

The Dance Centre Podcast Episode 12: Justine A. Chambers & Laurie Young

SPEAKERS

Claire French, Laurie Young, Justine A. Chambers

Claire French

Hello, welcome to the Dance Centre podcast. I am your host, Claire French, and I'm joining you from the traditional unseeded territories of the Musqueam. Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples also known as Vancouver, Canada. I'll be talking to dancers, choreographers and other members of the dance world here on the West Coast to find out more about their creative work and practices and to discuss what it means to us to be dance professionals today. Thanks for joining us.

Claire French

Here we are, again, we have another podcast for you. And today I am joined by Justine A. Chambers and Laurie Young, and I am delighted to be talking with them today. And also, I would just like to mention that Justine is our first guest to be invited back. She has graciously accepted this invitation and brought along Laurie, so thank you for both of those things, Justine. So just as we get started here, I'll give you a little bit of information on Justine and Laurie, Justine A. Chambers is a dance artist living on the traditional and ancestral Coast Salish territories of the Musqueam. Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations. Her practice considers choreography as an empathic practice rooted in collaborative creation, and the body as a site of a cumulative embodied archive. She is Max Tyler-Hite's mother.

Laurie Young focuses on the embodiment of unauthorized histories and their representation, and how relationships are choreographed between human and other than human beings in the theatre, museum and city. She has been working in transdisciplinary projects across the fields of dance studies, sensory ethnography, and archival practices.

Thank you, both of you for joining me. Today, we're going to start, we're going to save your duet information that you'll be presenting at the Dance Centre in October for a little bit later. But first, we'd like to get to know you a little bit and maybe talk a little bit about some interesting stories you have about the beginnings of your careers, how you started in dance or how you feel today, you would like to share the beginnings of your professional careers as dancers or choreographers. Justine, would you like to start?

Justine A. Chambers

Sure, I mean, I think, ah, how did I mean, I come from a family who dances I mean, not professionally, but dancing is a part of a part of life, in the way that when there's parties, there's dancing, when there's sorrow, there's dancing. And I think that that's sort of built into my family structure, like in the way of social dancing. So that's probably the real beginning. I won't bore you with most of my training except

for that I did do I think like my real formation training started when I was about 14 or 15 in Ottawa. I say this because this is where Laurie and I overlap. I was quite serious about ballet, despite the fact that it was probably not going to be my career. But I trained with Nesta Toumine, which was really significant for me, she was one of the Ballets Russes. And she was one of those teachers who yeah, who clearly believed in me and my ability and my my love for dance and really nurtured it. But then I also trained at Le Groupe de la Place Royale which is, Laurie can tell you about her relationship to that place. Laurie and I did not know each other at this time. We are ghosts, our past-self ghosts overlap. And then I went to Ryerson because well, I really thought I was gonna go to New York and be on Broadway and become a fly girl but my mother wasn't so interested in that plan of mine. So, I went to Ryerson and trained there with Nadia Potts and Karen Duplisea. and Vicki St. Denys and Vicki is now the director of that program. And that I loved it. You know, I loved it. I loved being there. I felt like I was in the movie Fame every day that which was perfect for me. There was actors and technicians. You know, it was, it was great. And it was it was another place where I felt, I felt, I guess in many ways I felt really supported or I felt like they made me feel like I could do that for a living. And shortly after that, I joined Desrosiers Dance Theatre, which was very formative for me. I mean, I was in this big modern dance company at length team and didn't know you know, my elbow from my eyeball, but was in there and with, you know, dancers who were all 10 years, my senior, there was a lot for me to learn in that space. And Robert really pushed me. I think about a good friend talked about, I felt like you know, I feel like I was broken like a filly. You know, they're like that was the place where I kind of learned. I think the thing I learned the most about was performance. And I had my first show with him and after that show, he came up to me and said, you can't be afraid on stage because the audience could tell. And that was the last time I decided to be afraid on stage, right. So, he really taught me that you have to meet performance as it is in that moment and stay with the performance. And that was like, that was a beautiful gift. It was also terrifying. And he wasn't exactly nice about it, but.

Claire French

Training a racehorse, I mean, you know,

Justine A. Chambers

Right, yes. this is it exactly. And we were a high-performance group that's for damn sure. So yeah, I feel like and then eventually, I left the company because I wanted other things from dance or I wanted to know other things about myself as a dancer, what I knew there were other things out there, I wasn't being with, you know, and then worked independently in Toronto, until about 2004 till I was 28. And then I met my partner who lived in the States, and then I left Toronto to go live with him. Because, I mean, he wasn't my partner, then he was somebody I've known for 20 days. But you know, I took a risk, took a gamble. 18 years later, one child, it all worked out.

Claire French

And in Vancouver, yeah

Justine A. Chambers

and in Vancouver, but I think like the my Vancouver time was really, I started to choreograph a little bit in Toronto, but my Vancouver moment when I came to Vancouver was when I really, I realized that I wasn't going to have entry to the community unless I made work on myself.

