

Theresa: Welcome to *Making A Scene*, an Esplanade podcast about how art gets made. I'm Theresa Ruth Howard, your host for this episode. Before we jump in, I'll tell you a little bit about myself. In this iteration, I am a curator and founder for MoBBallet, Memoirs of Blacks in Ballet, which is a digital platform that curates the contributions of Blacks in ballet internationally. I also work as an international diversity strategist and advocate for increasing the presence of Blacks in ballet, and people of colour in ballet. And I also work to reform the culture of ballet, so that it's healthy and positive for everyone involved.

Today, it is my pleasure to bring an episode with three incredible people. They've built up massive followings on social media with their original content about ballet. Their profiles have been lively platforms for self-expression that give audiences a closer look at how the work of dance and professional ballet dancers is, whether on stage or off. It's my pleasure to introduce Shelby Williams, who is also known as the Biscuit Ballerina, who is a soloist for Royal Ballet of Flanders; Harper Watters, a Houston Ballet soloist, also known for his heels choreography on that treadmill, and backstage web series, *The Pre-Show*; and finally Min Tan, who is a dancewear designer and meme creator, based in Singapore.

Thank you for being with us today. Let's just talk about this medium of social media and how it's actually changed ballet as we know it, and maybe even your lives as we know it. So, Shelby let's start with you. And let's talk about how you chose your social media persona. How did that come about?

Shelby: I was never really big into social media before Biscuit Ballerina, I was someone who came very late to Instagram compared to my friends. And it was kind of by chance. I never sought out to build a following on social media, I had a colleague record me kind of doing my typical satirical, self-deprecating humour in the studio one day, and she shared it on her Instagram account. And she's much more famous than I am. And so, it got a lot of views very quickly. And then I thought, okay, so my coping mechanism for the stress of this career is maybe something that resonates with more people than I realised. So I thought, oh, I'll make a little account on Instagram. And I'll call it Biscuit Ballerina because something I was always picked on, or I picked on myself for in my training, and then in my career was the fact that my feet were never going to be good enough. Like no matter how much I stretch them, they are what they are. And so, I kind of made biscuits my strong word, it became my word. And then I thought, oh it's got a nice rhyme to it, I'm going to go with Biscuit Ballerina, and that's kind of how Biscuit Ballerina came to be.

Theresa: It was organic. It's actually just you.

Shelby: Yeah, zero strategy to it whatsoever, did not understand how hashtags worked when I started it. And that's why I had these ridiculous hashtags, because they didn't make sense to me.

And then little did I understand that when I like, being sarcastic, used all the typical hashtags of like, #likesforlikes, and you know, #ballerinalife and all these things, that it actually drew attention from these other people. I was like wondering, where are all these people coming from? How are they finding my account? But then I learned how a hashtag works.

Theresa: That's incredible. Harper, tell me about how you engaged with Instagram, because all of you have these very, very distinct personas, and you occupy these very specific spaces on Instagram for the dance world. So tell me about how your content creation came about.

Harper: Yeah, so I started Instagram off of the idea of, I thought it was where you shared what you were eating. And you know, like what was around you? And it really was just, I thought it was like an extension of Facebook and to just share pictures. But at the time when I started, there was an account on Instagram called Worldwide Ballet. And it was another discovery tool of looking into the amazing talents of ballet dancers. And I was able to see the tricks and the amazing feats that dancers could do. And I was like, wait a second, I dance for a company that has dancers right in front of me, doing all these amazing things. And myself and my dancer friends were doing those things after class. And I was like, let me just film it. Let me start filming it in a different way. And so I did. And I mean, it's an amazing thing, when you start getting attention for what you're doing, because you're like, I'm a celebrity, like, people are loving it, like, you know, it's like crazy. And you're like, I need to give the people what they want. But like what Shelby was saying about having new eyes come to her page is exactly what I was realising. It was like, oh my gosh, this is not my high school friend who's watching me anymore. This is not my parents' friend. This is not my co-worker. This is someone in another country or another state who has tuned into what I have to say and what I'm doing. And I thought that was fascinating, and I wanted to build on it. And social media and Instagram specifically has always been a discovery tool and a tool to connect. And I found that if I shared myself, and what I liked, what I was interested, in a creative way, I was connecting to more people that allowed me to turn the volume up on Harper. So I started doing it more. I found such a fantastic parallel between my social media and my dancing and having to use it to cohesively to become a better artist.

