

## ABDP PODCAST #3 Alice Sheppard Transcript

[Opening music: bright melodic piano]

**[RIANNE ŠVELNIS]** Welcome back to the All Bodies Dance Project podcast - a series of discussions about dance, access, performance, the body, and everything 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 we admire, are curious about, want to learn from, want to be in community with.

Today's co-host is All Bodies Dance Project company member Harmanie Rose. And our guest is dance artist Alice Sheppard. Harmanie, Alice and I have a beautiful conversation about Alice's research on flying on stage: the intricacies of care, boundaries and virtuosity, and confronting spectacle, inclusion and representation.

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

**[Audrey Siegl speaks *hən̓dəm̓iɬəm̓*]** 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 hən̓dəm̓iɬəm̓*]. In the language of my ancestors, the downriver *hən̓dəm̓iɬəm̓* dialect, I say welcome to the lands of the *hən̓dəm̓iɬəm̓* speaking people. My name is [*speaks hən̓dəm̓iɬəm̓*] *sx̣em̓təna:t, St'agid Jaad* [*speaks hən̓dəm̓iɬəm̓*], 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 hətɔdəmɪtəm*].

[curious, bright melodic piano/chimes]

**[RIANNE]** So thank you so much, Alice and Harmanie, for being here. I'm so excited. And I'd like to have you both introduce yourselves. And we'll go to Harmanie first. And Harmanie, if you could introduce yourself and let us know where you are, and anything you want to describe about yourself or where you are.

**[HARMANIE]** Thank you, Rianne. I want to thank you for having me on to co-host, and for allowing me to invite Alice Sheppard. It's really a treat and a pleasure.

I'm coming to you from unceded, ancestral, stolen and occupied lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. I'm also coming to you from my kitchen, which has these beautiful light blue walls with white accent cabinet. Sometimes my cat will wander in and out. And I am a blond, manual wheelchair user with bangs, usually a smile... hopefully. Yeah, I think that's a good description of me. Alice?

**[ALICE]** Hi! Um, first, thank you. Thank you, Harmanie, for the invitation, and Rianne for the conversation. This is gonna be some fun. Um, I'm Alice. I am... I often describe myself in a number of complicated ways. So, I think the place I have landed at the moment is mindful of the politics of colourism, and in a resistance to that, and in creation of community, I would like to describe myself as a coffee-to-honey coloured skinned Black woman. I am a multi-racial Black

woman. I am disabled. I am a manual wheelchair user. I have what I have been calling gray, black, brown and the tips of dyed blond covid hair. And I'm wearing a light green, almost neon lime green sweatshirt. I am sitting -you might call it more hiding out- in a dressing room in a theatre in the middle of an active rehearsal. So if you hear noises that are unanticipated, that is rehearsal happening around me. And honestly, this is... this is a pleasure. I'm really looking forward to the conversation and to see where we end up. Thank you for having me.

**[RIANNE]** Thank you so much, Alice and Harmanie. My name is Rianne, and I'm also in so-called Vancouver, on unceded and stolen Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territory. I have long brown hair, light skin, I'm wearing a navy blue t-shirt. I'm in my living room, on a beautiful beautiful day in Vancouver. And um... yeah... I'm so excited! [laughs] I want to invite Harmanie to let us know how you know Alice, and what made you invite Alice to the podcast?

**[HARMANIE]** Yeah, so I've been thinking about this question for a while. How I know Alice. And like, one is, I think being a disabled dance artist, Alice has been doing work before I started doing work, and it's always been really exciting. So I knew that I wanted to work with her. And a few years ago, I got a call that said "hey, do you want to be part of a grant to do a dance film that Alice would be choreographing in Edmonton, with just 4 manual wheelchair users, down a really long ramp?" I didn't even hesitate when I said "Yes! Yes and definitely yes!"