Claire French

Yeah, I mean, it's the land of dancemakers. Really, isn't it?

Justine A. Chambers

It is. So that was sort of the beginning of my dancing in Vancouver was, I'd quit dancing for a few years, but it was I entered my way back in through teaching at Arts Umbrella and through beginning to make work.

Claire French

Yeah, great. Laurie, would you like to kind of canter, canter up?

Laurie Young

Yeah, absolutely. I love I love listening to you Justine oh my goodness. First of all, you are a fly girl in my eyes, and always will be. And I love, and I love the Fame reference because I was thinking about my my, you know, sort of earlier dancing days and Fame was prominent for me, prominent in my understanding of myself and pop culture. And I really do credit that show, the TV show with so much of my sense of what it means to be what it meant for me to be a dancer. Without exaggeration, Leroy is my hero. And Coco Yeah. Yeah, amen. And because of that show, I decided to go into high school, of the arts, which, which was in Ottawa, it was Canterbury High School. And it kind of just continued, I went to Canterbury High School. And then at the time, I was still parallel student, at the time, Le Groupe de la Place Royale, which turned into Le Groupe Dance Lab. They had a school. So, I was quite young. You know, I also won't bore you bore you with my childhood dance training. But what really happened is that I was in the schools of Le Groupe, and then I was kind of ushered into the company, and also a very young age, I was 18 when I started my professional dance career. Yeah, so I was at Le Groupe, and I also lived in Montreal for a year, but Le Groupe really played a huge part of my training and upbringing. And at the time, Le Groupe as a dance lab they were inviting different choreographers to work on the company in three-to-six-week rehearsal sessions, everyone from like, LM Blackburn to Meg Stuart and this is where I met Sasha Waltz, a Berlin based choreographer, and this was in 1996, 95-96. And then she asked if I would like to join her in a project in Berlin, on a short, you know, six-month contract. And I was actually quite tentative, I was really scared. It was, it was a big deal. And, you know, I had, I had been to Berlin prior, and had actually, it was an amazing time, but also a terrifying time, it was terribly racist. I was petrified and exhilarated at the same time when I came in 96. And I ended up staying until now! Where I, where else, I continued to work with Sasha and the company until 2003. And have kind of been an been, excuse me, freelancing as a performer as a dance artists and then also creating my own work off and on from that time. And yeah, and now now with Justine we've had this opportunity to to meet and to sort of share our stories that somehow intersect in really interesting ways. Yeah. And, and here we are.

Claire French

Yeah. And we'll get to, you know, we'll we'll move through some of that, too. And I know, lots of people will be asking you questions about the duet as it's coming around. And, you know, we'll we'll get a lot more information about that. But this is really lovely. I just want to interject a little bit that Fame was really big for me, too, in England, and I was in I was at stage school. I went to stage school part time

while I was in London. So there's a lot of crossover there and I can kind of imagine as all, kind of in our places and all of our different cities, like all just like honing in on these on this amazing energy that we kind of felt and wanted in our lives and like, Yeah, I mean, just amazing. And for me, they're the same people where it's so inspirational to me. And Debbie Allen still, yes. So you know, it's yeah, absolutely. Anyways, so I just wanted to throw that in as well.

Laurie Young

I love that. When the first lockdowns came, one of the one of the things that I did was to start following Debbie Allen's Instagram and doing her at home classes. It kept me sane.

Claire French

Me too. Yeah, yeah. And I loved it when she messed up. I so loved it when she missed Oh, yeah, just helped as a teacher to for me on zoom that it was just like, Okay, if she's doing it, I'm like, I'm fine. I'm in good company.

Laurie Young

Oh, that's so sweet.

Claire French

Okay, so let's move to well, when did you know, dance was your professional calling, like, I feel like already, I would just want to mention that there's something about both of you kind of jumping into the fire or understanding this line between fear and excitement, or the kind of that space where it's the same thing, you know, but you just kind of the perception of, you know, where you are in relation to that. I feel both of you have talked about that a little bit. And I wonder if that comes with when you decide that the calling to dance is bigger than any obstacle that might come up? Or anything psychological that might prevent you from doing it. But do you have moments? Or do you have a moment that you looking back? You could say it was there? Or is it? Is it been one of those things, it's just kind of like matured and just kind of aged?

Justine A. Chambers

I think for me, it was really like that sort of 14, age 14-15, you know, and, and training with Nesta, and training at Le Groupe and like those present completely different spaces. But I think I just I mean, I've always been a performing kid, like I, you know, shocking. I know, just like my kid. But like, there's like, I've always felt like that's what I was good at. And I've always felt most relaxed in performance, like more than any other space in my entire life in the act of performance, I am so fully myself. And I am so fully relaxed that I think I always knew that. But that could have been like I could have been anything with the performance, like, performance happens everywhere all the time. Yeah. But I think it was really in that moment with Nesta. And at Le Groupe, because Le Groupe the cool thing about it is like you're there, and you're training, but there's a company there, right? So, you saw the dancers walking around in their dance clothes and with their coffee, and I don't know, like, there was just this, like, I could see what a company looked like or would feel like, and I was just like, yeah, that is exactly who I should be. And I think I just dug in at that moment. And, and was just sort of decided it was already happening somehow, like I have a very, still I have a big daydreamy part of my life where like, I, I'd like to see myself in the future. I like to imagine myself in the future. I like to get down to like, what am I well,

