

## VDC Interview Transcript

Subject: Inlet Dance Theatre

Informants: Bill Wade, Founder &amp; Executive/Artistic Director

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The Music Settlement, Ohio City campus

2610 Detroit Ave, Cleveland

Key:

CF: Candace Feck

BW: Bill Wade

JC: Jessica Cavender: Videographer

MDB: Megan Davis Bushway: Videographer

JD: Jane D'Angelo, OhioDance Director

CF: I'm Candace Feck, and I'm talking with Bill Wade, Founder & Executive/Artistic Director of Inlet Dance Theatre. It's September 4, 2019.

Bill, I think that maybe we should just start at the beginning, whenever you might determine that to be. I don't even know, are you from Cleveland? Did you grow up here?

BW: No. No, I grew up all over America. I grew up everywhere from upstate New York to Southern California. I started dancing in Milwaukee at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee at eighteen. I went to college for Art; I went to college with the intention of becoming an animator for feature-length films, and back then we drew everything. There were no computers. So, that was my intention. And then literally on freshmen orientation day, when they're walking all the pods of freshmen around the campus, my classes were in the Fine Arts building so I heard drums and we went up on the second floor in these huge, gorgeous, *gorgeous* dance studios. And Clyde Morgan,<sup>1</sup> who's José Limón's<sup>2</sup> protégé, was teaching a modern dance class.

I was a gymnast when I was young, so I was that kid doing front and back flips off the garage and just climbing on everything, and I'm always doing tumbling without having any training — and then ended up getting training. But I also grew up with music and painting and drawing my whole life. I've known since I was very little that I was going to be a professional artist. I was going to make art. That was my thing. Just knew. Don't know how. Looking back, because I've got a twenty-four year old now who's an artist and I'm like, "How do we know this at such a young age?" But I did.

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<sup>1</sup> Born in Cincinnati, OH Clyde Alafiju Morgan received his early theater and dance training at the Karamu House Theater (1960-1963), and is a graduate of Cleveland State University. He was a member of José Limón Dance Company (1965-?) for many years, associate professor and artistic director of Sankofa African Dance and Drum Ensemble in the Department of Dance at The College at Brockport, 1988-2015.

Prior at University of Wisconsin at Madison, also studied at Bennington, worked as an artistic director and choreographer of the Contemporary Dance Group, the Dance School of the Federal University of Bahia in Brazil, performed internationally

<sup>2</sup> José Arcadio Limón (1908-1972) a dancer and choreographer who founded his eponymous company in 1945 after dancing in the Humphrey-Weidman Company, on Broadway and in many other works and genres. He was a major modern dance choreographer, a performer, a teacher and an author.

And then when I saw Clyde Morgan teaching class, I remember *stopping* in the hallway, standing in the doorway, and everybody else left. And there was another person standing there and I said, "What *is* this?" [Someone] said, "It's a modern dance class. That's Clyde Morgan." And I could tell by the way they said his name that this was a person of import. And I was like, "Okay. I'm supposed to be *doing* that." I just knew. It was the weirdest thing. I was like, "It's three-dimensional. I get to move. I listen to really awesome music. And it's art. And I have to *add* this." And they were like, "Well, you already have a double major in film and art to become an animator." And I said, "But I know that there's an interdisciplinary arts major here, which is how I got the double. Let me just add one and figure this out." "Young man, you can't take twenty-one credits your incoming freshman year!" And I'm like, "I'm *paying* for this. I think I'm going to choose what I want to take," which is kind of rude, but that's where I was (he laughs).

But I dove in, and I literally quit my painting class. I quit my design class. I ended up *in* everything because I was a guy and I wasn't kinesthetically retarded. So I just got cast in everything. And all of my original teachers were people like Clyde. There was Stephan Laurent<sup>3</sup> from Europe, from the ballet world Maurice Béjart<sup>4</sup> and that whole thing. People from Joffrey,<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Muller and the Works<sup>6</sup> from the Laban Center.<sup>7</sup> These were all my first teachers. I had scholarships for my artwork, so I had enough under my belt that I had a discipline at eighteen, and I knew *enough* about art history to be dangerous and kind of make some crap cross citations in classes. And it was like, "This is actually — it's like painting. It's like animation but it happens, instead of on a flat screen, it's three-dimensional and this is the coolest stuff ever." And I still feel that way. I still feel like I'm doing art. So, two years of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in their undergrad program. And one day Clyde picked me up and sat me on his desk. And he said, "You need to get out of here." He said, "You're

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<sup>3</sup> Stephan Laurent-Faesi, Swiss born, Professor and former chairman of the Department of Dance at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana, joined the Butler dance faculty in 1988 after six years as the artistic director of the Des Moines Ballet, danced with Scapino Ballet of Amsterdam and other companies, earned a BFA from Southern Methodist University in 1974, then returned for an MFA (summa cum laude, 1979), arrived as chairman in 1988, Laurent emigrated from Switzerland to the U.S. in 1977. He is a graduate of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, receiving his bachelor's and master's of fine arts in dance performance. Laurent emigrated from Switzerland to the U.S. in 1977. He is a graduate of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, receiving his bachelor's and master's of fine arts in dance performance. Ballet Royal de Wallonie in Belgium, the Scapino Ballet in Amsterdam and the Bayreuther Festspiele. He was artistic director of the Des Moines Ballet in Iowa from 1982 to 1988 until he became the chair of the dance department at Butler in May 1988, where he remained for thirty years.

<sup>4</sup> 1927-2007. Born in Marseille, Maurice-Jean Berger, Béjart founded three ballet companies: Ballet de l'Étoile in Paris (1954-57), Ballet of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Brussels (1960 – 1987), which for many years was the official dance company of the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, and finally the Béjart Ballet Lausanne (1987-2007), now directed by Gil Roman.

<sup>5</sup> One of the premier ballet companies in the U.S., the Joffrey Ballet was founded in New York City in 1956 by Robert Joffrey (1930-1988) and Gerald Arpino (1923-2008), consisting of an ensemble of six dancers. Through many iterations and developments, and after a brief stint in Los Angeles, the company moved to Chicago in 1995, where it is now comprised of forty dancers and directed by Ashley C. Wheater.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Muller is the Artistic Director of The Works, a contemporary dance company based in New York City that she founded in 1974. Muller previously danced with the Pearl Lang Dance Theater, the José Limón Dance Company and the Louis Falco Dance Company before founding JMTW in 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Now known simply as Laban and located in a newly designed building in Deptford on the southeast side of London, the Laban Dance Centre was originally founded in Manchester, UK, as the Art of Movement Studio by Rudolf Laban, an Austro-Hungarian dancer, choreographer and a dance/movement theoretician.

one of these kids that needs to dance and not write papers about those that are dancing. You need to be one of those people." And I was like, "Oh, now what do I do?" So, long story short, I ended up with a scholarship for Milwaukee Ballet's<sup>8</sup> Trainee Program. Great training, I *didn't* like it because my brain was already set: I was a pop artist. That's a world that you don't jump into at nineteen years old. I didn't know that. I would just take a class and be asking questions in the middle of ballet class and getting yelled at and I just wanted to *know* stuff. I'm like that ignorant dude in the back, in the corner, not knowing what the hell I'm doing. And I didn't know that there were rules. I mean, I just learned everything the hard way.

And then I decided, "I think I would like to work with a modern dance company that has a codified technique and that is connected to the history of the art form of American modern dance." So I ended up auditioning for and getting the job right away with Alice Rubinstein's Footpath Dance Company.<sup>9</sup> Moved to Cleveland, which I didn't know where it was. We didn't have GPS back then. Jumped in the back of my buddy's truck and he dropped me off in Cleveland. He was a sculptor. And danced for Footpath for six years. And at the end of Footpath, I had realized sort of the legacy and culture that is Cleveland and how *thick* that is and how rich that is. And I realized, "I *don't* think I want to move to New York. It just sounds like a lot of chaos for even less money. I don't know if I'm feeling that."

So I got a phone call from the principal of Cleveland School of the Arts<sup>10</sup> at the time, Tony Vitanza.<sup>11</sup> And he said, "I heard that you've retired from the dance company. Some of my faculty takes modern dance classes from you." And I was like, "Yeah, I know who they are." "Would you consider coming down and helping us with the dance department?" And I said, "Well, what does *that* mean? Can you quantify your question?" And he said, "Just come down, teach master classes for a couple weeks." I was like, "Okay, I can do that." So I hopped on a bus — I didn't have a car— hopped on a bus and went down there and found out that it was Cleveland School of the Arts and that they had a dance department.

It was *not* a dance permanent; the kids didn't know what a leotard was. And I was like, "I was on tour last week. And you don't know what a leotard is, but I'm supposed to teach a master class and you don't know what that is but I do, so we got a problem." So as I got to meet the kids, I fell in love with the kids, and I decided to roll up my sleeves. I started elementary boys dance on Tuesdays and Thursdays, because at that time they had fourth grade through 12th graders in the building.

And I took boys from fourth grade, boys from fifth grade, boys from sixth grade with the grace of the person who was running the dance department at the time. And in between everything on Tuesdays and Thursdays from one o'clock to two o'clock, I had thirty little boys in the dance studio with me and we just had *so* much fun! And, you know, I didn't have a degree, I didn't study dance education and pedagogy or any of that stuff that I *now* know about, but I just fell in love with these kids. And I started realizing pretty quickly, when you're dealing with inner ring, urban Cleveland, just like a lot of other large rust belt cities -- Detroit, Pittsburgh, et cetera, I was hanging out and getting

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<sup>8</sup> Founded in 1970, the Milwaukee Ballet is a professional ballet company founded by Roberta Boorse of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is currently run by Michael Pink, the artistic director.

<sup>9</sup> Footpath Dance Company was founded by artistic director Alice Rubinstein in 1976 and was disbanded in 1990.

<sup>10</sup> a public high school serving grades 9 -12, CSA is located in University Circle of Cleveland, Ohio, is the only fully infused academic and arts high school of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

<sup>11</sup> Former principal of the Cleveland School of the Arts.

to know a bunch of kids who, like *me*, this is their first access to dance, right? And I was like, "That happened to me recently." And kind of fell in love with them and started realizing that I had been part of an industry — because I did side gigs when I was with Footpath, just performing, et cetera — and I realized that at that time, in the history of the development of companies and how things were run, dancers were oftentimes mostly used to further either the choreographer's agenda or that project grants agenda or the namesake of that company. And you become the poster child of the company and the environment was not exactly warm and fuzzy. And I got into this environment, [where] these kids didn't give a rip about modern dance. They didn't even know what it was; they didn't care.