Theresa: That's really interesting, I do want to open that up. Because that's the nuance of the conversation. Min, tell us a little about your origin story, because you have a dancewear line that is absolutely hysterical. And all of you sort of feed into one another, like the content and the way that you're looking at the dance world. Min, tell us.

Min: Well, I didn't start, unlike these two amazing people, as a professional dancer obviously. I started ballet when I was a university student. And it was just something that actually really helped me recover from my eating disorder. And then I thought, there's nobody making fun ballet clothing for adult dancers, for adults. So I'm just going to do that.

And then how I got onto social media was that I actually had zero idea about running a business or how any of it worked. But I was always on social media before it was even social media. I was in forums for Lord of the Rings fans and LiveJournal and Tumblr. And so I was like, I don't know anything about running a business, but I kind of know the online spaces. And I know that there's usually a community for anything that you could ever be interested in. And so I think that's kind of how I started. I just made some T-shirts and put them out online and had a little Tumblr where I made memes and things, and had the shirts there as well. And then I did it for like six months as a hobby and then when I finished university, I was still recovering from anorexia and depression and I was still too sick to work full-time. And I was like, okay, well, maybe I'll try doing this thing for like six months, a year, until I find a proper job and was like, selling I guess these shirts online, while you know using making memes and stuff to promote awareness of it. And then I just kind of kept on going and going and going until this point. That's like the CliffsNotes story of it, but the actuality is that it took a while.

Theresa: I love how these stories start with like, no idea, right? I had no idea. But I think that that's also like the Internet space, right? Like somebody launches these apps. They're intended to work one way and then when people get a hold of them, the evolution of them becomes so fast, that the way that they're used and the influence that they have becomes like exponential, because you can go all over the world in seconds. So Min and Shelby, I want to talk a little bit about how you sort of poke fun at the world of perfection or the idea of perfectionism in dance and specifically in ballet, right? Like, Shelby, you are contorting your bodies like as dancers, we all know what we see it that sickled foot, you know, the hopping en pointe, the bad port de bras. But you're making it, you're expressing what we all feel, that inadequacy that we all feel. Tell me a little bit about how that has been for your followers healing, right, in that sort of connection.

Shelby: So it was always something healing for me doing this, you know, undoing of the ballet technique that it's so easy to get consumed by perfectionism and trying to attain something. And I think of it kind of like, when you're pointing your foot so hard, it feels good to flex it, just like go in the reverse, undo a little bit and then you can get back and it's more comfortable working in that original direction again. And it's been so nice, seeing the impact it's had on dancers, especially younger dancers, but also professional dancers, adult student dancers, in a whole spectrum of where people are in the training experience.

But especially from young dancers, who have grown up in the social media age where everything is curated. And when I was growing up, I would compare myself to other kids at summer intensives, because that's how I got a more global perspective of where do I lie in this competitive world? Do I have a chance of making it in this profession. And now, these young students are comparing themselves to people who've been able to edit, cut, filter, adjust, retake, do all these things to make sure they look their very best. And they're comparing themselves to that and not to the reality. So not just kind of having a sense of humour about it, but also incorporating things like

bad photos of professional dancers, or videos of dancers falling, or videos of pre-professional students falling, just kind of serves as a reminder that we're all human. And you don't need to expect yourself to be perfect. And I love how much people have embraced it. And I get so much sent to me, so many bad videos, so many bad photos, and I get comments like, I remember a few dancers, they'll send me ones and they'll say, yeah I fell down during this show and I wanted to cry but then I remembered I could end up on Falling Fridays. And so then it turned into something that was like funny that they could laugh off. And I think that's so important, because we are so human and so imperfect. We need to remind ourselves as often as we can, that it's totally fine to not be the image of perfection that we expect of ourselves.

