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Kevin Lau: I just think that the true essence of an artist is someone who really is not ever satisfied. They just want to continue creating and want to continue expanding their skills, and their way of viewing the world. And that can be represented in choreography, or art, or painting, or film, or whatever the case may be.

[Intro music fades in]

Bri Clarke: Happy New Year and welcome to (Art)versations, a meditative conversation about the artistic process. I am your host, Bri, like the cheese. Thank you for clicking on this show out of so many podcasts. You must be an artist? An art enthusiast? If you are feeling some sort of creative blockage or needing a bit of inspiration, this is the place for you.

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Alright, enough plugging. Let's hear from the first guest of 2023. He is a LA-bound dancer, choreographer and movement teacher. We talk all about his various past and upcoming projects, drumming, and we even get into the ups and downs of applying for an international visa. If you are currently applying to work in a completely new country, this is the episode for you. It's tough out there. So get comfy with us, settle in.

Here is an hour with Kevin Lau.

[End of intro music]

Kevin Lau (KL): ...I hope it keeps on going.

Bri Clarke (BC): I hope so too. I don't know if it's always, just going back to what we were saying, helpful for artists, but I keep getting people being like 'I listened, and I want to be a guest' or 'I tuned in.' It seems to be something that's super needed. So I'm just kind of trying to ride that train, you know?

KL: Yeah, I think it's really needed. I think just because it's such a fast-paced industry sometimes, that we don't really take the time to talk about things and reflect. Even if you don't like something, express that, you know? And I just feel like in order for things in the industry that I feel can be shifted or changed, we need to talk about it, otherwise it's just going to continue going on a cycle. So, I'm really glad that you're doing this.

BC: Thanks. Thanks for reaching out!

KL: Of course!

BC: I saw your name and I was like 'Oh yeah, of course I would have Kevin on'.

KL: Yeah 'cause I reached out to Kristen [Carcone] and she recommended that I reach out to you.

BC: Oh, that's so great. We briefly met a little bit because of the *Common Ground Dance Festival*, just kind of in passing. And I remember watching you perform Kristen's duet with Nick [Ruscica] and I was like 'Oh my gosh'. There's a movement quality there that I really resonated with. And I also want

to hear more about how drumming and percussion comes into your practice. So, I'm happy to be sitting here with you.

KL: Oh, I appreciate that.

BC: Going off of that: Do you start with rhythm? Is that your main step into process?

KL: It's a big part. So, I started drumming when I was about ten; about fourth grade. And I was doing that in tandem with doing hip hop and then I did ballet, and then eventually modern, contemporary, jazz and all that. Now I'm actually going back to hip hop. I stopped hip hop for a long time. But, I would say now, more so than ever though usually, whether it's freestyle, improvise, or I choreograph, music is such a big part of it. My brain just works really rhythmically. So even if I don't really know exactly what the intention is thematically of what I want to choreograph or create, I have to really resonate with what's happening rhythmically, and also musically. And so, that's always been kind of like a jumping point for me to be able to start. I definitely could do a piece in silence but I would say if it was up to me, I probably wouldn't just because I just love music so much that I need something going on besides just the movement. If, of course, silence brought out more in the process and made what I was trying to do clear then, of course, then I would do it in silence. But I think, especially if I'm working in the studio, I always have to have some sort of connection to rhythm and musicality.

BC: It's like a heartbeat? Keeps going, keeps going...?

KL: Exactly. With drumming, in high school, I played with other musicians and did jazz band and stuff. So when I listen to music and when I create, there's so many layers that you can choreograph to. You can choreograph on the bass sections, that are steady and consistent, or you can do the harmonies... there's so much. I think it's definitely played a big part in terms of me dancing as well too, and also taking class. If I know the music really well, regardless if I don't really know the choreography very well, it helps me adapt very quick. As long as I'm comfortable with that, everything will hopefully fall into place. (Laughs)

BC: Right. (laughs) I totally get that.