shocking, what am I wearing? But if you know me, you know, that's like a no brainer, but like, what am I wearing? And what am I eating? And where am I sitting and when I'm in this place I imagined, you know, I've really been this sort of imaginary world building my entire life. And I think that around that 14-15 mark is when I just thought this was this. Yeah, clearly, this is what I was going to do. And it didn't really occur to me that I couldn't do it. Because I do have a family where like, if you work hard, you could possibly have anything, which we know is not entirely true. But that worked out for me.

Claire French
Yeah, yeah. Laurie?

Laurie Young
I think similarly to Justine, maybe even younger, so I will bore you with my childhood training. I did start in ballet. No, I started to jazz, which was hilarious. And then my jazz teacher told me just try ballet because it would help my technique. And then from there, I was introduced to contemporary dance. And I just.... the feeling.. it was it was so free and so exhilarating. And so like, like I can do this with my body. And I was just feeling my body in a way that was so at once transcendent and so present. And it was like I just felt like this is I have to keep doing this and there was kind of no question, and you know, this is a young childhood very naive, but it was so real. And I just kind of maybe not unlike Justine I was just like, of course I'm gonna do this. It was so singular. I was so singular but in so clear. Probably the clearest I've ever been in my life. And you know, it gets muddy along the way. But no, I felt very, very committed and determined despite my mother's wishes, you know, it was not something that was supported. Dance was a hobby was not a career, and I really had to, you know, make it known and find my own way to do it. so that kind of made me work harder for it in a sense, but I was quite young. And there's a part of me that has lost that in a way. But if I, if I go back into my visceral memory, it's it's very, very, very much present.

Claire French
Thank you. I wonder if we can lead this into a segue into this idea of how the dance changes in us or like, not just not just necessarily age, but as we're introduced to maybe new concepts or new relationships to things or new people, like how, maybe there's... So, with that, like, I feel like already both alluded to this idea of key influences in your life and work, including doing it despite your parents' wishes, or knowing that you had your full support of your family. But, but those kinds of work life influences that might be key for you. I think it's a really, it's a really big question in turn, because every day, it could change a little bit depending on what you're doing. But, but Laurie, particularly, and when you were just saying that moving from jazz, to ballet, to contemporary, and then the muddying of the waters in as a career when you when you find yourself there, if that muddying has kind of sprouted several kind of new kind of relationships to dance, or helped you even kind of feel like, what contemporary dance is for you, and what those new sensations are, being a performer now, as you're older, or just more experienced too you know, just all the experiences you've had. So could you name a couple of key influences, I suppose it could be from mentors or collaborators, or it could be like a personal sensation or personal moment you had, you know, like, sometimes when you find yourself, like, just feeling like really happy and nothing has changed in life, like it's just a moment that hits you, you're walking down the street, or you smell something and just comes over you. But is there anything that comes to mind? Moments? moment? I know. It's big.

Laurie Young

Wow. But yeah, I mean, I've been so lucky to have such a long career. And it's gone through such different change - shifts and changes. I think one of the biggest shifts is kind of going from I was very much a company dancer for a long time, and really working as a dancer and a performer and repertoire and touring. And there was it's not that, I feel like when I started to shift towards making work, or being asked to collaborate on works, there was a there was a really, I was tapping into something that I wasn't able to access as a dance artist as somebody for somebody else. So, when I started making my own work, I was finding it harder and harder to work for other people. When I was much, much earlier on in my experimentation, I guess you could call it as a choreographer, I was suddenly kind of questioning everything much more, unable to answer for them, or felt like I needed more collaborative input with the choreographers who had asked me to be with them as dancers, and I felt such a curiosity to know what making work on my own or with collaborators could give me and that's really unfurled into a very expanded understanding of what choreography is. And while I can't, so I can't really say one sort of cathartic moment, but I am actually going no, I'm going to say that meeting Justine has really been really deeply moving, where, you know, choreographic interests sort of collide and, and come together, but also friendship. And that's, I think this is something that's become like the human in each other, the human as colleagues, the human like, just, oh, man taking care, and how that has to be, you know, foremost in any kind of space sharing, work sharing, life sharing. Yeah. So, in that sense, that this work in this journey with Justine has been deeply, deeply influential.

Claire French

Making space to take care in the professional environment, I think is just what I'm getting from both of you. So yeah, definitely. Justine?

