

The Dance Centre Podcast Episode 13: Shion Skye Carter

SPEAKERS

Claire French, Shion Skye Carter

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

It is my utmost pleasure to invite Shion Skye Carter into a conversation today. I'm very much looking forward to hearing from Shion because I've been a bit of a follower for a while and I think it's this is just going to be really lovely to hear from her herself her own words. So, Shion Skye Carter is a dance artist originally from Tajimi, Japan, who lives in dedicates time to her artistic practice in Vancouver, Canada as a guest on the unseeded ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples through choreography hybridized with heritage art bombs that interact with digital and sculptural objects. Shion's work looks inward to the facets of her intersectional identity as a lens to process the world around her. As a co-founder of Olive Theory, an interdisciplinary duo with musician Stefan Nazarevich, she collaborates to experiment at the intersection between embodied performance installation art and live sound. Shion has performed across Canada, she has interpreted the works of artists such as Vanessa Goodman/Action at a Distance, Wen Wai Dance and Ziyian Kwan of Dumb Instrument Dance, and her short dance films have been screened at festivals globally. She holds a BFA from Simon Fraser University and is the 2021-2022 recipient of the Iris Garland Emerging Choreographer Award. I think that's a wonderful way of encapsulating Shion who from that bio doesn't sound like an emerging artist to me. However, it's in a very short amount of time. And there's something really rich and so much that we can talk about in in so many facets of the work that Shion does, and the philosophy behind her work. But what I thought we would do is introduce Shion, with a little bit of a further background, so Shion, welcome and could you please talk a little bit about how you got into dancing, maybe even as a child, and kind of pre university education perhaps. And a little bit about that that track for you. Did it start in Japan?

Shion Skye Carter

Yeah, absolutely. Well, first off, Claire, thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be talking with you today. Yeah, I think when I was living in Japan, the closest dance education or experience that I had, I only lived there until I was six years old, but I did have that classic experience of wanting to put on performances for my parents in the house. So, my family has a lot of home or video recordings of

me doing dancing and singing around the house a lot. And then after we moved to Canada, when I was six, shortly after I went to my first ballet class at the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts, and I did ballet there just for one year. And then I told my mom, I wanted to do sports instead. And so, I ended up doing soccer and track and field and different sports. And I didn't actually go back to dancing until I was 13, when I started attending Burn Creek Secondary School, which was my high school, and as a public high school, I'm so glad that I went there because they had an amazing dance and theatre program in the high school curriculum. So, I did my first, I guess, really grounded dance training as part of just my high school program, and part of my everyday classes there. So, I was able to learn contemporary and modern dance and some jazz. And that was really what sparked my love for dance. And I'm so grateful that I have that experience. And my teachers there who I haven't seen in a while but Shannon Sterling and Alison Murphy, they were incredible and really encouraged students to not only develop their artistry and performance, but also to choreograph as well. And I think that was experience that for me as a teenager really shaped my love for creating and for choreographing, not just performing.

Claire French

I love that because while I grew up like I went to dance schools from three and was on the stage from that young in lots of different things. But I do remember my physical education teacher at my high school, almost demanding that I come choreograph something and perform something that I made like, and it's just such a fond memory I have of, you know, Trish Phillips, suddenly saying, 'oh, Claire, why don't you create something for this?' You know, so there is something, I think that's where the love of choreography as opposed to improvising something came for me at a very young age. But that's looking back a long way back to that world. But yeah, I love I love that connection you've just made to, you know, those teachers in high school and in general school who kind of noticed the creativity and kind of want to nurture that. Yeah, that's wonderful. So, would you say that the interdisciplinary work that you do is what helped you in a way kind of formulate your early career, like, in terms of a focus, I feel that strongly in your work, I feel like there's a real message there almost, or something you're inquiring about, that feeds you, and then feeds your audiences? You know, kind of so I wonder if you could talk a little bit about maybe that trajectory? Like, how did you find the interdisciplinary or did it find you, you know.