And it kind of knocked the whole thing off its peg. And I was like, "Okay, now what do we do?" But they *loved* to move, so I just like — we would turn on Mozart's *Requiem* and play football with a ball of socks, but in slow motion to certain sections of Mozart's *Requiem*, and I'd have other kids sit and watch: "What's *that* look like?" "Reminds me of a movie," and then I'm like "*Okay*, let's make a movie!" And so I kind of just followed *their* lead, like "Where are you with this whole idea of falling in love with movement?" And then the older boys started seeing it and then I was rehearsing... School got out at 2:45 in the afternoon, and there was this huge studio. And I was like, "I started choreographing, doing guest performances, and guest artists performing." And all of a sudden there was one high school guy watching in the corner after school and then four and then twelve, and then we started hanging out, and I shut the door and I got to know them. I threw one of them my car keys and we drove through the hood and he told me how to read graffiti. And this is in the '90s, right? So *now* we know that mass incarceration became a business, and I'm dealing with all these young minority black boys in the inner ring urban Cleveland where "My dad's in jail." "My uncle's in jail." "My brother's in jail." — *Everybody's in jail*. I'm like, "What is going on?" So I had this experience that I *now* know, after watching a couple of films (he laughs), what that *was* back then. So I started an afterschool program — *unintentionally*, at first — it was just me hanging out with the kids. And I was like, "I hope we don't get in trouble for hanging out until six o'clock at night." And then I'd have to drive everybody home. We ended up... I got really curious about... we had over ninety gangs in greater Cleveland, and I started doing some homework and some research. And I started realizing there's obviously — at that time there's *generational* gang activity — and *something* inside of this is meeting a need. What *is* the need? *How* is it being met? And so I started doing that research just on my own because I was *curious*, because some of those kids — that's who was in my studio with me. And I started realizing that your experience in a dance company *could* give you a sense of community, *could* give you that male bonding camaraderie that was ridiculous in our studio.

All of the things that... we didn't have a football team; it was Cleveland School of the *Arts*. So I sort of became the *ad hoc* movement guy/coach/thing. And then a couple of kids slipped and called me "dad" and then it kind of hit me, I was like, "Okay, this *is* getting real." And I started realizing the kids were showing me that in the context of a dance marketplace that often uses people to further the agenda of dance, that I was in a position where the kids were *calling* me to use dance to further their *lives*. And once that paradigm hit, it was a game changer. And so I started the afterschool program *intentionally* this time, called the Y.A.R.D., which stood for Youth At Risk Dancing — and it was *amazing*. We just collaboratively created works of modern dance that told the stories of the people in the group.

I was sort of the director at the helm, the choreographer at the helm, facilitating a collaborative co-creative process to create work that spoke about the different topics that were just everyday life topics, which was reminding me of indigenous dance from different people groups around the

planet. Storytelling: you tell your everyday experience through dancing. And I was like, "Well, that's like really the early pioneers." So then I started studying about Ted Shawn and all of *his* dudes, and I was like, "We're doing the same *thing!*" And I started sharing all of that information with those boys and they're like, "Oh, we want to do pieces like *that,*" and so it just *snowballed* into this thing! So my two weeks of master classes turned into eleven years (he laughs), because, you know, it just kept going. And all of a sudden I got to this place where I was like, "The environment at Cleveland School of the Arts was changing."

And I had this *realization* that I can make... I had a relationship with Alison Chase from Pilobolus.<sup>12</sup> She used to come frequently, she ended up mentoring me for seven years of those eleven years, we ended up choreographing together. We created *An Urban Nutcracker*.<sup>13</sup> We had the kids in the school retell the E.T.A. Hoffman<sup>14</sup> tale from their vantage point. So we didn't have Clara Stahlbaum; we had Maisha Washington with an attitude — and it was a very different...it was the *same* story, but *completely* changed the cultural lens through which this classic story was told. That ended up in Time Magazine, I ended up getting an award<sup>15</sup> from the National Endowment for the Arts<sup>16</sup> and the President's Committee.<sup>17</sup> Now it got really scary really fast, right? I was a nervous wreck at the White House like, "Oh God, I should be in *rehearsal* right now. This is really so uncomfortable."

But those things happen and if you kind of take that in after it's all over and kind of sit quietly, you're like, "Okay, I *think* I'm onto something. I think I'm going to continue choosing to use dance to further people's *lives*. I can only do that with so many people, inside this *one* building..." And a Nigerian business friend came to me out of the blue and said, "Whatever this thing is that you're considering doing, you're supposed to do it." Out of the blue! And it was like, "Whoa." So here I am — I'm married, we have an infant, and I'm like being the responsible guy with a *job-job* in the education system. And I was like, "Ironically, I'm a trained educator and I'm just like this artist-in-residence, having a great time with these kids and hanging out with Pilobolus and they would fly here all the time and work with the kids, and create and perform together." So, I started Inlet Dance Theater in 2001, with the vision of using *dance* to further *people*.

So, yeah, I still teach. I don't teach *dance*; I teach *people*. I use dance to teach *people* and I use dance to develop people, which means you need to find out where they *are*. What are *their* dreams? What are

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<sup>12</sup> Pilobolus Dance Theatre was co-founded by a group of Dartmouth College students in 1971, and continues to perform over 100 choreographic works in more than 60 countries around the world. The signature style of the work comes out of a group creative process, and is marked by strength, athleticism and gymnastic dexterity that often emphasizes exaggerations or distortions of human and non-human life forms.

<sup>13</sup> One in a time-honored series of alternative productions of the *Nutcracker*, created in collaboration with Alison Chase, Bill Wade and the students in 1998.

<sup>14</sup> 1776-1822: a Prussian author, who wrote among other works, the novella *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* in 1816, on which Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* is based.

<sup>15</sup> Wade received the "Coming Up Taller Award" at the White House in 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Founded in 1965, the NEA is a national funding allocation for the arts as an independent federal agency that works to give people across the United States the opportunity to participate in and experience the arts. In 2016, the NEA approved more than 2,400 grants in nearly 16,000 communities in every Congressional District in the country.

<sup>17</sup> Devised in 1982 under the Ronald Reagan administration, the Presidents Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH) was initially created to advise the White House on cultural issues. In August 2017, all private committee members resigned in protest of President Donald Trump's response to the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Authority for the Committee subsequently lapsed on September 30 under the provisions of Trump's Executive Order 13708.

their aspirations? What are their giftings? What are their assets? *Everybody has them.* I don't care what neighborhood you come from. I don't care if you're orange with purple stripes! *Can you move your body?* Let's go! And it's been that way for... today is day one of season nineteen, which is kind of weird, because again, I just kept going and here we are right before a national tour and a building of our own<sup>18</sup> for the first time, a headquarters. It's getting interesting!

CF: It seems like it's *been* interesting right along, Bill...

BW: Yeah, yeah. You learn a *lot*, if you really listen.

CF: Isn't that the truth?

BW: It's so true. So true.

CF: I've learned a lot today already, listening. But I wanted to go back, if you don't mind.

BW: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CF: So this is, as you mentioned, *before* the internet...

BW: ... most of my life, yes! (laughing)

CF: Yes! Mine, too — even more! So, how did a young man in Milwaukee hear about Alice Rubinstein and Footpath Dance Company in those days?

BW: So, I was at Milwaukee Ballet, it was the end of the season getting into the summer. One of my part-time jobs — because as a dancer, you've got jobs/schmobs that you do to pay the bills so you can continue to study dance, and perform — was at the Performing Arts Center in Milwaukee.<sup>19</sup> And I was on the ushering staff, and I was also the guy that ran the popcorn wagon. So I'm the popcorn dude, and I'm watching this modern dance company perform in the outdoor theater in the summer festival. And I was like, "These people aren't a bunch of rebellious kids who are abdicating the responsibility of technique. There's something actually *going on* here." I started watching them and I was like, "it looks kind of like Martha Graham's<sup>20</sup> work, but it's not. It's looser and... all of a sudden a hand comes on my shoulder and I look up and it's Clyde Morgan.

And he said, "You like what you see, don't you?" And I said, "Yeah, they actually know what they're *doing*, but it's *modern*! It actually kind of reminds me of working with *you*." And he said, "Well, I *know* this woman, her name is Alice Rubinstein." And I'm like, "How do you know her?" And he said, "The dance world is small, son. She's teaching a master class later, and I want you to take it." And I

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<sup>19</sup> Opened on July 26, 1969 as the Performing Arts Center, the name of the venue changed in 1994, when it was renovated with a large donation from the Marcus Corporation.

<sup>20</sup> (1894-1991) An American modern dancer and choreographer whose name is nearly synonymous with the early modern dance movement, and who promoted her belief that movement is the vehicle for giving outer form to inner feeling. Her style and training system, eponymously named "the Graham technique," reshaped American dance and is still taught worldwide. Graham directed and choreographed for her eponymous company, performed and taught for over seventy years.

said, "Okay." He said, "Actually, she's looking for a male dancer right now. I want you to take the class as an audition. There's an audition posting upstairs — I'm sure you've seen it." And I said, "No, I was making popcorn all day." So I ended up going to the audition, and I'm standing at the *barre*, with my luck — because the context is... I was in *ballet* classes today, I'm standing at the barre in first position, I turn, and everybody's seated on the floor, ready to do Hawkins!<sup>21</sup> And I didn't know who Hawkins was — didn't know how to spell Erick's first name. I was like, "Okay, this audition just became a master class, and I'm really kind of sucking at this whole experience..." So I took the class, [and] I was like, "I *love* this, it's so *beautiful*! It's so different." — And I got the job! You got to be kidding (laughing)! But it was really clear to me: "I have *so much* to learn, and that's how I'm going to posture myself at twenty-one years old with only three years of dance training in my body. And I just got offered a contract. This is *not normal*!" And my first day with her: "I've never hired somebody your age, you're so young, and I can tell that you haven't been around the dance thing long. *Do not* make me regret my decision! Go upstairs." And I was like, "Oh, damn. Okay, here we go. Strap in!" (Lots of laughter here.) And that's kind of how it was. I learned a lot! She was very serious. She *really* knew her stuff. Brilliant, brilliant lady.

CF: And she herself had been associated with Cleveland Modern Dance Association.<sup>22</sup> Is that right?

BW: Yes. She was part of Cleveland Modern Dance Association when she moved here from New York. She grew up in Brooklyn, taking classes as a child from Martha Graham, went to Juilliard,<sup>23</sup> which is where she met and started working with Erick Hawkins. Came to Case<sup>24</sup> to teach, *hated* being an academic teacher because she wanted to choreograph her own work. She had a lot of opinions, and wanted them onstage. And so through that, she then started Footpath, and then I met her in '84 and moved here. It's weird right?

CF: No, no, it sounds like a dance story. It's got all the elements...

BW: Especially for guys.

CF: Well, that's a whole other subject! I wouldn't know. That's a *different* thing. (He laughs.) So at some point, maybe towards the end when I guess Alice stepped down, didn't you actually become the director for a brief time?

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<sup>21</sup> (1909-1994): a major figure in the American modern dance movement, Hawkins studied and performed with such notable and varied organizations as the School of American Ballet, Ballet Caravan and the Martha Graham Dance Company before forming his own eponymous company in 1951. His signature movement style favors muscular release and free-flowing patterns of movement in pursuit of effortless movement and seamless transitions.

<sup>22</sup> CMDA/DANCECleveland is an institution founded by a group of determined women who loved to dance, and began as a teaching and presenting organization in Cleveland in 1956, when it was Cleveland Modern Dance Association. It became DANCECleveland in 1980, and has re-focused its mission to presenting. *CMDA/Dance Cleveland is a separately highlighted feature of the VDC.*

<sup>23</sup> The Juilliard School, informally referred to simply as "Juilliard" and located in the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in mid-Manhattan, New York City. Juilliard is a major American performing arts conservatory established in 1905. The school trains about 850 undergraduate and graduate students in dance, drama, and music. It is widely regarded as one of the world's leading music and dance schools and is highly competitive in its admissions criteria.

