

# The Dance Centre Podcast Episode 16: Tomoyo Yamada

## **SPEAKERS**

Claire French, Tomoyo Yamada

### **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**

I'm delighted to be joined by Tomoyo Yamada, who is an interdisciplinary artist focusing on performance art and choreography. Born in Japan and educated in the United States, she spent most of her life traveling between North America and Japan, negotiating distinct cultural identities. Her practice is influenced by her ongoing research into identity politics and her self-reflexive interrogation of transnational cultural difference. Her primary training is in contemporary and modern dance. And she completed her MFA degree at Simon Fraser University School for the contemporary arts. Tomoyo has been presenting work in various festivals such as Dance Cafe, International Dance Day at the Dance Centre, Open Stage, Dancing on the Edge festival, Vines Arts Festival, and Reverb dance festival. We will be talking about all of those things together, all of the projects that she's involved in, and all of the interdisciplinary collaborative works that Tomoyo is involved in. I also did my MFA at SFU, a long, long time ago in 1997. And so, we have that in common, which is really great. And maybe even a reason for us being in Vancouver, perhaps, but we will find out. without further ado, I'd like to introduce you to Tomoyo and her voice and ask her the question: When how and why did you start to dance

### **Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes. First of all, thank you so much for inviting me to your podcast.

### **Claire French**

Pleasure.

### **Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes, I actually started dance when I was three. And it wasn't really because I wanted to dance it was because my mother knew that our family was going to be relocating to the States from Japan. And I was, I did not have any English skills. The only language I spoke was Japanese. And being so little, my parents were worried that I wouldn't be able to communicate with any of the kids in the States. And they wanted me to have some sort of communication tool other than language to be able to connect with

people in the States. And that's why my parents enrolled me into a ballet class, because they knew that ballet classes didn't really require a lot of verbal communication.

**Claire French**

Wow. I feel like this is a drop the mic moment right there. Like you're just like, okay, and we're done. No, that's absolutely. That's just wonderful. I have I have goosebumps. Yeah. Okay. Please continue to that epic introduction.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes. And so that's how I got introduced into dance. And I think I moved to the States when I was like three and a half, just before four years old. And really, dance has been like a tool for communication for me since then. I never felt like I lacked any verbal communication skills in the States because I had dance, and I had my dance friends around me all the time. And also, well, this is my mom's story, my dad says that he enrolled me into dance, because he thought I needed to move a little bit more as a toddler, because I just loved sleeping and eating and reading books, and he was a little worried that I was not developing the social skills. So that's my dad's side of the story. But I like to think that my mom's side of the story is has a little bit more meaning to why I started dance.

**Claire French**

Well, I don't think you know, and when you're so young, I think just having this having the support and that attention, you know, and reasoning behind it is just really wonderful. Because already, there's a sense of, you know, it's there's such authentic reasons to be a child development, you know, to be to be in your holistic child development. So, I think that's, yeah, that's, that's a big thing, we know, we know that as dancers. Yes, yes. But to think that it's a natural thing that all children have...is, this is a really good perspective that maybe not maybe it's not just a given that all children innately have this skill. It has to be something that's developed and so that attention that your parents had on that is It's really quite, quite wonderful. I want to just draw on what you said about then having all of your friends around you, your dance friends, when you did move to the States, could you talk a little bit about that you must have danced quite a lot for you to feel like did you go to the States and go to a dance school?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes, yes. So we moved to Ohio, which is quite different from Japan. And it's also quite different from Vancouver. But I went to a school called Patty Pille's School of Dance. And initially, I started with just ballet, but I was really interested in tap dance, which is not really taught a lot in Japan. And so, tap dance, jazz and hip hop, were the few kind of dance techniques that I started learning. And that led me into being a part of the, like the competition team, the competitive dance team. But I was still quite little, I only lived in the States when until I was like, 11, 10-11. So yeah, I was in the competitive team until then. And that was where I made most of my friends. We were dancing, I would say at least, like, four or five days a week as like a 10 year old, which I think a lot.

**Claire French**

Yeah, that was me too. I did the competition, the festival circuit, it was more, you know, dance festival circuit, from a very young age up until about, you know, 14-15 and then went to stage school in London. So yeah, it's it's a very interesting time. Could you could you explain what you what you feel or maybe

what you felt like the, maybe the main differences are between? It's a big question like, you know, an unanswerable question in a way but just that when you said that there was such a difference between Japan and then Ohio, or where you were in Japan, and then Ohio, and then Vancouver? I'm interested in your perspective on that because of your interest in like dance and environment and landscape, and maybe some of your film work, too. But do you have could you kind of sum up what you think those differences are?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, and this is really my own personal.