Thankfully we got the grant, and I flew up to Alberta, and Alice flew up to Canada, and I met John Loeppke and Danielle Peers was part of the project, and Lindsay Eales was our production doula. So... and having worked with Danielle and Lindsay before, it was kind of like coming home, but also getting to meet new people and dancing. And yeah, I was just inspired by the way Alice worked. I was inspired by her work ethic. I think that really struck me the most, as how much she cared about the people that she was working with, and she cared about their wellbeing first and foremost... in such a project that has such a

high risk... as you're... how do we wheel down this ramp as fast as we could possibly go? Um... yeah. It was a great project, it was a lot of fun.

And then a few years after that, I had an opportunity to go to UCLA as part of their inaugural Dancing Disability Lab that Alice helped... you helped create that, yes?

**[ALICE]** Um... no, actually. That was Vic. I just happened to be invited by Vic to be part of a... part of the conversation. But yeah, that was Vic's work. Yeah, it's amazing.

**[HARMANIE]** It was an amazing 11 days of talking with a whole bunch of disability dance artists, and having Alice's unique perspective, and showing us a bunch of different films from disability dance artists around the world, was incredibly inspiring for me because it just showed the diverse nature of the work that we do, and how can we even quantify it.

So yeah, the way Alice celebrates other artists has always inspired me, and the way she holds up other artists in their own way of being has always made me really excited, and is the kind of work that I want to do. I know that we're completely different artists, but I think we both centre care of the folks we work with. And that's why I wanted to bring her along, so we could have a conversation on what is dance to us, and how are we gonna keep creating spaces for other dance artists to come after us?

**[RIANNE]** Thank you, Harmanie. Do you want to take it away with the next question?

**[HARMANIE]** Yeah! So the very first question - and I'm pretty curious about that, because I've seen a couple hints and pictures of what you've been doing lately - but what does your practice look like lately?

**[ALICE]** Ooooooh, you asked that question at the right time [chuckles] Let me back up. Thank you, Harmanie, for that generous introduction. I... you know... it was an amazing moment when we all gathered on that ramp, and I was excited to work with you, and to learn who you were, and to figure out some ways that your talents and skills and you as a person and artist could be seen in the work... and I mean I hope that the work on that project did that. And anyway, it is a good start... it feels like a good start to anchor a connection to someone, to dance with them. So yeah, that was... oh that was an amazing moment. So, yeah, a ramp is always a good thing.

One of the things I think that's going on just right now is the question of how do we get back to the bodies that we had? Or... y'know... after over a year of not formally being in dance training... or y'know... not even being in training for anything. My priority is getting back in shape, or maybe recreating a shape, or just simply creating a new body that I feel able to dance in. So that's been kind of a project, just kind of like "Oh right! I used to be able to do that!", or "Oh no! I need to strengthen this", and the resistance bands are all out, and the weights are out, and here we go again, it's time to start training.

The intensity of it is being pushed because the next piece involves flight. And we're working on a couple things with Kinetic Light, me, Laurel [Lawson] and Jerron [Herman] and Michael [Maag] are all figuring out how to do an aerial work in our wheelchairs, so... Laurel and me are in the wheelchairs, and Jerron is dancing in his body. And it's just an incredible thing, just feeling... for example, today I was working on bungee, and just pushing to the end of the bungee and feeling that yank back, and then feeling the rigger and flight operator pick the line up. So it comes... y'know, you run out to the end, and the bungee yanks you back, and then there's a moment where you're kind of almost stable, and then you just begin to fly. And it's just incredible, it's \*just\* incredible [giggles with joy] Sorry! Go ahead, Harmanie!

**[HARMANIE]** No, that's so exciting! And I've been wondering about that, the stability of doing a bungee... like, at what point... not to get too off track of all of

our questions... but at what point in the bungee do you feel unsafe? Or what skills do you need to feel safe so that you can get to that moment of flight? But flight in a way that's not gonna be "And now I'm gonna hit a wall!" Or something.

