

Susan: Welcome to *Making A Scene*, an Esplanade podcast about how art gets made. My name is Susan Sentler, and your host for this episode.

My first exposure to dance was when I grew up in the United States. I was introduced, frankly, to it at college, and eventually became a member of the original second company at the Martha Graham Company, which was called The Ensemble. This was in New York City. Since then, as I grew as an educator, a performer and a dance-maker, my career brought me across the world. I taught globally and I made and work globally. I spent 18 years at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in the UK as a senior lecturer. And five more years I've been teaching, in fact I just left in 2020, at the LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore. And it's really interesting because diversity and inclusion has always been a kind of obstacle, I believe, for all different institutions. We want to deal with that. But how do we deal with that? And what are what are the kind of support systems etc, that can happen.

But I'd like to add in working with Graham, Graham was one of the first people to include various different races, different people. I remember Yuriko Kikuchi was the first Asian brought into the company, this is many years ago. It is said that the spiral, which Martha used, was really stretched and pulled by what Yuriko gave to the company. And what Yuriko introduced, which I thought was very, very interesting.

For me, I'm now an independent, multidisciplinary artist. I'm working freelance, and in 2015, also in 2017, I performed with Candoco Dance Company, which is incredibly influential in my understanding of inclusivity. We worked in a company that was all ages from 18 years of age, to various people in their 60s, people who are performers, non-performers, people of different disabilities. For me, it was incredible. And it was a live learning experience in order to go forward in dance.

In the dance world, ballet has a reputation of having rigid forms, which uphold the standards of the profession. But there were also plenty of questions about how these may also be exclusionary, to historically marginalised dancers and impede the art form in some ways. Very slowly, but also surely, ballet is becoming more diverse, and that is creating a new dynamism for this form of dance.

There's still a long way to go. And today I'll be talking to two ballet dancers about the road ahead. Please welcome Georgina Pazcoguin, female soloist in the New York City Ballet; and Mohamed Noor Sarman, the ballet master and pioneering member of the Singapore Dance Theatre. Thank you both for being here.

Georgina: Thank you for having us.

Mohamed Noor: Thank you.

Susan: So I'm going to begin with some kind of personal histories. And I'm going to begin with Georgina, a little bit. Georgina, you've described ballet as a pursuit of perfection and a striving to attain a seemingly unattainable ideal. But you also describe yourself as a Rogue Ballerina. Can you say more about how you relate to these ideas of perfection, and going rogue as an Asian-American ballet dancer.

Georgina: The whole study of ballet is, bodes well to someone who is a perfectionist. You need a certain drive to become a professional ballerina. And there's a certain determination to walk into a studio, which I happen to be in right now, and look at oneself in the mirror and be able to automatically correct oneself in the pursuit of this ethereal quote unquote line. And so line is aesthetic, and in my relationship, the line is like, I have been told I have beautiful line, but my line does not match the ideal ballerina's line.

And so that's where my relationship with perfection gets a little fraught. And so I've taken on the moniker the Rogue Ballerina because I am flipping the connotation of rogue on its head. Rogue tends to have like a negative connotation. I'm saying it's okay to embrace one's differences, and spin them into gold, spin them into what makes me different as an artist. Because I still fit within the guidelines of ballet, my line still is trained, is honed, I am every bit a classical dancer.

Susan: That's beautiful. That's really, really interesting. And also for Mohamed, you just started out in Malay cultural dance group and then started learning jazz dance. before falling in love with ballet. I think this is great. What is it like to move into a space where there were very few ballet dancers? How do you think your exposure to different forms of dances has influenced your work in ballet?

Mohamed Noor: For me, in the beginning, I started to learn ballet, I took it as a hobby, actually. And then I realised the more and more I learned about the classical ballet technique, it wasn't easy. It requires total commitment, total discipline, a lot of hard work. Focus your mind and your body and practically your soul. So I was so immersed in achieving these goals, that I wasn't aware that time that there were few people like me learning or interested in ballet. That time. And because I was so interested in learning and pursuing that. I just like the challenges and the requirements that the classical ballet technique offered, and drives me to work hard at it.