**Claire French**

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Perfect perspective, take on it. Yeah. But I think dancing in Japan, for me, I felt like it was a little bit more disciplined in a way that everybody kind of followed what, like the teacher was doing, or I don't know, I personally, I when I am dancing in Japan, or when I used to dance in Japan, I felt like I needed to do the, like the right, right thing. Yes. And in a way, in a way, and I think that also really stems into what's expected culturally as well. But in Japan, I think it's more the culture is more collective based. So, everybody's like together as a group, and within your group, you kind of want to have like, share similar ideas and values. And you don't really want to kind of stir up the pot.

**Claire French**

Oh, I see. Yeah,

**Tomoyo Yamada**

That's just my personal take on it. And that's, it's a beautiful culture on its own. I think Ohio was like the complete opposite of it. It was you do you, be unique, don't follow everybody else. But follow your passion and what you believe in. And at sometimes, I did miss that like disciplinary part, where I felt like sometimes it's chaotic. And I, I also didn't know what I was doing as a dancer and relocating to Vancouver. I feel like it's a combination of both. Just because I think geographically Vancouver's very close to, I mean, we still have the big ocean between us, but it's closer to the Asia's. And I think it's like a more like mixed culture, city. So that's really why I like Vancouver. I feel like I have my feet in both cultures. I don't feel foreign in either of them.

**Claire French**

I think that's beautiful.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, I think that's one of the biggest reasons why I chose to be in Vancouver.

**Claire French**

Great. And I think that, you know, that idea of the one way or the one body maybe in the, you know, there's one technique or there's a kind of, you're all learning a particular technique, and then you're all

accessing kind of information that is not necessarily coming from the person, but a person's relationship to that other thing I feel is as maybe sometimes how we look at certain dance techniques, and then others definitely are more somatic and come from the each person individually. So I think that's a case nice to have both interbeing cultures where both are respected and appreciated. I think it's great. So when did you know or when did you decide that dance was your professional calling? Because it sounds like you could have gone in many directions like as a child, like you're reading and you're, you know, being interested in, you know, being busy alone, you know, even as a child or still even. Maybe that's where your media stuff comes in to your interest in dance and media combined, but particularly dance. Did you just do you feel like it was just organic and organic development? Or did you make a decision to follow it?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

I think it was organic. Yeah. So in junior high school, in high school, I was in Japan. And I think it's harder to pursue a dance career in Japan than it is to pursue it here, which is also my, my also personal opinion. But because of that, I never really thought I was going to keep dancing in Japan. In high school, I actually went to a high school that had a very strong, modern dance competitive team, where we were in the Nationals. And we've always been trying to get like the number one award, which is the equivalent to first place in the Nationals. So, in high school, I think I was dancing for like, at least, I would say, like five hours before and after school on weekdays. And then on weekends, it was like all day. And I specifically remember we only had like five days of summer break. And every, every other day, it was just practice, practice, practice. But even being that deep into dance, I feel like not too many people actually want to pursue a professional dance career just because how things are structured in Japan. But I did go to university to do dance. And that's where I met my mentor. Her name is Naoko Murakoshi, and she used to be a dancer at Toronto Dance Theatre (TDT) in Toronto. And she after dancing for a couple of years, she was on faculty at York University. So, she was kind of the person who was like, hey, Tomoyo, I know you're not really interested in pursuing dance as a career. But she was like, I think you have potential, why don't you further it just a little bit more, and see what happens.

**Claire French**

You've just mentioned, and for the listeners, I think this might be an important moment, because you're the lady who is your mentor? Could you say her name again?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes, her name is Naoko Murakoshi.

**Claire French**

So, Naoko actually noticed the potential in you, but you say you she didn't think that you wanted to pursue dance full time. And this leads back to don't you have a degree also in health science, or?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes, so that's in Japan, in some universities, dance is under like arts, and in some universities, it's actually under physical education. And the university I went to dance was under physical education. So that's why I have this science health degree.

