

ABDP PODCAST #2 Nadia Adame Transcript

[Opening bright melodic piano]

[RIANNE ŠVELNIS] Welcome to the All Bodies Dance Project podcast - a series of discussions about dance, performance, access, the body, and things between and beyond.

Each episode is co-hosted by me, Rianne, and another member of the All Bodies Dance ensemble. Each new co-host will invite an artist of their choice to be our featured guest - someone who we admire, want to learn from, someone we want to be in community with.

Today's co-host is All Bodies Dance Project company co-founder Naomi Brand. And our special guest is performance artist Nadia Adame. Our conversation touches on the multiplicity of Nadia's practice as a dance artist, actor, writer, film maker and mother, her international perspective on integrated dance and company models, and her reflections on virtuosity, story telling, and collaboration

Before we listen to that conversation, let's hear from Audrey Siegl.

[Audrey Siegl speaks *hərdəminəm*] I invite each of you: close your eyes, take a slow steady breath in, and let it out. Think about, say out loud if you know their name, the Indigenous

people whose lands you're on, the ones whose ancestors are in the earth, the ones whose language is still whispered in the trees and that comes up out of the earth itself. For those of you in the Vancouver area, I say [*speaks həɪŋdəmɪnəmə*]. In the language of my ancestors, the downriver *həɪŋdəmɪnəmə* dialect, I say welcome to the lands of the *həɪŋdəmɪnəmə* speaking people. My name is [*speaks həɪŋdəmɪnəmə*] ~~sɪ~~*st'əmtənɑ:t*, *St'agid Jaad* [*speaks həɪŋdəmɪnəmə*], also Audrey Siegl. I am from Musqueam and am the granddaughter of the late Steven and Celina August.

I want to raise my hands to you all for creating a safe inclusive space, for creating a space where everyone can come and move and dance and be, for us to celebrate not just the differences between us, but the strengths we bring together when we gather, that, where we all meet, where we're all sacred, where we are all safe and where we are all included. This is a beautiful place to be, and I implore you: enjoy your movement, enjoy your connection, and again I raise my hands and I say *hay ce:p qá'* [*speaks həɪŋdəmɪnəmə*].

[bright melodic piano/chimes]

[RIANNE] OK. So, let's get started. My name is Rianne, I'm one of the co-hosts, and I'm here with Naomi and Nadia. And I'm just gonna, right off the bat, have both of you introduce yourselves, and you can tell us where you are, and anything

that you might see/ smell/ feel/ hear around you. And Naomi, why don't we start with you?

[NAOMI BRAND] Hi, I am Naomi, and I am speaking to you from inside a cupboard in the All Bodies Dance Project office space. And, um, that office space is located on the unceded, ancestral and traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. And in this office I am surrounded by white walls, and it is a square room, and I can smell the ventilation system; and I can see the remnants of my lunch on the table; and I can feel outside of this building, the tradition and the history of Chinatown where I'm located.

[RIANNE] Thank you. Nadia?

[NADIA] I am in my living room, surrounded by two sofas, a big bookcase with tons of books, some pictures of the places I have traveled to. My hair is light brown, my eyes are blue-green, I have light skin, and I'm wearing a burgundy sweater. I'm smelling the nice cup of earl gray tea that I just finished. And I'm in Vancouver on the traditional, ancestral and unceded land of the Musqueam people. And I very much appreciate it.

[RIANNE] Thank you. And I'm Rianne, and I'm one of the members of the All Bodies Dance Project. And I'm in my kitchen, and I can see outside of my window a billow of steam coming from the neighbour's house. And I'm feeling the

remnants of my two year old niece running around and dancing and yelling in my kitchen, which brings me a lot of joy, and so she's still here with me [laughs]. And yeah, I'm in the Commercial-Broadway area, also on stolen and occupied, unceded Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territory in East Vancouver. I'm going to hand it over to you, Naomi.

[NAOMI] OK, well, y'know, in the spirit of getting to know you, Nadia, I wanted to start by just asking you like, how... what is the label that you call yourself? I mean, I know you have lots of different roles and skills, and lots of different artistic practices. And so I'm just curious, y'know, especially in these days when identification and representation are things that we're talking about a lot- about how you describe yourself, and what you do, and the kind of... yeah... identities that you carry?