**[ALICE]** Oh, OK, one no-no: we're never gonna hit a wall because we're on stage and everything is mathematically worked out, you know, and we know exactly how high, how much space, y'know, that part of it is... that's never a worry. Um, you know, I think there are things that I worry about, like "Oh, am I going to wipe out if I mess this up?" Oh possibly! Eh, OK, here we go!" Or if I don't stick my landing. Like, there've been a couple of moments where I've just gone like Oh! Plownk! And then suddenly the landing just didn't quite work as I had planned, I went Splat! But actually, I mean, I feel like... you know, when we're 23 feet, 24 feet up in the air and diving down... it feels amazing. I feel like my body is just ready to do this. It's such an incredible feeling. It's just... I mean I also did like a hang gliding / paragliding thing, and I also loved that. I did a bungee jump in New Zealand and I loved that. So... it feels like that.

I feel a little sorry for someone who's never known what utter joy that is in the pleasure of a wheel. Like, if you have not experienced the pleasure, the joy of rolling on a wheel, I feel a little sorry for you. And so, part of what I'm interested in intentionalizing in the work is that joy.

Y'know, I think so much of dance by the non-disabled world is cast as either therapy, or it's a place where disability is incidental. Y'know, "I'm dancing despite my disability", or "my disability doesn't have me", or "I'm a disabled artist but this doesn't matter in this work, it's incidental." Or people are about inclusion, like how including disabled people is a good thing, or they feel good for that, or it's like "this is a worthy project that we're doing, we're including these disabled people." I'm just kind of like... actually I don't even want to have those conversations with people. This is the ground that I wheel on. This is the surface that my wheels strike. How do I intentionalize that? How do I choreograph that? How does that become resonant in the work itself? Yeah.

[interlude chimes]

**[RIANNE]** Amazing. I have a question I want to just jump in with because I'm so curious about... what are you learning about as you leave the ground in your practice of flying right now? What are you learning about your dancing?

**[ALICE]** I think, actually, the biggest thing that I'm learning is how to refine [re-find?] the ground. You can fly, like, you can dangle, you can fly, you can carve through the air, but the risk here is of avoiding spectacle. Like everyone is sooo interested in this question of "what does it mean to fly in a wheelchair?", y'know, because it's so unusual. And really, it isn't unusual. I mean, there *are* histories of disabled artists flying - some of whom have flown in a wheelchair, some of whom have not. This is not a one-off thing, it's just that the world is caught up in this notion of wheelchair boundedness, and so the image of being in a wheelchair flying... is complicated. But anyway, the thing that I'm learning is that one of the ways to avoid spectacle is to intentionalize landing, the meaning of the surface, and the meaning of the takeoff. It's in... it's not to say that the flight is unimportant, but everything that precedes and comes after it is equally as important. So, that's where I am.

**[HARMANIE]** No, that's great. And when you talk about flying in a chair, I find that I can fly without leaving the ground. Something to do with the wheels and you get the right patch of pavement, or the right studio floor, and you do a spin, and you just let yourself go into the movement, and your chair into the movement, and I feel like I'm flying. So I feel like you're just taking it another step farther to... how do I do that airborne, and how is my chair still part of that experience?

**[ALICE]** Yeah, I think that's a big question, um, because of course, you know, non-disabled people think of the chair as a compensation, right? Which it's not. Um, and they think about it as a way to get from A to B, like a locomotion device. So in theory, right, with that particular understanding of the chair, it shouldn't be necessary in flight, except that my chair is my body, so of course

it's necessary [giggles] y'know? Even though I am not wheeling from A to B, of course I would want the option of flying in that particular embodiment.

**[HARMANIE]** And one thing that just struck me, it's not just flying in that embodiment, but being able to traverse air flight and ground flight, because if you didn't have your chair once you hit the ground, your movement would be different. You wouldn't have the same freedom that you would with wheels; at least I wouldn't have the same freedom that I would with wheels.

