatives as well. But there's a sense of long term in the career that you are going to have a pay increase as you go through this career.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Robert:

And the other is that when you are a parent that automatically factors into your pay. So you have a sense of like it, yeah, again, Charlotte's fantastic at this, she takes care of her employees and addresses whether they are parents, you know, for a lot of companies that wouldn't really figure in the factoring, especially because money's tight. And so having that just as policy on that top level that actually, that's a factor, you will address it, I think is interesting. And potentially, I think a good thing. So I know, that's a little beyond the scope of what you're talking about.

Melanie:

No, no, no, these are really good. And I love that idea of the agency and flexibility. It's very simple thing, isn't it? But just finding out from the people you're working with, what degree of flexibility do they have? So that you can perhaps ask the question is this you know, eight o'clock meeting going to be okay, would you be able to get anyone in? Or if for instance, I've got a member of my team whose husband does night shifts. So really, there's no flexibility of the evenings for her, it's really difficult to have board meetings in the evening, which generally we do. So we're really trying to work that through. And I think that's a really nice pointer for all of us to ask that question

Robert:

because I think just addressing it early and head on prevents that thing parents, especially new parents, get where often by the time they come to speak to you about it, and I've been that new parent. I've also had people work for me, who are new parents. By the time they come to speak to you about it to ask for it. There's been a solid 24 hours of nervous panic in the background.

Melanie:

Yes, oh God.

Robert:

they've been through. And by the time they come to you, they're like, Oh, my God, I'm so sorry. But would it be possible if I've really got to da da da...

Melanie:

Yeah.

Robert:

You know, by getting that in and being proactive as an employer, especially, I think, you just set a very different tone for the conversation.

Melanie:

You're so right. It can be so stressful can't it at trying to get your ducks in a row. And sometimes as you say, it's silently without, you feel like you have to put all of those bits in place. I remember once having to fly my mum over from Spain, and my little one was ill and so then I couldn't go and all of that was done silently. Nobody knew I was doing it because I hadn't said it's going to be really hard

for me to get to Paris. I can't get to that meeting. Charlotte, what are you thinking about all of this I can see looking very thoughtful.

Charlotte:

What am I thinking? I'm thinking lots of things. You asked what practical things can be put in place. So I'll just kind of try and focus on that for a second. So if you're an organisation, I really agree with what Rob and yourself has just said. Any organisation, whether it's an artist led company, or a dance agency or a venue needs to kind of lay out its stall about what their values are around childcare and parenting. And if they did that, I believe that it sort of levels the playing field a bit in the way that Rob's describing. And then the confidence to be able to ask for something is then enabled. Whereas if it's all done in secret, you know, particularly women, I mean, Rob's an exception, right? He's an incredibly committed male parent. But I have to say that in my running of a company, it's usually the female primary carers that come to me with requests of how am I going to do this. So you know, big up to the present fathers. But I think the practical things that a company can do, I suppose, is to make people aware when you interface with them, that it's okay to have a conversation about it to meet the human, not the dancer, or the performer. You know, we're human beings, and we have other lives. And I think what Rob indicated earlier is that when you first set out, and we're both quite experienced now, it's almost like there's a Presentation of Self that is the artist or the maker or the dancer, and then this whole other life, whether it's a partner, or a child, or a dog or an ill grandparent, whatever it is that you just don't share until you're in the mix. And actually, I think what we're both saying is, it's quite helpful to say, actually, I do have these caring responsibilities and they have some value in my life. And because they have value in my life, and I care about my kid, or if you're care about whoever you're caring for, then they have to be part of the conversation. And that's what I believe in from a sort of socialist and an inclusive point of view, I suppose. And from a feminist point of view, because as I said, it is often the women who are quietly trying to manage everything. And I should have said at the beginning, I'm a single parent, so I don't have a partner to cover things. My ex partner is extremely supportive and does a lot of childcare. And that's very helpful. But I think for single parents who really don't have that support, either, it's worth mentioning that that is extremely hard work to manage a career in the arts and single parenting, just to mention that. Anyway, things that we can do, we have a very, very strong family friendly policy that the company has developed with unison and ACAS and UK government's flexible working advice scheme. And we have a legal responsibility to take care as Rob used that word, which is nice to hear of the people that work with us whether they're at PAYE employees or freelancers. And so we have as an organisation, and as a charity, I suppose an understanding of our legal responsibilities to support that. This isn't a fluffy issue. This is as an employer you are have a legal responsibility to enable employees who have caring responsibility for children, elderly relatives, or dependents to apply for the right to request flexible working, which obviously, post COVID is happening more and more, and they are actually legally entitled to time off to deal with unforeseen circumstances, which I don't know about you, Rob but when we first started, it's like for God's sake, don't tell anyone that your child's ill. Just cover it, cover it, get the granny in, get this in. And actually, that's ridiculous. If your child's ill as a parent you want to be with them. You don't want to go and leap around a studio, you're worried about them. So of course we give time off for that as well, if it happens.