Theresa: Oh trust there's endless content in that arena, right? Because we're not perfect.

Shelby: And that does not always work.

Theresa: Min, you were saying?

Min: Ballet is an industry of perfectionists, isn't it? We like come to this, like, what other kind of person would willingly do the same exercises over and over and over again and be perpetually dissatisfied with it? It's like, we enjoy the self-flagellation in some way.

Theresa: Min, how have you healed from watching people really sort of like engage with your product, both the tactile ones of like the dancewear, but also the content that you're producing?

Min: I guess for me, like, when I was saying ballet is an industry of perfectionists, I think that's actually kind of why in a sense, I am attracted to this industry, because I'm a perfectionist as well. But like Shelby said, I think people have always sort of compared themselves to the person next to them. Am I doing better? Am I doing worse, especially when you're a perfectionist and you have such high expectations of yourself? And I know how bad that made me feel. I remember when I was recovering, for example, when I would see everybody on Facebook, like posting how they were successful in their career or relationships or whatever. And I was like, why is everybody so happy? Am I'm the only one miserable? And then, I started to realise that no, people only post the good things because it's easier to talk about good days than it is to be talking about bad days publicly. It's very difficult to be publicly vulnerable.

And so, it took a while for me to find my voice on Instagram. But I felt like it was really important to create, I guess a space where people who maybe felt the same way that I did when I was recovering know that they're not alone, in the way that they're struggling with anything. My mission has always been to create products and to create a space where people feel they can be that they can be accepted for who they are, and they can be themselves and know that they are allowed to feel good, and also to feel bad. And that social media should be a place that's helpful for them. And not something that brings them down because they're just always seeing something

that is perfect when it's not necessarily reality. I think Harper and Shelby would kind of agree with that, because we do kind of try to keep it real.

Theresa: I have such a love-hate relationship, I mean I think we all do right, with social media. Because in one regard, you can see so many inspiring things, right. And in another regard, it is so highly curated. And so I wrote an article about, is Instagram changing the value system of the dance field. Because we see tricks and we see the hyper flexibility and the fetishism. And so I think that there's an inspirational part of that. But then there's also the thing where it's unattainable. I wonder how you all as creators, because you're not just, you're these online personas, right? But at least Harper and Shelby, you two are actually on the stage. Right? And there's a reality that you're living in the art form. Does it play tricks on your head sometimes? Harper, you want to tell me like when you're scrolling through, you get in that vortex or that rabbit hole?

Harper: Well, I was just getting wrapped up in the conversation listening to Min and Shelby, I find this so interesting. And it just had my brain thinking about this idea of perfectionism. And I think that when I got to Houston Ballet, the Academy, I was able to understand that I did have facility, I did have an extension, and I had the qualities of making an ideal dancer, like the more I guess, the one that's more attainable, right? And so I was like, I have the technique. But what I lacked was the visibility of seeing a dancer who was of colour and who was queer. And so it wasn't this perfectionism that the ballet world was giving me, it was telling me this is the standard for success as a male dancer that I did not have. So when I'm scrolling, I struggled to see dancers at the top who were like me. I saw ones that I was like, my leg goes higher than that. Or, like, I can move like that, but I don't look like them. And so having that mindset at that age, you know, I was 17,18, it was tough. And having the courage to say I'm going to put myself out there on social media was like the same idea of putting myself out there in the middle of the studio to say I belong here. And so I struggled on both and social media and career-wise, of not seeing that portrayed. And that was my struggle.

And I think when I scroll on Instagram now, and I see young dancers who are queer or having success, who are BIPOC dancers, I'm like, work. Like, get it, and I'm like to me, I don't know how you can say that social media, I understand the pros and cons of it. But especially as a as a queer BIPOC person with representation and visibility being so important. I can't imagine someone saying it's a negative thing. In the sense where you can say, look, I see Harper, or I see Calvin Royal or I see Marcelino Sambé, you know, it's like these are people who are living their authentic truth and they're killing the game. And that's inspiring to me.