Justine A. Chambers

I mean, I think along the way, there have been so many people. I mean, for me, dancing is just relationships. I mean, that is it. We're just building relationships for the short term, hopefully for the long term, and sometimes you think it'll be for the long term, and then you hang out with and you're like peace I'm out, I don't want to be with you. But I think the relationship building is key. And there have been so many, you know, teachers and dancers and, and people I know and people I don't know, and performances along the way that have like, taking me away from what I thought I was doing, and also have brought me back to what I was doing initially, like, I think that there's this thing that happens where, you know, there's always this bratty moment, or has, I see it as a teacher to being like a long term teacher in many institutions in this country, that there's a bratty moment where we reject everything that we got, and it's all bullshit, and what do they know, and that, and that's a really critical moment. And I think my rejection period, I've had a few of them. Guess I'm just like a lifelong brat. And so, but you know, we don't have that much time for me to name them all. And I would always, I'm always in this fear of stepping on the landmine of forgetting someone and making some political gaffe. So, I will leave all those people out. But I think many of those people know who they are. And I think but when you said, you know, an influence, and I think of like, more recent influence for me, or like body of influence with 8 Days, which is this gathering for choreographers that started in 2012, that Ted Robinson and Amy Henderson spearheaded, and in, in inside the bubble of 8 Days, I felt like all of a sudden, dancing made sense to me again, because it hadn't made sense to me for a very, very long

time, and are like the making and again, this this world of care, right, this world of care that, you know, we're doing this incredibly beautiful, vulnerable, heart moving thing yet, in the spaces are in the structures, they were the antithesis of that, you know, they were racist, and they were sexist, and they were deeply unjust. And I always was just in a deep frustration about about the culture of the dance machine, or the dance market, or the hierarchies in dance and who got what, blah, blah. But at 8 Days, there's people really talking about it, and thinking about it, and, and more than anything, being joyful about it. The difficulty, you know, not just being like everything sucks and everything's hard. And we're better than everybody totally not the case. It was like, where do we where do we find joy? And in that second year of 8 days, Laurie was there, I was on the selection cup committee. I was like, "What's this weirdo doing in Berlin? Wait, we have the same history? How do we have the same history? And I don't know this person." But I met Laurie. And that, as Laurie said, it was like, yeah, I mean, I talked earlier about daydreaming into the future and world building. But I think, like Laurie said, when you move from being a dancer, only to being a dancer who makes work, our relationship to being a dancer can really become incredibly wobbly and unsure, and you don't know how to place yourself as a dancer anymore, because you have ideas and thoughts and desires and a desire for a certain kind of accountability to the relationship of being with a choreographer. And I feel like with Laurie, inside of our work, we've done a kind of world building, and I feel like I try and do it in all of the processes that are that are mine that I'm in charge of that I hold, but that we can actually build the world we want inside the world of the dancing right are inside of that world, because I can't, I don't feel like I can change Canadian government, I don't feel like I can change the municipal government. Like, I don't feel like I can change the whole world of dance. But inside my room, with my people, or our room with our people who we love, we can insist on a better kind of world inside of that space. And, and I think that I mean, we were calling ourselves the house of wellness, when we were working in Berlin, because you would end like we had food in the fridge, and we would have a hot lunch and we had supplements on the table. And Laurie was super sick, and she needed to sleep. And then I believe we sent you home one day, you know that like that was your wellbeing is on the table because we are nothing without you well, you know, and like so that house of wellness thing has been something that I try and do everywhere. But yeah, there was something about that, that encounter at 8 Days that sort of made me know the things that I thought could be possible actually were. And I wasn't the only one thinking about it.

Claire French

Yeah, that's really beautiful.

Justine A. Chambers

And the friendships, the friendships that emerge from that have been have been life changing for me. Yeah,

Claire French

yeah. Should talk a little bit about motherhood.

Justine A. Chambers

Always. (all three giggle)

Claire French

Over to you two maybe in terms of maybe the impact of or to keep up this idea of the joyful and the wellness and the and how maybe how that shifts things a little bit about what those terms mean suddenly in this you know, in that new situation, but maybe the impact on that on not necessarily your professional lives however you would like to talk about it really. I mean, that just it feels like it's a big, I know, it's a big part of your work together in how you've described it. And so, I think this is really opportunity for you to kind of maybe delve into that a little bit together.

Justine A. Chambers

Laurie was a mom first. Yeah. She came to 8 Days. And then every now and then when Milo little Milo was three.