Shion Skye Carter

Oh, that's a really nice way of putting it. I go look for it, or did it find you? That's lovely. Yeah, definitely. I have always been interested in different forms of art. My dad is also a designer. So, he, I grew up looking at his like architecture books around the house. And yeah, design and architecture and sculpture books as well. So having some exposure to those different art forms. And also, my parents both, they wouldn't say that they are great at this, they would probably get mad if they heard me saying this, but they're really amazing artists, they love to do illustrations and painting too. And I think that exposure to those different artistic disciplines, just around my childhood homes, also probably fed into my interest in how my curiosity and how I could bring those different disciplines in and have them feed into each other. And also, when I was at university, in the Simon Fraser University dance program, I think that the downtown campus the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts campus had opened, maybe just several years before I started there. So, I'm really lucky that that happened, because that downtown campus has the entire school for the contemporary arts in one building. And because all of the art students were in that one building, they had interdisciplinary creation courses there. And I was able to

meet artists from the music program, visual arts, film, dance, and, and also, I guess, theatre production and acting. And so, the students were brought together and every week, a new group would be put together to create a new short work that we would then share with the class by the end of that week. And that also, that experience was my first foray, I think into interdisciplinary collaboration in this very intentional way. And learning skills of how to have different collaborators, inputs and ideas come together.

Claire French

Yeah, I feel like, I came to Vancouver to do my masters at SFU, in the 90s. And I did the MFA in interdisciplinary studies. So, it's really interesting how, you know, it was it was up on the hill at the time. But but it's really interesting to see that the undergraduate program has definitely, you know, kind of taken on more of that idea of the the interdisciplinary in that the School of Contemporary Arts, as it was not a faculty at that time, but a school, you know, that was really its philosophy at the masters level. So, yeah, it's really great to see, I think it's really wonderful. So, is was that also your inspiration for Olive Theory? Or does that come from a more kind of personal place with the particular with Stefan particularly? And could you explain the name a little bit? Because I'm very intrigued by the name, I think it's, I think it's beautiful. It makes me think of so many layers of things. So yeah, those two things like,

Shion Skye Carter

Absolutely. Yeah. Stefan and I actually met before going to university when we were both in Grade 12. So, we had met prior to university, but then we ended up both going to the school for Contemporary Arts, him in the music program and me in the dance program. So even though we had already known each other, and we were partners, we hadn't tried collaborating and bringing our disciplines together before. And so, after going through the experience of the dance program for four years, and him going through the music program, we realized that a lot of the time, the disciplines could be quite separate from each other, even though they were in the same building, students would kind of work within their own bubble and with the same people who are in their same discipline. So, we received a mentorship from a few professors in the music side of things; Sabrina Schroeder, Mauricio Pauly and Arne Eigenfeldt and we worked with them to get some mentorship on to start Olive Theory while we were in our last semester at SFU, which was really cool to be able to have the resources of the of the school and studio space and using equipment and things like that. And what we wanted to do was find a way for dance and live sound and other elements that we're interested in, like installation work and sculpture, how they could be kind of working on the same playing field of a work and really feeding into each other and that felt different from other experiences we've had, where a musician from the music program would come in and compose music for a dance piece, that felt a bit like they were two separate things that were laid next to each other, but not in this, like melding together, if that makes sense. So, wanting to try something a little bit different.

Claire French

Yeah. And I think there's something really lovely about that, because that that's something that's really dear to my heart. But there's something about the form, how, what that does for your perception of form, and I'm, you know, as as a, you know, we open up this to kind of things, our belief systems or something in terms of dances that does that, has that influenced what you think is possible in dance?

Or would you say, yeah, that way round? I think part of my interest or my curiosity with with you is whether it matters whether or not it's called dance, you know, in a way, like there's something about I feel that there's a difference between dance and performance.

Shion Skye Carter

Yes.

Claire French

And so, dance performance becomes a particular kind of dance. And it's not that it has to look the same at all. But it's a, it's an intention as the word you use before. That's an intention is to perform dance, which is quite different to possibly making or doing dance, you know, dancing dance. So, so I wonder if you could maybe you know, is that, does it matter to you that it's dance?