Theresa: I love the idea that social media to a degree, barring the algorithms, right, that are not fair. I mean, the racism that exists in the world is the racism that exists in the algorithms and online. I love the idea that it can normalise any and everything, because the more that you see things, right, the more that things that are outside of your norm, you can scroll across and be like,

what is that? Like there are cultures, there are people, there are lifestyles that we might not have any idea, right, existed, but in a sense, that are like literally at your fingertips. At the same time, I think my concern, and I am an auntie now, right? So auntie is concerned that with the high amount of editing, right, the idea that there are youngsters that are coming up, that really don't understand the actual work that entails. And oftentimes, professional dancers aren't posting the actual work. They're posting the product, which is awesome. But all the in between stuff gets edited out. And so when they're faced with the real world of what dance is, then they're shocked. And then the other thing would be, people are becoming famous on Instagram. But we're not necessarily seeing that product on stage. Like, oftentimes, it can take them away from the thing that made them famous in the first part. That's the part that that concerns me. Min, I feel like you have something to say.

Min: I just remember having conversations with friends in companies, telling me yeah, this dancer, maybe who has a prominent social media following, like you don't know, you know, he posts this picture of this amazing trick he does. And it is amazing. But you didn't see like the 100 takes he did to do it.

So I do agree with the fact that what you see on Instagram, people don't realise it's not the finished product. And what I do feel that Shelby and Harper and I kind of do sometimes is almost consciously trying to buck that trend by showing the real things and showing more of ourselves. But I'm also curious, if you don't mind me asking like the other two people, do you find that sometimes that's just when you put yourselves out there and you consciously try to buck the trend of only showing this polished veneer, do you sometimes worry that you're putting too much of you out there? Because sometimes I will consciously talk about what I struggle with, say with my mental health over my business, because I think it's important to show people that social media is not just everything fancy and nice. But then sometimes I worry, am I putting too much of myself out there and having it just all be the me show? And I was wondering if...

Theresa: So Shelby do you ever feel that you're exposing too much of yourself to the public?

Shelby: I do have questions about, where's the limit for my privacy. So for example, you will never see a picture of me with my family, you will never see posts that shares exactly where I am at that moment. I think that while it's great for dancers to share these sort of behind the scenes moments, and a lot of the reality if they can, I mean, you were talking about that it's true that maybe we don't always share the process and that's a problem and you can't just keep showing the products. But some people do share a lot of their personal life and they also do share the process and it can become very personal. For me, it's always been I do want my privacy because I get this feeling that when too many people see too much of my personal life, I know that's going to put expectation on me of how do I want to be perceived, and I kind of don't want to care about it. And I don't want to feel pressure from the masses of judgment of any sort. So it's kind of why I keep things divided.

And it's easier somehow to do that with dance, because dance is judged all the time, you get reviews in the newspaper, you get commentary from your ballet masters all the time. So I really don't mind putting myself as a dancer up online. And so that's also why I don't mind showing, like when things go wrong, because I want to set that expectation that people know kind of what my normal is, that if you come and see me in a show, you're not going to have this super high expectation of me because I've filtered down on my videos, and then you see me in a show and you're like, oh she was better on Instagram.

Theresa: And that has happened.

Shelby: Yeah. I've gone to see things and, and I hate that. And I also hate that I'm judging people.

Theresa: It's tricky, right? I mean, Harper, do you fear, like, over exposure, not in like being everywhere, but personally, as a human?

Harper: I don't know why, but I'm someone if when I get into the studio, I really struggle with turning on the camera and filming a rehearsal. And there are dancers who I can see who I follow on Instagram, who share all the rehearsals, they share all these clips, and I find it such a distraction. I find it that like, I just can't, I'm like worried about the camera or I'm like, oh my gosh, like, I rarely ever film my rehearsals. And I rarely ever show a lot of that on my social media. I share pictures of me dancing or a pose or, but there's not a lot of me doing like my job as much as people maybe would think.