Laurie Young

Yeah,

Justine A. Chambers

Two and a half, three, yeah, three, and just seeing the potential, like the possibility for motherhood inside of dancing. I mean, I think I come from a generation where, if you were a mother, you didn't talk about it, you didn't, you just like, shut up and did what everything else did. And you pretended you weren't a mother, that your work was supposed to be your baby. But I feel like my career took off the minute I became a mother, like, I feel like all of like career as a choreographer, you know, as having sort of more exposure beyond the borders of British Columbia. And I feel like everything I've made has been received well, and I think that has everything to do with being a mother, because your worldview changes, I was like, you become way less myopic, because nothing's about you anymore. You know, and there's a beauty to that, it has like limited what I can do as an artist. It's also made me much more demanding as an artist, like, if you're gonna have me, you have my kid too. And if you can't support that, I don't need to do the gig. And I feel great about that. And it's not, it's not contentious for me, it's not combative. It's just like, that's just what it is. Because I'm a mom first, you know, I'm a mom before, I'm an artist, because I had no choice. And because I chose it at the same time. And I think the thing about working with another mother is you don't have to explain all the internal, all of the simultaneous conflicting emotions that you have, not wanting to be at a six hour rehearsal, because you don't want to be away from your kid that long when they're little or when they're, you know, whatever. Or knowing that you probably aren't going to sleep because you just got to Berlin, and your kids jetlag, they don't give a shit about jetlag, they're waking up at 2am to party, and that's it, you know, so having someone with you, where you're not having to, like, beg for mercy for your motherhood, but someone's like, no, go do it. So yet, like, it's just a no, there's no discussion, but then also this thing that like, you know, you become a mother, and then you see the world and everyone's somebody's baby, and it just breaks you and also bolsters you like, it's so it means the way you're in the world, I think is like just way more empathic, you know, because you can see the baby in everyone, right, just like sometimes you can see how we're all going to be 100. Yeah, and then there's like, the reality is like training, what the hell is training after you become a mother, like, whatever, you just get in shape for a work and hope it works. You know, like, there's all these things that like to juggle our lives, which both Laurie and I, our lives aren't just in the studio, like, we're in books, and we're talking, and our choreographic practice is incredibly expansive and moves beyond just dancing, the work of dancing, or that dancing as many, many things for us. And I think being a mother has made me feel much more sanguine about that. The

fact that I can't be in the studio, three hours a day training and like punching out movement all the time, but I can be thinking about dancing, and that is also me dancing and working. So I think there's something about motherhood, The other... not long ago, I performed in work for Kate Franklin as a dancer. And in my bio, as you know, I always the last thing is that I am Max Tyler-Hite's mother, and my choreographer, Kate Franklins in-laws that oh, you know, who's Max Tyler-Hite? And Kate said, oh, that's Justine's kid, you know, when he said, Yeah, but who is he? Because I make it sound like my kids from celebrity, I guess. And that's just he six-year-old, you know? And no one that everyone right. So, I guess that kind of like, I love that moment that there's this expectation that he would be some huge, influential person in the world. And, you know, he may very well be but the fact that he's a huge influence over me and he, he determines my time and my availability he determines my mood often. I just feel like he is he is the the ultimate influencer for me and the work I make.

Claire French

It's interesting, too, that that draws attention to you drawing attention to being a mother, as a professional artist by putting it in your bio, and that somebody read the bio and expected that to mean something different. I think that's that there's a yeah, there's a really nice inter relation there. Laurie, would you like to add anything?

Laurie Young

Yeah, gosh, mothering is so much about care. But clearly, but it's also really can be really brutal. And you know, we... Yeah, and I think that's something really important to acknowledge And, you know, I think my experience of being a mother in Berlin, and a working artist in Berlin is very different than for people who live in Canada, because daycare here is subsidized. It's free. So that allowed me in some ways to have a choice to work different kinds of hours, because I had someone to take care of my very young child, that's not to be overlooked, because it's, yeah, it's free here. So, I feel like I was really able to, in some ways, keep working creatively in a way that I don't think I would have been able to, or I would have had to do it very differently had I'd been in Canada. And now things are shifting again, you know, Milo just came home from his first day of secondary school. And so, you know, it's, it's yeah, I know, grade seven, you know, so, I'm, you know, believe it. And so now I'm like, oh, my God, but now he's being independent and doing all these things. And now what so, you know, this, this sort of relationship that you build with time was also shifting with with him. But yeah, you know, when I started working, the conditions were a certain way, and they and in many instances, they haven't changed, but you do, or I do, you know, your life, your your life conditions change what you need to change. And so I'm fortunate to be able to work with people or be resourced enough to create the conditions so that work can be more than manageable, but actually enjoyable.

Claire French

Fruitful and yeah, yeah, it's making me think, would you would you say that being mothers is also, a becoming mother is one of the biggest challenges that you faced? And would you not call it?

Justine A. Chambers

Yes, it's a challenge so hard.

Laurie Young

Nobody told me it would be this hard. Like, I didn't know

Justine A. Chambers

I don't know anything. We wouldn't have believed them anyway.

Claire French

Yeah, exactly. You've done it. Anyway. Know what our next thing right? That? It's Yes. That's good. Yeah. And you're also comfortable not knowing.

Justine A. Chambers

Yeah, well, if you know, just what you think that you know, something they change. It's very strange. It's very annoying. Yes. You're like, Wait, I thought you always like edamame. No, not anymore. I just bought 18 packs from Costco

Laurie Young

Well, now exactly. I mean, now it's I mean, you know, now it's also shifting because Milo is almost my height, you know, and so there's that your your young child is growing up, just like shifting time, so quickly and so dramatically right now. It's, it's quite a journey.

Claire French

And literally, in that instance, where you're seeing the vertical time vertical.

Laurie Young

I know I mean, I'm not that tall. But still, he's like, shooting up.