Shion Skye Carter

Yeah, yeah. 100% exactly what you're saying. I think that working with artists of other disciplines has made me completely rethink what the lines are of that that dictate what a discipline or an artistic form is. And there's so much more fluidity to the space between artistic disciplines than what I initially imagined when I was younger, when I was a student. And those distinct lines can be pushed, and they can be blurred a bit more. And while there is an aesthetic and artistic interest, definitely where those lines blur, there's also such a fruitful experience in that skill exchange that happens when working in an interdisciplinary process. So, Stefan was teaching me specific skills around music composition and electronic synthesizers and what plugs go in where and input and output and yeah, composing certain sounds and rhythms with an intention of doing that in a way that is similar to I guess, some choreographic scores. And I was able to do a similar exchange where I really tried to help Stefan with his embodiment, and his gaze, and how to use the body and live in the body and be present in the body in front of an audience in a way that he's never done before, which I think learning these skills from each other, and shar- and then sharing with a live audience, or virtually what we learned was really scary, because usually people will take years of training in one artistic discipline, and then they can gain that confidence to share with an audience. But this was a more fast paced experience, where we take the experiences we've had and the knowledge we have of our own discipline, and now we're adding in new skills of something completely different. And then we also got to learn a new skill together, which was instrument building through our project, which is called *reach-close* that amplify piano wire sculpture that changes and transforms a room into an interactive instrument that creates sound. And that was something brand new for both of us. So, receiving mentorship, also from Stephen Smulovitz , who is at SFU. And taking knowledge from all of these different people, we were able to go from figuring out how to just amplify one wire and connect a contact microphone to it and what all of that means to then being able to develop more full-scale installation, which we hope to revisit sometime soon. We'd love to develop that project, maybe into a public artwork.

Claire French

I was just thinking of that I was thinking about the you know, it's visually stunning. And then there's the there's the element of it changing the sound of a room but then the other way is for the environment itself to change it. You know, which is exactly where you're going with that. I think that's so beautiful. Olive theory then as a name.

Shion Skye Carter

Yes, as a name, it's not as deeply layered as you might think. It's there's a TV show called *How I Met Your Mother*. And they have an episode-so it's totally a sitcom. And they had an episode where they talked about the olive theory, which is where a couple on average, apparently one person likes olives, and one person hates them. So, then whoever likes the all those who will eat the olives off other person's plate. And that's the truth for Stefan and I. But at the same time, we wanted a name that was a little bit light and lighthearted, and also kind of rolls off the tongue. And we like how the letters look written out as well. So, we just wanted to have something playful and lighthearted for our new company.

Claire French

Oh, that's so wonderful. But of course, that stuff runs deep, right? It's all like, you know, that psychology of like, deciding that most couples are you know, there's there's a psychology to that, which I really love, like on my psychology 101 mind. Oh, okay. So, you just mentioned you like the way it's written. And that seems to be a good segue for me into the the notion of calligraphy to a certain degree, and that might be too much of a literal, kind of jumping on the words. But I think that's a nice, also a nice tie in with what you've been talking about design, illustration, the visual thing of it, the body involved in calligraphy like all of those elements. So that's in your, that's a little bit in your work of *Residuals*, isn't it the piece that you'll be performing at the Dance Centre in November? So maybe, could you talk a little bit about that side of things? Like, what the inspirations are? Maybe in terms of concepts? Maybe? And is it different between your collaborative work and your solo work, but I have a feeling that your solo work is still very much collaborative, in terms of just in its interdisciplinary nature, you know, in that kind of skill sharing and skill building, and that as a solo performer, that's where you kind of are on stage alone, kind of, not alone. But you know, like the only person the only human form but with all of your disciplines and and collaborations. So, could you talk a little bit about that? Maybe what went into *Residuals* as a kind of concept and what you're exploring there.

Shion Skye Carter

Absolutely, when I graduated from SFU, the dance program, I finished in 2018. And then I was finishing my kinesiology degree. So, I actually graduated from the University in 2019. And I was,

Claire French

Can I interject? Does that mean you have two, does that mean you have two degrees, then two full degrees?

Shion Skye Carter

I have a minor degree in kinesiology, major in dance, yeah. Being in school and having the support of being in school and having those, that environment almost like a cocoon. And that to break out of that cocoon was very intimidating to me, going into the professional realm as a freelance artist suddenly felt a bit like the road was being pulled out from under me. And something that I was struggling to find was what I wanted to say with my work and what my artistic voice was. And a big shifting point for me was when I graduated university and was looking inward towards myself and my family history, and I was also exploring some internal reflection around my identity as a mixed-race person and an immigrant