And I do know that I have people who appreciate ballet and love ballet and know ballet and know dancing. But I share my energy, I share my excitement, my interests, because I think that I thought that you couldn't be interested in the things that I'm interested in to be a classical dancer. And you couldn't watch *The Real Housewives* and be obsessed with *RuPaul's Drag Race*, you couldn't put on a pump. You couldn't do these things, because it would have some effect on your career or your work ethic. And it doesn't. And so I share that. And so, yeah.

Theresa: And so let me ask you another question. Because it's almost like you became an unintentional, or maybe it was intentional, advocate for LGBTQ, for non-binary dancers, for a lifestyle, for living openly and out loud and unabashedly. Was that just a byproduct of you creating content? And then if so, then like, how do you put that backpack on and walk with it?

Harper: Okay, do we have the time? Here we go. Here we go. Here we go. I guess where I'll start is that this past year and a half, really was a learning experience for me with the Black Lives Matter movement, with figuring out what to say as a black queer dancer. I felt a responsibility, especially within my company, as the highest ranked black dancer. I felt like I had this responsibility to be

the voice of black dancers in my company. I felt like I had to represent them all and I had to speak eloquently with management, with staff, with my boss, and it took a real toll on my mental state. It was a lot to navigate and it was a lot to, I felt like a huge burden on my shoulders. That was also put on by myself.

And I think as a visible social media, Harper's queer, we get it, I felt the same thing. How are you advocating for the LGBTQ+ community? Do you always have to advocate for the LGBTQ? What are your thoughts on this? What are your opinions? What are you doing to use your platform? And over the past year and a half, I really have come to the understanding that I am the activism, I am the change by living my truth, working hard, waking up, eating right so I can take ballet barre and do it really well, is activism.

Theresa: Yes, holding space.

Harper: It's full activism. And so to your question about the responsibility of being an advocate, I think that it came with, oh this opportunity happened. I will take that and speak on it, and then learn from that opportunity. I've done Pride campaigns with Ralph Lauren and MAC Cosmetics. And I understand when they do the interview, that they love these words of authentic, unapologetic, living your truth, you know, I can give you that. And I know that's what they want, but also, doing the Nutcracker prince for an audience at a 2pm matinee is just as much activism as speaking and using my platform.

Theresa: Absolutely. It's just, it's one of those things where you, you don't realise it, as you're doing it, you're just being like, I feel the same way. I fell into the work that I do. And all of a sudden, it's like, oh there's this responsibility, you can't necessarily back away from it. But it's everything. It comes at you and you slay it as it comes.

Harper: Yeah, I mean, the first, 2015, my friend surprised me with giant pink stiletto heels when we were working out in the gym. And I put them on with my best friend, and we ran on a treadmill and the video went viral. Probably because a lot of gay people and people who loved gay people, it resonated with them, and they followed me. Now I have all these gay followers. Does that mean that I'm all of a sudden speaking on political rights for gay people? I don't know. But all of a sudden a lot of gay people followed me. And I was like, I want to keep making these videos, I want more people to follow me. And what you choose to continue to share, your followers are going to want more of that and demand more of that. So you have to consciously, especially when you get a lot of numbers, you have to consciously be aware of what you're sharing. Because I'm a Houston Ballet soloist first and foremost, I'm not a professional heel dancer, I just happen to be a professional ballet dancer who can run in heels on a treadmill. So it's not what I want to be known for. I could be the next I could be the next Charli D'Amelio on TikTok, and have a whole page of heels, right? But that's not what I want to be known for.

Shelby: I wanted to add on to what Harper was saying. Yeah, it's a lot about how, Theresa, you and I met. Just because thousands of people follow you, that doesn't suddenly make you an expert on a subject. And you've got all these people listening to you. And you're kind of like, what do I do with this? Because I don't want it to go to waste, like this is this is a possibility. It's a platform. We all want to do good. I can maybe change people's opinions on things, I can make people aware of things. But also, if you kind of misstep or you say something and you didn't quite understand, also it means thousands and thousands of people hear you say that or see you do that.