Melanie:

Charlotte, can I ask you about that before you move on?

Charlotte:

Yeah.

Melanie:

I can imagine that's much easier as an organisation that's got I don't know producers in and running classes, what have you. But when you're trying to mount a work, how easy is that? How readily can you deliver that policy when you're in creation mode?

Charlotte:

Yes, I deliver it for myself, as Robert well knows in a way that two of a five day week say, I will leave at ten to three to go and get my kid from school. And that's not a compromise for me. So we'll start earlier, which for Robert is sometimes difficult because he's coming from London to Brighton at God knows what hour in the morning. But we've made a commitment to start at nine o'clock or 9.30. Rather than in the olden days, it'd be like 10 to six.

Melanie:

Yeah,

Charlotte:

If you do ten to six, you miss the best part of the day when we're all up stupidly early with children anyway, so we don't need that kind of luxurious start. So I've brought the start of rehearsals or making periods sooner, which seems to suit most people. And then we finish at five so that we often, the again, because of the travel Robert sometimes doesn't make it back for his son's bedtime. But he's got a chance of getting back now that his son's earlier by sort of seven, maybe instead of getting back at eight or nine if he's commuting, and I get a chance to either pick my kid up from off school club or pick him up from school or whatever he's doing that day. But I've made a commitment to myself that I don't want to be absent from school pick up five days a week, for example. So I'm not. What that means from the experienced performers that I work with. And you know, I'm deeply grateful that they can do this. And they can do this because they're experienced and their parents and they're mature and they're brilliant is I can set them tasks and kind of go if you can just do this in the next hour and a half and I'll look at it in the morning.

Melanie:

Right.

Charlotte:

I wouldn't do that with the young people are the vulnerable people that I work with in a sort of mixed cast. But when it's us working as professionals, I can set tasks or just say carry on with that duet and just show me tomorrow. Again, it's a slightly I've had to let go have my terrible controlling habits of needing to be in the room all the time because I need to be with my child as well. So yeah, as Rob indicated earlier, it's a balance. And so you sort of structure a week in a way that is a bit more balanced. Yeah. So that would be my answer. But that supports me as the director, if you like. And funnily

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

As Rob indicated earlier, it's a balance. And so you sort of structure a week in a way that is a bit more balanced.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

So that would be my answer. But that supports me as the director, if you like.

Robert:

And funnily enough, we produced a lot of our best work when you have left early!

Charlotte:

Oh! Hurtful! What we haven't said is Robert's taking over Vincent Dance Theatre in the next... Clark done.

Melanie:

I asked the question, because for us at Greenwich Dance, our flexible working has completely transformed over pandemic because, you know, suddenly we had to be remote. And we've all pretty

much stayed remote. And we're really reinventing between us and in collaboration with each other, what coming back to the office is going to feel or look like

Charlotte:

Yes.

Melanie:

But none of the people that I'm working with are performing, they're not making. And so I was really interested in just how that was translating for you in studios with dancers.

Charlotte:

I think the other thing to say about that is that I know if I look at the scope of the year, and we're making something this sort of September, October, I know that if in those eight weeks, I might not be as available to my child, I will absolutely make sure that I have proper time off in the summer before I start that period, or I don't work every half term in the rest of the year.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

So I often look at a whole year and go, he'll be able to manage my absence in that 8, 10, 12 week period. Because I've put the work in I put the sort of money in the bank for the rest of the year. And as I said, he feels secure enough for me to maybe have a period where I'm not as available.