<sup>24</sup> A reference to one of Cleveland's major universities, Case University has a highly acclaimed dance department.

BW: Yeah. We were working on a world premiere with Alice Rubinstein, and I will *never* forget this day. We were working out some of the issues of this one section that she was trying to... and we had an agreement with the Bulgarian women's chorus, because they were, like, the thing at the time. *Phenomenal* musicians, oh my gosh! So we're upstairs working on some of the bugs out of this one section and she came up in the studio and she said, "That's it, I'm done. I'm quitting! You'll all be fine. If you want me to call Paul Taylor<sup>25</sup> or you want me to call whoever, you'll all be fine — because you're very, very beautiful dancers. I'm out." And she got in her car and we heard her car pull away. We were like, "Laying on the floor making a circle of my arms."

And I was like, "Hey, what just *happened?*" So then I got named the interim artistic director and being the stubborn cuss that I am, I kicked a dead horse for two years trying to get it going. I was like, "She's had a *moment.*" You know, "Let her have her moment. And then she'll come back, and we'll keep going, and let's finish this piece for her!" And all the dancers rallied behind me and we changed a couple of things, like about how the trainee program was run. It pained me to watch people leave in tears who didn't make the cut, or whatever. And I was like, "These are *humans.*" I don't know, it's just... the empathy thing's pretty strong in me. And that really bothered me, so then I said, "If we *had* more trainees who were paying tuition, that might help pay some of the bills that are stressing her out. Maybe *we* should be running that part of this to make it easier for her." So I tried for two years, then I finally was like, "This is... I'm pulling ninety-hour work weeks. And it's not working" — because I started going through files and uncovering why she was so stressed out. And that's when I got the phone call from Cleveland School of the Arts. And I was like, "Oh look! — I've got to go."

CF: You pulled "an Alice!"

BW: Yeah I *did*. (laughing) It was like well, I just got to this point: I was like, I actually went to the board of trustees, "This is killing me, I can't do this. I didn't *cause* these problems and I'm not going to be used as a scapegoat, either. I'm *not* that dumb. I see some of what's happening and I'm going to get out before the ceiling hits my head as it falls." And so I quit, and I worked in a catering company in the kitchen for six weeks in the summer, going "What am I *doing?*" And I really kind of hated dance all of a sudden, because I was like, "Mean people suck. This is just not... the ballet people, like, I *get* it. They got hit with a stick — the whole old school thing." And I was like, "Painting was less awkward." Because it was me, and the paint, and the canvas.

But then I got the phone call and I was like, "Okay, I can teach." I used to teach for Alice all over the country when we were on tour; I was one of the people she would let teach. And I *loved* it, I love teaching; to *me*, it's not teaching — it's sharing your art and making it with people and showing them how. And it's just, that's what it feels like or should feel like, maybe. So, that's how the trend, I went from being a dancer to being interim artistic director and suddenly *having* to choreograph new work, which — *that* was scary (laughing)! But she *did* groom me. She groomed me the second year I was in

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<sup>25</sup> (1930-2018): a major American contemporary dancer and choreographer, Taylor is yet another dancer who performed for Martha Graham, among other distinguished dance artists, and was among the last living members of the third generation of America's modern dance artists. He founded the Paul Taylor Dance Company in 1954 in New York City, and his 16-member-company, Paul Taylor American Dance Company, continues to perform his legacy of 147 works.



her company. She came to me, pulled me aside when we were on tour somewhere, and she said, "You know, I want you to be my right hand in these choreography classes that I'm teaching, as we go from college to college to college on tour." I was like, "Okay." "*Why?*" And she said, "Because you have the thing, and I want to develop that thing. You have what I have. Yours is going to look very different." (I was like, "I hope so. You know, I think the way I'm going to approach it, it's going to be a little bit different than my experiences, but that's cool.")

I mean, she had Erick Hawkins yelling at her, and Martha, you know what I mean? So I'm like, I get it. You know, if you really look at historical context and where she was-- there's Martha, Erick, *her*. And then me! So I'm like, we're getting further from the need to prove something, right? And I think that when you're in an art form where scarcity is the norm, and your passion is higher than others, then that combination is sort of ingredients for monsters, if you're not wary.

CF: Hmm. Nicely said — and true, in my experience. So when did Alison Chase get--how does Pilobolus come to Cleveland School of the Arts as [he starts laughing again] just an "Oh, by the way..."

BW: It was one of those weird things. I was running the Y.A.R.D. and Eugenia Strauss<sup>26</sup> was the head of fundraising for Friends of School of the Arts,<sup>27</sup> which is sort of an attached 501(c)(3) to the school. And the Friends of Cleveland School of the Arts at that time, their job was to bring artists-in-residence in for a week or a month, or I kind of kept staying there full-time. And then the String Department started, the Y.A.R.D. started and happened, and there was a ceramic thing that happened. And there were three of us that were full-time because... just, the magic happened, whatever that is: basically, love the kids, really actually care about them really, for real. And you have the freedom in that situation where you don't have to follow the rules of the state because "I'm *not* a teacher. I'm glad that you have those tests. I'm not teaching to any test. I'm an artist. That's not what we do. We share our life through this medium called dance. And that's why I'm here." So I think one day I came downstairs and Eugenia was sitting there and she's this *amazing* woman. And she pulled me and she said, "I have a question for you." I said, "Okay." "A friend of mine is on the board of trustees for this company called Pilobolus. Have you ever heard of them?" Now, here's what's weird: when I made that decision seeing Clyde Morgan, "This is what I have to do," two months later, Pilobolus came to the Milwaukee Performing Arts Center where I worked part-time, and Clyde said, "I want you to go watch this company. You have an art background." So when she said, "Do you know who that is?" I was like, "Oh my gosh. Yes." And I told her the story. I said, when I was eighteen, I saw them right before my nineteenth birthday. And I was like, "I *have* to do this. This is art. It is onstage. It's moving. And they're doing *Day Two*."<sup>28</sup> They're dancing to the Talking Heads, which happened to be my favorite band at the moment, and that helped. And the

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<sup>26</sup> Strauss has been involved with various arts and community organizations, including Executive Director and Former President, Pilobolus Dance Company; former Development Director, Friends of Cleveland School of the Arts; former Board Member, Apollo's Fire, Cleveland Ballet, Metro Hospital Foundation. She is currently serving as executive director and founder of CityMusic, a chamber music orchestra that she co-founded in the city.

<sup>27</sup> A lack of reliable, consistent funding prompted CSA to seek outside help for its burgeoning arts programs. The Friends of the Cleveland School of the Arts was founded in 1983 by a group of well-connected Clevelanders - primarily women - to secure this support.

<sup>28</sup> *Day Two* (1981), a Pilobolus work that traces human evolution, is considered a classic in their repertoire. It is set to a soundtrack from Brian Eno and the Talking Heads.

movement was just so gorgeous. It's just, everything is sculpture. 'Cause I did sculpture, and I just fell in *love*. And I was like, I'm going to do that someday. So when she's like, "Have you ever heard of Pilobolus?" I was like, "Oh my gosh. Yes. Why are you asking me this question?" She said, "Well, there's this woman named Alison Chase<sup>29</sup>..." And I'm like, "Yes, she's the mother of Pilobolus!" Like, I know these things, right?

And she heard about this rogue, modern dance guy in Cleveland, Ohio, hanging out with kids from the hood. And I was like, "Oh God, that's so *awkward*." (laughter) Really. Okay. And then, "She's very curious that you work improvisationally with these boys that are not dancers and it's reminding her of how she helped start Pilobolus, and would you ever like to meet her?" And I was like, "I... *What* do you need from me? I will do *anything!*" She said, "Well, what if we brought her here for a week?" And I'm like, "You're shitting me. Are you serious?" She was like, "Yes!" I was like, "Can you find enough money to make that happen?" And she said "The money..." and she smoked in her office, which is so wrong in a public school. She was like (making an exaggerated inhale sound) "You let me worry about that. I'll take care of that."

I was like, "You do you. I'm going upstairs, hanging out with the dudes. Keep me posted." And then it turned out it was true and Alison Chase really wanted to meet me 'cause I don't know how she heard... she heard through Eugenia, was friends on the board, and that. So she came out. So what I did is I went to every library I could find that had anything dance related in any way — like, in the back of the [book] they had Pilobolus on page 37. And I took out all these books and I brought them and I threw them all on the floor in front of the kids. And it was like, "Look at this, look at this! Let's try some of this stuff." We started to climb on each other. We didn't know what the *real* vocabulary was, so we created our own code and I was like, "We're going to call this the... whatever." I never remember what we called stuff. So she came and I was able to, because the Y.A.R.D. was going well and some of the kids' lives were transforming from flunking out and having emotional flashbacks in class to actually passing the classes, to now they're getting A's and B's and that because art has that *power*. And we were able to pull the kids out of all of their academic classes for, I think, the first visit was a week, an entire week and from the beginning of the school day, Alison Chase would walk in. "Hi everybody!" I was like, "Oh my God, I *love* her." And she could not believe how game these boys were to try *anything*. And she was like, "*How* is this working?"

"I don't know — we're just making stuff up after school." Like, we showed her a couple of our pieces and I was like, "I feel like that kid who was like 'Hi, mommy, here's my refrigerator art (laughing).'" It's just the worst, but she really liked what was going on. And then it was interesting because at that time, Alison sort of realized [when] we have auditions, we have one guy's position and over a hundred boys will show up. We have one girl's position, over 300 girls. She said, "Here's the reality. The last twenty or thirty women we look at are gorgeous and they can do anything. The last ten guys, same thing." So we're like, "Let's look at the *Melanin*<sup>30</sup> and let's look at the size and who was going to fit the costumes." And she said, "It's terrible." She said, "Wouldn't it be interesting?" She said, "I brought this up at a board meeting recently. Wouldn't it be interesting if we actually

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<sup>29</sup> Alison Becker Chase (b. 1946) taught the dance class at Dartmouth that led to founding of Pilobolus Dance Theater in 1971. As a founding artistic director of Pilobolus, she worked with the company from 1971 to 2006.

<sup>30</sup> A shorthand reference for the Pilobolus work, *Of Night, Light and Melanin* (mus. Keith Jarrett, 1981; video version, 1982).

trained people to move like we do and create the way that we create?" And I was like, "Wait a minute, you don't *do* that?" She said, "No, we just hire freaks of nature." I was like, "So that's only going to work *so long*?" And she said, "My point, exactly." She said, "How about we use this little experiment that you've created to see if we might be able to break down non-traditional partnering and some of the theater things that we utilize on a daily basis, and actually teach it as types of technique. Are you game?" And I'm like, "Okay, wait. You're Alison Chase, and you're asking me if I'm okay with helping you codify training for your company. I'd be a moron to say no to that. Are you serious?"