from Japan and feeling like I've had one foot in one culture and one foot in another culture a little bit for most of my life. And there are also some family expectations that I was struggling with, some cultural differences. And so, I was having this period of internal reflection right after graduating from university trying to figure out who I was and who I am as an artist, what I want to say. And then I reached out to Ziyian Kwan, the artistic director of Dumb Instrument Dance about doing a mentorship project. And I would reach, I reached out to her about being assistant and her work. And also, as part of the mentorship project, she would also be an outside eye for me, and as I started my very first work as a professional artist outside of the university environment, so she thankfully agreed to that. And I reached out to Ziyian, because I was so inspired by her rigor, and her passion for dance and the arts, as well as the fact that she's also an Asian Canadian artist who is... seems so comfortable with who she is and proud of who she is. And she allows her heritage and her ancestry to really influence her artistic voice. So that was incredibly inspiring for me. And after working with her for a year/year and a half through this mentorship over the course of multiple projects, I had the initial I guess 15-minute work in progress version of my solo that I had created. And part of what went into the concept of *Residuals* was me using calligraphy as a traditional art form that I view as part of the kind of strict sort of meditative, this very specific art form that's linked to a very old part of Japan and Japanese culture. And I would use that art form as almost like a portal to travel back in time a bit, and then bring that into the present day to incorporate with dance and almost provide this new contemporary perspective on this very, very old art form. And I used to do calligraphy when I attended Gladstone Japanese language school in Burnaby. That's where I went to Japanese school for 10 years after moving from Japan. And thankfully, my parents enrolled me and my sister in that school so that I could keep my Japanese skills and be bilingual. And yeah, when I was younger, at that school, I did calligraphy lessons for a few years with the headmaster of the school, whose name is Yoko Murakami. She's incredible. And she is still teaching calligraphy and still leading the school to this day, I think she's like 84 years old or something now. And because she was such a constant presence throughout the 10 years that I went to school there, she almost felt like this kind of maternal grandmotherly figure as well. And in 2019, you know, it's been quite a few years after I'd graduated from the school, I reached out to her and asked if I could come back to do calligraphy lessons with her, and some of the other, a lot of them are elementary school students who I would sit in the classroom with, I asked if I could come back and do calligraphy lessons as part of the research for my first solo work. And she was very interested in helping me and she provided me with words that were a bit more difficult than the ones she was giving to the elementary school students who would sit in their little chairs next to me, but it was such an amazing experience to go back to the school where I attended for 10 years to go back to a location that was so close to my heart and close to my childhood, but coming back as an adult with a new intention, which was to learn calligraphy, but now for incorporating into my artistic practice.

Claire French

So, did you feel that you your calligraphy skills, were kind of like, did they kind of put you back in time in terms of skill level as well? Was it like relearning the skill did you feel like an elementary school student like, you know, like,

Shion Skye Carter

I actually felt a bit like I was riding a bicycle, like I ya know how your muscle memory kind of will remember how to ride a bike, even if you've gone years without riding a bike, it felt a little bit like that.

And something that I was proud of, was the fact that I hadn't gone I hadn't done calligraphy for so many years aaaand probably 10 years or so I hadn't really touched a calligraphy brush to paper. But my teacher was able to guide me in a way that I was able to move up from writing in, there's two main ways of writing in calligraphy, there is the form of writing the letters in quite a clean-cut kind of way that is very easy to read. And then the one level above that is a more abstracted brushstrokes, where lines that would usually be completely separate could connect together, almost like learning dance technique, or ballet. And then going one step further, and learning how to improvise and create your own lines and shapes

Claire French

And somatic practice verses. Yeah, exactly.

Shion Skye Carter

So, by having her guide me into that direction of having the more abstracted brushstrokes, I was able to really feel how much the body and movement is involved in that process of writing calligraphy. And so that was a huge part of the initial movements that I brought into the studio then to recreate these calligraphy words and brushstrokes with my body. And I also was very inspired by the monochromatic colour scheme, the white paper, the black ink showing up on the paper, the stone inkwell where you would put the ink in and the brush and all of these tactile elements. So that definitely influenced how much props and objects are a part of *Residuals* as well, which people will see when on stage.

Claire French

Yeah, absolutely. In Japanese, how do you say calligraphy and *Residuals*?