**[ALICE]** I think it's all about understanding that there are three different bodies, y'know, one is with chair, one is without, one is with crutches, four if you combine wheels and crutches, or y'know, whatever, they're all bodies to work in. But I think the other part of it is the relationship between the genre of flight known as "low flying", where you can be 3 feet off the ground, your chair is partially on the ground then it comes off. So even though you can be suspended, part of the work is just kind of hovering, and like, a hand that can push your chair... push the ground and then you're spinning and then you can come upright and land on one wheel and spin, and then the line can lift you up, and, y'know, it's about fully choreographing the full body in all of the spaces.

**[HARMANIE]** Honestly, I think that sounds incredible, an incredible process to be working on. Um, yeah, and I feel like that's where our practice is different, just like a little bit. Not because I'm not interested in all of that, but I've spent a lot more time working on my new [inaudible] how I move in my body, rather than how can I push my body. And I think both are incredibly valuable practices.

**[ALICE]** Yeah, I actually think they're part of the same question [giggles], right? Y'know, how do I move in my body is... one way of... y'know... I would say yes I often ask the question of how do I push my body, but only in relation to the question of how is it that I move in my body. So these are all... I think those are different manifestations of the same question, which is a commitment to our disabled bodies. I think that's something that you and I share.

**[HARMANIE]** Yeah, and the fact that your body moves differently than my body, and to actually really move into that. So what is the curiosity? This is the next question, um, I just want to look up what the question is. How do you see disability as a point of curiosity rather than a point of limitation? We already talked about it not actually being a point of limitation, especially our chairs not being a point of limitation, but a point of this is part of us, how we move. Um, but how can we then transverse our... hmmm... our choreographic interests, our point of research, to push disability forward as opposed to...

**[ALICE]** Ohhhh I wish I knew...

**[HARMANIE]** I wish I knew this question better! [giggles] It's such a complex question.

**[ALICE]** It is, but in some ways it's also a question without an answer. I just, I mean, as long as the spaces in which we teach and work and perform and create are framed by the non-disabled world's language of "inclusion", and language of "despite", as long as we, as long as disabled artists hold fear and shame and discomfort about the awkwardness of our bodies, as long as we are embarrassed, and as long as we are trying to work in spaces that weren't meant for us -and I don't just mean architectural spaces, I mean emotional spaces, artistic spaces- as long as we are trying to work with artists who don't understand wheelchairs and disabled movement, as long as we are in a space of correction and adaptation and adaptive, as long as there is a focus on ability and not disability, those... that's where we're stuck.

So we don't... I don't... you and I can make work and maybe 50 years from now we will see a change, and somebody will name us in their history of that change, but the rest of it is stuck. Like, it's gonna be so incremental. And maybe 50 years from now, no one will know that you and I existed, but the world will be different because of the small changes that we made. Who knows. But it's not like we can just kick this history out of the window - though I wish I would. When you shunt it out the window... the spaces are so... the structures are very firmly in place. And

we can make dents in them, and fractures and cracks and openings, whatever vocabulary you want, but essentially we just need to blow the whole thing out of the water and start again. [giggles] Sorry!

**[HARMANIE]** No, I totally agree with that, and that might be a controversial opinion [inaudible], but while we are still working within this same framework, until people decolonize, or completely rethink what dance is, specifically what dance is, I've had so many people come up to me and be like "How can you dance in a chair if you can't use your feet?" And I had to like, unpack that. I was like... do you think dance means you move your feet? Is that the definition of dance? So what is the definition of dance, and what is it about the word "dance" that I'm interested in? And I've had to unpack that a lot, and I'm really interested when people are moving their bodies, like, when they're invested in moving their bodies. And that might be as easy as they're walking across the floor, but with intention. I can be really down for that movement. Or they're wheeling with intention. Or they're just staring up in space, but they're holding it. Stuff like that is the type of movement or non-movement that really fascinates me. Sorry... this last...

**[ALICE]** I agree!

**[HARMANIE]** Yeah! So but that's not typically what people think of as dance, and I think until the idea of what dance is gets re-thought, spaces for us won't appear, we'll have to continue to make them for ourselves.