Melanie:

Yeah,

Charlotte:

and that is a conscious decision. I think in terms of the pandemic. This has been well documented in the press and online actually, that it has really democratised things for parents if you're in a management role. And particularly for women, it has also pushed women back into being domestic goddesses, which I have some problems with. Because again, if you want to look at the actual statistics men have carried on essentially doing the work that they've done. And women have been stuck at home trying to either maintain jobs and do childcare when we were in the deep lockdown periods, which was extremely stressful for everybody. So I think we have to also have this discussion with a complete understanding that we are still in a misogynistic and patriarchal system that

countries like Denmark are really pushing against, which is why it's great that Rob used that as an example like in the UK, we are still very gendered in the way that we expect women to step up and do both things, generally speaking, and men can carry on as though nothing's happened. And I think that is actually reflected in the dance world, quite widely. Like I was talking to someone I was mentoring the other day saying, Do you actually know who out of the successful male choreographers, present company excepted, do we actually know who of those are parents? And we don't because they don't talk about it. It's people like me and you know, women who generally stand up and talk about it because it's in our interests, too. And I have sat in conferences in Sadler's Wells and elsewhere Leap Festival, WOW, you know, festivals at Southbank and said, where are our feminist brothers in this issue? And that remains a question for me. Can I return to what we do for creative teams just I'm keen for it to be known about really

Melanie:

Yes,

Charlotte:

it's actually not rocket science. It is very practical advice. So there's the staff team and flexible working, there's the scheduling thing, there's finishing early, and starting earlier, there's actual money for childcare if it's needed. We have a childcare line in the budget. With the creative team during rehearsal periods, we have a policy that supports, I mean they're called employees because you have to be called employees now as a freelancer, but to return home not less than once every four weeks. So standard return travel to and from home will be paid for by us. On tour, the company will return the employee home as soon as is reasonably possible after a gig. So sometimes Rob will not come to the bar, and we'll jump in a cab to get to a station to get home so that he doesn't have another day away from his family. Much as it'd be nice to go to the pub, it's actually nicer sometimes to get back so that you're not extending what's already a long day and a night away from your kids. And then of course with us because we work with non resident artists from within the European Union. So Aurora, for example, has a child with a disability and she needs to go back every two weeks say and so we are really out of pocket for this. We pay for her flight and her taxi to Luton or wherever to get home so that she can say in a 10 week making period, have every other weekend in Poland, because that's appropriate. So we foot the cost of that, for example, and we also pay for family accommodation should the children I mean, as I said earlier, once they're all in school, this isn't possible when they were young, her whole family came over and we paid for family accommodation.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

And in fact, in the good old days before her two children were over five, we used to pay for a mini bus and her husband used to drive around on tour with all the baby seats and all that stuff. But I quite miss those days to be honest. That was before I became a parent and I drove the bus quite a lot but that's another story. And then the other thing is to contribute to childcare provision for non resident artists if they do bring their children like the Costa Rican family who put their kid into nursery. So the artists that we employ freelancers are responsive for arranging their childcare, but we will support the costs of it if it's with registered childminders. And those are some of the things that we do. And in fact, if I can just add this in, because it again, it's I feel it's quite important. I've been in quite involved with parents and carers in performing arts PIPA. And I have been quite involved in Dance Mama. So we should big up those two organisations for the work that they're doing in the sector. But I also was contacted by a group of Irish choreographers and dancers, who asked for some advice and had a big meeting with them. And they're taking a slightly different approach. And in fact, some quite big choreographers from Ireland, been in touch with me to get the policy as well and to have a bit of a sounding board. But what this collective of dance artists in Ireland have done is to write to the Irish Arts Council and say that, perhaps there should be always a budget line in Arts Council applications for childcare. Because if it's there, you can't avoid it. It's not a choice for an independent artist or a company to put it in. It's there, like earned income, like, how are you going to diversify this or how you're going to do that? It's there, and it's in black and white. And so we don't have to go through this thing that we've started the conversation about, Oh, am I confident enough to ask for it? Could I do this? I think that's a great approach.