And for helping me with the future kind of in my career, I think I can break it down in three things. For the mind, I think it's, it had helped me to think faster, because during the training, and during class, and all these you have to be focused in learning the steps, and I realised that it had greatly helped me in the process of the chronography to be able to think fast. And for the body, I realised that of course, it's the musicality, more exposure to that. And it helped me with my coordination. And I start to discover the dynamics of the movement, kind of, the control and things like that. And for the mind, I felt that I have to feel in order to move and to reach and discover something from inside.

Susan: Thank you both. This is kind of for both of you. How do you think race and racism has shown up and influenced your careers and artistic perspectives?

Georgina: I share the same experience that when I was growing up in Altoona, Pennsylvania, it was just this fascination with the craft of ballet. It was a way for me as a very high energy, anxiety-ridden middle child, I'm one of six children in a Filipino Italian family. And so, me studying ballet was great. So I got to focus on me. And so I never really noticed how different I was from everyone in the room.

And when I, as I continue to grow and progress, I noticed, especially when I went to the School of American Ballet for my winter term on scholarship, that's when I started to see. I wrote my book reports

on Maria Tallchief, and Alicia Alonso. I was able to kind of like focus, like as I was walking down the halls to Studio 5, I'm seeing all these dancers who do not look like me. I'm seeing Peter Martins and seeing Darci Kistler and seeing, you know, none of these dancers not only looked like me, but shared my heritage. And then I realised as I look around the room, I was maybe one or two multicultural women. And so that started at the school, but I was not made to feel like I was other at the school, it was really when I got into the professional company. And you're knocked down off the totem pole from being the top of the school.

So all of a sudden, starting over in a professional space, and that's when slowly but surely the insidious comments about 'you don't fit in', it was always made to be like a weight comment. And then I realised that no matter how much weight or how fit I became, they were still saying I didn't fit in. And it took me to just a few years ago, when I started this real work on understanding my heritage, understanding myself, and then when me and my best friend Phil Chan co-founded Final Bow for Yellowface. That's when I really, aha moment, oh, this was racially charged towards me.

Susan: It's interesting. I read that article, a friend of mine just sent it to me prior to this, an article that he wrote, and you're quoted within it. Really, really interesting. And it was illuminating for me, I didn't really realise those things were happening. It's strange, because at Graham, it was a kind of a different facsimile. At least I believed it. But now even that is being brought up, especially with Black Lives Matters. Are we all on an equal scale? Is there no hierarchy? It's being illuminated at this moment in time, everywhere, and in every context.

Mohamed Noor: Well, I can only speak from my own experience. I mean, I've been brought up in a multi-racial environment. And from young, growing up, and even through the army that we have to go through, we are well integrated. And thus we have a clear understanding about different races, and different cultures and all that. And because of that, from young also, we, I mean, I discovered that we do respect the differences of culture and religion and the practices and all that.

So for me, and the company, the dancers are very diverse, come from around the world as well. And I mean, of course, the Singaporean dancers as well. It gives me the opportunity to work together with different races and cultures I suppose, and of course, to be able to share and learning from each other. And has driven me to be a better person, in my own way, a confidence in a way, because I'm quite a shy person. So it gives me confidence to like, talk to people more, and sometimes in the unknown territory you afraid of, to venture out. I'm glad that in in the company where I am, we really complement one another. So I didn't really quite experience any kind of segregation or disrespectful or anything.

Susan: And for both of you, I mean, again, you've touched upon it, but have you observed shifts in how racial equity and other issues of diversity are discussed and addressed in your companies over the course of your careers? How have the discussions arised, how has maybe policy changed, especially now because of this illumination that has happened globally?

Mohamed Noor: I do observe, but talking about the company, no there isn't any at the moment. Awareness, maybe, and observation, yes. But not that I know of at the moment.