So we did! And it worked, and now I'm allowed to go around and teach that. It was brilliant. She is a genius, and one of the *kindest* people I've ever had the privilege — and I've been very blessed. I mean, I sat in the studio with Agnes de Mille<sup>31</sup> and Betsy Schoenberg<sup>32</sup> and Clyde Morgan, like I said, and some names — (laughter) and the whole time, I'm like, "I have no business being in this room, and I'm absolutely stealing everything I hear." You know, seems to be working (more laughter)! But working with her was amazing! And she said, you know, "If this wasn't going so well with you in these kids' lives..." — and by that time there were like, forty kids, and we did the *Urban Nutcracker* where there were eighty kids involved and obviously boys and girls, and she said, "If this wasn't going as well for you, I would absolutely *steal* you."

And I was like, "Oh God! I would love to work for Pilobolus." But my love for these kids is actually greater." Felt like sacrifice for a split second, but then I was like, "Look at these kids! No, thanks." That's cool to know that I had the stuff, you know? And we still Instagram each other on occasion. She's no longer with Pilobolus. She has her own company. She's wildly creative and still one of the kindest people I've ever worked with in the studio. Yeah...

CF: And she would just come in for a week, at a time?

BW: She would come in for a week. And then she came in for two weeks. And then she came back for a week and then we figured out how to train the kids and then they started doing things and we started having them co-create, with us at the helm.

And then she gifted the Y.A.R.D. Pilobolus's piece, *Ciona*,<sup>33</sup> which is one of the quintessential Pilobolus pieces. And we learned, I learned it and Adam Battelstein<sup>34</sup> came for a week, and then two

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<sup>31</sup> 1905-1993: an American dancer, choreographer and author, DeMille choreographed for ballet, Broadway and film, including the ground-breaking choreography for *Oklahoma* (1943), the ballet *Rodeo* (1942). She was the author of many books, including a 1991 biography of her lifelong friend, Martha Graham, entitled *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham*.

<sup>32</sup> 1906-1997: Originally a performer in Graham's early works, Schoenberg became a beloved and influential teacher and mentor, beginning at Bennington College and garnering national attention for her dance composition classes at Sarah Lawrence College, where she became the Director of Theater and Dance and served until 1975. Schoenberg taught throughout the country until her death, and one of the most significant annual awards in dance, "The Bessie," is named in her memory.

<sup>33</sup> Created in 1974 by company founding members Robby Barnett, Alison Chase, Martha Clarke, Moses Pendleton, Michael Tracy and Jonathan Wolken, *Ciona* is one of Pilobolus' earliest and most iconic works.

<sup>34</sup> Battelstein was a member of Pilobolus for nineteen years, and since 2009 has served as the founder and director of Catapult Entertainment, described on its website as "a shadow-illusion company that presents concerts around the word as well as providing custom entertainment for the corporate world."

weeks, and then Darryl Thomas<sup>35</sup> came in for a couple of weeks, and then I started bringing Pilobolus dancers in as guests for the summer camp, and it was just amazing! We just had this very reciprocal relationship. And we were like the training camp. And several people have gone on to be in the company that started out in the studio with me. So that's very rewarding to, you know, like Chris Whitney,<sup>36</sup> Christopher Whitney, Cleveland Heights High School, after being with me for two years and training and performing, got a scholarship, went to the Honor's College at OU, did a senior thing with the Shaolin Warriors<sup>37</sup> 'cause he got a grant, came back, auditioned for Pilobolus.

And as he made that cut, and he made that cut, and then he was in the top ten. I'm teaching down in Houston, he's calling me panicking on a cell phone, outside the bar. And he's like, "So they're down to ten guys. What do I do?" And I'm like, "All right, what have you done so far?" I just kind of walked them through. I'm like "Calm down. You're gorgeous. You're so talented. Let's talk about this. All right, when you go back in, don't show them anything you've done before. Always, always invent new." And I just gave him some tips and then he called me back: "It's between three guys. I'm one of the three — I'm kind of freaking out." I was like, "Just keep doing what you're doing. It's out of your hands." Like, "Who gets to say 'I was one of the top three guys at the end of auditions?' Like, go for it."

He got the job! And then he was still a student at OU, so he had to talk to them and say like, "I'm going on tour to Greece, but I'm not done with my papers my senior year." They were like, "Just email them in." So I remember getting a text... no, an email from him. He was performing in Greece and he was backstage and he had just finished and emailed in his last paper and he was so happy. And he said, "*And...* I'm in Greece! I got to perform. Bye!"

It's amazing, but these Cleveland kids end up... I remember one of the kids was in Pilobolus, Cleotha.<sup>38</sup> He was one of the kids in the Y.A.R.D., called me from Hawaii — and with his Ebonic self, they call me Mr. Wade — "Mr. Wade, we're in Hawaii, man! It's so beautiful here, man. It's better than TV, it's like real!" And I'm like, "What're you doing?" He said "I'm performing. We got Pilobolus, and we're in Honolulu. Da da da da da." He said "I'm in Hawaii, man. People like me don't get to see stuff like this." That's rewarding. That's life changing.

CF: Gosh, yes. I can't remember now, because we were going back, but how did you manage to leave the Y.A.R.D. and that school, and start Inlet? So...

BW: Oh God, *that* was scary (laughter).

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<sup>35</sup> A former member of Pilobolus, Thomas is now co-artistic director of Rainbow Dance Theatre, and Professor of Dance at Western Oregon University, where he teaches composition, jazz dance, contemporary partnering and modern technique.

<sup>36</sup> A 2001 Cleveland Heights High School graduate, Whitney trained with Inlet and joined the touring company of Pilobolus in 2008. He returned to the city to perform with Pilobolus at Playhouse Square in Cleveland on May 8, 2010, a show co-produced by DANCECleveland and Cuyahoga Community College.

<sup>37</sup> An internationally touring theatrical Kung Fu company of 22 Chinese Martial Arts performers based in the UK.

<sup>38</sup> Cleotha McJunkins III, who trained with Bill Wade and at the age of 17 performed as the prince in the Y.A.R.D.'s *An Urban Nutcracker*, went on to join Pilobolus. There are also indications he may have performed with Cirque du Soleil. Apparently, he has returned to Cleveland and may be involved with Capoeira Narahari.

CF: Another scary thing!

BW: Yeah, that's a thing — there's this pattern... (laughter). The Friends of the Cleveland School of the Arts drastically changed all of a sudden, and then it became very corporate and very... I'm trying to be careful... different. A *different* set of people came in. Trips to the White House, *Time Magazine*, *Wall Street Journal*, things were going on in the String Department, kind of same sort of thing, and all of a sudden there was a different set of people from town who came in to take control and set up all these systems and things and how it should be run. And I'm the type of person I'm like, "Why? It's obviously running *itself*. Like, let's *do* this! Let's just keep going." And I duked it out for about a year.

I was like, "Yeah, well, I got to take the kids out of school again. You know, SUNY Purchase<sup>39</sup> at University of New York at Purchase wants the kids to come out for a week and perform and for me to lecture and for *us* to teach their dance majors master classes. Like, how *weird* is that? And well, "You can't just take them out of school!" I'm like "We already said yes to the trip. We're out. And our parents all said yes — all the moms. So I gotta go. Purdue University, same thing. We would go to Purdue University almost every single year. I take the kids and I'm like, "Okay, you guys, wake up. Purdue University is a top ten school." I'm taking a group of hood rats to a top ten campus, and they're meeting people that they're getting along with because they're dancers, and they're falling in love with the people on that campus, and then they fall in love with the campus. Then, "I want to go to a school like that." And then we talk about how do you get there: *Let's do this*. "And you're dudes, [so] you're probably going to get a scholarship" — back then. It's changed some. So I kind of duked it out for a year and that's when I was like, "I can make *this* much difference in this building. If I create a company of professional dancers and we can *all* have the same heart to give and to serve with what we've been given and bring about transformation..." That's a far... like, the math is exponential, right? So I *just* jumped off the cliff. It was hard (laughing). It was *really* hard! But I had enough experiences by this time and sort of my mental portfolio of things that I took some fat chances on. It went well. I had a folder full of those in the back of my mind and I thought, "Okay, I'm going to trust and have the faith that I'm actually, like... I *literally* got a *phone call* to go to Cleveland School of the Arts.

I was feeling this calling to start this company. And so I did, and there was a *lot* of prayer involved. I'm not going to lie. There was a lot of praying involved. I was like, "I know that I'm called to do this. I'm going to need dancers." Boom! Dancers showed up out of New York City, Southern Methodist University, who had — oh, by the way, spent a year in London, and then while she was in London, she ended up working with Lar Lubovitch<sup>40</sup> and then... So these dancers that were beautiful people and just could *do* stuff, came to Cleveland and moved into Cleveland. One of the girls from Indiana University<sup>41</sup> was trained by all the post-Balanchine people. This girl was a ballerina and I was like, "Honey, look at me. I'm a barefoot/roll on the ground/climb on people guy." She was like, "I *want* to learn how to do that stuff. I've only ever done ballet in my life." And I'm like, "This might

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<sup>39</sup> The State University of New York at Purchase is a highly regarded university, and is among the top ten public national liberal arts colleges in the country. The school houses a conservatory of dance offering Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

<sup>40</sup> Based in New York City, Lar Lubovitch founded his eponymous Company in New York in 1968.

<sup>41</sup> IU boasts a highly regarded Balanchine-influenced ballet program under the auspices of Jacob's School of Music as well as a separate contemporary dance program that is part of the Department of Theatre, Drama and Contemporary Dance.

push some buttons. You will never wear your *pointe* shoes in my studio — but you're very *good* at that." I'm kind of curious as to why..." Her husband turned out to be my first composer. His name is Ryan Lott. People now know Ryan Lott as Son Lux<sup>42</sup> in the world of people who take their music very seriously. He's very well-regarded globally. But Jen<sup>43</sup> and Ryan, when they got married, they lived in our house with us for the first year or whatever, until they found a place, and then moved out. But it was just this ragtag group of scrappers, man. And we just started this thing and paid attention to-- paid a *lot* of intention and attention to the "how we're going to do this." I also am a believer that the higher the bar, the *greater* the range of possible transformation, which is not *super* popular in some circles working with at-risk populations or underserved populations. And I understand vantage points that are very different than mine, but with the experiences that I've had, I'd have to sit down and figure out how many kids I've sent to Juilliard that went through Juilliard on a full ride that are now dancing all over. Antonio Brown<sup>44</sup> ended up dancing for Bill T. Jones<sup>45</sup> all over the world. Now he has his own company. He has come back and set pieces on Verb Ballets. My little Antonio! He was our Nutcracker in the *Urban Nutcracker*. You know what I mean? So I think that I had gone through enough that I knew...and it was surrounded with business people who really saw the value in what was happening and they were savvy and they could tell "what is happening here is very different than what is normative in this guy's marketplace. Let's help him, let's set him up." So it was, it was rough. It was scary at first, but I worked slowly. I worked *extremely* intentionally. Seems to be working...

CF: Talk about the title of the company.