**Claire French**

Oh, right. Yes. Great. Thank you for clarifying that. Yeah, that's yeah, that's wonderful. Okay, so this was in Japan, then this was in Japan. Yeah. Great. Continue, sorry.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, Initially, when she told me to pursue it, I was like, Yeah, I think I'm just gonna get a job in Japan. I was, I really thought I was gonna be a translator or something to kind of use my language abilities. But she was like, no, no, just just do it for like a year at least, see what happens. And so for me, it was kind of that push that she gave me. And her friend from TDT, was also doing the MFA studies at SFU back then. And so, Naoko knew about the program. And she knew that I was also interested in not just dance, but like theatre and musical theatre. So, because of the nature of the multidisciplinary approach, at SFU, Naoko was like, just try, just go.

**Claire French**

Excellent.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

So really, it was, I feel like it was the people around me who kind of pushed and supported me into going into this direction. And I can't really thank them enough for doing that. Because otherwise, I don't know where I would be now. But.

**Claire French**

Well, that's good, because now we get to thank them too. So. Yeah, really, really lovely. So key events, then in your life and work, I suppose changing, you know, kind of where you're living, you know, like moving countries is a big thing. And the people that you've mentioned so far playing such a role in your life like guiding you, would you say other other highlights? Like would you say that the MFA was a highlight or is it find it because I found on the MFA that while it was wonderful for me and I moved to Vancouver for it and I really enjoyed it. The biggest thing for me is that I made seriously lifelong friends who, you know, 25 years later, or something like that, maybe not that long. Give myself a break, but a long time. It is, it's definitely we've all moved off to different places, we all came here and met here. And then most have gone off. And I sometimes go off and come back and, and we're still very, very much a group. So, the people I collaborated with at that time, really were impactful on my life and choices following that. I feel like it's kind of meant to be like serendipitous, you know, thing that we're all arrived in Vancouver at the same time. I know you've met your some of your collaborators through that program as well. So maybe you'd like to talk a little bit about some of those collaborations and maybe even your MFA graduating project or something, just to give us a little bit of background on your work?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, of course, I really connected well, with my MFA colleagues, I think, I think the biggest part was because most people came from outside of Canada, our cohort was outside of Canada. And so, everybody brought their own unique perspectives of art. And of course, everybody's everybody pursues different disciplines. So not only that, but there was another cultural aspect where I feel like it's really rare to be able to collaborate with artists from all around the world. And before that, I always felt like I was the odd one out everywhere. Like being in Japan, I didn't fully I felt like I wasn't fully identifying with

the people in Japan, just because of my upbringing in the States. And obviously, in the States, although people were very generous and open into like, accepting me. I always felt like, well, I'm not American, I'm Japanese. And I felt like the MFA space was like the first place where it was okay to be myself, because everybody else also came from different walks of life. And we all accepted that. So that was, I think, my biggest eye opening thing for me, and then with a program.

**Claire French**

Great.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

And in the MFA program, I think I really like using gestures in my movement. And so I was able to talk about, like different types of gestures from around the world. I think my closest friend, she was from China. And her name is Xinyue Liu. Right now she's actually in the UK. She's doing her PhD.

**Claire French**

Great

**Tomoyo Yamada**

So she's not in Canada anymore. But I think we shared, we talked a lot about differences in China and Japan, and similarities that stem from our culture. So yeah,

**Claire French**

When you started to create work your MFA project, I think you also then recreated outside of your MFA project did you not as a as a presentation?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, I think we went to I think, like, we shared it in maybe two different not venues, but like festivals, and the MFA project, I think I was interested in language and gesture and how language change how people execute, like, movements.

**Claire French**

Can I just say, I wish the listeners could actually see you right now because I'm so I'm just going to suggest that as you listen to Tomoyo for the next section, just move your hands a little bit and just circle your fingertips and your wrists and just rotate them. Palms facing each other, fingers, individually wiggling and then just rotate your wrist as you do it. And then then that will help us as do that, as she's talking. Okay, off you go.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

And I guess right now, I'm, I still have that, that research question hasn't really, like left me. I also realized that I use different types of gestures when I speak different languages. And that's, I think, my biggest interests currently, on how language influence your body movements and rhythm and tempo as well. I feel like when I'm speaking in Japanese, my movements are a little bit more slower. And I'm like more flowy versus English is a little bit more like fast and

**Claire French**

punctuated. Yeah, yeah, they are, like, short. It's interesting, isn't it? The kind of emphatic gesture, that's what happens when we you know, when we gesture when we speak, we're kind of trying to support the speech, but when we tried to do it, when you tried to do those gestures, and, and you're not in a conversation, I find it quite difficult.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

It is yeah,

**Claire French**

They just kind of seem to be in the air, like they don't have. So, I love that as a research area. And as a kind of, you know, something that is behind your work in general, I think is a lovely way to kind of go through as an artist, you know, whatever the research question, you have these other things that you are exploring individually on all levels. So I would like to talk a little bit about the project that you did during COVID and the film, the film project, actually in the house, and which is on your website. You do have a link to it on your website so people can see that at tomoyoyamada.com that correct?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes.