Georgina: I think in my experience, there was a time I spent 10 years in the corps before I was promoted to soloist, and in that time, there was no discussion, but everyone knew. I mean, I write about it in my book, that there was an A cast and a B cast of *The Nutcracker*. And the B cast was always the people of colour. And it was just unspoken about. And then I believe New York state mandated that institutions had to have diversity panels, and through that, to New York City Ballet's credit, those panels were made. I initially was not on them, and I made it known that I wanted to be on one, as one of the sole female women of colour who had ever been promoted out of the corps, who's of Asian descent.

Susan: That's crazy, to have the panel and not have the representation.

Georgina: Well, I wasn't with the company, I was performing in *Cats* at the time. And so they made this panel was like kind of a focus group, I guess, if you will. And so the point was to not have everyone represented, but then I made the point that wouldn't it be great to have everyone represented since there are people who are interested, that want to speak and I let it go, because I was like, I'm not actually on the grounds. And then came the fall, I did get an email from Kathy Brown, the executive director, and Peter inviting me to join. And that's when some of the real nitty gritty happened.

And that was all said in safe space, but it was truly the first time then I can honestly say that my boss at the time really understood where some of his dancers of colour, how they were raised, how differently their world, their lens was from his. And so you could see the wheels start to turn. That's where it started, and then like to also be given a space. And we worked with a wonderful collaborator, Tammy Borman, who still is working with us now, we were able to have some really uncomfortable discussions. You know, that's when I was able to bring up how problematic *The Nutcracker* was, specifically the Chinese divertissement. It was through those focus groups that we were able to initiate ever so small changes to the Balanchine choreography, which is huge.

Susan: Yeah, yeah. That's so beautiful, because I think that kind of those subtle shifts and nuances within the choreographic, within the creative, are so potent, and to bring the visibility of that out. The contrast, the juxtaposition of the before and after, I think is really, really important, because it shows a move forward.

Georgina: I think also, it's important to note how they were simple changes. Like, instead of the three dancers shuffling out in the greetings, we were able to run out and then what we call a normal ballet run, which is like that's so simple. That is not changing, like, a van Gogh painting. And so that was also another part of the discussion. It's like, so how do we adapt and change while holding tradition? And like these are, these are people whose works who are no longer alive. And so you have ballet as an ephemeral art and Balanchine was known for changing roles according to the ballerina who was inhabiting it at the time. But now that he's gone, I feel like there is a sense that some of the people closest to want to try to hold, but we can't just be a museum anymore.

Susan: We're looking at how do we care for these works to go into the future, not to stay in the past. And I remember working at Laban, there's a woman who is a Laban specialist, Valerie Preston-Dunlop, would say, look at what is the trace of the work, and the trace, meaning what must be in that work, in order to be recreated. And other things that could be left behind. I would always, as I do a lot of

Graham's work while I was teaching at Laban. And I remember thinking, could costumes change, could the sound even shift, what is the trace? What must be there? And what could be altered? Or stretched or played with?

Georgina: Yeah, what was really interesting is that through our research, in our talks, when I gave a talk at the New York Public Library shortly after we announced this initiative, this petition, and we went through the archives at the performing arts library, and we watched like some like 15 or 30 versions of the Chinese divertissement. And then also, in working with Doug Fullington, he restaged the early version of the Chinese divertissement and it did not have any of the tropes that we saw in later versions.

So somewhere along the line, this was not the pointed fingers, the bobbing heads, the coolie moustache, the rice paddy hat instead of a regal. I'm not saying that Balanchine was a racist, I don't believe so. But was he influenced by the propaganda at the time? Absolutely. Because it wasn't the rich Chinese who were immigrating to the States at that time, it was very, very poor people who are immigrating. And the propaganda was saying that these people should not, there's still a Yellow Peril.

Susan: And it had a particular kind of animation characteristic about it that really wasn't, wasn't there. But it was illuminated in a particular way. Now we read and understand is inappropriate. So how can we change that?

Why do you think some groups continue to be under-represented in the world of ballet, So say, for instance, gender. Though there were more women ballet dancers than men, but unfortunately, women are often under-represented as choreographers and directors. How can institutions better support and give credit to women, as creators and leaders? And also besides gender, how can institutions reach out to make dance more inclusive in terms of race and class as well? So it's kind of a big question, but just to throw that back at both of you, just ideas or things that you consider.