BW: Yeah. So in that entourage of people that my wife and I had around us at this time was a company. They run a consulting organization called Tinamou, it's a type of bird, Tinamou Consulting, and Chris and Judy Schenk are Tinamou Consulting.<sup>46</sup> And they gave Kristin and I--my wife's name is Kristin-- and they gave Kristin and I a card and said, "We're going to treat you to go to this dinner at a restaurant" — that I would never go to, because I can afford Chipotle on a good day. And this was a very swank restaurant. And they said "In this restaurant, they have the white paper tablecloths and the thing in the center with crayons. And we want you to answer this question and draw it out" — because my wife's also an artist. "Drawings are fine. You can decipher them for us later, translate them later. If you had all of the time and the finances that you needed, what would you be doing? As long as you come back with a really clear answer, we will buy your dinner."

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<sup>42</sup> Ryan Lott is an American composer and musician who was born in Denver, Colorado, and is based in Los Angeles. He founded the band Son Lux which has released five albums and four EPs.

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer McQuiston Lott earned her BFA in Ballet Performance from Indiana University, and her MFA in Dance from the University of California, Irvine. Among many other accomplishments, she is a dancer, choreographer, teacher, director and advocate for the arts.

<sup>44</sup> Antonio Brown, a Cleveland native who began dance training at Cleveland School of the Arts (1996-2003), graduated from the Julliard School (2003-2007) and joined the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in 2007, and is currently on the faculty of Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School and Camp in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, among other creative and professional endeavors.

<sup>45</sup> The Bill T Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company was founded by the two artists in 1982, and has remained at the forefront of contemporary dance since that time. The company is currently based in Manhattan, where it is part of New York Live Arts, a movement-focused arts organization (formerly Dance Theatre Workshop).

<sup>46</sup> Founded in 1995, Tinamou Consulting LLC: Architects of Change exists "to launch life-giving leaders, teams and organizations." Run by Judy and Chris Schenk Tinamou is based at Yellow Birch Farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Charlottesville, VA.

And they did. And we did. We had this big thing, and we brought it back to them and in the conversation that unfolded, I said "I envision a building embedded in a neighborhood that is full of artists of various different kinds of mediums who use their art form to *give* to people, to help *transform* their quality of life, help *change* their paradigm, help them have hope and imagine a different future than their history to that point has given them. And we create beauty together." The artists in the building need to really be high-level craftspeople, because I've run around a lot. I've done a lot and I've hung around with people with really, really good hearts with low skill sets, trying to do a lot. You can only give from the bank account that you actually have. And after hanging out with Bessie Schoenberg and Agnes de Mille and some of these other people, I realize that I've been given *a lot*. So I definitely fit the re-payer model. So I envisioned this building full of people like myself and various pottery, painting, poetry, whatever — music, like Ryan Lott/Son Lux.

And they said, "What would you call it?" I'm like, "It's like an outlet people come in, and they could just get out of their pod at Progressive or wherever they work and just let it out. I think the building's called Outlet. And they were like, "Well, what would *you* have?" I said, "Well, I'd have a dance company that needs to be the type of caliber where they can get standing ovations because of the level of craftsmanship in their technical virtuosity, but also emotional availability and vulnerability, where those two things meet at the top. And then they'd have the heart to share that with all the little kids running around the neighborhood or whatever. And they were like, "Well, what would you call it?" And so we're on... by this time we had cell phones.

So we're on the cell phones, and I'm like, "outlets" — and synonyms, antonyms. I see *Inlet*. And I'm like, "Ooh!" So *yes*, my career thus far has been [that] I've derived great pleasure from giving the information from people like Agnes de Mille and Alison Chase and Bessie Schoenberg, and the other people that I've had the privilege of being with. I have an unusual amount of pleasure out of giving that to people who a lot of people would think this information is above them. And I'm like, it is absolutely *not* above them. That's *so* arrogant. I'm gonna' prove you wrong. And it's *been* really fun because literally the kids in the Y.A.R.D., no, I've never seen people improvise like these kids because they *have* to on a daily, to survive. I was like, this is why jazz music is so good. Where it comes from... duh! It's the same thing. It's just moving. So I was like, "Well, Inlet, and then it's..."

So I was like "Inlet"...and then I looked at the dictionary definition of it. And that was really fascinating because it's a point of *entry*. So it's almost like where a river meets the ocean, an estuary. If you're really studying what an estuary is, it's like the most bio-diverse place of all these pockets of completely different things coexisting. And I was like, "yes, this is what we need. We need these estuaries or incubators or greenhouses." And each of these metaphors — if you really think it through — it falls apart at some point. But this idea of a place where people can be led *in* to something that perhaps they perceive prior to walking through the threshold of that door. "Well, that was for those people over there. I'm from over here." And I'm like, "Well, look at me." Coming up for me was rough, growing up the way I did. I come from a *very* dysfunctional family, and in counseling in my twenties, I realized suddenly *dance saved my life*. That's all this is. I'm repaying that favor. That's all it is. It's really important.

CF: There's a lot there and I don't want to skip over it. I want to come back, but it has to be said that now you're *getting* that building. 2019 years later. So the idea of it... I don't know, did you lose track of the idea?

BW: Hmm-mmm (negative). No. I've been in and out of really nasty buildings for years. "Maybe that's good! Ooh, no, no. God, no!" And building the repertory and then all of a sudden we were doing touring on a regional and national [level] and I've started landing commissions for the work. We had a really unique problem to solve when we first started the company and that was that [for] everybody in Cleveland, all the foundations and the people who hold the resources, I was the "dance education guy" in their head. I was the Pied Piper of modern dance. I was like, have you *seen* these dancers? They're gorgeous *and* they're generous. So we had to really fight my prior success. It was not easy, but it was awesome, because it was like iron sharpening iron. I was like, okay, the dance education thing, I've gotten somewhere with this. Now, I need to really allow those things to push me as a creator, as a co-creator, as the one who drives a co-creative process. I need to hone that in. I need to give that language, I need to give a framework, I need to come up with tools — all of that replication stuff, and really think this through. I allowed that to really *push* me as a dance maker and (addressing imagined criticism) "No, we can *co-create high quality* work." So *now*, and it's so weird because there's still just a little bit of this weird dynamic of like, "You guys are the dance education company." And it's like, "Only in Cleveland! Because everywhere else we go we get standing ovations."

Somebody from that audience at the Prince Theater<sup>47</sup> in Philly asked to have breakfast with me at Starbucks the next morning, who was the producer for Michigan, who wanted to do a full-length work. Long story short, I ended up working with José Cruz González,<sup>48</sup> Mexican American playwright, writes in the style of magic realism, [with a] painting background. "You mean like the *paintings* of magic realism?" "Yes, but in theater." "Weird, I've never seen that." So we ended up co-creating an evening length work<sup>49</sup> based on human trafficking. Met a bunch of people who were survivors. That was rough! And put their stories on stage. Again, *using dance to further people*. Giving voice to people who don't actually have one. Most people don't even know they're in every single neighborhood, these people that are being trafficked. And that again is very satisfying for me because I can use my art form to make a difference for somebody else's *life*. This is not about my ego. I don't have time for that. Ego *kills* process. It absolutely halts process. I see it all over the place in every industry that I get an opportunity to peer into. It's really frightening to me. This stuff has been given to me so that I can give it to others, so that they can do something new and different and beautiful. I think that artists would do well to take up the mantle of responsibility for caring for culture. I think we're living in a time right now that's quite frightening.

I think that as creators, we need to create the solutions and we need to get off our high *artiste* horse and actually use what we have to make a difference in other people's lives because that's more transformative. If you keep doing that, if there's enough of us doing that, we will transform our culture. We will care for our culture. We can quell the culture wars that we're in the midst of, which are just so stupid. It's all so *stupid* — and treat each other as human beings. There is no such [thing] as, in my [view] there is no "other": *one* race, human! Get over it, let's get onto it, let's make art.

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<sup>47</sup> Inlet performed *Center of the Earth (Te Pito o te Henua)*, the piece inspired by their 2006 residency on Easter Island described elsewhere in this transcript. The performance at Philadelphia's Prince Theater occurred on January 5, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> An established playwright, Cruz González is currently Distinguished Professor of Theatre Arts at California State University at LA.

<sup>49</sup> *Among the Darkest Shadows* was commissioned by the Wharton Center at Michigan State University, premiering in February of 2017.



CF: I noticed that you had a piece called *Men in Dance* and I was just thinking about the Ted Shawn connection, with you working with these boys at the Y.A.R.D. I wonder if you'd like to talk about that.

BW: Yes! Working with all those teenage boys for eleven years and my dudes in my company now — there are a bunch of dudes in the studio. There are so many different angles. One angle is I look at what's in the landscape of dance right now, and there is a masculine voice *missing*, I think. Again, using what I have been given to make a difference. I have no shame in saying I've got a bunch of dudes in my studio because that's not *hyper-masculine*. They're dancers. It's not about hyper-masculinity and I think that I, being a male dancer who's in my mid-career, I have again a *responsibility* to put some things on stage for little boys younger than me at eighteen to have an “Aha!” moment about this entire art form that they can participate in and have an incredible experience.

I was recently in an artist studio down the street, and there was this big welded structure. I looked at it — it was as a head — and I said, “Oh my gosh, that's a Moai.”<sup>50</sup> And she said, “A *what?*” I said, “This is a Moai.” She said, “Oh, this is one of those heads from Easter Island.” And I'm like, “Okay. I've been there twice. Those heads in Easter Island are called Moai.” And she was like, “How do you know that?” “Well, I've been there twice. Ohio Arts sponsors an international artists exchange. It was a thing. We had a blast. There are people running around the Island right now with Inlet Dance Theatre t-shirts. How weird is that?” And she was shocked. And one of the things that we did was — I have a collection of rep that I've created over the years that we sort of internally and affectionately call “dude art.” Every year or two, I try to make a new one. Just the guys in the studio. There's a thing that happens with that camaraderie and that fraternity that's actually super healthy. It's *not* hyper-masculine. We're making art, for crying out loud. And we're able to talk about the various different facets of what it is to be a man in America who happens to be professional artist — and of all the art forms, *dance*. We were invited to the Men and Dance Festival<sup>51</sup> in Seattle twice, and I took a couple of my dude art pieces. We have this whole collection internally amongst the repertory. There are certain pieces of the all-male pieces in there. They're... awesome (laughing). It's really fun! And it was for NDEO, National Dance Educators Organization<sup>52</sup> — they did a Men in Dance symposium<sup>53</sup> and I was asked to speak and we did one of our dude pieces down there.

And then Yoav<sup>54</sup> who runs the dance department down in West Virginia saw the piece and he said, “Oh my gosh!” Turns out when they redid a Jacob's Pillow Men in Dance<sup>55</sup> [centennial concert] to

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<sup>50</sup> Easter Island, known to its inhabitants as Rapa Nui, is famous for its stone statues of human figures, known as *moai* (meaning “statue”). The *moai* have a complex history, but were probably carved to commemorate important ancestors and were made from around 1000 C.E. until the second half of the seventeenth century.

<sup>51</sup> Men in Dance (MID) is a 501c3 organization in Seattle, founded in 1994 by Richard Jessup. MID hosts a curated festival of men's dance every two years.

<sup>52</sup> Established in 1998 as a national non-profit organization supporting dance education and dance in the United States generally, NDEO is a membership services organization that supports dance teachers with programs and services.

