



Translating Experiences

A Little Commitment – Kiruna Stamel and Gareth Beliner

A Commission for DaDaFest International 2020 – Translations!

Podcast 2

Interview with Dan Daw:

GARETH: Hello and welcome to DaDaFest International 2020. Translating Experiences.

KIRUNA: We're your hosts, Gareth Berliner and Kiruna Stamell

GARETH: Today we speak into dancer and choreographer Dan Daw. This interview touches on adult themes and uses adult language, so you might not consider it appropriate for children.

KIRUNA: This interview was also recorded over Skype due to COVID restrictions, so we apologise for any effect this has had on the sound quality of the recording.

GARETH: Hi Dan, thanks for joining us. Now, you grew up in small town, Australia. What was the town called?

DAN: Whyalla

GARETH: You originally came over from Australia to work with Candoco? When and how did that happen?

DAN: So I started engaging with Candoco in 2006 which was exploring avenues into professional dance and Candoco looked like the golden ticket I started looking at the foundation course that they were running at the time and, through a series of conversations and doing a couple of workshops with them on various trips over to the UK, we kind of decided that the foundation course wasn't quite the right fit. Think I only kept the relationship up with the company and then long story short I

came over to audition for the company in 2009 and then got the job the following year in January.

KIRUNA: And what made you want to become a dancer?

DAN: I was always enamoured by it when I watched it, being interested in dance and theatre, I joined a Youth Theatre Company in Whyalla called D'Faces of Youth Arts. And there were based at the local theatre, running workshops in theatre and dance and circus and singing, kind of bit of everything, and I really enjoyed dancing, but I decided to follow theatre and acting as a career path.

KIRUNA: Were you worried that being disabled meant you couldn't be a professional dancer and that meant you leant towards theatre and acting instead?

DAN: Yeah, well I kind of, and again it goes back to you know companies like Australian Dance Theatre and Lee Warren and Dancers, and Australian Ballet would tour to Whyalla. I'd just see those bodies and go "I haven't got a hope in Hell of doing that job" I don't see my body represented there so I kind of went "Okay, I do want to perform very much, I get joy out of dancing, but maybe I could have a good old crack at being an actor and working in theatre" So I auditioned for a couple of schools in Adelaide and was offered places in both acting schools. So then I was faced with the choice but I decided to go for the degree Flinders University Drama Centre. So I did that for 3 1/2 years, but while I was there I became quite disenchanted with acting in theatre and really struggled, particularly with the film and television component, because for me to achieve continuity is a nightmare because my hand won't pick up the phone the same way twice, it just won't. It won't hold the cup the same way twice. I felt the whole time that my body was wrong and that I couldn't do it. So it was just like "Oh, I'm going to explore dance a bit further". So then I hooked up with Restless Dance Company or now Restless Dance Theatre and that changed my whole perspective on what dance was and who could dance and who dance was for. So that was kind of my journey from theatre into dance.

KIRUNA: How does dance translate the disabled experience in a way that's different from traditional theatre and acting?

DAN: Dance, for me, is a way I can authentically take up space. And take up space in a way that I don't have to apologise for it and to allow my body to do what it does and kind of finding a way to be with my body. I couldn't in theatre so much. So it's a sense of ownership over my body in in performance context. In a creative context.

GARETH: When I see you dance, you seemed very empowered. So do you find dance empowering?

DAN: I think because of the fact I was bought up Non-disabled, so there's a lot in my childhood, I guess, I'd lost. And now at the point through my career, my craft. Finding ways to get that back because I learned through growing up like I was essentially taught that having a disability is shameful and it's something to be fixed and during my craft I kind of go "Fuck that shit. It's not about that". And I actually don't care about what people think, like, I care about people, of course, but I don't care about what they think.

KIRUNA: Do you think then that dance is the purest translation of the human experience and therefore the disabled experience too? That it somehow more honest than simply talking about it or muddying it with words?

DAN: It's something that has worked for me in does work for me because there's, as you just said, there's an honesty and authenticity. Over the last couple of years, I found solace in not trying to make my body fit and embracing my physicality and that's been quite a long journey for me as a dancer. To let that in and let the comparison between my physicality and an abled body dancer go.

GARETH: So what's your process and approach when creating new work?

DAN: I very much work from that place of putting people first and the people I work with first because in the dance industry care is rare, and it's about making sure the people I'm working with the looked after and feel safe and that we're creating a safe space for each other, and what that is. So it's almost the work is secondary because it needs to establish this sense of care, for each other and I want dancers to share what's going on for them and I'm aware that it's just not possible to ask dancers to leave what's happened to them on the outside of the room at the door to them come in without that baggage, like, I'm inviting people to bring their baggage into the space, cos that's where, there's so much in there we can safely use, and it's not about excavating trauma. It's about how can we safely share our lived experiences with one another to make rich thought provoking work that matters.

KIRUNA: What are you currently working on at the moment?

DAN: Yeah, so at the moment I'm working on the Dan Daw show, which is being essentially four years in the making. It's taken on various incarnations of which you are part of the first incarnation,

KIRUNA: Yay!

DAN: So we kind of started there looking inspiration, inspiration porn.

GARETH: Sorry can you tell us what you mean by inspiration porn?

DAN: Yeah, so for those out there who aren't sure what inspiration porn is. Inspiration porn is essentially non-disabled people getting off on the fact that disabled people doing things it doesn't necessarily have to be extraordinary things. Just the fact that disabled people get out of bed in the morning and then non-disabled people being really inspired by that I've been on quite a journey since that point of looking at inspiration And kinda going "Actually the work is fundamentally about my relationship to my disability. What are my crosses that I have to bare?" Cos essentially in the first incarnation it became a work about ableism. I didn't want to go there, it hurts, but it's about, kind of, my relationship to my disability and if anything my internalised ableism and looking at that. Where the piece is at now, is that we're a looking at the relationship between my disability and kink

KIRUNA: Thank you so much for your time and we look forward to seeing more of your work in 2021.

GARETH: More out about them on his website, www.dandawcreative.com.

KIRUNA: This podcast was produced by Little Commitment and edited by Pete Gledhill.

GARETH: This was DaDaFest 2020 Commission.