

Janice Laurence Pt. 2 | Discover Stories Episode 88

Announcement 0:08

The Strong Sessions are back. The Vancouver Adapted Music Society's flagship event celebrates musicians with disabilities, featuring performances from four talented artists and bands from our community join us on August 25 at the Roundhouse Community Centre from 5pm to 8pm. Tickets are by donation. For more information, visit the Vancouver Adapted Music Society on Facebook, @vamsociety on Instagram, or on our website, www.vams.org, we hope to see you there.

Tanya Griffiths 0:45

That's such a beautiful and open approach to to dance as well. Of just like being being open to the different forms that'll come up that day and and really welcoming whatever a person is bringing into the space.

Janice Laurence 1:06

Yeah, I try to make it personal, you know, so that people feel welcome and seen, you know. And part of it because I think so many people are isolated at home that yeah, just, I just think when we reach out to other people and share ourselves, it's it helps social health, you know, like, just makes the world a better place. When we find the way to communicate through dance, through movement, rather than than our words. You know, I think we can all find things to agreement, to agree on when we're dancing. It's easier. You know, we might have very different political opinions or religious beliefs or or whatever. But yeah, I just, I just, I just want everybody to find a way to connect.

Tanya Griffiths 2:00

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And dance can be a way for that to happen.

Janice Laurence 2:09

Just little talk about that, enough like it's this elite kind of colonial kind of definition of who gets to be in the space. You know?

Tanya Griffiths 2:20

Yes, yeah, absolutely. And my next question actually sort of ties in with what you've been sharing, but based off of what you've learned from your research into dance and movement, can you talk more about, like, the self healing aspects of that.

Janice Laurence 2:44

Absolutely, actually, I just was part of a dance documentary on the topic of healing.

Tanya Griffiths 2:51

Oh, wow.

Janice Laurence 2:52

Yeah, it was, it was really beautiful, because there, I mean, there are a few dancers who have found the path to healing through, through dance, yeah, just, just a beautiful way to enjoy your body and connect with with what is possible and appreciate and nurture and you know, like there's forgiveness in there and care and compassion and just, I think I've, I think I have spent so much time in my head most of my life, you know, all my my academic accomplishments, my career accomplishments, and then worrying about all the medical appointments and doctor's appointments, and always being told what's wrong with me? And I like to say, I'm in great shape for the shape I'm in, like, a lot of it's just how you tell your story. Yeah, right. Like, if I say to somebody, oh, I'm a disabled dance artist, they probably will think that I used to be a dancer and I got hurt in some kind of horrible accident, and now I'm disabled. But the opposite is true. I became a disabled dancer because, because it's a, it's a, it's a possibility I never thought about, and it's and I always have the equipment I need, I always have my body.

Tanya Griffiths 4:25

Oh, oh, that's so beautiful. I know I've overused the word beautiful today, but I'm always, I'm always in awe of the the experiences and the gifts of of yeah, of people's stories, and how, how much they have to share, and the wisdom that they've gained through their life experience. So yeah, it's always, it's always me being in, just like marveling in, in the the capacity for for people to you. To take complete ownership of their story and their narrative.

Janice Laurence 5:07

Thank you. It's, it's, I love being able to talk about this and to realize how far I've come. And you know, of course, sometimes I feel like I'm living with the imposter syndrome, like I don't

have the years and years of university training to be a dancer and this and that, but I mean, I have the lived experience of learning to dance, and I'm an educator, and I'm just a human being, and I'm not trying to claim that I'm an expert. But you know, if you want to learn something, it's good to teach it. Yeah, I just, I'm always, I'm always humbled when I go to other people's dance workshops and I'm like, Oh, I wish I could be like them. And then, and then I just absorb a little bit of what I like about that person. And, you know, it's Rome wasn't built in a day. And I just keep learning. And, you know, my first master's degree was in education, and I, and I feel this is a self directed learning project right now, where I'm I'm learning as much about movement as possible. And, yeah, why not? Why not? I want to. I want to dance as long as I'm breathing.

Tanya Griffiths 6:33

Oh, oh, wow. Um Yeah, I think I remember somebody before mentioning what, what you just said, about how the things we need to like, we teach what we need to learn the most, because there's this affinity that we have to it already, and there's that like foundation in the relationship with it and and so we sort of deepen our, yeah, our knowledge by being in the role of a teacher somewhat or a facilitator in some of these spaces too, because that also brings us to step further into our teachings and really live that out. So I I'm also, I'm also a believer in in that, in that sentiment.