**Claire French**

So yes. Could you talk a little bit about that project?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, this project, it, it was more of like an experiment rather than a project. But it was just a response to COVID, where all of a sudden, everybody was just stuck in their house, and we couldn't do anything. And so I wanted to make a piece about that. But I didn't know really how to approach it also, because we still had, like, isolation rules where we can't really be in the same, like, space. And so we were like... Yeah. So we were like, how are we supposed to make? How are how do we create while we still have to social distance and my MFA project, we had to like spread really apart, everybody was at least like five meters away from each other that it was so hard to create? Because it's not just that, but if somebody used a specific part of the Marley floor, nobody else could use that section. And, yes, of course, like, it's because of COVID, but as a choreographer, I found that really hard and we were looking at, okay, how can we safely create work without having to distance like 5-10 meters apart? And so we were like, Why don't we just like put everybody in their own small boxes. And then if they wear a mask, and if they only touch their box, we were like, isn't this a little bit safer than having, creating a normal work. So that's where the box idea came from. And then we just kind of changed it into a house looking structure.

**Claire French**

So it's like a doll's house with dolls that are too big inside them outside on a beach with that whole environment behind. So all of those layers become really quite playful. And also such a comment on, you know, being outdoors, but still the social distance and then being too big for the space that you're in, and all those things and, and then also, there's the kind of rickety-ness of the house itself that was



built that was just like, I thought I thought that was just so wonderful, like, playful and just, you know, kind of imaginative. So that's that was kind of exciting. Did you feel like it was quite serious to make? Because all of the protocols? No, no, no, good. Okay.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

This one, this one, the film, it was just like, let's just have fun and play and see what we can do. Also, I think we spent most of our grant building that house, so we didn't have a lot of time, either. And so it was just like trying to figure out what we can do. And hopefully, we thought, we hope that it would like become a seed for some other projects in the future, which it did. That's what we're developing with the DanceLab at the Dance Centre.

**Claire French**

Great. Yeah.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

So now it's become like a interdisciplinary work where we are trying to project some images onto these boxes. And it's still kind of the theme is still kind of the same. It's we call it the home project, but it's a working title. And basically, it's the research question, the big the big, broad research question is what is a home. And people have different perspectives on what a home is, some people think it's like the people, some people think it's the safety or the location. For me, it's sound and language within the home. Not super not visual, but what I hear and what I say inside my home makes it feel like my personal space. So and other collaborators come in with different ideas of what a home is.

**Claire French**

Do you ever feel like the studio itself is a bit of a home?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Sometimes...in a way? Yeah, in a way,

**Claire French**

As dancers, I feel that I sometimes have certain spaces where I go, or even onstage, which I don't do very often now, but I mean, life just feels like one big performance sometimes, but on, you know, performing onstage always felt like home for me.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah.

**Claire French**

Which was kind of a nice realization at one point in my life. I wonder if there's, are you building it in the theater? Or are you building it in a studio? Well, how is that working?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes, right now we're building it in a studio, and we will have a showing of that in the Dance Centre space at the end of March



**Claire French**

End of March yeah Great. Yes. Okay. I look forward to that. And it will be quite different than creating it or having it have experiencing it indoors. I would think

**Tomoyo Yamada**

yes, yes. We also do have a film components of that.

**Claire French**

But, oh, of the previous one.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Oh, not the previous one. Actually the one that we're building right now. Okay, we're gonna have an in person showing and then also a film aspect of it.

**Claire French**

Oh, great.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

But yes, it feels very different. It's also much more longer. And we have way more time to kind of develop and structure everything.

**Claire French**

Yeah, I suppose kind of introduced the ideas and kind of unravel them. And this the stories, so to speak, not necessarily that it's fiction like that. But so the media work that you do is it mainly in collaboration. Do you create your own? Do you create the films? Do you work with collaborators?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

It's, I work with collaborators.

