

Q & A after Indigo  
Saturday June 18, 2017  
Velocity Dance  
Seattle, Washington.

Kori: But rather than launch into the history of everything, let's just stay with what you saw tonight and any questions you might have about that.

Q/Melissa: I was riveted personally... [breaks into tears] I was in tears for twenty minutes, and I was worried I was going to have to leave. I saw the whimsy, and this purposefulness of play. I saw my childhood, the intensity of play, how important play was, and it felt like you guys' — like the way you were mirroring each other, synchronizing and stuff, was incredible to me, seeing as how I understood this was an improvisation.

I was also curious, I was reading a little bit about Kelly. I was curious, your study of alternative medicine or holistic medicine, how do you feel like this has kind of worked into dance, and how it's helped you to emote, or even feel within the...

Kelly: Yeah, I think it's absolutely, directly tied in there.

Q/Melissa: OK, yeah.

Kelly: I mean there are traditional routes in which it is absolutely tied. There is a whole field of movement therapy, dance therapy, which is a little bit more structured. So for me this is a way to dive into that realm without the formal structure of that. But it certainly has... gosh, the sense of community that you build, so number one that's like a healing factor, so having support in that way. But also being able to use your own agency as a voice, so finding who you are within this network, and how that builds... I think that is exactly, hugely medicine.

Q/Melissa: Oh my god, yes. I mean like I feel healed tonight. [Big laughter.] Thank you, thank you.

Q/Venerable: Yeah, so um, it's just very impressive, the first part. Especially is the older dancers. I thought, "Oh my god. Those are older dancers!" [Laughter.] And also I loved it that the first part was without the music. Again, that was like a real revelation, "Look at that, they're dancing without music!" [Big laughter.] Anyway, [...] a revelation.

Jonathan: Thank you. [To the others:] This is my meditation teacher. [Ahhs.] So glad to see you here.

Christopher: [Referring to the first person who spoke:] And that's Melissa, one of my best friends.

Q/Melissa: I know, I'll try not to cry any more.

Kori: Two question, we'll do... and then...

[4:41]

Q3: Was the music improv too?

Christopher: nodding yes.

Q3: So you didn't follow any specific...

Christopher: I call it live scoring. It's improvised, context-specific.

Q3: It's beautiful. It went along with the movements that they were doing. Fantastic.

Q4: Do you follow them, or do they follow you? [Laughter.]

Christopher: That's a pretty good question. [Chuckles.] It's a really deep question. I could go deep pretty quick, but I won't. [Laughter.] I would say it's supposed to support what's happening, in the context. Time of day, [...] everything. I don't need to make a list, just everything. But as soon as that starts, it becomes [...] Does that answer your question?

Q4: Mm hm.

Christopher: And then I'm putting things out based on them, and they're probably responding in a way that they can probably answer more accurately. And then I kind of see what they're doing, and it starts that conversation. It's like any conversation. It's like this conversation. [Laughter.]

Q5: I'm curious about the array of responses to this question, but what inspires your engagement in the motion. Like whether you're standing on the fringe, or you're engaged in a different movement, what inspires you to either break off or sync with something else? Is it the meaning that you see, in your feeling, or you want to create, or an emotion or a story? I'm just curious what's happening in your minds when you're improvising.

Kori: We can have like half a dozen of us answer or so, (or all of us, if you want). I think it's a little bit individual for each of us. So we can just popcorn, and give you our answers.

Josh: I think it's a range of things, depending on the moment. First thing, for myself, it's kind of like this dialog thing that Christopher was talking about just a moment ago. Just staying open and trying to communicate with the things that are going on in the space, the music, the person next to you, my own internal impulses and sensations. It's a matter of saying yes or no to those, and then just trying them out...

Hana: Yeah, like listening, and sensitivity, and trust, lots of trust.

Joe: To me there's sort of an overall field, almost like a magnetic field that, as we move into the space, as the music contributes, as the lighting changes, different places in the space will ask for something. And then layered in there is an awareness of the space itself, and compositionally what might look like it needs to happen. And then it's all about the relationships. Who am I connecting with, and what's happening here? Is there a connection that's alive and we're amplifying it, or is it reaching its completion and we're dispersing.