Claire French

Yeah, yeah, exactly. Well, I'm not a mother, but my, and I'm not going to talk to any of that. But just in terms of height. My cousin's my nephews, even my niece are shooting up. So, it's it yeah, yeah, just on that level, that's all I'll say. Okay, I'm gonna stick with challenges a little bit before I move on to your collaboration, because underlying a lot of this that I haven't kind of jumped on yet, but I feel like needs a little bit of room in this conversation to talk about racism, sexism, feeling, even marginalized within quite privileged situations. Like you, you both talked about having amazing training, and these and these phenomenal experiences very young, that are privileged positions to be in access to those kinds of resources to those people to those environments, to and swept up out of those environments, into the privilege of being in companies that are, you know, and alongside that you're having to face all of these, you know, kind of as you talked about, Laurie, when you first got to Berlin, the racism that was there and, and Justine, you've mentioned the sexism and all of those and, and just attitude that you've faced, and that is in the culture that you've, you know, in 8 days, you were you were addressing, you know, with a group and and I just think we should give that a bit of space because I'd love to know, how you faced those challenges how you deal with those challenges. And I also feel like for both of you, I know Justine does this and Laurie I don't know you well, but but I'm sure this is part of your practice that in transposing your experiences for other people and sharing your wisdom if you like with others. That is part of it is like conduct, you know, how do you practice care? How do you consider care for yourself as you practice? And I think they're really great lessons moving forward. Because the younger people are

learning those from you, from us. And so, how have you faced those? How are you? Maybe tackling those? Where are we with that? Where do you think we are with that? With that? in quotation marks, terrible gesture, not as sophisticated as their gestures, by the way, by any means.

Laurie Young

Oh, gosh,

Claire French

Are we in are... is it improving? Are we in are people listening? Is there space for alternative? One of the things I see in your duet is an alternative virtuosity. I'm not going to dwell on it here. But But I think there's a there's an it's an interesting time where there's an expansion of that idea of virtuosity and expansion of choreography and expansion of dance and expansion of audiences engagement with these things, and with physical arts, kinetic arts, all of but are we tackling these bigger issues by in doing that, can we do you feel you are?

Justine A. Chambers

I think, of course we can. I mean, the sheer fact that Laurie and I are dancing in the way we are in a world as bipoc mothers, I mean, that unto itself, 100 years ago, this would not have been a possibility for me outside of some sort of body house tawdry situation, right, like, either of us. This is like so, you know, I do I do think obviously, there's improvement. Is there progress all the time is sort of the question that I have, like, there's improvement around the optics of human rights, I don't even know if they're always actually worked through, there are certain things that had to happen in the world for humans to feel evolved, or like my grandmother, when she was born, she was considered two thirds of a human for most of her life, you know, so yeah, things have improved, maybe in a large way. I think in particular, in that the dance community, I feel a real commitment to anti racism, I, I feel a real commitment to refocusing our host nations I feel a real a real commitment to being anti sexist and to being, you know, anti all the phobics, transphobic, queer phobic, all of it, I think what I get worried about is that this becomes, we become only conceptual or theoretical, and you forget about the practical experience of living as a bipoc Individual. And I don't feel like I'm trying to tackle it inside this dance. I think, perhaps, maybe, Laurie, you can correct me if you're wrong, but maybe we're trying to lay bare a little bit. That, yeah, like, of course, I was like, there's, we're trying to be like this. This is what these bodies hold. And like, literally, in the past, how did I deal with racism, a forward bend, I would be in a studio, someone that would say, some stupid, racist shit. And I would go into a forward bend, because I was 25. And I didn't know what the hell to do in that moment. A lot of my career was absolute silence so that I could stay in the room, because it felt more important to me to stay in the room. And then over time, you get more courageous, or you get more tired or the accumulation of transgressions or micro aggressions or literally not micro, totally macro aggressions.

Justine A. Chambers

You just can't anymore, right? There's a moment where you're full. And then, you know, we're in this moment. This you know, I'm feel like how many times have I said this, like this post, George Floyd moment has us all reckoning a little bit more with everything. And in particular, white people working really hard to try and grapple with their own sort of, un-Earth biases, or the biases that they've allowed or like, where they're complicit or, you know, we I see this work happening, and, but to be honest, I feel