Robert:

That's brilliant.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

And they've also are campaigning and advocating to add family status to the section of equality and diversity in the application forms with the Ireland Arts Council. And I talk a lot about this. And I think I'm right in saying that being a parent is a protected characteristic. And we need to shout about whatever gender we are.

Melanie:

That leads me on to one of the questions I had actually, because it was from one of those PIPA reports that it the suggestion to monitor the number of parents came out. And I did find that really interesting because even as a parent myself, even knowing that a number of my team are parents, I don't think I'd ever considered monitoring it in the way that I might do other equal opportunities. And when I reflected on that, I thought, of course, that makes sense. Because if we know officially,

who are the parents, within our teams and within our participants and everything else, then you have that evidence base to make the changes that you want to make and to put in those new infrastructures. And perhaps also, if you were given that form, as you enter employment with a company, it's a perhaps sort of less, and I use the word aggressive, and I'm very conscious of you pulling me up on some of my language here, Charlotte, which I do appreciate. But what I mean is, it's a less aggressive way of paving the way for saying, hey, my needs might not conform to how you're setting it up. And can I ask for something, in some ways, it allows perhaps a new recruit, to frame their ask because there's a tick box that they've already had to tick. And then they can add value and more detail to it instead of having to go Oh, and by the way, I might not be the same as the others that you've got there. And I wondered how you felt about that.

Robert:

There's one thing I'm worried about with this, and it's a worry that I would have filling out that form is that moment of certain employers, and again, because of the financial constraints because of competitiveness and applications, that them looking at that as actually something that they could also avoid,

Charlotte:

Yeah that's a really good point,

Melanie:

If it was part of the application process, as opposed to the equal ops monitoring once you are recruited. Yes, I would understand that.

Charlotte:

You're talking about as an employer, I think it's important, maybe to distinguish, I don't know Rob, answer for yourself. But I think you're like, if I didn't know you, and I said, Hey, do you want a dancing job, here's a form, you might choose not to tell me about being a parent, because I might go, oh, that's gonna be hard work. Or I've run out of my childcare budget for this year. That's not what you're talking about. You're talking about, I think, within an organisation. So for example, in our latest NPO, we're making a statement that three of the management women that run the company, including myself are single parents, and that is a protected characteristic. So we're saying you need to monitor this not because we're singing the praises of being single parents, it's more because we can then say that, because we're mostly focusing on touring and making but actually, we do a lot of participation and teaching work. And we do a lot of social engagement practice. And we want to be representative of the communities that we work with. So for example, some of the work with marginalised groups that I've done, there are a lot of single parents. So we're flagging

Melanie:

yes,

Charlotte:

that to be in that group is a helpful thing, because you can relate to the people that you're working with, in the same way that as we diversify the workforce, which is, as we know, the big part of the Let's Create agenda, and absolutely should be, we need to include parenting in that diversification, not apologise for it. Because I think what you're talking about Melanie is confidence. You don't have to be aggressive, you can just be confident and bold in your ask. But if there's a framework that you sit in, then it's not all down to you. It's a universal framework.

Melanie:

Exactly.

Charlotte:

The flip side, this is where I get quite passionate about it. There are a lot of dancers who have suffered, really suffered, body blows in terms of miscarriage and infertility because of the culture that we're in of punishing your body for many years and of being slim. For example, in the ballet world. There's quite a lot of research around how pregnancy isn't possible for some sectors of the dance community. So the other sensitivity that we have to have is around those particularly women who haven't been able to have children. And I'm just wondering about that form. Are you a parent? That can be quite triggering for some people that have wanted to be and aren't. So, I think Rob's right to question it from an economic point of view, not wanting to scupper your chances of getting a job, and also from an emotional point of view. Part of what's never discussed as well, Melanie, because it's a female thing is the emotional and the physiological impact of things surrounding pregnancy and childbirth and your body changing. And for me, we're about to introduce the menopause policy in the company, because my god, I'm in it and it's really strange. It's like having COVID constantly. So you know, there are processes that a female body goes through that are distinct from a male body, if I may put it like that, that needs acknowledging as well as the economics or the ask, or the whatever we want to call that negotiation of how we might work together.

Melanie:

Yeah.