**[ALICE]** Truth for that. Just truth. Yeah.

[musical interlude]

**[HARMANIE]** So that really leads us to the next question: In your practice as a choreographer and a leader of artistic practice, how do you consider care for yourself and your collaborators as part of the process? And what strategies do you use?

**[ALICE]** I'm not sure that I know how to answer that. Um, many times I'm not all that good about caring for myself, so that's something that I'm learning. I'm likely to want to push and push and push until, y'know, at the end of the day I'm just completely wiped and like "oooo y'know I can't... I'm just lying on the floor right now. Oops! Maybe I overdid it. Oh dear." So there's that. Maybe I'm not all that good at caring for myself.

I want to create and be in processes where if today it isn't working, I can take the day off. I want to create and be in processes where if that doesn't work for me as a dance artist, I can say no, and not have that count against me, or in any way or for anything, y'know? I want to be in processes where I can say no, that's not a representation of race or gender that I feel comfortable, or with disability, that I feel comfortable with, and be respected for the no. And I want to be in a place where my yes is not taken as a default, and that the yeses are actively appreciated. And I also want to be able to... I guess that's unlearning for me as well, to make sure that I'm always paying attention in the ways that I would want to be paid attention to. And yeah, I think that's a learning practice, and I would never assume that I have it right. So I feel very uncomfortable with that question. I don't know how to answer it. I would hope to be in and create practices where it's OK to be a human. Yeah.

**[HARMANIE]** I think you brought up some really good points. One about... and I am definitely... I do this a lot, and I push my body til the next day I'm like why did I... I can't move and my armpits are tingling... what does it mean about my armpits tingling... sort of, discovery of... is that a good thing? Is that a bad thing? What's going on with my body? But also that space where you want to make sure you're working in spaces that you feel valued, and that you can value. But I often catch myself saying yes to spaces that I probably should have said no to, or I should have stood up for myself in spaces that I just wanted the work. And I think that's a tough space, especially... well, for all artists, but especially for artists with disabilities who are not only representing themselves, they're

representing the small few of other working disabled dance artists. So we're all trying to create spaces for each other.

I wanted to bring up... because this question actually reminds me of our ramp project, our ramp video. Remember when you had Danielle... no, it was John first, then Danielle, then me... try to go down the ramp together in like close formation, only there wasn't a lot of space for all of us to sort of spin off at the end of the ramp?

**[ALICE]** Mhm. Yep. Terrifying moment, and yes I remember the instance when that did not work. Yes only too... like, that was one of the most terrifying moments in all of my choreographic career. Yes, I remember that. It sticks with me.

[both laughing]

**[HARMANIE]** ... the rest of the podcast audience a little bit more information. I was at the tail end, and my choice when we got to the bottom of the ramp was to run into Danielle or take the brunt of it. So I went and grabbed the railing, my body went with the railing, my chair went spinning off in another direction, and I managed to somehow majestically -I will say majestically- land on my shoulder and my hip perfectly. So perfectly that I had absolutely no whiplash, nothing. And it was a hard hit, as Alice's reaction [laughs] can attest to. And as John later called it, he said it was like an inclusive Michael Bay action sequence from like... Transformers or something... where you have cars spinning and then... [laughing]

**[ALICE]** Yeah, I remember that. I remember it.

**[HARMANIE]** What I really remember about it wasn't... well... I remember it being mildly terrifying... but I remember how much everyone was there to say: if you feel like you need to go to the hospital, don't feel like you have to keep pushing yourself. You can... we'll put you on the couch, you can rest for the rest of the rehearsal, you can watch the rest of the rehearsal, but this isn't a thing where

you have to push yourself. You don't need to be anything more than you are to be in this moment. And that kind of care really stuck with me, and I feel like that's the kind of environment I want to keep working on, where we make space for people to show up where they're at, in whatever bodies they're at, in whatever pain level they're at.