Janice Laurence 7:34

I love it. Everybody's a learner, everybody's a teacher. We can all benefit from exchanging ideas and information experiences.

Tanya Griffiths 7:45

Absolutely. Can you share a moment from your dance journey that was transformative for you?

Janice Laurence 7:54

Yes. Last December, one of my friends told me about a performance project that was an eight-day project that was paid, paid at a professional dance rate, and she said, "I think you'd be great for this. Why don't you apply for it?" And I did, and it took a couple of months, and 65 people applied for this, and they hired 15 of us, and I was, I was hired, and I got to work with some, they were all, everybody that I worked with was an amazing dancer, professional dancers, and some, some of us had visible disabilities, but most people, I don't think, were disabled. And it was we put together a piece for International

Dance Day, and we performed at the Dance Centre, and we were hired by Action at a Distance in New Works in the Dance Centre, our director and choreographer was Vanessa Goodman, who was amazing. But the reason I got that job is all my work with All Bodies Dance Project and everything else that I that I'm doing around you know, everybody knows each other, and, yeah, I that was able to be given a good reference, but it was amazing to work as a dancer for on a stage that I've watched people perform, and I always wanted to dance on that stage. I always had a picture of me dancing on that stage. I've watched my friends dance on that stage, and I did it. I danced. I danced on that stage, and I knew that the the backstage area was not accessible and that the dressing rooms were upstairs. But I also met with Vanessa and Hilary Maxwell, who also hired me, who said, what are your access needs? And they made sure that I had a bathroom that I could get to and stuff. So a lot of stages are not accessible. This stage was accessible, but the backstage wasn't accessible. That is a significant barrier in for performers, and we're working on it solely. Is, you know, when you when you are working as a dance artist, where are the accessible stages and backstages and and if you're in the audience, there's more likely to be a space for you, but there might not be. And what if three people who use wheelchairs show up, and there's only two spots for people that use wheelchairs? I mean, so, I mean, there's lots of barriers. Yeah, for accessibility, I am. I'm very passionate about advocating for change. That's something I never thought that I would get involved in. But when you really live it and you're excluded from space, so you just want to, you just want to make it easier for other people to get into those spaces, whether it's it's just a lack of confidence, people don't feel that they belong there, or they don't know how to get into that space, or they don't know a type of mobility that could be used for dancing, or, I don't know, just always trying to open doors for People. And yeah, be that outreached hand. So, you know, people have helped me, and oh my gosh, I had so much fun performing, and we had a professional photographer that documented it, and I and I saw myself through the audience's eyes, and I'm like, wow, like the lighting was really cool, the score, the dance. Oh, this, it was magical. I never, oh, I would love to do more of that. That would be my dream. Is how to do more professional work, get hired work, work in a professional setting. And I always am working on my health and being as healthy as possible, so that, if I get these opportunities, I can actually do it, you know, although I could, I couldn't, I mean, it's hard, it's hard, it's hard. When you have a disability, you don't know how your body is going to respond. But there's, you know, there's certain things we do have control over. So, you know, yeah, I do as much as I can.

Tanya Griffiths 12:23

Yeah, yeah. I think that's a really lovely and empowering way to put it. And I think there's this magic and beauty too of being on this, on these big stages where you you get a larger reach, and there are more people who get to watch you, and some of these folks may be in a wheelchair or need mobility aid, and seeing you on the stage and seeing different bodies take up space in these kind of events I could, I can imagine how affirming and validating and how that already opens doors for them in their way of thinking.

Janice Laurence 13:14

yeah, and it's just, and I, and I would like to see disability just more normalized, you know, where people don't gasp in ooh and ahh and call me inspirational just because I'm dancing using a wheelchair or like, just like I had one friend who said, I actually love watching people who are disabled dance, because I'm so tired of looking at the same normative bodies all the time, and with a disabled dance artist, it's all different, because your bodies move in different ways, and your you know, the art is there, and your creativity is there, and your dedication is there, and it's just but your body moves in such different ways, and it's interesting. You know, like, we all know what the traditional ballet dancer moves like, you know, there's, it's very predictable in some ways, right? So, yeah, I just want more representation of people with disabilities as performers and in all walks of life, all areas of life, you know, and just being part of that, that momentum of, let's move forward, you know, yeah, let's include more people. Let's show the possibilities.