Spring: Also, improvisation is called instant composition. So all of what is already shared, but also like looking at it compositionally, what adds, what's missing.

Kori: My mom came to the show last night. And afterwards, I asked her what she thought and what her experience was, and she was like, "There were a lot of people doing a lot of things all at once..." [Laughter.] "... and sometimes I just wanted it to be still." So I shared that with everybody tonight. And then, one of my things tonight was making choices about what I would do. Every now and then I would

look around, and if other people were moving I just chose to be still. So there are these really simple compositional things that you have in your pocket like that, and if you're not excited about what you're doing or you're not sure what to do, there's always some little thing like "just hold still." You know? There's all these small things like that. And then there's bigger things, too, like this shirt that I had on. We wear different costumes every night, so this is the first time I've danced in that shirt. And it sort of has a life, it's so big. And then I was taking it off, and then that means something, about this person talking to you, when they take their shirt off, like getting rid of this burden or something. And then it came back later with a different shirt, and what does that shirt mean? It was like a theme or motif building, so there's a story that gets carried through. That too. So there are various plain, compositional tools, and there are very emotional, tender, story tools that weave in and out. And they're all kind of there, and it's like cooking. There's no recipe, you're just, "I think it needs more salt," and you just try it.

Q6: When you're practicing, is every practice different because of the improv?

Kori: Well, sometimes we choose a project that we want to work on. Like "Let's see what our range is with moving fast, all the way down to not moving at all," and we'll do an exercise where we're focusing mostly on that sort of compositional slider. So in that regard, yes, each practice is different. But I'd say that since our group really sort of synced up Monday this past week, (we've been rehearsing every single day), we have a sort of recognizable flavor or feel. I think you could pick us out of the other, (all of the other!) improvisational groups. [Laughter.] So yeah, I think we have a tone, sort of like a group of musicians that would play together. But every time we get together and improvise the sound is a little bit different.

Joe: There's a thing, too, about, if we do something and it's magic, then there this idea that we've cast this beautiful pot. [Ah.] And we break it. [Oh, plus laughter.]

Hilary: Which also comes back to the choices we're making compositionally, and what we're thinking. There's moments when you're like, "I'm going to go break that thing..." [Laughter.] "...and see what happens when it breaks."

Q7: I was just wondering if you ever think about characters, or themes, or ideas that you want to portray, like before you go into it.

Jonathan: Yeah, I can answer that one. So this also addresses the question of what is your motivation. So, we were working, there were three sections, and in each of the sections there was like some [...] I don't think everybody relates this way, but for me, I had kind of an imaginary landscape for each of these three sections, and in that landscape I had a certain character I could relate to. And for some reason, when you're doing improvisational dance, there must be some bad blood between dancers and mimes, [group chuckles], because like many times, you're like [gestures] [...] and they're like, "Don't do that! That's miming!" So you don't want to have too much like a character, really, but a little bit, a little internal attitude can change the way you move. For me I find it taps into just different qualities of movement.

[12:35]

Kori: There is a character in this story though. Josh I think was the one who invented this. Well, we watched a documentary called Blue Alchemy. And in that documentary there's the whole history of indigo, how it was made by indigenous cultures, and then it was actually part of the plantation economy