Shion Skye Carter

Oh, that's a really good question. So, I always went to my calligraphy lessons, and it was called Soshō. Soshō, is short for shoes. Yeah, but there's another word for it. Shodō I think and that is also like the more formal way of saying calligraphy. But the calligraphy club which is what the lessons with the teacher Kawakami Sensei was called, was called Soshō club. And actually, my title of the piece *Residuals* you'll I think you'll notice that there's the Japanese characters, that's actually not a translation of residuals. And it's a bit of a word play. So, *Residuals* is the English title, connecting to these parts of myself that feel like puzzle pieces within myself. And the puzzle pieces have not really felt like they clicked together necessarily, to make up what my identity is. And so, I feel like I have residual bits that are kind of left behind in these different places where I've lived or where my family is spread out across the globe, I feel like I've left residual parts of myself and I right now I'm through this work, I'm in the process of bringing those pieces back together a bit more. And the Japanese characters after is almost like a separate Japanese title. And there are two characters, they're two separate words. The first word *sumi* means to reside or to live somewhere. And the second word is also pronounced *sumi* and it means ink. So, it's a bit of a wordplay there.

Claire French

Oh, fantastic. Oh, that's wonderful. I'm glad I asked that question. So, you premiered the piece in Montreal? Is that correct? That's right. in 2021. Was that a delayed performance? Because of COVID?

Oh, was it all? It was? Yeah. So, you've been with you've you have a residual experience with, with the president with the premiering of this piece, too, don't you?

Shion Skye Carter

Yeah, 100%, it was supposed to premiere October 2020. And because of all of the closures of theatres and venues, it got pushed October 2021. The version that I'm performing at the Dance Centre is slightly, it's remounted. And I love the idea that a work can continue to evolve and change. So, it has evolved a little bit like in the remount process. But yeah, I'm very excited to share it with Vancouver audiences.

Claire French

Yeah, that's wonderful. Yeah, I'm very much looking forward to seeing it. You've mentioned quite a few people that you've reached out to receive mentorship from. And I think that's quite inspirational for, you know, a lot of our listeners, and it's so lovely to hear. It's inspirational to me, too, that you've, you've sought out mentorship, and you've known very specifically what it is you want. And also you've gone back to connections that you've previously made, or that have been in your life, and they think there's something really respectful and wonderful about that learning. What would you say that key influences in your life or your work, don't necessarily have to be the same your life and your work. But just a little bit of insight into that. And also, maybe who or what is had the most impact on you do you think? At this point in time, as I'm asking you this question, in this moment? What comes to mind?

Shion Skye Carter

Such a big question. Yeah, I definitely felt a big shift in my artistic I guess, what's the word I'm looking for, I guess the the motivation and determination that I feel now. And that shift from being a student to a professional in the freelance world, I felt a big shift when I did my mentorship with Ziyian. And Ziyian has been a creative force that has influenced me so much and has supported my work so much since I met her. And I really appreciate you saying that the seeking out mentorship is an inspiring thing. Because I definitely had to push myself to reach out to people, it was very nerve wracking at first. And I really didn't know Ziyian, until I reached out to her. And we started to chat and get to know each other. So, there is that bit of knowledge now that I have that I wish I could tell to my younger self, or to other young people listening or to anybody really that I guess like pushing yourself to reach out to people and connect with people that you admire, or even to just drop a line to somebody and say, 'Hey, I'm a really big fan of your work. I'd love to chat with you sometime, about your ideas', even saying something like that is usually something that gets received really well from the other end. So, it's not something to be scared of.

Claire French

No, and they don't have to turn into big lifetime commitments, either, you know, nobody has to make any promises, you know, in those situations, it's just, there is something that there's a camaraderie there. And there's a and the only people who can really understand are the ones who have gone through or are going through it. You know, so there's, I think there's something just really beautiful and keeping that healthy kind of connection. Yes, yeah.

Shion Skye Carter

And yeah, a couple of impactful people. Definitely. Yoko Murakami, the headmaster of Gladstone Japanese language school and her generosity with sharing again, skill sharing, sharing her knowledge and her masterful expert, you know, her expertise in calligraphy as somebody who is coming back after being disconnected from her and from the school for so long and the support of different organizations and funding bodies has been huge in letting me explore my ideas and really start getting my footing in this world of freelance artmaking, which has so can feel so tumultuous and shaky. So I think, yeah, hugely, I feel so grateful to organizations such as the National Association of Japanese Canadians who supported my first iteration of the work, BC Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, and the Iris Garland Emerging Choreographer Award from the Dance Centre, they've all been huge in making my work happen. And now with Iris Garland, I have the chance to perform in the Faris Theatre, which I never thought I would be able to do. I always regarded that theatre in such like, high, I guess like vision and esteem. Yes, and I've seen people perform there who I've, you know, I've gone to show since I was in university at that venue, and I didn't think that I would get to perform there myself and let alone perform my own work, which is so different from performing in someone else's choreography in that space. And I've even had pinch me moments recently where the Dance Centre's, I guess, new season pamphlet, went out in the mail to lots of people. And I've had multiple friends reach out to me saying, Hey, I saw you in my mailbox. There's a photo of you in, in the pamphlet, and it was such an unexpected thing to get reached out to by multiple people about that. And it just warms my heart so much to yeah to go from not knowing what my artistic voice is to then, having come that all this way, and through COVID as well, I'm really grateful to have received support for the work despite the pandemic going on, even though some things were delayed, I was still able to go through the creative process, whether even though split up in chunks, and work with so many amazing collaborators, whether it's musicians, a costume designer, prop designer, lighting, and video projection, all of these people to develop a work that's now going to be shared in the city that I live in. It's so special, and I would have not believed it if I told myself when I graduated university when I was like 21 or 22, if I told them that I would be in a pamphlet in people's mailboxes.