in this moment, also, as a person of color as a fair skinned Black person. There's all this sort of like, pulling me as a resource for working through oppression politics, and to be honest, I'm so tired. I'm so tired. I'm more tired of that in some ways than anything else. You know that I kind of feel like, can you guys go sorts yourselves because I've been doing this for a long time. I think- I was born in 1975. So probably that long, you know, and at which point, do I have to continue to shepherd you through like, the aftermath of colonialism or the continuing math of colonialism like So yes, I think like, what's better now is I can take space in a really maybe more aggressive way. Because I'm incredibly middle aged, I have an established career. And these are all privileges in a way so and I have partner like to do it alone is so scary, and you're so worried. I'm so ready to be blackballed at any moment for saying something that's difficult for other people. But when you do it with someone else, like Laurie and I do this together, and I do it together with so many people, I do it together with Su-Feh, and I do it together with Bopha Chhay at Arts Speak, who just left art speak, and was Vanessa Kwan. And Maiko Yamamoto like there are so many people, women of colour, people of colour I can do this with. And I'm grateful for that. But I there is always this moment where I'm so I feel so exposed for the last two years, and I'm old enough to be able to deal with it, and to have tools and the therapist and all that stuff, right. But I think about young people who are so exposed in this moment, and then learning and growing into being a racialized person is totally, it's not private for them. And it was a little bit more private for me, because of when I was born and how I was born. The time, right, like I was a pre, we've all pre-Internet people. So, there's perhaps a little bit more privacy. So, I do think about the exposure of young people like being watched, as you contend with these world shifts, you know, and then I have this question, did the shift even happen? Like, I felt like there was this beautiful portal that opened, and I always am in this feeling, sometimes that is just closing. but not completely, because we do the work, right? We do the hard work to keep those conversations alive and to be difficult for people just and to be honest, sometimes very difficult, just because we're ourselves, we don't do anything else, but be ourselves and the difficult for people. Yeah.

Claire French

I just want to just before Laurie speaks to it, I just want to say that I've felt this, I'm sensitive to all of this. It's not necessarily new information for me, but it is a new space to be as well for like, for my relationship to my art making. And I'm allowing that to shift, I'm just giving it space to shift. And so I'm I don't want, I don't want them to shut it down and close that space up again and go, Oh, I tried that. Now I'm gonna go back to what I know. And it's going to take time. And I'm giving it time to shift. So, I just wanted to put that in, it's my way of dealing with this discomfort, I have an hypersensitivity I have to certain behaviors, I might have, you know, kind of added to or certain things I might have believed that I didn't commit to the belief, but I acted on it as if it was a belief. And I wonder, and it's just making me question those things. So, I appreciate you saying a forward bend. Because I think about the amount of times I might have been in a studio and my behavior in a similar way, whether it's physical or leaving a room, or, you know, asserting my opinion at a particular moment. And the why of that what what makes me do it. Like, what what is driving that is something I'm really, really paying attention to now. So Laurie, would you like to?

Laurie Young

Wow, there's so there's so much to think about and respond to? I do. I do feel like things have shifted. I feel like there is more attention given to art making that speaks to racism, sexism, transphobia, queer

phobia I do I see that in the curation, I see that in the programming, I see more representation. And also at the same time, I'm exhausted. It's so important that work is so important. And at the same time, I'm exhausted that this has to happen and what where could that space for abstraction be? For those who are racialized for those who are marginalized. I just, there's, you're always speaking for more than yourself as a bi-poc person, and that's so tiring. It's so tiring. But yes, I do. I do feel like there is a shift within a bubble. You know, and you step half a centimeter outside of the bubble, and like, what rock have I been under? What rock have you been under? So, you know, there, there is conversations happening, there is dialogue, but the insistence still needs to be there. You have to say again, and again and again. And this is something we talk about in our duet, Justine, you know, it's this repetition, you know, repetition as a choreographer or as a choreographic device, but it's really like, no, you're not getting the message. We have to say this again and again, and in this way and with this gesture, and with these signs, and with this headline and so it's not, it's not to be taken for granted that the message, the message is out there because again, like you step two centimeters over, and they're not getting the message, you know,

Claire French

I think about, you know, One hundred more, and just the more speaks to that idea that it's like 100 isn't enough, you know, even if it's 100% committed, it still takes more than that, to like, you know, like, it makes me think of that in the way but I do have to say, I mean, there is something quite remarkable about how you have packaged, like, it's so stylish, your show? I mean.

Justine A. Chambers

What else would it be seriously?!

Laurie Young

You sound surprised!

Claire French

No, I'm not, but I'm not at all. But for some of the listeners, if they don't know what's coming, just it's, it's pure style. So, I'm, I'm happy for the repetition to be like 24 hours of repetition. I could watch. I mean, it's just, it's stunning. And there's, there's something about there is something about care, in every single gesture, there is something about and there's something about care and your performance, and I don't not every performer has that care for an audience or for each other. They just don't. And I think there's and I think there's something really quite beautiful and undeniable about that in the duet. So, from, from what I've been able to see so far. So, I know you both do a lot of things, a lot of things like independently of each other. But we will have to bring this interview to a close very soon, although I think you know, it's another, you know, we can go and find out about you. And we can look at your research. And I just want to mention a couple of things like Laurie, would you just could you just mentioned something about your VW fellowship, Arts and Science fellowship in Berlin? Just a little sentence about that, we can research it ourselves.