here in the United States. And then indigo was synthesized in Europe around the turn of the century, and that totally shifted the methods of producing indigo and all of the economic structures that supported that. So we had all of this kind of floating around, and we didn't want to bring any of it heavily into the forefront. Except we were working on scores, like practicing these things, what do we want to practice doing. And there was the story of this daughter of a plantation owner. And the plantation owner was doing business in London, leaves his 17-year-old daughter with the plantation, like, lots of slaves and a bunch of money, and seeds for indigo, and he's like, "Sweetheart, we need to make this work. I'm going away now. Figure it out." And so eventually she does, and it's a success, but in watching the documentary, just thought to myself, what a crazy thing to get dropped into. Like on one hand it's so much power and authority and responsibility, and if you want those kind of things, amazing. But also power and authority and responsibility for all these people who probably don't want to be where they are, and potentially could like take you out of the picture if they wanted to. So they have a lot of dark stories in there; there's also a lot of really sweet stories of cultures where wearing an indigo sash or shawl is an honor, reserved for the elders in the community. The process of making indigo, like the methods of doing it are passed down from generation to generation, and taught, almost as a secret, to the generation that's going to inherit it, in some cultures. So we decided to bring one of those stories out, and have a known character. But I think otherwise it's just the implication of an indigo person layered on here we are everyday, and the relationships that we actually do have with each other.

Q8: You guys have spoken a lot about stillness, and space, and... how do you balance the, by its nature dynamic, elements of dance with the enclosed space, that is this closed studio space. I mean that logistically, and conceptually.

Josh: Earlier I was thinking one of the cool things about improvisation specifically is, you get to be the choreographer and the dancer. And there's this weird dynamic I feel in the dance world. There's like the choreographers and the dancers don't mix with the choreographers, especially in the ballet world. And there's just this really terrible divide, and it's awful. But the nice thing about this is we get to do all of it, and we get to do it together, in this space. And so that's, there's a lot of dynamic, there's a lot of everything going on all the time, but the nice thing to remember is, even though it is overwhelming — it is, like, infinite, improv is infinite, it just keeps going — you're still making the decisions, and you get to decide what's going on as a group and as an individual. So it might not seem like there's very much cohesion or control sometimes, but really, we all are under control at all times.

Q8: That was obvious, though, I was going to say, no, there was fucking cohesion. [Big laughter.] I mean, wow, it was beautiful. Yeah.

[16:50]

Hilary: We actually worked a lot on that this week with completely open scores, just be in the space, make choices [...] whereas this is, like where you're working on, like a speed shift. But we also talked about, as each individual person you have this framework that you bring which includes history with dance, other things you bring to the table, where you come from, where you're going, and that creates this box within which you make choices. So you talked a lot about specifically making choices, so you're not dancing every moment within this infinite frame of possibilities but you are still creating individual boxes for yourself as well as constructing with other people in that relationship, this world that we are developing.

Christopher: I feel like all of this improvisation is two things, and they might be equal. It's the acknowledgement that what's really happening is a microcosm of life itself. And that it's also, it's a celebration of the now, the music, the movement, writing, whatever.

Q9: I'm curious about preparation. A lot of people said it brought up the theme of trust, and one of the things that was really affecting me a lot were these antagonistic movements, the kind of pushing, the pulling, a little bit of violence and boundary breaking. And so I'm wondering how do you prepare to be engaged... [Big laughter.]

Megan: I just feel like we create a space in which we can build that trust and start to get to know each other's structures and how we feel like we're prepared to move, and it's really just a building, developing. We've worked really hard over the past week, and I think we've all had a really great time getting to know each other, [...]. There's still, there's many more things that are [...].

Josh: It's a lot where it's like interpersonal growing with one another, but also there's a lot of technical skills that we've built together in terms of how we're moving, and our bodies are responding. So I mean, you can move through these more antagonist ways because we have the dance training that keeps us safe to support that.

Kelly: If somebody runs at you, and you don't catch them, it's on them. [Laughter.] It's like, yeah, I'm going to try to catch you, but if I don't, then I didn't. Sorry. [Laughter.] We have an agreement to take care of yourself first, and then it's checking with people.

Eve: I have a tendency to get a little pushy. [Laughter.] And it's just a lot of fun. [Big laughter.] And I'm excited when people... because you don't get to do that in everyday life. I mean, yeah, without some [...]. [20:21] And it's enjoyable to have like, real strong physical interactions with people [...] you know? It's intense. Maybe it might come off as violent, but it's just intense.