**Claire French**

Yeah.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

I would love to do my own, like, film and edit on my own. But I feel like I don't have the technical skills, nor like the artistic skills yet to do it myself.

**Claire French**

Yeah. And I think that it takes a lot, a lot. A lot. I think it's a really, it's a shift of mindset, then to trust that. And then to find a way for yeah, this is just it feels for me, it feels a bit stuttery right now, in my in my learning and developing those skills, but I think it's fabulous. And it's nice to have an eye for it. To you know, to kind of have that juxtaposition of that media and landscape, and then the extra, like you say, the gestures and the emphatic behavior and all of that inside it. I think that's really great. So you're working on that project, or you're working on? Do you have other things like, I noticed that you also are

represented by a talent agency, and I wondered if you do some commercial work? Or if that's something that is just kind of in the background for you? Or would you and a couple of other things you also work with the is it Clala Dance Project? Am I saying that right? Yes, yes. So there's this project that you're doing for the DanceLab, but I feel like with your representation, and then that project, I wonder if there's something you'd like to talk about in either of those two?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Well, I can actually talk about both, right. I think as a kid, I've been doing musical theater. And I've always been interested in the theater. After graduating from a university in Japan, I sometimes performed in musical theater, and like operettas. And also, I was an assistant, for a, as I was an assistant choreographer for a play, for a theater play. So that's where kind of my interdisciplinary interests came from. And

**Claire French**

do you sing?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

I sing as like an ensemble, I can never sing as like a solo. I've only been trained to, I entered musical theater with my dance background, so if it was like a big ensemble piece, then I would, I would be asked to sing, but I can never belt out like a, like a big solo piece. I don't have the vocal ability to do that, unfortunately. But I've always been interested in the film industry. And I was actually last year, I was not doing dance at all, I was a part of a show that was being filmed here. And I was a, I started as a background performer, and then got booted up, not to a cast, but like, somewhere in between background and

**Claire French**

It's like a special ability...

**Tomoyo Yamada**

And I was also a translator on set. So if I was not, if I was not called in as like that background performer. I was on set translating for the cast and the crew. But that's the reason why, because of that role that I had, I was really fortunate to get an agent, and now I've started auditioning for like, other works as well.

**Claire French**

Oh, that's so great. Yeah. So yeah, that was that's really kind of like that's a very special way of entering into, getting an agent, an agency. I mean, like, there's another tip from Tomoyo.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, like, really, I think the big keyword for myself is just connection. Because the reason why I got the agency was I also work at a place called Arts Umbrella.

**Claire French**

We all know Arts Umbrella.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes, yes Arts Umbrella. And I work in both Dance and Theatre departments. And so, the reason why I was able to get an agency was I connected with one of the theatre faculty. And she just reached out to her own agent and was like, here's a friend of mine. Do you? Are you willing to meet her? Yeah, yeah.

**Claire French**

Nice. That's lovely.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

I think performance art is really all about connection with the people you have.

**Claire French**

Yeah, the networks and the integrity of the connections that you make, I think is really Yeah, is really key. Yeah, that's wonderful. Okay, so can you talk a little bit about Clala Dance Project?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah. Yeah, of course, Clala Dance Project. I actually founded it in Japan with a friend of mine. Her name was to Chihiro Nukuto and she also graduated from the TDT School of Dance. And we collaborated together, we had a performance in New York at the River of Dance Festival as Clala but then following my relocation, we have stopped working together. And then here in Vancouver, I was able to collaborate with another dance artists, Charlotte Telfer-Wan and Ana Daria Vieru. They were like my like key collaborators with as Clala not collaborators. I think we run the collective together.

**Claire French**

Yeah, you're like CO directors really? Yes,

**Tomoyo Yamada**

yes. And just recently, we were also able to invite another person and he's his name is Sam Mason and he he's been creating most of our film work. He's, he's a filmmaker. So yeah, we worked collectively. And we're also a project based collective. So, the four of us will mostly be working together. But we reach out to other artists to collaborate for different projects. So we also get to experience working with other people as well.