Georgina: When it comes to women, I think women in ballet have always been told to be silent. Be silent and be beautiful. Do not use your voice. I think the first thing is being able to use a voice, being able to be a muse and being equal collaborator in the process of creating dance. That's the first step.

And then yes, of course, we need to hire women in these leadership roles. But then we also, it needs to start before that. Women need to be able to formulate their own opinions about dance. We still quite literally do full-lengths about 15-year-old girls who fall asleep, are woken up by a prince and then are just married off. It blows my mind right now with the amount of work and growth that I've done, I don't want to, I would never want to be the princess in Sleeping Beauty. That is not my dream as a woman. Well, that's my opinion.

Mohamed Noor: Oh, my own experience, the artistic director of the company is the founder. And of course, it's the first artistic director was a lady, Ms Goh Soo Khim. So I, maybe where I am, I don't see that it's often under underestimated or anything like that. And plus also, the company also has the privilege of working with female choreographers before like, from Australia, Natalie Weir, we had from Japan, Sakiko Oshima. And then Marie Claude Pietragalla, and recently under the artistic director

Jane Schergen, we had the Singapore International Festival of Arts, just recently, in the beginning of August, at Esplanade Theatre where we worked and collaborated with Christina Chan, Singaporean female choreographer and Pam Tanowitz. So I think, yeah, I don't think women are often under-represented.

Susan: I may even come in just thinking about this question. I know, once again, because of the Black Lives Matter movement, and a variety of different things, I've noticed in Britain, that loads of institutions have now become co-directions, they're shared positions. And I think that's a really interesting way forward, and many of the shared positions have to be two women. But I find this kind of thing, instead of the figure as being director or etc etc, that people are now more interested in co-creating together. A really interesting way for institutions to go forward is instead of having the one person, is to allow a team of people. And that way, you can checkpoint each other when things are going off kilt. And you can work and support one another too, that everything's not resting on your shoulders continuously at one time.

Georgina: I absolutely think checks and balance is needed in the ballet world, it's still like very much a thing, there's one, and for the most part it's a patriarch. It is that ideale. And so we need to just, I think that can shift, it's going to shift with time as my generation and the generations following me step into more leadership roles, I suppose.

Susan: I see a lot of shifts and changes happening in the contemporary dance world. And even then, though, there's still problems. But I think there are kind of scaffolds that can allow that direction to go forward better.

Visibility is often one of the first issues that institutions seek to address. For example, by developing more diverse hiring practices. Here we go, what kinds of expectations are placed on minority dancers to represent their communities, such as do they feel they have to work harder to stand out or defy stereotypes? I know, it's very interesting for Mohamed, dealing with Singapore because again, it's such a multiracial kind of community. But still, I think there is a subtle hierarchy that is influencing and I'm wondering what are the effects of that? And definitely, Georgina, how you feel as you represent your community.

Georgina: Well, to answer your first question, yes, it was very apparent that I was going to have to be excellent. For me to be a classical dancer at New York City Ballet, I was going to have to be not only the best in the room, but exceptional. That is really how it came to be that I got to dance the Dew Drop in *The Nutcracker*.

It's like I had been aiming for it and gunning for it. And there was really no reason, and I had been a soloist, it's time. I had to, not only for myself, but for this person who was deciding casting, I had to meet all of their metrics as well. So not only me, keeping in mind that we have already established that everyone in the ballet world is a perfectionist, but then I had to meet someone else's idea of perfection.

When it comes, what does it feel like to represent? I'm realising what it means, it's not a weight, but it is a responsibility to be the first of something. I can't wait for the time where it's like, there's no one to be

the first of anything. And I stand here saying that, recognising that I have gotten this far, because I am half-white, I am recognising my privilege. And I'm recognising the privilege that my dad also saw and being like, oh he can raise me in this trajectory. So was only able to get this far, he had no idea how strict the rules were in an actual company.