Hana: [...] support you. Because, what Megan was saying about knowing each other's structures, and also what Josh was saying about this intense training that we go through as dancers to just prepare ourselves in this ready stance that we innately have and yeah, our resilience, if I know Eve is about to start doing those things, I know how I can support her in that way, or complement her or contrast her, or just walk away, because of this trust and relationship and communal sense of helping each other through those moments of [whispered] violence. [Murmuring/laughing.]

Jonathan: It didn't start out like that. We started out more gentle, and build the trust up. We just met, most of us just met a week ago, and so we had to build up to that. For me especially, my background is in martial arts. So here in dance, what appears to be violence or antagonism is wrapped in a giant bubble of play. So it feels very safe. But I've had to do a lot of recalibrating to things, like it's not actually... it's pretend, it's playful. So, yeah, that's come out a lot more in the past few days as we've really come to trust each other a lot. We've had some just crazy rehearsals.

[00:22:16]

Q10: That was going to be one of my questions. I noticed that... Jonathan, yeah?... and Spring have martial art training and Qi Gong respectively, and I was curious how you felt like that helped you contribute to the dance and if you felt like it gave you a level of intuitiveness that you may not have otherwise possessed had it not been for your practices.

Spring: Yeah, I have a different background than the dancers. I didn't formally train in dance but I have a different vocabulary coming from martial arts and Qi Gong, which really helped me to approach contact from an energetic perspective. Yeah.

Q10: Do you feel like it helped you read everybody's energy and kind of flow with... well, I don't know, not "easy," but you know...

Spring: Yeah. That's my interface to start with. That's the doorway that I enter in through. But also, like Jonathan's martial arts training has a very different focus than dance.

Q10: Yeah, yes, yes.

Spring: So there's a translation of that world. Which, this world, for me is much more preferable, the playfulness and intimacy.

Q10: Yeah, that came out. It was really beautiful. There was just this sense of whimsy that was palpable.

Q11: I was translating the movement into sound, as if I were hearing it, and no matter what was happening, the whole was, there was some coherence. But I found that when there were more than four or five people who were coordinating together, it was like a melody, and a part of me relaxed, "Oh yes, now, that's familiar. I can understand that." In particular when you were all raising the one who was horizontal up and then carrying her around, and there were several other times when there was a larger coordination, I suppose, that's what made it seem like a melody. There were more individuals coordinated on one interaction. I just wanted to offer that feedback. It isn't that it should have all been melodies, because then that would have been boring. But to have that appear in the notes that were happening, or the phrases that were happening elsewhere, was an interesting contrast.

Jonathan: We worked a lot on that, and the word that I prefer is "group mind." So if we're copying each other, it looks different. But if we're all really having the same internal feelings, and therefore doing the same things, then I feel like it comes across as coherence even if our movements aren't exactly the same.

Joe: I love that metaphor of music. [00:25:32] It matches my inner experience, and the choices that I make. If there are deep, low tones going on over here, and there's sort of a through-line, a melody here, I might make a little high cymbals, or do something that contrasts but complements and adds to the whole. Yeah.

Q12: Can you all, each of you, lift any of the other ones? [Big laughter.] That's awesome.

[Lots of animated talking over one another.]

Christopher: In my dance experience, it's more of a mechanical, learned thing, rather than... [shakes head to indicate BSing, followed by big laughter.]

Jonathan: It's not as hard as it looks, if the balance is right.

Kori: Yeah, if they jump, too, then you get to lift them if they land on you... [more laughs]

Hilary: Well, it goes back to that sense of dialogue, and saying yes or saying no, and I think that maybe you could see some of this on stage, but like, "OK, are we gonna do this? Are we gonna do this? Are we gonna... Oh! You're up! OK."

Jonathan: Or I'm jumping on you, so therefore... [Laughter.]

Kori: There's a look, that I'm going to jump on you. [Laughter.]

Hilary: Or I'm going to pick you up. Don't move, I'm gonna pick you up. [Laughter.]

Kori: All right. Are there any more questions?

Q13: Just one more. How has improvisational dancing, especially for those of you have done this a lot, (I don't know where on the spectrum you're at, if this is most of your first time doing this, or if you've done this many times), but how has improv dancing affected your lives outside the dance world, like with, either other relationships, or yeah, just outside of dancing with people who are used to this? How does that translate over?