**Claire French**

Yeah, that's great in the film, as well. You have performers that you've brought in for that project? And you know, that's the way I work with, you know, Restless Productions that I run is project based, too. And it's a wonderful way of kind of working with different people and also building up your kind of artistic relationships. So yeah, in New York, your performances, it was 2016, wasn't it? It was quite a while ago now.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

It was 2016. I think we also did it in 2014. We went there twice. One, the first time we went was through, Naoko's connection. Yeah, it was a bigger piece that we brought, it was based on my, my

imagination of what the world of, world after death looks like, from like a Buddhism perspective. Yeah. And then the second time it was with Chihiro with Clala. And I think that was the first time I ever interacted with artists from outside of Japan. Since my like, as an adult.

**Claire French**

Yeah. And as an artist, as opposed to a dance. Yeah. dancer in training or something. Yeah. And,

**Tomoyo Yamada**

yeah, I think that's where I kind of saw everybody working professionally as an artist. And I was like, Oh, this is a new world that I never really thought I'd be in. But I, at that point, I still didn't know if I wanted to pursue my career as a dancer. But I think it was just like, watching everybody do what they're doing kind of, I guess, like unconsciously planted ideas in my head. And, and then ultimately, it was like that push and support from other people that yeah, helped me get into this direction.

**Claire French**

Yeah. Like, this is another moment where the gestures, gestures of like, almost like embroidering. If you can imagine just kind of embroidering the space around her and then pushing it along. Which is really Yeah, it's really beautiful. It really helps. Okay, that's wonderful. So how long have you been in Vancouver then?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

I think this this September, I think I'm in my sixth year now living in Vancouver.

**Claire French**

No, that's great. And you intend to stay?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

I hope so. Yes, I hope so.

**Claire French**

Yeah, great. Yeah. It seems like you you're kind of nice and busy and productive with them? Do you teach it at Arts Umbrella when? So do you have a kind of very rounded kind of career that way? Like teaching, creating, do you perform for other people? Like those kinds of things? Would you like to talk a little bit about how that like, not necessarily what a day looks like, but what a year might look like for you? Like all of the different things that you do?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, I feel like I'm in terms of career wise, half of my career I teach. And I teach smaller kids,

**Claire French**

young, what ages?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

I think the youngest is age five. Yeah. And it's, it's like creative dance classes. And it just brings me back to the foundation of dance and why we even start dancing in the first place.

**Claire French**

You have such a wonderful story with that as well. Your parents instilled in you that kind of like, yeah,

**Tomoyo Yamada**

I guess I see like a little part of myself in all these little kids. And it's just they just have so much potential. And it's really beautiful.

**Claire French**

Yeah, I think that's lovely. So that there's the teaching at Arts Umbrella, Obviously, this Yeah.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

And then I think the other half is mostly doing my own project. I haven't really been dancing in other people's works. I've been dramaturging for a couple of artists, Japanese Canadian artists' works. And I'm really thankful and happy to be a part of the Japanese Canadian community here and for trusting me to be like, a dramaturg for their works, but I think it's mostly teaching and doing my own projects is what I'm doing right now.

**Claire French**

Yeah, that's wonderful. That's really lovely. And you dance in your own works, do you?

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Um, not recently, I haven't been. I used to do that when I was like in my early 20s And I find it really, really hard to choreograph and dance in your own work.

**Claire French**

And I found the same thing, because I moved from dancing to choreographing, solely choreographing. I mean, I still dance in rehearsals and still dance things out if you like, and I still dance a lot but, and teach, but I am, I found that I was really pulled to choreography, and to that, and to thinking about dance and being with dance from that perspective. And that's, I'm very happy. And I'm kind of grateful for that in my life. And I think there is something quite, I'm glad to have let go of the performing side, in a way, but I don't think about it very often. And maybe you don't either, like, I just realized I'm not I just realized I'm not in it. I'm not, you know, performing it. And it just feels better for me to be kind of not really on the other side. But with the work in that in that other way. You know, I don't feel like it's one side or the other anymore. But I feel like being with the I can be with the work more as a choreographer.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, I feel something really similar too, also when I include myself in the work, it's really hard to see everything from the outside, it's really hard to remove yourself in the work and then see everything how everything balances out.