Claire French

Well, you better get used to it, because I don't think this is gonna be the only time So and I think I think what's so great is that there's, it feels like, there's something you inherently understood as you were leaving university that you would have to do something to transition, you know, and so your openness to that, I think has also been appreciated by the community, so that you it's been okay to support you. You know, it's only been four years since you left university. And for a lot of people, this stuff doesn't happen until they've been out in the world for 10. And so sometimes it's there's practicing of patience, but you have that patience, and you have that patience with your work. I think that's why, again, psychology 101 I think that's why.

Shion Skye Carter

I love that Claire. Oh, can I say one? Can I say another thing also, I realized reaching back to our earlier part of the conversation where you mentioned, like reaching out to people and connecting, but also going back to past relationships to see what new fruitful experiences can come out of that. Yeah, part of this Iris Garland presentation. I'm so excited that it's not just my solo that's being presented, but also a short solo by Juolin Lee, who is an emerging dance artist in the city is going to be performing. She's like the opening act kind of performing years before my piece. And Ziyian has choreographed her

solo in collaboration with her. So, I am so excited that I've now reached back to this person who was my mentor for the first time of my career, and who is now mentoring Juolin. And also, I think there's something important in that about uplifting other young people who might not have had chances to be presented with their work on stages yet, and I know that I would have really loved it if I was just out of university and able to create and perform something. I'm just so excited to for Juolin and to also be part of this experience and for Ziyian as well. But yeah, I hope that that can be something that also happens often in the city as we go is inviting young artists who maybe haven't had a lot of presentation experience and having them brought into maybe perform just like a short thing as part of a double or triple bill or something like that. I love mixed shows with lots of different pieces. So yeah, I just wanted to pop that in and say that that's something that I'm hoping I can see more of in the city is shorter works where people can get a chance to perform in these esteemed spaces.

Claire French

What a way to build community, healthy community and also I think, you know, that's happened in previous generations in Vancouver. And its shifted focus, you know, so I think there's a, there's a cycle of life, you know, in the dance communities, and that that occurs. And so, it feels like it's time, I feel like you know what you're you're kind of one step ahead and kind of, you know, imagining this kind of like peer to peer relations world again, that could be, you know, could come out of, could resurface with a different generation. I think that's really wonderful, really great. So, what's been your greatest challenge?

Shion Skye Carter

Oh, probably, as it probably has been with lots of other artists, the initial year of the COVID pandemic was very nerve wracking, because I didn't know when artistic projects would be able to happen, because so many of them got canceled or postponed. And also that fear of financial stability not being a thing, I was just starting to get contracts and starting to incorporate freelance work and contract work alongside my dance teaching, as part of my income, and then to have the teaching and the contracts suddenly gone was really scary. And I know it was for so many people. And so that was a time when I not only was fearful for financial stability, but also for my artistic momentum. I felt a bit at a loss when I was just stuck at home for months at a time, I felt a bit like I wasn't contributing to society, maybe a little bit and again, like a reflecting on what my identity is, if I'm graduated from an arts program, and I'm wanting to go head on into being a freelance artist, when I'm not able to do that, then what am I doing or who am I. So that was a moment of that was a bit rattling for me. And it happened right at the beginning when I was trying to kickstart my career. So that's probably the biggest challenge that I faced. And I took a lot of inspiration and gained my creative, I guess, curiosity, again, through inspiration from seeing people who were suddenly pivoting their projects into digital and creating dance films and seeing how these people had so much drive to still create and to still share something with the world, even if it wasn't being presented by an organization or a venue or even if they weren't getting paid for it. They're just like, I'm just want to keep creating and keep that momentum going. And that was hugely inspiring. So that inspired me to start getting into DIY dance filmmaking as well, which has been really fun.