[NADIA] I carry quite a few. I think I've been kind of accumulating a few through the years, probably like everybody else, or most people anyway. I identify myself as a dancer, as an actress - so a performer in general. I am a choreographer. I am an advocate for arts and disabilities and people with different abilities. I am a teacher, I am a writer, I am a video editor and video maker. I... yes, I am a woman [laughs], and hopefully I am a good human being. But that's a label I think somebody else has to give me, I think I can not just take it and appropriate that one. I think you make that one happen through the years, and hopefully somebody will give me that label one day.

[RIANNE] Nice.

[NAOMI] Totally, yeah. And have all these different kinds of artistic practices, like, developed at the same time, or is there sort of a trajectory of where your artistic work began and how...

[NADIA] Yeah. No, I come from... so I started dancing when I was 6 years old in Spain, at the Royal Conservatory of Dance, at the National. And I started through ballet and Flamenco, which are two very opposite styles and techniques. And then, through the years I had a spinal cord injury due to a car accident. And then I started thinking -at that time there was nobody who would dance with a wheelchair, or with a cane, or you know, it was the traditional -I'm saying quote unquote "traditional" way of dancing. So I never saw anybody like me. And so I thought OK I cannot perform anymore, this is it, that's it. But then I started finding, well, but I can choreograph, so then I started choreographing at age 18. I put an entire professional show on the stage in a few cultural centres around Spain, for... yeah, at age 18. And I thought OK *now* I'm a choreographer, right? You do an entire show and you put the label on your passport. And then I started discovering acting, and I love... because I love performing, and it gives me something that nothing else does. It's like I go to another dimension, kind of. And it might sound cheesy, but it's true, it's like, I become this other human being that almost sometimes I

don't even have control over. That human being knows what to do on the stage or in front of the camera.

So then after that, I started discovering acting, and I did some plays, and I did some short films. And then I started writing, and then I thought "Oh! I can do some writing!" So I wrote some plays and some shorts [laughs]. And then I went back to dancing.

So those are things that have been accumulating through the years. In different stages of my life where I've been trying to discover new ways of telling stories, which is, I think, what I love doing.

[melodic chimes and pulses]

[NAOMI] And how did you become, y'know, like, involved in integrated dance or I don't know if you call it mixed-ability dance or inclusive dance...

[NADIA] Yeah there are many labels on that one right now...

[all laugh]

[NADIA] In fact, I had a conversation today about integrated dance or inclusive dance or what is the... so... yeah. I'm still trying to figure out what I will call it. But basically... I left Spain when I was 19, I'm originally from Spain, and I went to university

in the United States. And after I finished university, I tried to find a job. I thought I can maybe dance, just as a try [laughs], and so I sent my CV. I remember sending my CV and my picture to about 20 companies in the US, and nobody responded [laughs], except one. And that was Judy Smith at Axis Dance Company in Oakland California. And so she said “you know what? I would love to chat with you. I would love to... why don’t you come over? Why don’t you come and do a little class with our company? Why don’t you...”, and I said “OK! Sure.” So I went, and then my world changed right there, because I saw dancers in wheelchairs, on manual wheelchairs, dancers on power chairs, dancers who were not “traditional”, again, I’d never seen anything like that before. And I thought “Ok. I can do this. If they can do it? I’m on it. I can do it.”

And that’s how I started, by being rejected by 19 other companies [laughs] and being accepted and included...

[NAOMI]... that’s like the artists’ story right? All the no’s lead to the right yes, right?

[NADIA] Yes! So I stayed with Axis for almost 3 years, and it was an amazing time for me. It was a time of learning and developing as an artist, as a performer, of being in a place where I felt I belonged, and I was not the weird one in a way. And when I traveled with Axis I could say I am a dancer without feeling... I mean, people still look at you weird because they would say “Oh! So you have a little injury! So when are you

recovering?” And I’m like no no, this is permanent. But still, it was a place where I learned a lot. And Judy has been always a great mentor to me in many ways.

So yeah, and then from there I had some family things that I needed to take care of in Spain. So I went back to Spain with my partner, and we started our own company for 10 years. So we did a lot of integrated dance, integrated theatre; we worked with immigrants, we worked with people with disabilities and different abilities, we did touring, we did some films. And then I found myself... Candoco dance company in the UK had an audition, and I thought “Why not? I’m just gonna try and see”. And I got in! And then I stayed with them for only one year, and again, it was another great experience, almost a continuation in a way of that path.