<sup>53</sup> NDEO held the first symposium focusing on dance as a lifelong vocation for men and boys entitled *Men in Dance: Bridging the Gap* in the College of Creative Arts at West Virginia University in Morgantown, WV from June 29 – July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Among many other achievements, Dr. Yoav Kaddar is professor of dance at West Virginia University (WVU), where he is the current director of the WVU Dance Program, the founder and director of the WVU

celebrate, he was one of the guys in that company. He was like, “This is so Ted Shawn!<sup>56</sup> I said, “Well, yes. The research I did was *about* men in dance. I'm aware that you were part of the resurgence of that.” And I said, “Well it was also based on this men's book called *Wild at Heart*.”<sup>57</sup> That was a men's study book that I went through with the guys.

CF: Was that Robert Bly?

BW: It's sort of like Robert Bly's<sup>58</sup> stuff but it's, yeah, somebody else. John Eldredge, I think, is his name. *Awesome*, awesome book. And the guys and I, we read this book and we're like, “Let's choreograph this.” It's this piece called, *This Could Hurt*.<sup>59</sup> It's a band of brothers out on a risk-taking adventure. And when I narrate the concert — depending on the audience that we're serving, sometimes I have to narrate the concert to give onboarding for the audience, who are like, “modern dance is weird.” It's like “No, it's actually *not* that strange.” One of the things we talk about, all the guys in the audience: “Would you agree with me that wearing lycra and doing a dance in front of an audience this size is taking a risk?” And they all (he indicates an affirmative nod of the head). “That's what's about to happen. This is called, *This Could Hurt*. Please notice the costumes are black and blue. There's a reason. When we made it, *that* happened.” They throw each other around and it's Ryan Lott's bombastic four hand piano piece. The audience loves it. But we have pieces, some of them really serious in their intention. Dominic<sup>60</sup> does two solos that make people cry because of the content. He just has that ability.

CF: He does! Well also, if you could, I told you we were going to run out of time and that's what's happening, but I'm really interested in your creative process, your collaborative way of making art. You don't bring in choreographers to make pieces for your company. You make them together?

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Summer Dance Academy, and the president and founding member of the WV Dance Education Organization.

<sup>55</sup> To commemorate the centennial of Ted Shawn in 1991, Jacob's Pillow produced a full evening performance tribute that celebrated the legacy of its founder. The program was developed at the Pillow and premiered at New York's Joyce Theater in October 1991, exactly one hundred years after Shawn's birth. It was later presented at the Pillow, on a cross-country tour and internationally in Amsterdam, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Novosibirsk, and Tallinn over a two-year period.

<sup>56</sup> In 1915, Ted Shawn and his wife and artistic partner Ruth St. Denis founded the influential dance school and company, Denishawn, where they taught and inspired several notable performers, including Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. After the two separated in 1930, Shawn, who is often called “The Father of American Modern Dance,” purchased a ramshackle farm in the Berkshires called Jacob's Pillow that would become the crucible for his revolutionary company of men's dancers, as well as the site of America's oldest dance festival.

<sup>57</sup> *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* is a book by John Eldredge published in 2001, revised and updated 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Born in 1926, Robert Bly is an American poet, essayist, activist and leader of the “mythopoetic men's movement.”

<sup>59</sup> *This Could Hurt* seems to have premiered in 2017, and was performed at Jacob's Pillow on August 4<sup>th</sup> of that year.

<sup>60</sup> Dominic Moore-Dunson began training and performing with Inlet Dance Company in 2010, rising to the position of Assistant to the Artistic Director, choreographing for the company, and receiving various awards, including the 2019 Cleveland Arts Prize. *Moore-Dunson is the informant for a separate interview regarding his work with Inlet Dance Company in this collection.*

BW: Yeah. (He thinks again) Ah, we *have*. I want to do it again, but I have a building and a national tour to do, and *then...* (he laughs). There's the resources thing that I'm far better at understanding than when I started this — *that's* for sure. Right now, I'm navigating two commission situations, because people saw something else that happened to be a commission, and they're like, "Hey, could you do a piece about *this* topic?" So one of them will end up being a full-length work about a Holocaust survivor named Ruth Kropveld.<sup>61</sup> I'm going to meet some survivors next week, which is so cool. And then there's a modern, classical composer in town named Ty Emerson<sup>62</sup> who wrote a suite called *Caliban Ascendant*,<sup>63</sup> which is sort of a spin-off of a facet inside of Shakespeare's *Tempest*.<sup>64</sup> We had a conversation, and he saw the company in performance, and he was like, "I've never *seen* stuff like this before. I wrote this ballet years ago..." So now we're going to do *that* premiere next June.

I have friends who danced in all these companies we've been talking about that I would love to bring in and set work, and that *might* happen in two or three years just because stuff is scheduled, which is a first-world problem, right? But our creative process is... so Tye said, "Here's this piece of music. I went home and I studied it. I had conversations with him. I pulled Dominic into those conversations because I'm grooming him as a choreographer. He's *brilliant*. Then we took it into the studio. I explained everything to everybody and said, "This is what I'm thinking. I think the character Ariel needs to be two bodies that make one body. One male, one female. Male represents culture. Female represents identity. The only way Prospero is able to gain control of the Islanders is by *ripping* them apart, taking the culture from their identity because that's where we derive...because that's what people do to each other, and we have long, long histories of that with various different people groups." I got to Easter Island and had no idea the slave trade hit there. And I'm like, "Of course it did. It's a thing." But realizing that everybody met on the Island was the relative of the 111 people that hid on the Island and didn't get taken off the Island — that's heavy stuff. I'm like, "Holy crap — *whaaa!*" They're like, "We used to have 30,000 people that lived here and they all got taken and enslaved." In America, we're aware of African diaspora and what happened. We're *so* not aware of other people groups, unless you happen to be Jewish (he uses an Israeli word here).

We're not as aware of these other things. And there's so much that we're not aware of even with Africa, because so much has been kept from our education systems. So, what I'll do is I'll bring the topic in and sometimes it's a commissioned topic. I kind of over-research; I realized I *like* doing that — because then it fills my head full of all these images and ideas, and then I go into the studio with the dancers. Then we sit down and I show them...sometimes it's visual, sometimes it's not — and then we do open-source playing. Play is the highest form of creativity, and thinking, in a lot of aspects. And then what we do is we go through this search for...*that* image connects directly to this topic. Let's see it, do it again, film it, stick it on, you know, the phone (camera).

And then we sort of go inside of the images that are really *sticky*, that have resonance to the topic and go inside of those and play the composition games with that movement — you know, can it turn, can it change levels, can it change dynamics, and all those types of things. So the start to each

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<sup>61</sup> Holocaust survivor Ruth Stern Kropveld is the subject of a biography by Lisa Phillips (Xlibris Corporation, 2008).

<sup>62</sup> Dr. Ty Alan Emerson has presented music in Cleveland since 2000. Following two terms as president of the Cleveland Composers' Guild, he is currently Director for the Cleveland Chamber Collective.

<sup>63</sup> Recorded 2017 by Albany Records.

<sup>64</sup> Thought to be one of the last plays that Shakespeare wrote alone, probably 1610 – 1611, the play features the character of Prospero, one of whose two servants is Caliban.

piece creates like a universe or vocabulary that's specific to that work. Which is why my name is on 95% of our repertory as the choreographer who drove it. But every piece in our repertory looks *pretty* different than each other because it was a different group of artists in the studio at that time working with me. You know, I may be facilitating and driving the process, but every piece literally has the voice of that group of people that was there because all of the material comes up and out of their bodies. And then it's just the whole composition game in your head as a dance maker. And then, if you're blessed to have friends who write incredible scores for you, that's awesome.

CF: Well, I'm curious about... this is a personal question I guess, but it seems that in all your choices and the way you work in the studio, the people you work with, the work you did at the Y.A.R.D., the many international partners you've had at various places and also from my talk earlier to Dominic. What is it in you, where do you think it comes from, this drive to be non-hierarchical — if I'm right about that?

BW: No, you're right. The thought of being somebody's boss is just so *gross* to me. (He laughs.) I can't stand it. Eeew! I don't want that responsibility. I don't think it's me abdicating responsibility — it's that none of us are as smart as *all* of us, so who wants to go *there* — that's actually not very *intelligent*. I'm noticing through history... Autocrats? Not a long-term solution. Authoritative [leaders] — long-term, doesn't last. Dance is ephemeral *enough* — can we raise some leaders who don't *do* that, so it'll last longer than the actual dances do onstage? I don't know, it just makes *sense* to me. This isn't about *me* — I mean, that's so morbid to think of, it's just so gross! I'm a person who was deposited *into* from so many brilliant, brilliant minds... and the reality is I don't have to be that brilliant. I just have to pay it forward, tell *them* what *they* told *me*. You know what I mean? You got to pay attention. You got to do your due diligence. There's a lot of rigor involved. I'm not going to poo-poo that stuff, because there's a lot of late nights. *But* if you're passionate about this making thing, and you're passionate about people — and this is like the one art form, right, maybe other than theater? We *are* the stuff that it's made of, and the way we move. I mean, that's so...that's the best art — which is terrible to say, because I have paintings and other things on my wall that I adore, but they don't *move*. I don't know, time and space and happening in the moment — that's real life. So the metaphor is to me, super, super clear. Even in the creative process, we're not looking for what's right or wrong. It's like, what is stage-worthy? There's a joke in the company. Somebody will be hanging upside down and they'll yell “stage-worthy?” And I'm like “I don't know. We'll film it, and we'll see.” It's become a joke in the company — we have a lot of inside jokes. There's a *lot* of laughter in my studio — *not* the experience I had in a lot of other people's studios that I was in. But there's such *joy* in the work that way, there's so much honoring, because everybody that's in my studio has assets. My job really is to align the assets to see what new stuff can pop out. Really, it's kind of a fun thing. They love playing with Legos — it's not dissimilar. You know?

CF: Well, they're much boxier. And they don't move!

BW: Yeah. They're a *little* boxier. They've got new stuff that's sort of curved and weird. They're fun to play with.

CF: Well, you're going into your 20th season. I know, this is day one of year 19, but next year is a big one.

BW: Right. And that's the national tour. That's when we get in our building and “Oh my gosh, the company is 20 years old. What happened? I'm too young to have the company to be that old.”

CF: I *get* that.

BW: Right?

CF: So what are you excited about? Maybe it's a crazy question, but this building was a dream you had...

BW: Yeah. No, I've been thinking about it a *lot* because I'm like, "Oh crap, it's actually *happening!* Now, what do we do?" And I'm like, "This is exciting!" Here's what's interesting: having our own building with 8,000 square feet where the office is, the costume and wardrobe, scenic stuff, three studios — two of them are huge and they open up and turn into this intentionally informal performance space. I don't want to run a black box — too much stuff. It's going to greatly *increase* our capacity to do what we're already doing on a much greater level. I mean, Dominic is off and running. And he *just* got back from Jacob's Pillow — one of eight choreographers selected from around the world. He needs a studio to develop his voice. Josh Brown<sup>65</sup> has been with us. This is day one of his *16th* season with me. The man's a genius. You have to look socially through him to see the genius. But when he creates art, you're like, "Oh my God. That came out of this guy!" I've got a couple of women that are *brilliant*, and I think that again, because it's never been about me, I'm excited to give my dancers what they need to keep going, and growing. I retired fifteen years ago, but I got to dance professionally for twenty years — also a rare thing, right? But at 41, I started this company — and, you know, "I have to train everybody, and I have to do all the phone calls and keep spreadsheets — and I'm going to give up performing. I don't want to be on stage anyways. I want to make the stuff and let other people do it and give them a chance. I had a chance; I did a 20 year run. I did pretty good kicking the boards." I'm very blessed. Time to pay that forward *and* I can grow as an artist. And *now* I'm growing as an executive director, which is *still* just such a weird... (he laughs) term. I'm learning a lot. I'm in an executive program out of Washington, DC right now. It's kicking my butt! But I graduate in two weeks.