When it comes to visibility and how I am cast now, I don't think we're quite there yet. I think there still is token casting. I can only speak from my experience. I can't speak to anyone else's. In my experience, because I am this like exotic looking person, I kind of very geared into certain roles. And they don't see me as the princess. They don't see me as the pretty sylph, which I absolutely can embody. And it's hard to go, like for some reason those that play the sylph, those that play the queen can all of a sudden play the love interest, the strong woman. But it's very hard to go in the reverse direction, is what I'm just trying to say.

Susan: I'm curious, do you know Eisa Jocson, she is Filipino. She is amazing, contemporary dance artist. And she does this whole series called Princess but it's really kind of reflective of Disney Princesses. But she talks about the Filipino body, the Filipino dancer. She deals a lot with the economic body and she makes these kind of political statements within her work, within her choreographic work. You should check her out.

Georgina: Oh, wow. I'm going to have you email me all the things.

Susan: I met her and got to work with her whilst in Singapore and she's brilliant. She came from ballet. She came from design into ballet, and then started doing pole-dancing, started doing a whole host of different things. And looking at how the Filipino dancer striving to be this perfectionist within this world, but never arrives to those roles of the princess. So she within her choreographic palette, she kind of confronts this issue. Really brilliant, really really brilliant.

Georgina: It also speaks to like, if you think it's hard for someone who is half, or multicultural, let's imagine how a darker skin, a black-skinned person feels in this space. So we should mention that. And then also the visibility is not quite there. I mean, I'm still the only woman of colour in some rooms that I'm in, in 2021.

Susan: Mohamed, do you have anything to say about dealing with the sensibility or the sensation of having to work harder to defy the stereotypes?

Mohamed Noor: Visibility is, for me, maybe it's a consideration. And however, to develop, as you said, the diversity of hiring practices. That's what it is, the world has a lot of challenges. And you know, it depends where you are, some challenges are harder and things like that. But where I am from, it's, at the end of the day, is how much the talent can offer to the company. Do you know how ballet world is, there's so many beautiful people around, and ballet is into form, and aesthetics, and all these, you know. Somebody can point better or, they're taller, they're more, fit better, and things like that. But that's all challenges. But again, at the end of the day, I guess, is how much talent you can offer.

Susan: It's also and I'll bring this up a little bit later, too, but just about how also ballet can just allow

itself and not only ballet, but through dance itself, how we can just kind of open up what that aesthetic is, and what the aesthetic can be. I think that's another question that can allow individuals to really be seen or to have the possibility to be seen.

But going on a little bit about this visibility, what needs to be done to ensure that visibility is not just tokenism, but a genuine commitment to equality? We've got an example, in recent years there has been attention to the colour of tights and shoes. One dancer, Nadia Boodoo, explained that she was encouraged to wear shoes and tights that match her skin. The company's budget only covers pink shoes. So to cover the cost of skin-coloured shoes, she has to do extra work as a brand ambassador on social media.

Georgina: Well first things first, I think that needs to be in the budget, they need to budget that. When it really comes to not making it tokenism, it's not just giving a shot. And it's not just giving visibility during like a school show. It's artistically directing a dancer and figuring out where their scope, their arc, their trajectory, and where they might be. Not having it be haphazard, not only picking, I feel like they've decided as soon as you get into a company that you are going to be a principal dancer and that's your law. I think it's decided very early on. And I think that's an unwise choice.

I think there should be time to test. It's been said to me, like, oh we don't want to put you out there not looking your best. And I'm like, what does that mean? People don't want to see the same cast and things all of the time, season after season. And I think also when it comes to true equity, and inclusion, we need to then also do work with the leaders, it needs to come from the top.

And understanding that the people who have thrived under the power dynamic, and the structures that lift white bodies in this institution of classical ballet, they also need to realise that although they might have more competition, there is still room at the table for everyone. I'm not hearing that sentence, and I'm feeling a lot of people grab on to things needlessly, because if, you don't get to keep it regardless. This life as a ballerina, as a dancer, is so ephemeral. So like, one show, two shows to share with a counterpart, like that is the toxic competition that is inherent in dancers, that has become to be in some spaces, that's what we need to break down to really lift up equality and inclusion.