Charlotte:

And it goes back to what both Rob and I have indicated that you have to see the person as a person. A living breathing person, not just as a dancer, you know, I don't make work on people,

because it's not my job. I don't want clones of me. I want to work with people as much as I can, and people who bring themselves to the work and that includes all the complexities of who they are, which is why I said at the beginning, it's important to have a bespoke arrangement with each person that you choose to work with whether they're PAYE or freelance or just a consultant sort of coming in whatever.

Melanie:

Yeah, Charlotte, can I map you right the way back to back in 2009, you published a report on pregnancy and parenthood, The Dancer's Perspective, and I wondered whether you could summarise the key findings that that drew and whether you feel that anything has changed from the findings of that report to where we are now.

Charlotte:

That report was generated with Helen Laws, who was at Dance UK at the time, and my then General Manager, Jane Whitehead, just to attribute the work to who wrote it. And I would say that, sadly, some of the case studies would be exactly the same today

Melanie:

Really...

Charlotte:

despite all the work that we've done, because I think we've possibly touched on some of the things that remain the same which are around the confidence to ask the lines in the budget, the commitment, you know, Rob's right. He mentioned a minute ago, if it's a choice between a sixth dancer and some childcare and what am I going to choose? I mean, not me, but what would an artist choose? They'd probably choose their great vision of having six performers instead of five and some childcare. Or, I can't have a set that big, because I want to spend this many 1000 pounds on childcare in a year. So

Robert:

Or even the thing of like, I've got a performer who already has kids, and I've got a five year relationship and commitment to that person and now this new person's coming in who's got children. And now I've got a choice around budget here. And how do I make that work? Yeah, sorry to interject.

Charlotte:

I mean, I think things have moved on. I don't want to be too negative I think the campaigning that Dance Mama and PiPA have done in the theatre world, which is currently Professor Angela Pickard at Canterbury is currently absolutely addressing this issue in the dance world following the format's that PiPA have done in the theatre world. And in fact, I'm part of a round table that's looking at the initial research findings of what she's been commissioned to look at in the world of dance and how we treat each other. But I also think that the big players do not seem to be joining in the game, you can still talk to ballerinas in some of the bigger institutions and their world hasn't changed, and they're still cast off while they're pregnant. And then they still have a very long training programme to get back in. And I don't see the role models in that world saying, Here I am dancing pregnant, or here I am standing up for particularly women who want to have children, I think there's a system there that's almost feels too cumbersome to make these kinds of adjustments. But I say time and time again, if there's a tiny company, I can do it and commit not to having that sixth dancer but having childcare for example, then surely the bigger companies can make that choice. So then it comes down to who is the chief executive? Or who is leading those companies? And what are their values? And what are their politics? And will they be embedded in the choices that those bigger organisations are made. And unfortunately, there is still a bit of a culture. And I do think this is changing of a lot of men and chief execs being white males who may or may not be parents. And if they are, it's almost like they're removed from the parenting, they do the dad thing, but they're not really invested in what parenting means and how it impacts on their world.

Robert:

There's something to add to that as well, which is again, I don't know how your report was written in 2009. But one thing I would doubt has changed at all is the male part of that. There might have been some shifts positive and negative around women. But I think the thing around and this is broad brushstrokes, but fathers is that it's probably very, very similar. Even if the female thing has shifted in one direction or the other. The male thing would have probably stayed pretty much doing what it was doing so that either women are taking on more in order to handle that or they're still not getting opportunities that when they are getting opportunities, it's probably predicated by the fact that they take on more, and I think that's an issue I have with that. And that status quo plays out in the expectations around me as well. Like I've had three or four experiences when I've tried to address being a father it's very much taken people by surprise, and that's not a good indicator. When I say again, with a young child under the age of three I'd like to do discuss whether my family can come with me for this. And the next question is ah so your separated?

Melanie:

Yeah.

Robert:

Because why else would you need to bring your child with you?