And so that's actually how Theresa and I met. So when the Black Lives Matter movement started revitalising on social media, I thought, okay I have this huge platform, and we know that in ballet there are a lot of problems with racism on various levels. And a lot of them were also things that I think a lot of people maybe never even considered, because they weren't in those shoes. And so, I first started trying to bring in people and I was like, hey, okay, I'm going to reach out to dancers of colour that I know and kind of let them talk and they can share it. And then it was really Theresa that approached me. And she said, like, also consider that you're kind of asking a lot of people to speak about their experience that could weigh heavy on them. And have you considered other ways also to help educate your audience? And there are so many problems in ballet, in the dance world in general, that I would love to talk about, but it's like, how do you approach it?

Theresa: And you created, what was it called, a study hall?

Shelby: Yeah, because everyone's having this discussion, like, you got to do your homework. Theresa you came up with that name, and I love it, it was a perfect like way to kind of invite people to show, I'm studying, you can study too. I found some interesting articles that were suggested to me, maybe you want to read them. If y'all want to discuss together like a study hall, let's do that, invite as an open table, whoever wants to join in my Instagram Live. Come join me.

And I feel like that's been, along with other things, so then for example I'm not a nutritionist, brought in a professional nutritionist one time also to do live Q&A that people can bring their questions forward, their concerns and things. And I think approaching social media that way, as an open dialogue with people rather than preaching, is a really great way to raise awareness of things that probably need a little bit more attention.

Theresa: I think that's amazing. And I think that that's really the heart of not just this conversation, but the conversation around social media, because there is, the reach is so broad, the impact can be so great, and rapid, that there's a level of responsibility that when you're at home going, like, oh I'm just doing my thing, right, you don't necessarily think that that's going to become something.

So now that you all have these amazing platforms, how do you see your platform evolving? Now that you're aware of the reach that you have, the influence that you have. Obviously, it does change, like before you post, you're like, wait, is that okay? Who is that going affect? How is that changing?

Min: I kind of see my platform evolving organically. Of course I do put a lot of thought into how I can use it to say help my business, obviously because Cloud & Victory is a business. And also how can I serve my community. But I've never been super calculated about it. Because the goal for me is always to kind of provide like I said, a space that makes people smile and feel good and feel accepted, when I didn't have that and social media is always changing. So I evolve and move in whatever direction best helps me get out that message. But at the same time, for me, the most important thing is to keep that focus and be responsible again about how I use Instagram in like a positive way and however my use of social media evolves for me it's very important to retain I guess those core principles of why I do what I do, and to do it with compassion. That's really important.

Theresa: Harper, Shelby, any thoughts on how your platform either is evolving, or how you would like to evolve your platforms?

Harper: It's interesting, because I feel like I do wear the hat of influencer. And, you know, I have a manager, a social media manager, who helps with brand deals, and I've created a way to have income through my social media. And I think because I have this career as a ballet dancer, and showing up to work every day for that, and the stresses of rehearsal, I didn't get that lift, I need to build my stamina for that, it takes away from oh I didn't do that post well. It's a healthy distraction from the world of social media.

But where I see it going, I mean, I'm obsessed with social media. Like I love it. I love the fashion, I love the ideas of meeting new people and photoshoots and creating something and images. I love taking pictures, and I love dancing to music and heels. It's just like, when would I ever get to dance to house music the way that I do on stage? I would love to just continue to build. I just think that visibility is currency. And the more eyes I can get on what I want to do, it just will help to make that happen. And I confidently trust my point of view, and where I see my world going, and so I want elevation, I want more eyes, I want more traction, because there's more that I want to do. And I think that the attention of that through my social media can help that.

Shelby: I kind of second Harper, dance is a healthy distraction from social media. I do not have a social media manager, I didn't even have a phone that video worked for the whole first year that I had Biscuit Ballerina. I would ask my colleagues to film me on their good phones and email it to me and I would pull up a tablet my grandma gave me and upload it to Instagram. And so mine's evolved because I have a phone that has video now.