Because if it's trying to come and there's all this resistance, it's not working. That's where I feel like the tension is right now. It's like a shift in not wanting to change, because it means that maybe there won't be as many opportunities for the people who have already thrived in a situation. They need to not feel like that.

Susan: That the space is there.

Georgina: Absolutely. The space has always been there.

Susan: And I like the sense of being surprised, is that why do we have to see things as they were done? The beauty of art is to be surprised, is to not be in a comfort zone, to not be in a constant state of reiteration, in a particular kind of horizontal mode. You want those moments of new possibilities.

Mohamed Noor: I mean I quite agree why you guys are saying and in terms of moving forward. But for me, basically the company where I am, I mean, we hire people based on their merit. Like professionalism of a dancer, and also to be able to integrate with the company, I suppose. And not so much of where I am. It doesn't, with all those things that you guys are saying, I don't experience that a lot, or at the moment now. Yes, I am, I'm very blessed, I'm very lucky. I mean, the things that I've experienced, I may not have if I'm outside, truthfully.

But even then I'm still being open and learning always . Because we have foreign teachers and choreographers being invited. And I learn from them as well, even though I don't go around the world.

Susan: I think that is the constant thing, is to not settle, is to not go on recipe, to not settle.

Georgina: I think as a leader in dance, it's so important to remain curious. I get that sense from you Mohamed, that you are still innately curious. I think that's what makes a great artist as well.

Mohamed Noor: Keep on learning. Yes.

Georgina: I think it's fair to say that, like, I think we as a ballet community have gotten a little lazy. And now we we're being held accountable, not only dancers, but artistic directors, leaders, the people who inhabit our space.

Susan: Again, you don't want to settle. That's the thing, is once people start settling, feeling too comfortable, that's when the problem happens. We can't be, we need to constantly have kind of a turbulence, in order to stay active, to promote appropriate kind of actions.

Mohamed Noor: Especially now, like with the Covid time, we have to lock down and all this, and we go crazy not doing anything.

Susan: And frankly, it's the whole planet. I mean, that goes into another shift together.

Going on. Apart from placing diverse dancers on stage, the content of performances are also being re-examined, such as gender roles in ballet, cultural sensitivity in choreography and costumes. You both have experience re-imagining *The Nutcracker* for contemporary audiences. Could you share a bit more about this, and Georgina, about your, extend to the work for Final Bow for Yellowface? And thinking about what new works of ballet being created today do you find are challenging and expanding ballet's traditional paradigms, or even responding to global discourses about equity and justice?

Georgina: Final Bow for Yellowface started off as like just a pledge, a pledge to eliminate offensive Asian and outdated Asian stereotypes on stage. And it's grown and grown and grown. I think where we are, is we're going to be a broader foundation. We're not ready to officially announce yet, but I can say that we've got six major American companies signed on to produce new works with all Asian-led Asian creative teams, start to finish, by 2024. We're expanding upon this pledge. So like, let's not only put diverse bodies on stage, let's have diverse bodies making music, let's have diverse bodies designing the lighting, doing the costumes. Let's flood with colour, in a sense. So that's happening.

So Phil and I like to have a game like every once in a while, like, we are ballet nerds. I am so lucky that I get to do what I love for a living and my body still lets me, at my age. Our recent conversation is, I called him up and I was like, okay, here's our goal. Let's decolonize Scheherazade. Because it is beautiful. But we cannot present this idea, even though it is a fantasy and it's a story, we're not having slavery on stage. I'm not doing that.

And so we went back and forth. And I was like, well, why don't we make them both gods? Why don't we make it the story of Aries and Aphrodite? Because Aries, the god of war, loved Aphrodite so much he sacrificed himself. It works. It all works. That's not the only way one can go with that idea. But it's like I think it's exercise games like that, to see how we can decolonise. Of course, we can always look at the context of how it was originally created. But I think it's important to reimagine in this sense, but then also pay homage.

Mohamed Noor: To see it in another angle, to have an open mind also.