Melanie:

We could have another couple of hours just on this, couldn't we, because it's such a topic. I mean, certainly one of my questions to you is going to be whether anything had changed for you over COVID in terms of visibility, and certainly for me, all of my board meetings, which are now usually during bedtime, because that's the only time my board can convene. And I'm really trying to find a way through this because it's problematic, as I've said before, for some of my team, as well as for me. But every board meeting that we've had, has been bombed by a child possibly wearing all of their pyjamas, possibly not. And before that, my board probably didn't even think of me as a mother, they just thought of me as a CEO. But going back to that male thing, my husband and I had a bit of a chat about this recently, because I was pulling together an annual album of 2020. And all of the pictures are me and the kids doing something, and me and the kids and crafting. But meanwhile, I was running Greenwich Dance, and my husband said, Oh, my God, I feel awful. I'm looking at those pictures, and I'm not in them. And it was because I was working the whole way through. To be fair to him, he was shouldering this kind of fear of will he be one of the ones that are made redundant, he's responsible, or felt responsible for his family and providing for them. But also what I was so cross with is that there were members of his senior team, often women that he couldn't say I'm a dad, schools are closed, I'm not gonna be able to make that meeting. He didn't feel he could say that. It seems like systematically that's so broken.

Charlotte:

But it's only going to change, and this is where the feminist politics come in, the personal is political. And unless, I mean, let's take the heat off your poor husband, but

Melanie:

you can keep it on if you want. He won't listen.

Charlotte:

Unless men stand up and say this is not okay. And actually, this is a problem. Like Rob just said, it's problem for me, I'm uncomfortable with it. I'm uncomfortable with the dynamics. We can only soapbox these opinions for so long, because actually, I feel like I've been saying, and actually everybody says this, and I still get asked to contribute to conversations like this, which I'm very happy with my experience in my own personal and the company experience to do, but I want some change. And I'm unapologetic about that. And it's only going to change, frankly, if men take on board the things that we're saying, and people in power take it on. And I would say to you, you are the chief executive, we don't have our board meetings in the evening, because we've all got children. So we say to them, if you want to be on the board, you have to meet at 10 to 12, once every three months in daytime, and you have to take that time off work, we have made a concerted effort to not have them because I'm not prepared. And several of board have young and very young children, there's no way I could do it six til eight, I'm putting my kid to bed.

Melanie:

It's so tricky, Charlotte, because I completely agree. We are talking about this with the board. But I've also got parents on the board that only want the board meetings in the evening because they're at work. And they therefore don't want to take that time. And so it's one of those things that we've got to square.

Charlotte:

Then they're not the right board people.

Melanie:

And it's a really interesting model that Strike a Light are using which I hope might give us a solution, which is about kind of workshop board meetings where you perhaps call on those board members less and bring other people in. And so we're going to be looking at something like that to try and find this happy balance between when we have these meetings, how we call them in and as you said before scheduling, so we put them in the diary, and we're going to have a day strategy meeting

Charlotte:

and it's not going to change.

Melanie:

So you know, ask for your annual leave or whatever. You're absolutely right. But it's

Charlotte:

I'm not trying to be harsh about it. But this is part of the boldness of leading in this area, you almost need to say, if the values of the agency or the company or the organisation are to be inclusive of parents, then this is how we have to do it. Because there's so many really brilliant performances and conferences and training programmes that I've missed, because I can't do six till 10 at night. And actually, I used to work all day, put my kid to bed when he was younger, and then start working again at eight then work through till midnight, and I was happy with that didn't tell anyone that was what I was doing. But that was my over my hours capacity. And now that my child is older and doesn't go to bed till bloody half past nine or 10.

Melanie:

That's harder too

Charlotte:

That's impossible. So in terms of those phases that we were talking about, I feel like I've just entered another phase where I've got to bloomin' entertain him until 8.30 as well as everything else.

Robert:

I think there's something there, though, about, you know, one of the phases which we're all in is the COVID phase.

Melanie:

Yes.

Robert:

And I think one of the ramifications for that for freelancers, in particular is this nasty reset away from the confidence that you might have built up. For me it's like manifested as I'm like, I'm a recent graduate again, and in terms of the work I'm taking and some of the choices I'm making to be bold, confident slash difficult, depending on your perspective, you know, going back towards that place where I was as a 20 year old. Which is like much more positive about everything and just doing in and I'd worked quite hard to be able to not be that you know. COVID is pushing us to make choices and especially for parents, where you do have a financial obligation. So that point of compromise between the money and the responsibilities is far more up in the air again, for me, I'd be interested to know from other freelance parents in the arts beyond the people I know, I'd just be interested to see whether that's been widely felt or not because...