CF: You reminded me that I had a question way earlier and it was when you started the company, it was 2001, and I have to be curious about the date September 11th and...did that or did that not play into anything you chose to do.

BW: It was like, "Yay, we started a company! Oh my God, what happened?" Literally so fast, and it gave all of it this really somber reality. It's like, "I'm married, we have an infant, I *just* quit my job — and the towers fell. *How wise was this?*" I tend to be one of those people like, "let's do it and go, because I can just tell the idea is good, why are we asking questions? Go, kind of a person, but it did give me great pause. And it was really, really interesting because we were, at that time, we were in residence at Playhouse Square, rehearsing in the big studios that have all of the windows you can see out. They're called red and green now — they used to be called east and west — (deep breath) and it was really *quiet* in the sky. And we were creating new art and it was just such a weird... and then we'd go home and get on the television, right? I mean, it was right after 9/11 and it was like, this is such a frightening... you know, I had lunch with my friend from Ailey there, in that neighborhood a couple of years ago. It was a very weird experience. I mean, everybody has their unique vantage point, but I

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<sup>65</sup> From Norwalk, OH, Brown earned a BA in Theatre Education with a Dance Minor from Ohio Wesleyan University. Brown joined the Inlet Trainee Program in 2004, was promoted to Apprentice in 2006, and has now been a company member and residency instructor for nearly 20 years.

was at the gym when the first plane hit. I was on the elliptical. And when the second... I watched the second plane hit. I was watching the news and this was live coverage, so I watched it happen. And I stopped on the treadmill, thinking "I'm going to break my neck." And then, because there's a lot of military in my family, I immediately was like, "*This* is military. Okay. I've got to get out of the gym. I'm going to go to the school. I'm going to get my son. I'm going to bring him home. That's as much as I know what to do."

And that's what we did. We went down to the basement and turned on the TV. We just sat there holding each other, and just watching. And I called my grandmother, because my grandfather was a pilot in World War II on D-Day, and I was like, "*How* did you guys *do* this?" *Such* a new respect, right? Created a piece as a result of that. Because then I was reached by my Nanna, my grandmother. And she said, "Well, when Papa was over in England and doing the whole D-Day invasion thing, I got a job at the steel mill and I rolled..." And she's like, "You can do it." That's my grandma, for real, with a cigarette.

And I was like, "Dang! I have such a *new* vantage point of respect for... you guys are some tough people, man. That's crazy!" And it was really interesting — but to me, one of the most powerful things was those film shots *after*, when they were digging through the rubble. And every once in a while, you would see somebody lay flowers down on the sidewalk. And I was like, "That's what I'm going to do." This world's pretty messed up. This world's pretty messed up. *Somebody* needs to take on the responsibility to create beauty, where people actually get along. And I was like, "I know an art form where we climb on each other and we share weight with each other, *literally*, as that metaphor. *This* is my responsibility. You know what? I'm going to do this. I have that responsibility. I'm going to do it. I'm going to share it with even the least of these, because that's actually where the greatest need is, anyways. And you know what? Some of them are better at it. Let's give some career path choices to kids who've never even heard of this stuff before. Let's do it." And the families — when Antonio comes back and he visits all the kids from Cleveland schoolyards and other people in his family and everything, it's like this big-deal moment. He's still in New York, he's still doing the thing. He went to Julliard, and he was just a little kid in the Y.A.R.D., used to sit on my lap in rehearsal.

But I think that 9/11 kind of also gave me that... "I just started this/towers just crashed down." There was a context set in my mind that beauty has the power to counteract these cultural wars. And they were literal on-the-screen cultural wars. And I was like, "I think beauty is so underestimated. I think real beauty — not prettiness, because that's different — but I think real beauty and people working together and sharing weight, and the topics that we can develop out of that work, where we bring transportive beauty to people, is super powerful and it can counteract a lot of this negative crap. Again, internally, we talk about beauty as a weapon. "Yeah. That's good. Push it further. Can it go further, so that it's actually (vocal inhale) beautiful?" When you have that gasp when you see a moment in the studio. "Wow! Do that again!" You know what I mean? I'm like, if we all had that reaction just now because those two just had this moment, so will the audience. That is a "save as, use." And then variations and foreshadowing and all the comp stuff that you can do with it.

But I think it's so important that we have *some* of us involved in the act of co-creating with others things that are beautiful and life-giving. I have a real thing about... I want to make sure that I'm putting on my stage what *could* be, not what is. You can't negate what is, in order to get to the what-could-be part. But I see a lot of work in my industry where people are all about putting ... "my experiences and they're so negative." And I'm like, "Is that helping anybody but you? Are you re-traumatizing yourself? Are you sending triggers to other people that are traumatizing them? *Can* we

put on stage and be responsible enough to put on stage, things that show people what *could* be? Go back in the history of Motown, and that's what was going on. I grew up with Motown music. I got the message. So I think that we're sitting on a gold mine. Who's going to mine it?

CF: Inlet, maybe!

BW: Working on it! We're going to dig up the floor of that building. Yeah. It's providing some context and some resources. I'm getting better, as I'm getting older, at allocating those resources. And I have to get out, like Raymond Bobgan<sup>66</sup>, who runs CPT, Cleveland Public Theatre<sup>67</sup>, which is where we were earlier today. He's like, "You need to get out of the studio and talk to the business people." He's like, "You're actually doing the right thing the right way — they just need to know that. You'll have everything you need." And I'm like, "Do I have to wear shoes?" So I'm learning, I'm getting there.

CF: Shoes.

BW: I can't stand shoes.

CF: I'm painfully aware that we've only just scratched the surface and our time is ending, but is there something you would really like to say that you didn't get to say about your company for this record?

BW: There's no burning "I didn't say this." Although I didn't have any of those coming in either, so is that bad? No, I don't know. I think that as an artist, I have this weird thing. Artists are... Do you remember *Beowulf*?<sup>68</sup> Okay. There's this character in *Beowulf* who's the mearcstapa<sup>69</sup> that borders... I'm probably saying it wrong, but the border stalker character. And what's interesting is, there's a very famous painter, whose work sells for a lot of money and he deserves every penny of it. His name is Makoto Fujimura.<sup>70</sup> Speaking of 9/11, when the towers came down, he lived three blocks away and he had shows in *the* major galleries in Soho at that moment. He's written a couple

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<sup>66</sup> Nationally and internationally known playwright, director and actor, Bobgan has been Executive Artistic Director at Cleveland Public Theatre since 2006, after serving in various other positions there. In 2014, he received Cleveland Arts Prize for Mid-Career Artist Prize For Theater And Dance. In 2009, he was also named one of *American Theatre* magazine's 25 artists who will shape the future of American theatre.

<sup>67</sup> Cleveland Public Theatre (CPT) is a theater and arts complex founded in 1981 by James Levin, and located at 6415 Detroit Avenue on Cleveland's west side in the Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood. CPT's mission is to raise consciousness and nurture compassion through groundbreaking performances and life-changing education programs.

<sup>68</sup> One of the most important and most often translated works of Old English literature, *Beowulf* is an Old English epic poem consisting of 3,182 alliterative lines, probably composed sometime between 975 and 1025.

<sup>69</sup> The compound noun mearcstapa is used to describe two of the *Beowulf*'s three monstrous characters. Its translation is "boundary-walker" (literally, "mark stepper").

<sup>70</sup> Born in Boston of Japanese parents in 1960, Fujimura, currently based in Princeton, NJ, describes himself as a 21<sup>st</sup> century artist. Having lived and studied in both Japan and the US, Fujimura's work combines traditional Japanese painting (Nihonga) with abstract expressionism, informed by his deep Christian faith. He is also the author of several books, including *Culture Care* (2014), *Silence and Beauty* (2016), *Art and Faith* (2021). Fujimura promotes a practice that he describes as "slow art," which entails among other things the use of pigments created from the painstaking hand-pulverizing of minerals. His International Arts Movement offers a new paradigm by lovingly tending to cultural soil and caring for artists as pollinators of the good, true, and beautiful, which he insists is "beauty through brokenness."

of books and one of them is *Culture Care*.<sup>71</sup> I just finished re-reading it the other night for the second time, with a different colored highlighter pen. And now I'm like, "I just highlighted the entire book." And what's interesting is, he talks about our role as artists, and he gets top dollar. And he asks about our role as artists, "Is that because we're the people that are comfortable sort of skirting borders between people groups, and oftentimes becoming a bridge between those people groups because of our craft? And to see that as an intentional design choice when you're creating, so that young artists don't feel, "I'm an outlier and I don't fit in and poor me and all that victim stuff." It's like, no, no, no. You're actually intentionally wired for a very unique purpose that is desperately needed more and more lately. To be able to walk on the borders between people groups and be a bridge... It's ironic, because the piece that we were rehearsing at Cleveland Public Theatre is a section of *Building CLE*,<sup>72</sup> which is a big piece, called "Bridges," where we make this giant bridge out of our bodies and then the whole thing rotates and then it disappears and turns into these fat little characters that walk around and exit. It's stupid — but the metaphor is *huge*. That as artists, I think that we have the ability to *be* border stalkers, to care for culture by caring for people in that group of people and this group of people, and show them their commonalities. We spend a lot of time the first few weeks of every season with all the new dancers, let's find out all of our commonalities. Can we move in unison? Can we weight-share, no matter the scale? I mean, Dominic's not a small man — that's a big boy! And I've got my little tiny company members, those women can lift him because they figured out how to *leverage* their assets and his assets. So he goes up and the audience was like (big gasp), that chick just picked up that dude!

Yeah. And I think that, that's the thing that's so *fun*. —There's a choice there, right? I *choose* that it's fun to be a border stalker, to be an outlier, because I have a vantage point *because* of that under various, numerous people groups. And creating work where we can talk about the level of craft. We had a moment on Easter Island, I will *never* forget this. It was kind of scary. We had learned... When I went there, I found an artist to do a reciprocation with, his name is Akahanga Rapu Tuki — "Aka." Aka. Aka's family line, the Tukis, passed down the traditional dances on the highland. Aka has an older brother named Lin,<sup>73</sup> who takes himself very, very seriously.

Aka was cool, we got along really well. And Acha taught us five different dances, and one of those dances was the men's hoko. Like a haka<sup>74</sup> from the Maori and whatever, the Polynesian as well. So they have a hoko<sup>75</sup> and the boys and I in the company learned the hoko. And then when the company went to Easter Island, we were having a moment with the dance company on the Island, Ballet Cultural Kari Kari<sup>76</sup> And I'm freaking out. I'm like, oh my gosh, this is like... We're sharing American modern dance and they're sharing their cultural Rapa Nui dances with us. And all of a

<sup>71</sup> *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for our Common Life* (2014).