Susan: I think this is brilliant, to deconstruct or reconstruct, I think that's really a fantastic, creative way in. It's how you play it, that's how you play the lens.

Georgina: This isn't a new idea. People have been doing this for so long, and it's just like, okay, how do I take that amazing idea and apply it to my world for the better.

Susan: These are stories or ideas or sensations or emotions that are experienced globally, that are experienced in different cultures and different ways. And it's how to illuminate how that's experienced in a particular kind of way and give it its full breadth.

Working towards diversity and inclusion is a matter of equity. But it can also bring up creative possibilities. As artists, what are your thoughts on embracing diversity can help to explore beyond codified norms and traditions of ballet?

For example, I come from contemporary dance and improvisation and other forms of play in the creative process. And you look at Forsythe, I guess, in comparison with a lot of contemporary work or even modern work, modern's got a different lens, but there's a tradition, you talked about the line, you talked about the form. To really be inclusive, or to allow that inclusivity, we've even got a stretch the form itself. And just your ideas about that. Should it? How can it?

Georgina: You had me really thinking there. How can it be stretched? One can imagine that it would indirectly affect diversity and inclusion. Ballet is not meant for a body to do, so like if we were to really understand when and how it is appropriate for women's bodies to start going on pointe, for women's bodies, because it does shift and like a woman's body, like her bones, they're still forming at a time. So maybe we should re-examine that.

I think we just need some more bodies doing the form. There's still so much good in the discipline of the first position, the fifth position, but like understanding that not every body is going, like 180 degree turnout is not necessary for an amazing, immersive, spiritual experience in the theatre.

Susan: And even the sense of unison. I remember working with Graham, and we were working a lot with unison, and we used to call it being on the roller coaster together. But I thought it was brilliant when the bodies were different. Yet we were able to attune a kind of energy and a kind of clear dynamic so that we became one.

Georgina: That's what is so special about New York City Ballet corps and the Balanchine technique is that it is a technique. It wasn't based on each person looking the same. All the bodies could essentially be completely different, be completely different colours, but the same attack, the line is stretched further, the timing is faster. That is the Balanchine technique. I am very much a Balanchine dancer even though I do not look like Balanchine's ideal of what a Balanchine dancer was, because I still do the technique. And I think it's less about switching the form, and more about re-wiring the minds that gatekeep the form.

Susan: This is fascinating because it's like the surface of the form to become less the priority, and more what is inside. What is inside the techniques? What is inside the choreographic? What is inside, going almost into a somatic realm of going in, of what really constitutes the works. Not that the form happens because that is nurtured.

Mohamed Noor: Something came to mind, where is no doubt that classical ballet technique, I think it's one of the hardest thing to achieve, but somehow, for me, if you have that technique is easier for oneself to adapt other form of dance. Because of the foundation of the technique. For me, it's much easier in any form, like, it could be a traditional Indian dance or something or other form of dance. Because of the coordination and the strength that it provided. And then plus, if you are versatile in modern, and with both balance of modern and classical technique, imagine how much further you can do or stretch out your lines in dance and interpretation and everything.

Georgina: It's like being a great jazz musician. They're expert classicists, and then they can bend line, bend the sound, you know, isn't there a Picasso quote? Like, you have to learn the rules first before you break them, something like that?

Susan: I can understand, I do feel there's so many elements within dance, that in order to become better, to stimulate that curiosity and stretch that curiosity, and stretch the knowledge, I think it is a kind of openness and weaving of a whole host of things. And I think by going out of your technique, to see it from another lens, it lets you go back in. Deleuze used to say go out of your discipline to come to understand your discipline. And I think that's important for us.

Guys, I thank you so much. This was absolutely brilliant. And I've learned so much within this podcast, and I just wanted to say thank you once again, and Making A Scene is produced by Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, Singapore's national performing arts centre. And our theme music is from Angels by hauste. Look for more episodes of Making A Scene at esplanade.com/offstage, and on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and SoundCloud. Thanks for listening and stay tuned for more inspiring conversations with art makers.