Laurie Young

Yeah sure. About six years ago, I was given the opportunity to I was given the grant given out by the Falvey, the Volkswagen, so it has nothing to do with the car company it was that was just the seed

money. So, I'm not advertising for VW. And it was a special program designed to bring artists and scientists or academics or scholars together. So that was my first moment when when I was really able to work truly transdisciplinary. So, I was I found my people, and I was trying to work with the sensory ethnographer as well as anthropologists. And some of the work involved me in creating audio guides, choreographic audio guides for Natural History Museum. So that's kind of a little, a little bit of what, what was coming out of that, that fellowship. But what it really did was introduce me to whole worlds of academia and scholarly thinking in a way that I never would have done before.

Claire French

Hmm, great. Yeah. And I wanted to just mention that because of the kind of when Justine mentioned that the dancing happens kind of outside of the studio and in in the research and things you do, I think that's a really good example of one of those spaces. And Justine, would you like to mention any of your projects at this point, your writing, perhaps, I mean, we mentioned it before in the previous podcast. So, if people would like to go back and listen to the podcast I did with Justine last year. But we talked quite a bit about embodiment and and writing on that and Justine's connections with visual artists as she was saying earlier in the community and a whole bunch of other people. But if there's something you'd like to mention now.

Justine A. Chambers

I think one project which started off as a dance project, Semi-precious. It sort of started in 2017. And then it's sort of stretched into, I don't know forever, we just kept working on it as a research project. And we worked on it in at Art Speak with Bopha Chhay invited us to come and work on it there. They got a new floor put in so all sudden, there was a beautiful floor, and she's like, you want to like break in this floor with your dancers. But what has happened is I let go of the project as a dance performance. Because the thing I want to do with it, actually, I would need to have Las Vegas money. Like I'd have to be a show in Vegas that actually no one in Vegas would want to see, but I would need that. But also, I just realized that it was sort of maybe more. It was words. It was words in that our scores, we had like 72 scores that were running simultaneously. And I just realized that maybe it could be a book, I got approached by Art Speak to like, think about making a small publication with them. So that's with a designer now and in the throes of becoming a publication but for me, it's very much still the dance piece, but it is now a series of like bits of the score but then filled out with bits of musings or text or references to other thinkers or artists and, and I think that's like my most, I feel very excited and terrified about that being a public thing for the world to consume or to take in. But I also feel very proud of how it came about and who I worked with to find those words and thoughts. And Natalie Purschwitz ,who I love and collaborated with on the installation she's made, she's made images for it based on photo- from taken from photographs. So yeah, I think that's like a thing that will happen, it'll arrive sometime. I don't know when I'm, I can't hold the deadline. I just know that I submitted my things. And it happened. And we did all the final edits. And

Claire French

So, it's coming. And in the meantime, life continues. And that will appear on your, come through the mail and be like look! Oh, my gosh. So, what's now and what's next? My last question to you. We have, we're going to see the duet in October, you will have already performed it in Berlin. I believe that's where it premiered? That's correct. And you've you already performed in in Ottawa and Montreal? No,

because that was delayed because of the pandemic. So, yeah, so that's possible. But we get to see it in Vancouver in October,

Justine A. Chambers

And we go to Montreal and Ottawa directly after we built our little we have our tour.

Claire French

Yeah, yeah. Okay. That's great. So that is happening. Yeah. Okay. Well, yeah. And so, present day realities, your upcoming schedules, like, once a week look like in a nutshell.

Justine A. Chambers

I'm in summer mode. But in two weeks, my reality looks like I'll be teaching at SFU. Again, couple of courses this fall, but I'm also starting an MFA school at the same time. So, my life is about to go into a whole other level and it feels like an MFA could be a two year residency. And that's kind of how I'm trying.

Claire French

Yeah, absolutely. Are you doing it at SFU then?

Justine A. Chambers

I am. It's very strange, all sorts of conflict of interest going on over here.

Claire French

But yeah, I moved to Vancouver to do my MFA at SFU in 1997. So yeah, that's why I ended up in Vancouver. So, 97 to 99 was my MFA time. Yeah. Wow. Yeah.

Justine A. Chambers

Yeah. Yah, yah, that's my what that so what's that going to look like? A lot.

Claire French

Exciting, though.

Justine A. Chambers

Yeah, totally exciting. Totally. Yeah.

Claire French

Yeah. Great. Laurie?

Laurie Young

What am I doing? Well, I just got I'm finishing summer mode. I was just in Toronto actually visiting my family for the first time in three years, which was beautiful. And now I'm back and working on an exhibition showing with Annika Joyce Siddiq, which will be at D 21 in Leipzig, so that's going to be actually installation work and sculptures as well as a choreographic performance and working with a fantastic video filmmaker called Vika Kirchenbauer as a performer in their work. And yeah, it's going to

be a lovely full week. week-S. And then coming back to Canada, where I'll be reunited with my love, Justine. Yeah.

Claire French

So great. Yes. So wonderful. Well, thank you so much for spending this hour with me. I really do appreciate it. Feel all kind of expansive and ready for my ready for my day. Yeah, thank you. And good luck with the tour. Lovely to meet you, Laurie. Thank you. Nice to see you, Justine.

Justine A. Chambers

Thank you so much. Bye, bye.

Claire French

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