Yeah, and then here I am! I don’t know, I think... I have my hand in a lot of places right now, in the sense of, I can... I can be... y’know AXIS calls me... Marc Brew is the artistic director there... he called me “Hey Nadia, can you teach a class?” “Yes, sure! I’ll teach a class”. Or, you know, I get a call from Sweden, I got a call from Sweden say last sum... well it was last year... it didn’t happen, hopefully it’ll happen this year... but “Hey Nadia, can you come and do a two-week dance intensive with people of different abilities?” “Yeah sure.” So yeah, it’s nice.

[NAOMI] Geography is like, y’know, I mean, pre-pandemic geography was one thing about how we talk about, y’know,

like, in many ways we live in a very big world, but y'know our communities are so connected. And now, in pandemic world, like, geography doesn't really even make a difference anymore. This morning you were taking class in California... or... internet in California [laughter], so yeah.

I'm curious about... because you've lived and worked in so many different places, and have connections in sort of we'll just call it integrated dance for now... in integrated dance communities in many different places. Like, if you have any... I don't know... insights/ observations into the ways that people are practicing, or the way that integrated dance is sort of situated in different cultures, between Spain and the UK and the US, and then now of course being here?

[NADIA] I think it's very curious to me how, like you say, the world is very small. However, how things are perceived and developed are very different and have different paths everywhere. I remember in Spain, not too long ago actually, about two months ago, I got a call from a professor at the university, and he used to be the artistic director of a theatre company, performing arts company called El Tinglao, which is integrated also. And he said "Nadia, I'm writing an article about the pioneers of Spain in the integrated performing arts." And I'm like OK. He said I want to interview you. I'm like, wait a second... wait? And he says "Yes, you are a pioneer, together with another three women", and I'm like "no, come on, somebody had to do before me". And he says "...not really".

So to me, that surprised me, that was not that long ago. So it was... I mean... I feel honoured that he wanted to talk to me, but when things in the US... for instance Judy, you know, had the company already for 30 years, or Candoco in the UK also for 30 years... there are companies in Spain that still think that what they are doing -even though they're professional integrated companies- they are being... they are seen as a social and therapeutic... I won't say profession, but a hobby.

You know, when I started my company in Spain, we went to the Ministry of Culture to see what grants we could apply for, to start having a conversation, to start having this relationship, and they kept on saying "You don't belong in the cultural part", and I'm like "But wait a second, I'm doing art", and they say "No, you belong to the Social Services Ministry". And I keep on fighting with them and saying "No, I don't! I mean, I am not trained to be a therapist!" So I don't pretend to be a therapist! And I don't think it's good for the world if I am seen as a therapist, because I really don't have the training, I don't know it. Um, so it's always this fight that you find in different countries. So Spain is I think a bit behind on that kind of stuff, and even companies that have been going on for a while now, like Danza Mobile in Seville, I think they still have struggles with that label. And I think in the US and the UK, because AXIS and Candoco have elevated their artistry... so much... not that other companies in Spain haven't... but I think they haven't had the support to do that. I think in the UK and the US... through a lot

of work... I'm not taking that away from them either... they have been able to get that support at that level. Canada I'm still trying to figure out.

[laughter]

[NAOMI] So are we, so are we.

[NADIA] You are, OK OK great! Then we're on the same boat. To my knowledge, I don't think there is a professional company that has been as long as for 30 years or something. I think it's a fairly new thing within the last 10 years maybe? I saw some things in Ontario, and All Bodies is here... um...

[NAOMI] Yeah there definitely is nothing sort of comparable to, like, the history that AXIS has, and the sort of infrastructure of a company, y'know, with that kind of history that Candoco has. And I mean, obviously there have been people doing work in Canada for many years, but like yeah those same kind of structures aren't in place in the same way. And y'know, those kinds of things have to do with, y'know, all the things around funding and stuff like that. But, um, yeah, I think that's why I'm so curious about your experience working with AXIS and working with Candoco, because in many ways they are very - or my perception of them as an outsider - is that they are very traditional dance company structures, in that, y'know, you were hired as a company dancer.

And of course in Canada, like, there aren't very many dance companies anymore, like that sort of model of funding dance, y'know, everything's project based, right? With the exception of y'know, like, a few ballet companies and that sort of thing. So, yeah, sort of what it means to be a dancer - where at one point, y'know, again, from the tradition of the ballet company, where you go to work every day in the studio - like, that kind of way of practicing doesn't sort of exist in the same way now.

Yeah, and I guess I'm just curious about your experience working for these dance companies that have this kind of, like, really strong aesthetic and kind of... I mean, I'm trying to avoid saying these things, but I'll just say it... that are virtuosic. Y'know, like the dancing is like, they're super trained, super technical, integrated dance, right? I mean, like, they're working with physically integrated, so not necessarily, my understanding, folks with cognitive disabilities or things like that. Is that correct?