**[ALICE]** I um, you know, I just don't think that that should be special, honestly. Y'know? Every rehearsal looks like that as far as I'm concerned. Yeah. I mean if all you're going to do today is come to rehearsal and sit in the corner and watch, that is fine with me because... I just don't see a problem with this. We shouldn't be in a space where calling that out is special. Yeah, I just don't see why that's special. There is something wrong. Yeah.

**[RIANNE]** Yeah. One thing I'm struck by, um, I don't know if it's a question or just an observation, about the last few minutes is just... when you were talking about yes and no, and respecting the no, and it occurs to me that that's... it's its own skill to know ones responses, to know ones range between yes and no, and to be familiar with one's range between yes and no. And I think that's a skill I could really work on, so I'm just reflecting on that itself.

**[ALICE]** I think that's a lifetime practice, and it's certainly not one that I have full control over. Y'know, yes and no and the capacity to say it in a particular situation is... y'know, it takes practice to say yes and no.

**[HARMANIE]** I agree. I recently said no to a project recently, and, like, wanted to do a happy dance for giving myself the self care to say no that project doesn't work for me at this moment at this time, and to have the knowledge of myself to know how to say that.

**[ALICE]** Yeah.

**[HARMANIE]** And that was like a big learning for me because I love to say yes to everything.

**[ALICE]** Mhm.

**[HARMANIE]** But it doesn't work all the time.

**[ALICE]** I think the other thing I want to pick up on is your observation about the way in which any single disabled artist is somehow a representative of every disabled artist; and I just want to say that cannot continue to be the case. We cannot... we should not be expected to carry that weight, and we cannot carry that weight. It's just wrong. It's... yeah. And I understand, y'know, the... there is... I mean... I know this, right? That asking for access, not being able to... to... y'know... needing to fall out, or needing to take a break, or... these kinds of things in the non-disabled world feel and can be risky, right? If you ask for access, does that mean the next disabled artist doesn't get work? And it shouldn't be that way. It just should not be that way, and I don't think that's a fear that we should have to carry. I know that we do, but I don't think that it is a fear that we should have to carry.

**[HARMANIE]** Yeah. I agree with that. And I think that goes beyond dance and beyond art. That happens in the employed world, like the regular employed world with people with disabilities, and how you say yes or no... the employers do not know or do not have the education about the vast amount of human variation there is out there, they will judge your experiences with one disabled person with the next person that they meet. And that's hard. That's really hard to carry, and is something we shouldn't have to.

**[ALICE]** Right. Y'know, again, world change in 50 years. No one could have imagined where we are 50 years ago or 35 to 40 years ago when physically integrated dance practices began to be more regularized. No one could have imagined that we would be here, now. And 50 years from now, we cannot imagine what the world will look like for dance artists. I know there *will* be dance, I know disabled folks *will* be dancing.

[musical interlude]

**[HARMANIE]** So this next question I don't actually expect you to have an answer to, I think it's another one of those thought experiments, and it's something that we talked about at the Dancing Disability Lab: What is virtuosity, and what does virtuosity mean to you specifically right now, and how does it interact with the practice of inclusion?

**[ALICE]** Mmmm... Alright, well I actually can answer that. Um... I am known for doing big athletic movement, which I enjoy. And in some ways, that is a practice of virtuosity. But the only way that I get to the big athletic movement, in my practice and in my experience, is through understanding the virtuosity of a single finger on the wheel. Like... you don't get big without being virtuosic at the small. And so, y'know, this summer I did a dance, it was entirely about faces. Y'know, and it was *only* a face dance. And the complexity of being able to regularly communicate expression and manifest artistry in a face dance is equally as hard as doing something wild on an aerial point.

Um, so I think the... what we need to do is disconnect the notion of virtuosity from ability, right? I mean, to me, if there is virtuosity in the world, it is in intentionality, it is in the communication. Like, some of these older dancers that I'm watching, like in their 80's, y'know the virtuosity is not in how high their legs go; sometimes the virtuosity is just in their eyes. And it's... so I just need to disconnect virtuosity from ability, and disconnect virtuosity from technique. And for me, it's about the virtuosity of expression sometimes. And sometimes it's about intention, um, it's... and then sometimes I ask myself: OK now you've done that disconnection, why do you need a notion of virtuosity at all? Um, so you know, it's something that I wrestle with thought-wise and word-wise, so... yeah.