**Claire French**

Yeah. So and then and also, the sense of the work is, then you understand the work, I think you understand the work in a different way. Through the you know, so. So that's useful. It's extremely useful. And that insight is really valuable. But I think there's something about, like you say that not, not just balance, but the the sense of the whole. That I have questions about all the time. And I can only ask those questions, if I'm from that, on that side. You know, like, from that perspective, so yeah, we have that in common. So what's coming up for you? We have this showing in March,

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yes, we have the showing in March. And then I think in 2023, we're gonna start developing a new project. It's not necessarily new. It's based on a poem, that, a performative poem that I've been working on for like the past two, three years, it's my experience meeting a vet, a US veteran. And coming from a military family from Japan, I had this very, like I had this very intense hug with this veteran, I think that was like five years ago, and ever since I've been wanting to kind of dive deeper into what happened between Japan and the States, and what people still carry and how like intergenerational trauma carries through different bodies. That's kind of my main interests now, I think, for our next upcoming projects, but it's such a, this project, I've been thinking about it for, like five years. And it's such a, like an emotionally, heavy, heavy topic. Yeah. And so I've been hesitating to fully take on the creation of this work. But I think, I think I'm ready now,

**Claire French**

I would like to just kind of support you in that decision to be to feel ready to go and, you know, address the intensity of it. But partly because of something you say in describing when you're, you know, in your kind of concern, in your research for that. And you say that the aim of the project is to examine the potency of witness, and the collective healing realized through the shared intimacy of an interdisciplinary dance performance. And I think there's something just really genuinely beautiful about that, the potency, of witnessing, and putting yourself in that position. I mean, we as choreographers, sometimes that can be, that's the incredible experience of witnessing your dancers or witnessing a moment, you can only experience the potency as a witness. There's that element. And then there's the idea of being in the shared intimate environment that doesn't always feel rigorous and intense, because there's a joy that's inside it, that actually, by being in it, there's a joy inside it, that is actually the strongest part. So the shared intimacy, then from the witness seems intense. But when you're in it feels joyous, you know, so there's something about those two things. One of the things that I'm saying, please, you know, start this work and kind of pursue this as it you say, it will create an opportunity for people to think about these topics. And I think, you know, as artists we, we forget sometimes that we can do, that we can help people think about these things in a different way. You know, like you were saying with language and gesture, we can help them think about those things through how their bodies feel, you know, and so with so there, they get to experience memories of these kinds of occasions as opposed to being told how to feel, you know, forcing a situation on them. I think that's really lovely. I think there's a lot in there and a lot around your language and gesture as well. A lot.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Yeah, I think I think this the, this is called the Hug Project. It's still a working title, too. I think this was the first project that I was like, Oh, I will probably never get an answer from creating this project. But I

can, like, it's more of an offering than something, then, like, my perspective, if that makes sense. Yeah. And it's my collaborators for this is also, like, I have my Chinese friend Xinyue, also on somehow on this project. And so I really want to create people from different ethnic groups and different cultures in this because, yes, from my personal experience, it's between my Japanese heritage and the US, but it's not just that, I think, what happened historically, and what the wounds that people still carry is all around the world. And, yeah, it I don't really know how this piece is going to pan out, but I'm hoping that it's it just opens conversations into how we heal as, as, as a community.

**Claire French**

And what we're healing, you know, like, why we need to heal, you know, like the situations that require us to think about healing, which means drawing our attention to, to the trauma, like in a sense, I think, for me, the interesting thing is, it's kind of around this, we start from what we know, or we can only really start from our perspective, right? That's the that's an I don't want to say safe, but that's the way that we can stay authentic and in true to the project that we're working on, with the hope and with the anticipation that it will reach out to people and will expand, because other people will find other reasons for engaging in it. So I think that's what this offers, I think that's what, because in a hug as well, yeah, hug. A hug is kinda, there's an yeah, there's no resolve, right? When somebody hugs you, you don't need to know the reasons why the hug is important. But the hug itself is a kind of gives you a kind of resolve or kind of closure at a temporary split second. Closure, like it's a full act is a full embodied act. And I think that's, I think that's a beautiful thing to research and pursue.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Oh thank you.

**Claire French**

Yeah. Wonderful. Great. So, I look forward to hearing more about that maybe toward the end of 2023, maybe into 2024. Who knows. But for this, I just like to say thank you so much for talking with me as just a reminder that your you will be having a showing at the Dance Centre at the end of March of 2023. Yes, we're actually talking in 2022. But don't tell anyone I know time is just flowing by like a river. Yeah. So there will be information on the Dance Centre website, obviously. Yeah. And thank you so much for talking with me today. It was a real pleasure.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Oh, thank you. Thank you for having me.

**Claire French**

Pleasure. I look forward to seeing your work later in 2023.

**Tomoyo Yamada**

Thank you so much. Bye, bye.

**Claire French**

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