Kori: OK, like we all have five or six new friends that we didn't a week ago. Let me tell you a really quick, funny story. At this place where we studied, Earthdance, an improvisational event that happens, it's like a get-together once a year, and I once went a few years ago with my friend Gary. As we were leaving, he's like, OK, you're all going to get in your cars, you're going to drive down the highway, you're going to notice that you don't have enough gas, so you're going to pull into the gas station. When the attendant comes out to fill up your car for you, don't hug the gas station attendant. [Laughter.] He's not been at this event with all of us, so it's gonna weird him out a little bit. [Groans, laughs.] So there's, I don't know, we kind of have a way of relating to each other that's like a little family of sorts, and I mean that's sweet. And also, I think there's maybe something about the possibilities about how you can interact with someone, or the possibilities of what a relationship with another person can be like, that maybe you get a hint of in working through dance. So it's not a direct translation. It involves a little bit of, you take it out of this tank and you put it in this tank that has a different kind of water in or something, and it swims differently over here. But it's still recognizable.

Spring: I want to add a little bit. I do a lot of writing, and I find that my experience of doing dancing and writing really inform each other. It's as if my intellect, writing self is also a body, and as I'm dancing this body is learning this body, and it really, I feel like the feeling of dance, the texture, the sensation, the perception, really informs how I write, how I use my mind to embody a world through words.

Joe: It's also, it's really, really helpful. The practice of improvisation is incredibly helpful to learn how to not take yourself so damned seriously. [Laughter.] Right? If something happens, and you don't like the way it turns out, let it go. Try something else. [Murmurs.]

Jonathan: I would phrase that, also, maybe a different version, is not taking things personally. Because we all have an array of possibilities at any moment, and if someone picks you up and puts you somewhere different, you're like, "Whatever." [Laughter.] "I'm gonna be over here..." you know, and that translates directly to everyday life. If that happened to you like at the bank, you'd be, "Why did you just...!" But you're like, "Whatever." [Laughter throughout.]

Joe: So, I've never actually worked with a group of eleven dancers like this before. I was really impressed, throughout this process, you know, there would be some interpersonal conflict, or somebody'd get upset about something, or something else, but within minutes, or definitely very soon, it was let go, and we were back in the groove. Right? I was really struck by how unusual that is, for eleven people who don't know each other to get together and to work as beautifully as we did.

Q14: Yeah... Would you say that's because you're dancers? I mean many of you have been formally trained...

Joe: It's less with the dance and more with the choice and the practice of improvisation.

Christopher: It's really not about dance, actually. It's not about music. It's about finding a way to intentionally navigate risk, and move forward. That's really what it's all about.

Q15: You might say, trusting the flow. [Yeah's.]

Christopher: Or you can put it many ways. It's about risk in that almost innate human way.

Kori: Yeah, and imagination, and there's something about dancing, moving, (whatever we just did this last hour out here), where there are so many possibilities, and it's up to you, sort of, how many exist, because you can always imagine like a dozen more. And there's something so exciting about that. And also really satisfying. And maybe that's what we're all so interested in, that even if something goes wrong, or we get in a fight, or something doesn't feel right, it's like, OK, but this other stuff is important. This matters enough that these guys flew half way across this country to be here and do this, and we're going to do the same in October and visit them. So I can't put my finger on it or tell you in two words exactly what "it" is. It's "the thing." [Big laughter.] But yeah, that seems to matter more than whatever other things that cause us to stumble on the way to it.

Q16: It's too bad that our politicians can't do this! [Uproarious laughter and applause.]

Kori: It should be kindergarten.

Christopher: This touches on an interesting point. I think that everyone should engage in improv. Improv, contact improv, whatever you want to call it, everyone should do it. You learn that it's impossible to learn any other way. I mean, when I do that improvised music, it's just not the same.

Kori + others: Speaking of which... [announcement of workshop in the park].[00:33:54]