Charlotte:

I would say from the people I've talked to, it's very widely felt, I think the positive of COVID, if we can focus on that is that I can fit much more in if I talk remotely to people than if I'm trolling around having a meeting in Eastbourne and then Brighton and then here and then there, and then going up to London, and I can be more efficient. And I think as a parent, I've really valued being more efficient. But that's not...

Robert:

that's management side, I'm talking about the physical practice side, which has suffered.

Charlotte:

Yes, it has completely, I was gonna say, That's me as a chief exec and as a manager type person. But I was also going to say that that's also me as a teacher. And as a dialogue and event person that I've

done much more I haven't done, well we tried, didn't we, Robert, and it was a mixed effect trying to teach dance online. But in terms of giving talks or seminars, or MA students, or the HEI stuff that's been quite useful, because I can teach a bunch of 20 people in Plymouth University without going there. And as a parent, that means my day is shorter, and I'm not spending four hours coming back. So I think this whole remote working and this video conferencing thing...

Robert:

but but your parenting situation would have been that your child went to school throughout because for me, my son was in the next room.

Melanie:

Yeah,

Robert:

so even

Charlotte:

Yeah, that's true.

Robert:

what you're talking about just wasn't a thing. So just to flag that as again, a balancer. I was running a leadership training course for an organisation in London, and having visits from an eight year old was not good.

Charlotte:

The video bombing is one thing. And I suppose what I was talking about is a shift in practice and methodology not so much reflecting on what happened in lockdown, because it was different for everybody. But since I'm making considered choices about what I do online, and what I do in person, and in terms of confidence, I haven't been on a train for two years, I don't feel comfortable with that. I don't even feel comfortable getting on a bus. So that's affecting how I'm operating. So I'll walk or drive everywhere. That's a separate issue. But in terms of being bombed by children, one of our board members until very recently was based in Australia. So she was on a different timescale. And her kids were always running in and out in their pyjamas, but we're an open organisation, it's fine. What's the problem? She's got a kid who's making a bit of a noise. She dealt with it, he went away, he came back again. But she was still multitasking, which is something Rob brought up earlier. But in terms of children in real spaces,

Melanie:

yes, in your studio.

Charlotte:

I mean, we've had interesting discussions about this, haven't we Rob? That for some people with babies, they don't mind. I made a whole piece with Aurora's kid, you know, very much in a pram and in my arms in 2009. And that was very challenging for all of us. But it was okay. But there are mixed opinions. I've never particularly wanted children running around in the space. But I have offered that. And I think you've felt the same thing. Because there's something about being in a professional space where you've got a job to do and it's not appropriate for say, an older kid to be mummy, mummy or daddy, daddy, you know that it's not going to help anyone.

Robert:

And then there's also content issues, isn't there?

Charlotte:

Yeah, there is in our work.

Robert:

VDT stuff. You just wouldn't do it. I mean, safeguarding policy aside, which wouldn't even allow it?

Charlotte:

Yeah.

Melanie:

I certainly had two contrasting experiences. One was when the school was closed because of snow. So I had my older boy at home, and we were doing some work in care homes. And he came with me, and he loved it. And we've talked a lot about that experience. And it feels like a real joy and gift almost that he was there in that space and interacting with those older people. And also seeing me in that space. And what I was doing, it felt really nice. I've also taken my youngest son to a workshop who has unravelled the workshop, and the artist said to me afterwards, could you control your child, please. And I'm meant to be setting up a really safe environment for those artists to do their best work. And yet it's my offspring that's unravelling it, which was challenging. But anyway, I want to ask you one last question, it sort of takes us on a slight divergence, what I wanted to ask is, has being a parent brought creativity to your making? Rob, how about you?