**[RIANNE]** Mhm, and it feels like a place where it's almost like language is not quite sufficient or not quite accurate to experience, or new language is being made about this.. um...

**[ALICE]** Something like that. I'm not sure. I mean, I do want to be able to recognize that there are things that you can improve on. I think part of the difficulty of doing away with the notion of virtuosity is that it risks the notion of... as a disabled dancer, you will never get better, you will just be this thing here, right now, this thing that you are right now. You don't *have* a pathway. And so I want to be able to hang onto the notion that you *can* have technique, and that you *can* improve in your technique. You *can* learn to do things that you couldn't do 10 years ago. You *can* do this. And so, you *can* get better at it, you *can* be more effective at it, you *can* grow, you *can*.

But... I... yeah, I just struggle with it. I just struggle with it, because it's not... like, the non-disabled world will constantly use virtuosity as overcoming disability, and the risk of that is that those... that there is,, that there are disabled artists and athletes who work in the framework of the supercrip. And, y'know, I would say that I don't overcome disability, I work because of it. But then... what does virtuosity mean?

Sometimes you know [sighs] I remember being... this is an exercise in virtuosity. Um... but let me just... hang on for a second, this is an exercise in virtuosity, and we can do this now, together even... stop... just stop, be still for a second, compose yourself for a second, and wait. Wait wait wait wait wait wait. At the moment that you feel that it is urgent to say something or to move, the moment you feel the necessity to move, now you can move. For me, the virtuosity is in the waiting. It's in the... it's in the... I gotta go! No, you don't have to go. Ah! No I gotta... No. You don't have to go right now. The virtuosity is... and that's never gonna be seen on stage, y'know? So... yeah.

**[HARMANIE]** I love that you pointed that out, because I feel that one of my biggest challenges as a dancer is that I don't take enough pauses, and I don't take enough time to breathe, I always want to hurry. So there is, I think, a skill and a virtuosity in learning that moment of stillness, and allowing it to be part of your work. Another ensemble member of ours at All Bodies Dance, romham gallacher, they inspire me because their movement starts so deep within

themselves, and can be so small, but every single movement they do counts, and I want to watch.

**[ALICE]** Mhm. Mmm.

**[HARMANIE]** That is beautiful to me, it's something that you recognize the intention, and you know that they've waited, and you know that they're ready. And that's just so exciting. And I did a project with them in January, and felt so honoured and privileged not only to learn from working with them, but also from just... being able to watch.

[music]

**[RIANNE]** So the last question is an opportunity for you to pose a question to the listeners.

**[ALICE]** OK.

**[RIANNE]** Y'know, there's people listening, and many people of different practices listening, and so, yeah, just something for the listeners and for Harmanie and I to reflect on.

**[ALICE]** Well OK, there is no one question to each of... to everyone. So to Harmanie, just personally, I would ask you to go back to a moment that you were disability uncomfortable in the studio, and a moment that you were disability joy in the studio, and a moment that you have for yourself about what's next, to be able to carve through some of your journey as an artist, and figure out what you need to support that.

To you, Rianne, I have a different question. Y'know, where does disability figure in your own practice. I know you're here, um, at All Bodies Dance, but to figure out what is disability in *your* work, and how is it there and why is it there, and who is

it there with, y'know? These are separate questions. And to figure out what *you* want.

And then I think I have a question that is for All Bodies Dance, and I don't know the answer to this, and maybe you aren't the people to answer this... is: How do we understand the dancing body, the dancing mind? That's it.

[musical interlude]

**[RIANNE]** Thank you for listening to the All Bodies 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: [info@allbodiesdance.ca](mailto:info@allbodiesdance.ca)

Until next time.