[NADIA] Yeah yeah yeah. I think... I mean on one side, as a dancer, it's fantastic in the sense of when I was there as a dancer I didn't have to worry about anything admin, y'know?

[laughter]

Which was great! You just went, you dance, you do your thing, you talk, you do your thing, somebody else took care of the travel arrangements, somebody else took care of whatever

there needed to be. And so you were focusing on your artistry, and I think that's what was so valuable to me because, y'know, when I had my own company, when we had our own company in Spain, we were everything. My partner and I, Mark, y'know, we were, there were days when we were working 15 hours because we had to write grants that we never got because we were part of the social services and not... and then the social services said no we don't want you because you're not therapeutic. I'm like, I know we're not. So we had to fight with the system, we had to hire people, we had to talk to festivals... And then I would perform also in the pieces, or choreograph, y'know? So being in companies with a structure like AXIS and like Candoco, was great as an artist, 'cause you could focus on that. And I think that's what elevated the work.

[RIANNE] Mhm Mhm.

[NAOMI] Totally.

[NADIA] Um, y'know, yeah, it's like in any job, you cannot be... I don't know... five thousand things at the same time [laughs]. You could, but you don't have the time or the energy to put 100% on every single thing, right? Um, so that was good. The one thing I... to me, the technique of companies -and this is for any company- is that I am not much for tricks... yeah... I am not much for that. I like to create and I like to do my movement with a purpose. I think both coming from the ballet world and the flamenco world as a child and young person, it gave me

both things: it gave me yes, strict, and the line, and you know the balletic kind of structures in the body and how you have to be; but also, coming from flamenco, it was very grounded, and very internal and very sentimental, and y'know, I would dance at family parties, y'know, while my grandfather would sing flamenco and my uncle would play guitar. And y'know, it's... they're completely different techniques, and I think having that exposure gave me that wish for purpose within the movement.

[melodic chimes and pulses]

[NAOMI] And so, when you create work, like... where do you start? What is your... do you come with narrative? Or do you come with story? Or, what is sort of your...

[NADIA] Yeah, because I have to do a lot of theatrical stuff, I generally come from a story. I either read a story in the paper... I did a piece about... in Spain... about people who come from Africa in small boats to Spain, and they risk their lives and they spend hours and days alone in the sea, and how badly they are treated when they arrive. And then, how different it is when you have money and you come also as an illegal immigrant but you have the money and so you're treated completely different.

And I read that story... you know, it happens a lot, but I read a specific story about that, and I thought this is a story that needs to be told, not only on the newspaper, but also on the

stage. So that's how I started it. Just by reading a story in the paper, and then I developed everything else.

Or, the last piece I did for AXIS was... I wanted to explore the idea of baggage. Somebody had... y'know, we all carry our baggage through our life. And those baggages for the dancer were full of letters. So there were letters that they wrote to themselves, they wrote to their loved ones, they wrote to the people they hated, they wrote... so based on those letters, we created the movement.

Um, so, I think for me, I start from a story that I either create or I read, or I find, or... yeah. And I used to do it at the beginning, when I did my first big show in Spain [laughs], when I was 18, I started with music, I didn't start with stories. It was music, and then that music brought me to a story.

[NAOMI] And how do you know? Because you have so many different practices, I mean... it could be... I mean, it could be a script, it could be a play, it could be a film, it could be a dance. How do you know, like in the example of this news story that you heard about, how do you know that that should be a piece of dance, versus a play, versus a film?

[NADIA] I think because I always come... my base is always movement. Um, and because of that... and because I have more access to dancers in a way, because of my story, right? Um, so, so generally it does become a dance piece. However, I

am trying to finish right now a script about a story, and that would be a film hopefully one day in the world maybe. You know, I had a chat with some friends, and I'm like "Oh man, this will be a great film!", and they're like "Yes!", so I started writing and writing and, y'know, I'm still writing it. But uh... so that one I see it as more of a film than... yeah.

[NAOMI] And when you're working, like, in... how do you turn a story into something... like, how is movement generated? How do you know where it lives in the body?

[NADIA] I think it's different for every piece I've done. There are pieces that uh... especially at the beginning of my career... I choreographed more exactly the steps I wanted to see.

[NAOMI] Mhm.