Robert:

Unless you're somebody who really, really separates your life from your practice. I don't know personally, many that do that. I know some do it more than others. But in general, the two embed with each other, and your preoccupations as a parent are going to become manifest in some way. So for me, that's been a lot about notions of connection. And that's been a really beautiful investigative tract that's really solidified since like, how we connect and learning the process of learning through a performative work. So whether that's performers, being able to map a process of learning for performers on stage, audience watching so that there's something real in terms of the learning that happens through work. I think that's something that is an analogue for having watched that as a parent, that kind of developmental process going on, and then stuff around kind of touch and then politically, there's stuff for me around touch and consent and masculinity that is very present through being a man raising a son. I mean, I can't imagine it not being an inspiration, as well as an intervention in your previous kind of creative concerns.

Melanie:

That's lovely. How about you, Charlotte?

Charlotte:

Yeah, I was just thinking about Robert and I made an all male piece called Shutdown. And we sort of hovered around toxic masculinity. And we hovered around issues of parenting and fatherhood and didn't really get there. And I think that's the piece that's yet to be made probably between us But it made me think that throughout my career, I have embedded the values that I feel as a feminist into the organisational structure, which is why I'm so bold, confident, aggressive, whatever we want to call it outspoken about those politics, if you like, and values and ethical questions and answers that I try and find, but I've also put the female experience, and I use the word female knowingly, at centre stage. And so for me part of wanting to make an all male piece was to absent the women and see what happened. So even that was framed in a sort of feminist framework. So if you make a women's experience, if you place that centre stage, and it's loosely based on my auto biography, which it has been on and off for many years. Judith Mackrell once said that I'm a sort of close spectator of my own life. And I'm lucky enough to work with brilliant translators, performers, who can translate concepts and ideas that I come up with, but becoming a parent to try and answer your question, made me want to make work even further away from my body.

Melanie:

Okay

Charlotte:

So the two pieces of work that I made, once I became a parent were more issue based. And Robert was in both of them, more kind of politically over there somewhere not close to my own autobiographical or lived experience, let's say. Whereas the piece I made before I became a parent was called Motherland, ironically, or not ironically, very strategically and deliberately and creatively brilliantly called Motherland, because I knew I was going to become a mother. So yes, there were a couple years where I wanted to just push it all away, to give me space to be creatively working over there somehow. And that's when I started to kind of change the practice and start gathering testimonies from other people to place in the work rather than my voice driving the work. Because my voice will always drive the work because I'm the director and the conceptualiser and the designer of the work. But in terms of working with material more off of me, that was a very conscious decision. And interestingly, the last two pieces that we've made, as Rob will testify, have started to creep back towards what's my experience? And what do I know about attachment? And what do I know about adverse childhood experience? What do I know about trauma? And so this sort of spectatorship of how I am as a parent becomes more centre stage again. And that's fascinating to me. Because when, when you're as experienced as we are, you start to create a body of work. And you can see the ebbs and flows of how your work affects your life. And that's the most brilliant thing about practising as an artist for life, if we can call it that, because you can see when it's appropriate for the work to really be in you and on you and about you and driven by your passion and when it's necessary, if you like practically to remove yourself. And I would never call what I do luxurious because I work bloody hard for it. But the luxury of having a company that can plan and can set the agenda in the way that I've described and can set the conceptual ideas that I want to follow, that longevity is absolutely invaluable for that because I can respond to where I am at with my parenting and my creativity. And I don't have to get knocked around, if you like by external influences, and that's ruthless, that is rigorous and ruthless and not compromising. But the finishing point, I suppose, is to say that that's not just in the studio, it's about the language you use. It's about the ethics of the companies we run. It's about standing up time and time again, to say this is not good enough. It's not good enough to ostracise parents, it's not good enough for them not to be confident to step forward and find their voice. How can I make work about you know, allowing vulnerable marginalised people, young people to find a voice within the platform of the work that Rob and I make together without doing that, organisationally as well? It doesn't make sense. So we have to embed our values in how we work across the board, which I think funnily is what we've all been circling around in a way of like, you need to find your voice and use it.

Melanie:

Well, I think that's an absolutely lovely place to stop. Thank you for that rounding up.

Charlotte:

See what I did there Rob?

Robert:

Definitely a sound bite!

Melanie:

It was, wasn't it? That's the marketing strapline I think for this one. So thank you for that Charlotte.

Charlotte:

That's alright

Melanie:

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