<sup>72</sup> an evening-length, multimedia performance piece derived from the stories of residents of Judson Manor and Judson Park, and how they played their part in building Cleveland, funded by Ohio Arts Council's (OAC) Creative Aging Initiative.

<sup>73</sup> Lynn Rapu Tuki, head-teacher and founder of the Ma'aranui Cultural Academy and the Cultural Ballet Kari Kari, is an active promoter of the arts and traditions of the Rapa Nui People. He is Cultural Ambassador of Asia-Pacific and has been Head of the Liaison Office of the National Council of Culture and the Arts.

<sup>74</sup> The Haka dance of the Maori is usually performed in a group, and typically represents a display of a tribe's pride, strength and unity.

<sup>75</sup> The hoko is the tribal war dance of Easter Island, a dance of welcome and a sign of hospitality.

<sup>76</sup> Founded by Lynn Rapu Tuki, the Cultural Ballet Kari Kari is the most experienced cultural group of Easter Island, with over 18 years of existence, whose objective is to rescue and value the traditional dances and songs of their Polynesian ancestors.



sudden, Lynn, he had this big thing, like boom! And he said, "I understand." And his English was... whatever. "You boys have been taught a hoko." And we're like, "Oh God!" We're like, "yeah." He's like, "Show me your hoko."

And I'm like, actually, it's *yours*. And I had Josh and Justin, the two white boys from Ohio, and they're in board shorts. And they looked at me, kind of panicking. We just did a little huddle. I was like, "I love you guys. Let's just man up. Let's do this. Let's try to show some honor and respect to these people. Let's do this." And they threw down the hoko and all of the women sitting there, stood up and started screaming and doing this gesture, then they started teaching the boys in the company. And Lynn was standing there; he has this really serious face. And he goes, "That was pretty good." And I was like, wow, this could have been a really scary moment, had that not gone well, but I was like, all right. So this art-sharing thing is actually called *diplomacy*. These American boys showed mass respect to the Rapa Nui culture, their history, their legacy, all of that stuff, by being the white guys from Ohio throwing down a hoko in front of men whose families have been doing that for 400 years or whatever. And I thought "Let's teach everyone in DC a hoko." "Everybody, put your blue over there (he gestures in one direction) and your red over there (he points the other way). Everybody wear purple and we're going to lean on each other."

CF: We're going to work on being together.

BW: Yes, because the two together create purple. And let's just be there.

CF: Well, thank you. It's been great to talk with you.

BW: Yeah. Yeah. It's fun to talk.

CF: It's been fantastic.

BW: It's also weird thinking yeah, we've done... there's a lot going on.

CF: There's a lot of history there, and a lot of future...

BW: There is, and I think that's kind of weirding me out. It's just, you just keep going and keep... "What's next?" And "what's now?" And we were talking about this, this morning and I said... I had a major "Aha!" this summer because... National Arts Strategies<sup>77</sup>, N.A.S., out of Washington, DC, has a program called the Executive Program for Arts and Culture Strategy.<sup>78</sup> I got in, and I brought Dominic with me and I was like, "They didn't have this stuff when I was your age and now that it's here, you're learning it too. I'm not doing this by myself." Always bring someone with you — I have a thing about that. Always bring someone with you. I go to an international conference, I brought him with me, or some of the other dancers with me. It costs *money*. They are worth that money.

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<sup>77</sup> Begun in 1983 (originally as National Stabilization, and later National Arts Strategies), NAS strengthens the arts and culture sector by creating meaningful and useful educational experiences for leaders at all levels of the ecosystem – from boards and CEOs to entrepreneurs and artists – giving them the tools, connections and support to transform their leadership, their organizations and their communities.

<sup>78</sup> The Executive Program in Arts & Culture Strategy is a partnership between NAS and the University of Pennsylvania that provides a certificate in cultural leadership through an actionable and skills-based curriculum.

And there's people like, I can't afford to... This word "can't," actually is not *allowed* in that studio. If I hear somebody say the word "can't," I stop them in their tracks and I make them restate that statement with the word "must." *Don't tell me you can't.* Where's your growth mindset? Like really? But it's interesting, because I had this aha moment about... why is some of this executive functioning so difficult for me? Because it's so *forward* thinking. You're setting up frameworks and planning — and there *is* a lot of planning in what we do, but it's a very different mindset and resource allocation and relationship cultivation and all of these things, fundraising and finance and all good stuff. All learned behavior. And I've spent most of my lifespan honing the skill of being in the *now*. And once I realized that about myself, I'm like this is why this is so hard. I'm not there yet, I'm thinking about right now, because that's how I was trained. And once I figured that out, all the coursework became so much easier.

CF: Amazing.

BW: Well, because I'm a creative person, so I can *pretend* that I'm in the future. And what do I need to get this piece done? And that's where the budget comes in. I mean, it's not rocket science. It's just like, it's funny how your assets have a shadow side, if undiscovered, right?

CF: Yeah, great. Just pretending.

BW: Yeah. Well, and it's like, executive functioning is the same as being a choreographer, it's just, they're not bodies in space, it's numbers on a spreadsheet or it's a pile of emails and everybody needs something... It's really actually the same, and once I made that connection — this is the same stuff — I think I can do this.  
So we'll see. I have to, we have a building sitting there — it needs a lot of money (laughter)!

CF: It does.

BW: It does, and it's worth it.

CF: I have a feeling it's all going to come together.

BW: And I've seen the plans, the architect's.<sup>79</sup> Oh God, it's so gorgeous.

CF: So exciting.

BW: This wall is glass and I'm like, *whaaaaat?* This is big boy stuff, man. Glass walls. I don't know. It's just weird.

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<sup>79</sup> The company will be one of many arts and social-services tenants occupying 7,500 feet of the 80,000-square-foot complex of the new Pivot Center for Arts, Dance, and Expression. Formerly the Astrup Awning Building, Cleveland developer Rick Foran designer Joe Smith of the New York architecture firm Smith & Sauer. Joe Smith received his Bachelor's of Architecture from the University of Notre Dame, and a Masters from Yale, working for other firms in Chicago and New York City before co-founding his own firm with his Yale classmate, Dylan Sauer. A renovation of the former Astrup Awning Factory, The Pivot Center for Arts, Dance and Expression is on West 25th Street in Cleveland's Clark-Fulton neighborhood. Foran named his project The Pivot Center because he wanted to show that the neighborhood surrounding the building was and could turn around.

CF: That's great.

BW: And I think the neighborhood needs it. It's on the street, *literally* on the street where Ariel Castro held those three girls captive for ten years.<sup>80</sup>

CF: Really?

BW: It's a rough neighborhood. I'm all about it. I'm like, the more, the better. Let's do this. Let's create beauty in this... And that house is not there, but my new office window looks right out to that plot of land, and that's a *great* reminder. Kind of like 9/11, right? I'm going to create beauty. I'm going to watch the kids in this neighborhood create joy and create life, rather than have it taken from them. This is stupid. This is just wrong, and I'm going to do something about it. We have Robin Vanlear<sup>81</sup> and Cleveland Museum of Art<sup>82</sup> is in the other part of the downstairs. Restaurant/bar is going on the first floor and a bunch of friends of mine that are artists that are going to go... So it's literally the thing that we sat down and drew up — the thing is happening.

CF: It is.

BW: So weird.

CF: I guess just wait for twenty years — but you weren't really waiting. You were busy making it happen.

BW: Yeah. I was busy, I was looking, I've been in... I went into the old Hough Bakery. Oh my God, it was so disgusting. I was like, "My allergies are gonna — I'm going to die in this building. This is not going to work." Yeah, there are several different buildings that I went in and out of, and people were like, "You should find an old school." There's a lot of "you should, you should, you should." I was like, "I know that what's going to happen is, that I'm going to walk in some random building and I'm going to be like, *this is it.*" That's what happened with this building. And then it turns out, the guy that owns the building, the building developer said, "I've been trying to find you."

CF: Really?

BW: Yeah, because he said, "I got Robin Vanlear in here, and my next favorite thing in this city is Inlet, and you called me." And this is like... I was so excited. I felt like a little kid. And he's this elderly gentleman, he's just such a nice guy. And I was like, "I would love *this* part of the building." He's like, "It's yours." And I'm like, "Nah. Come on!" He was like, "No, I'm serious. Let's do this. I have the architects." I've met the architects and they're the coolest guys from Brooklyn. One of them is originally from Cleveland, and they've done a lot of work. They helped Mark Morris<sup>83</sup> with

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<sup>80</sup> The house, at 2207 Seymour, was razed to the ground after it made national news as the site where Castro held three kidnapped girls from the neighborhood captive for ten years, 2002-2013.

<sup>81</sup> Vanlear has been the Director of Community Arts at The Cleveland Museum of Art since 1989.

<sup>82</sup> One of northeastern Ohio's principal civic and cultural institutions, The Cleveland Museum of Art was founded in 1913. CMA plans to use its space in the Pivot Center for community-based programs, and for storing and displaying floats and costumes used for its annual Parade the Circle event.

<sup>83</sup> Contemporary American dancer, choreographer and director, Mark Morris, is based in The Mark Morris Dace Center, the permanent home of his company, the Mark Morris Dance Group. Located in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn at 3 Lafayette Avenue at the corner of Flatbush Avenue, the Center, like

his space, so they know their stuff. And they were like, "Well, Mark got this kind of flooring, maybe you should consider that." And I'm like, "If Mark says it's okay, then I think I'll be good. He's not, you know, he's not the most *amenable* person.

CF: No. He's many things, but not that.

BW: Yes. Yes. He's *really* funny after a glass of wine or two...

CF: I've seen that!

BW: ...in a snarky kind of way. He's really funny, though.

CF: Yeah, he is. And brilliant.

BW: He's a *brilliant* man.

CF: Well, I hope I get to come up and see something happen. I want to see this company next year and this building.

BW: Yeah, isn't it weird?

CF: It's great.

BW: It's so crazy.

CF: It's very exciting. Congratulations on all of it!

BW: Thanks. Yeah, it's a lot to manage. I feel so bad for Libby.<sup>84</sup> I'm like, oh, this stuff is... So, we had this analogy that Dominic and I are just zooming around, creating this wake that Libby then has to manage. I sat down with her, and I said "I'm so sorry." She said, "You guys are *very* active." And I was like, "I'm *sorry!*" We're both kind of achievement-driven, and it's fun. Making a mess is fun!

CF: For sure.

BW: And beauty comes out of it and lives are transformed and when you see all that stuff happening, it's like, how can you *not* do that? It's not boring! It's keeping me out of trouble, which is good.

CF: Yes, I think that's probably good.

BW: Yeah, it is. I have a deviant nature — got me in a lot of trouble when I was younger.

CF: I see!

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the Pivot Center, began with a derelict building redesigned by the firm, Beyer Blinder Belle Architects and Planners.

<sup>84</sup> Libby Koba, the Managing Director for Inlet Dance Company, is featured in a separate interview for the Inlet feature of the VDC.

BW: Well, thank you for doing this.

CF: It's been wonderful.

BW: This was such an honor.