Tanya Griffiths 14:35

Yeah, yeah. And I, and I already see that you're, you're part of that, you're part of that movement. And as we come to the end of our conversation today, I just wanted to open up the space for you to if there was anything else that you'd like to share with the folks who are tuning in today.

Janice Laurence 15:02

Thank you, yeah. I mean, of course, I encourage people to find a way to dance, find people that they can dance to people are welcome to to join the the All Bodies Dance Project classes in person in Metro Vancouver. They're free. They'll start up again in in September at different community centres. And, you know, we have a virtual class on Friday with Connectra. You can find inclusive dance with if you just do a Google search, just, you know if one instructor or facilitator doesn't work for you, find another one. But I think it's always good to let people know what your access needs are. If you have hearing loss, let people know that if you have sensitivity to light, let people know that if you need to come and go

during the class a lot because of whatever reason. Just let people know. Just let people know what you need to be in that space and and try to learn about how you can support the other people in the space, because we all are going through things in life, and we can all support each other. And, you know, I've, I've met people that are scared to ride in an elevator, you know. But I'm, I'm scared of unexpected touch, because it can be so painful, like so.

Tanya Griffiths 16:34

But we just all have our thing, you know.

Janice Laurence 16:38

Yeah, you know, one, one thing. Tanya, I didn't, didn't remember to say this, but some of the musicians from VAMS have actually come out and played for our classes at the Roundhouse for All Bodies Dance Project. Graeme and is it Brandon? Bryden.

Tanya Griffiths 16:58

Bryden, yeah.

Janice Laurence 17:00

And Dave, who, sadly, is no longer with us, was just an amazing part of that. Dave and Graeme and Bryden, yeah, they came and they played, and so, yeah, there's this, there's this beginning of this relationship between our bodies, dance and VAMS.

Tanya Griffiths 17:18

Yeah, oh, that's so beautiful. And music too, with dance just such a good what like, what good therapy to really tune into one's body. My friend, who I love going out dancing with, she's always like, just, just tune into the music and just move. Like, let yourself be moved. And I always remember that, because sometimes it's it's all up in the head, that really it's about coming into the body and the breath, so.

Janice Laurence 17:51

Yeah, just get out and try something. And if it's not dance, just if there's something that that calls you, just find a way to do it. Find your people. And it doesn't, it just might, it just might change your life and bring you healing and introduce you to a whole new way of moving through the world.

Tanya Griffiths 18:12

Well, that is such a beautiful way to close our conversation, and I really do hope that people feel called to explore movement in ways that feels good for them. And yes, thank you for coming on here and for sharing your story and just for being authentically you so it Yeah, it was an absolute pleasure being in conversation with you today, Janice.

Janice Laurence 18:44

Thank you, Tanya, it's my favorite topic. Yes, thank you.

Tanya Griffiths 18:54

Of course. And for folks who are tuning in, I'll be sure to include the the links to All Bodies Dance. So, yeah, if you're interested in that, you can check it out.

Janice Laurence 19:09

That's great.

Tanya Griffiths 19:09

Yes, thank you. Thank you again. And I really look forward to all these events and all these collaborations where art gives people the opportunity to come together.

Janice Laurence 19:22

Yes, to be continued. And my, my dance class coming up is called Move to the Beat with, a disabled dancer named Janpi Star and they're, they're down in California, and we've been dancing together for over four years and we've never met in person, we have a great time on Zoom. So yeah, Move to the Beat.

Tanya Griffiths 19:49

That sounds so fun. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Janice Laurence 19:54

Thank you. All right.

Tanya Griffiths 19:56

Take care. Bye.

Announcement 20:01

This podcast is brought to you by the Vancouver Adapted Music Society. Since 1988, VAMS has been supporting and promoting musicians with disabilities in Metro Vancouver through various programs including music lessons, recording projects and live performance opportunities. To learn more about us, visit our website at www.vams.org, @vamsociety on Instagram, the Vancouver Adapted Music Society on Facebook, or email us at info@vams.org. Thanks for listening.