Claire French

Yeah. Is that where your dance film stuff started, then? Or had you done some before that? Yeah, it was, okay.

Shion Skye Carter

Yes, that was my first time. Yeah, it was during the lockdown. I would just create some films in my home or outside. And thankfully, those films have gone on to be screened in different places or have developed into live performance. Yeah, it was really inspired to see other people doing it. And that really pushed me to get out of the slump that I was feeling.

Claire French

So, as we bring this wonderful interview to a close, I'm really interested in what's now aside from performing in November at the Dance Centre, as we know about and what's next for you. And I'm particularly intrigued that I know that you are getting on a plane on Friday morning and going somewhere because we were trying to work out and schedule this interview. And that turned out that one turned out not to be an option because you're flying away. So please tell me more about that. Where are you going?

Shion Skye Carter

At the moment, aside from Residuals, I'm working on a couple of different projects, one of them being a residency at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. So, I'm grateful to be one of the Artists in Residence there this year. And I've been doing my residency program from July, and it goes till the end of October. So, what that program involves is it's mostly a digital remote residency. And I'm creating a work with two collaborators who are based in Ontario, Mayumi Lashbrook, who is a dance artist, and Hitoko Okada who is a fiber artisan and a storyteller. And we all share Japanese and Japanese Canadian Heritage. So, the work is centered around community building together and reaching back to heritage art forms, such as shifu, which is fabric made from washi paper thread. And it is an old art form that's disappearing. Even in Japan. There are very few artisans left and Hitoko one of my collaborators is one of the few Japanese Canadian artists based in this country that is continuing that art form from the sixth century Japan to now and keeping that going into the future. So, we're creating a work around that history and with also the intention of calming our nervous systems and trying to bring in have a sense of calm and recentering for both us as performers and for the audience. And that piece has been developed over the last several months remotely. And for the tail end of our residency, I'm going to Toronto to film the piece at the AGO. So that's where I'm flying out to, I'll be spending some time in Ontario for that. And aside from that, I'm also doing a project through Dance West Network for their youth BC dance and research project. It's basically a program where few artists have been selected to develop new project ideas that center around conversations of facilitating community building for youth, especially BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth in BC, especially more rural areas. And I'm through that project, developing a dance and calligraphy workshop that I'm hoping to travel to different rural communities and teach this dancing calligraphy workshop to people.

Claire French

Wonderful. That's great. And is that next year, is that scheduled for next year?

Shion Skye Carter

Yeah, that Dance West Network program is happening right now. And the sharing of the projects are happening, I believe the first week of November, 2nd week of November

Claire French

Yeah. Because your performance is the first week...

Shion Skye Carter

Yes, performing the first week of November with *Residuals*. And then the week after that is when we're sharing all of the artists are sharing their project ideas. And it's really nice, because it's basically a research incubator for the selected artists to develop these ideas for their workshops, or whatever projects they're developing. And then share the ideas with the hopes that maybe in the future, it can be taken to these communities to share and build connections with folks. And I think, other than that, I'm also as a full circle thing, I'm one of the guest choreographers at SFU dance program for the repertoire class. So, they will be having performances the following week in November from November 17 to 19th. And I'm really excited to be working with this new generation of rigorous amazing dance artists.

Claire French

That's so great freelance career, check, check, check. This is how you do it. Okay. Excellent. At this is so wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing. Could you please tell people where they could find out more about you?

Shion Skye Carter

Yes, my website is shionskyecarter.com. My first name is S-h-i-o-n, middle name, S-k-y-e, C-a-r-t-e-r, let me just spell the whole thing. And dot c-o-m. My Instagram is [at]ShionSkye. And you can keep up with me there to see what I'm working on. And I often post videos and photos of the work while they're being developed in the studio. So, I love posting kind of behind the scenes. And also during my travels. And yeah, thank you so much, Claire, this was so nice chatting with you.

Claire French

Yeah, thank you. This was absolutely wonderful. So yeah, good luck with all of it. And yeah, I look forward to following you and following your career. And yeah, we'll be in touch again soon. Okay, sounds good. Thank you. Bye, everyone. Thanks.

Claire French

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