Also, it used to be at the beginning, it was just me, I would literally go into studio at the end of the day, and in one take like pick a variation and like do it, record it once. The first take was the first take, it was literally a minute and 30 seconds time commitment to create content. And I would cut it into a couple pieces and post a little piece each day and do the same thing the next week. And then I kind of got to the end of what variations I have memorised, so then I had to put in more effort to like watch a video and learn choreography.

But the fact that I'm still working as a professional dancer, that's my priority. Like Royal Ballet Flanders, that is where I get my greatest joy, is rehearsing and performing with this group. So there was maybe a time when Biscuit Ballerina started growing that I felt this expectation of, I have to post every day, people are expecting to see stuff from me. But actually, I kind of made the choice that I wasn't going to make money off of this. Like, maybe I could if I found some way and I hustled and I worked it. But I feel like as long as no one's paying me for any sponsored content, I owe no one nothing on social media and like I took a two-month hiatus just recently, it's just like I don't, I'm on vacation, I want to be with family. I don't owe anyone anything. And although I do like to make people laugh, and do all these things, I also think I need to respect my needs as a person. And when I'm stressed at work, and I need to invest extra time in the studio and I don't want to be staying up late trying to edit a video because I want the timing to be perfect with a fall and an accent in the music or whatever.

I like that I can disconnect that way and be like, you know what, my real-world life comes first. Maybe after my career ends, I can transition Biscuit Ballerina into being somewhat more of a business. And then yeah, I would dedicate a lot of energy and time. And I would maybe have more of a plan of what to do with it. But right now it's quite improvised of okay, opportunities come up, issues come up, and maybe an idea, sparks. So it's like, okay, balance in life. Social media needs to also be balanced with the process in your personal, real-world life of what you're doing.

Theresa: I love that. Kids, listen to that. This has been an incredible conversation. And, you know, I follow you all, and I enjoy you all, and I think that I get a little giggle in my day. Does anybody have anything to say in closing, we'll make it like a Quaker meeting, if there's anything on your heart?

Shelby: There's just one other thing I found to be really interesting, as you know, kind of the dangers of social media that I think we could be aware of, I think teachers especially should maybe be aware. Over the years, I always teach in my hometown, or I teach at kind of small dance schools in the US. And I've noticed a change in the way that students approach class, that it used to be that when I would give a correction or say something, people be trying it as I was saying it. And then slowly over the years, I kind of saw kids not really trying it on the spot as I was giving feedback. And I thought that was kind of strange, maybe it's a generational thing. Maybe this group just isn't as interested in ballet. Maybe they're not as you know, like correction-hungry as I was as a kid.

And then one day after class, I saw the kids sticking around and trying all the pirouettes and trying all the jumps and trying all the balances, but recording themselves. And then I saw a bunch of them start adding me on social media and I saw that their Instagram page was so confident. And it was filled with nothing but photos or videos of themselves dancing. And I realised people are starting to be afraid of failing because of how much they edit themselves online. And that's really impacting your ability to grow. Like you have to fail to grow, and you need to be comfortable failing in a studio and a studio needs to be a safe space.

And that kind of reminds me going back to what Harper said about he doesn't like having people filming rehearsals, because suddenly he's aware of the camera. And I think it happens in maybe ballet schools and companies that people film themselves in class, in rehearsal. But I look at, for example, especially the commercial dance scene where being filmed in a class is so important, and it's always show, and you're always trying to look your best. And I kind of question like, how can we help people get away from that and understand again that the studio is a safe space to fail so that we can learn from our mistakes, rather than it being a place where you don't want to show yourself off and you'd rather have your private moment to practice on your own, and then only show the final product.

Theresa: Thank you. That is going to have to be our final word. And I love that it's a final word because it goes back again to the heart of what we do, which is the dance. With that, I would like to thank you for joining us. Making A Scene is a product by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Singapore's national performing arts centre. The theme music is more than we know from the album Seamonster by The Steve McQueens, a band supported by Esplanade under the Mosaic Associate Artists initiative. Find more episodes of Making A Scene at esplanade.com/offstage, and on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and SoundCloud. Thank you for listening and stay tuned for more inspiring conversations with art makers.