[NADIA] I gave the dancers, the performers, the movement. And then they would have to adapt it to their own bodies. And in the last few years, I've been learning myself and I've also been trusting the people I'm working with to generate the movement together. So if I write a text about that piece, you know, I give them maybe 5 movements based on that text, and then I say "OK, could you modify it?" Not only to adapt it to your own body, but also to maybe make it upside down, or maybe repeat it three times, or, you know, how would you manipulate it? And then as a choreographer from the outside, I would look at it and say you know what, that doesn't work for

me, or yes that works for me, or let's go more this way or that way.

But I work more with what I have in the room, because also not everybody's open to give you movement. And I remember that as a dancer too. It's like "I'm tired of creating movement! I don't want to do it! Just tell me! Just tell me what I need to do and I'll do it!", right? Um, so you have to read the room, and you have to decide- do they need it? Or do they not need it? Or do they want it or they don't want it? Um, I think it's more now it's more collaborative for me.

[melodic chimes and pulses]

[NAOMI] I'm curious, like, where you feel like... y'know, we don't have to dwell on the pandemic, but where you feel like dance is going? Like if you had to kind of think about... y'know, you spoke about Spain being a bit behind, and having these relationships with these companies that have these huge long histories, and the integrated dance world in Canada being, y'know, where it's at, do you have a sense of, like if you had to sort of think about the next 20 years, where integrated dance will be?

[NADIA] Hmm. I can barely think about what is going to happen next week [laughs] so 20 years is quite a big stretch. But I think every change like this in history, it always has created new opportunities, and I think this pandemic is gonna

bring a lot of that. It's gonna bring... y'know, this online teaching and this online watching performances... it did not happen before. And I think it has been very beneficial for a lot of people.

You know, I was talking to Janice from All Bodies works, and she say "I love it! Because I am taking so many classes with so many people. In other scenarios, I would not be able to do it." And so I think it has benefited a lot of people. I also think it has isolated a lot of people, because you are in a 2D version computer, when you turn that off, there is the echo of silence, and it's isolating.

So I hope that we can learn from this, and we can, um, have both options for the future. I think changing how we... how we believe the performing arts should be, it would be a good thing. Because I can not travel to Germany and see a company in Germany, or to China, or to South Africa, or to, y'know, Argentina. I wish I could [laughing], but I can't. So it would be nice to see those companies and to create a connection between all of us that is not restricted by money, by finances, or by accessibility.

[RIANNE] Mhm.

[NADIA] So I really hope the two can live side by side and hold hands, and create this world more accessible, I think. Hopefully it will become more accessible.

[NAOMI] And beyond the script that you're writing right now, what is sort of like, exciting to you creatively? Or have you been making stuff, doing stuff during pandemic life? Or are you just surviving like the rest of us?

[NADIA] I am tired of the pandemic [laughing]. I'm exhausted. I have been writing this thing, um, I also have a regular job that I need to do to pay bills and to put food on the table. And I have taught a couple classes for AXIS Dance Company online. Last summer I was a mentor in their choreo lab. So that was exciting. Um, and, yeah, I did a little video dance with my kid, one of my kids, in the woods with nobody around, with a friend who is a trumpet jazz player. So we played music in the woods. So we just put a camera there... and something happened.

[melodic chimes and pulses]

[RIANNE] I want to lead us to our final question for you, Nadia, which is a chance for you to ask a question to the listeners. Something for the listeners to reflect on.

[NADIA] I've been thinking about this. I'm trying to be very clever, but I'm not clever.

[All laugh]

[RIANNE] No need, no need.

[NADIA] OK good, good. No pressure, right? So one of the things I always have, I haven't struggled myself, but I think a lot of people struggle within the performing arts, and within the integrated dance world, is that: what is dance to you? 'Cause people see... yeah, like Naomi was saying, you know, companies, and that's what professional dance is. Um, so I think I would leave the audience with the question of: what is dance to you?

[Stretched out layered musical chimes]

[RIANNE] Thank you for listening to the All Bodies Dance Project podcast. A special thank you to our behind-the-scenes collaborators. Our soundscapes were created by MJ Coomber, podcast graphic by Kirsten Hatfield. Editing by Tuesday Ferguson. Episode transcription by romham pàdraig gallacher from the Radical Access Mapping Project.

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The transcription of the episode is available on our website along with info on upcoming guests and our other projects. Links to artists and organizations mentioned in the episode are in the show notes.

And finally, we would love to hear from you. If you have feedback questions, or ideas, please email us:

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Until next time.