KL: I stopped drumming for a while because I was just so focused on dancing. When I moved out of Toronto and I went to live in Calgary for a year, I stopped drumming altogether just 'cause I didn't have access to it. But ever since I started coming back home here and there, between college and stuff, I started picking it up again and playing quite a bit for fun. It helps a lot. (Laughs)

BC: Did you find a new-found passion for it outside of the academic, high school band? Did it become more of a passionate venture or is it still kind of like training and technique?

KL: No it's definitely more of a passion. When I was in school, it was always just fun for me too. It didn't feel that academic. I love reading music charts and adding fillers in these little sections like the trumpet playing and the bass playing. Being able to work with other musicians. I miss that, to be honest. I think playing with other musicians in that setting, even though it's an academic setting, it feels super alive. So yeah, I don't know. It's always been fun for me.

BC: Cool. That's good, that's good. You mentioned your training at Boston Conservatory. It's really cool that you moved around a lot. Started in Toronto, Calgary for School of Alberta Ballet, and then Boston. And then you left Boston to go to Germany. Is that right?

KL: Yeah. So, I graduated in 2020 and I was gonna stay another year in the US. I was gonna stay and do my OPT and go to New York or LA. But, obviously the pandemic happened.

BC: That old thing. I can relate.

KL: Yeah, so I had to kind of pivot a bit. I was able to get a visa fairly quickly and freelanced and moved to Berlin for a year. Did some freelancing there. It was great. Not only different culture, different language, and different way of looking at art and dance. It was just very much a healing and awakening process for me too.

BC: Oh wow.

KL: I was also going through a lot personally too, leading up to the pandemic. And I think the pandemic for me really just allowed me, instead of shoving it under the rug and moving on, to just sit with it. And get to know myself more as an artist.

BC: Hard to do. Especially when you're not home.

KL: Yeah, especially when I moved in there, two months in, we were in a lockdown for 6 months.

BC: Oh my gosh.

KL: I barely knew anyone. I was stuck in my apartment for about 6 months. So yeah, it was pretty tough. I was really contemplating coming home too, but I stuck it out, things started opening up. I started to get more you know auditions here and there, some jobs, went to do B12 there, did a workshop there. It ended on such a high, and so I'm really glad that I really kind of saw it through. The whole way.

BC: It was worth all that turmoil.

KL: Yeah.

BC: 2020. I also graduated that year and it, like you said, kind of put me in a perspective of 'What do I actually want to do if I can't work in the way that I wanted to or dreamed of when I was in university?'. This feeling of adapting is, I think, so prominent in your history and in your journey so far. I just feel like there's so many ways that you've put yourself into a location or a process and not having a safety net. And I think that's super admirable as an artist. Just kind of jumping in.

KL: Oh, thank you. Yeah, Berlin was pretty scary. The months leading up to applying for the visa, I was constantly emailing different choreographers in the city, and project-based companies and all that. I think probably at least 50-60 emails, maybe heard back from like 2 or 3.

BC: Wow.

KL: And then, when I got there, it was very casual. One of the choreographers that was based there, he just asked me to come because he wanted to bring all these other guest artists. And then he couldn't. And now the fact that I was coming, he was like 'Maybe you can come help join our production?' Very casually like that. And so, it was new. I also feel like, with the pandemic, I never got closure from my time in Boston.

BC: Yeah.

KL: Because we were all just shut down and forced to just continue. And I don't think I had much of an issue because I just felt like, 'Okay, well what's next?' But well into freelancing, and over the last couple years, I felt like I didn't really get to still have closure for that. Until recently, when I actually

visited Boston again, and that was super super nice. But for so long, I felt it was just kind of lagging and stuff there. So I just felt things didn't really get to come to a proper closure.

BC: I totally relate. I don't know what it was. This feeling of: I'd spent 4 years working up to being able to say I finished it and getting the traditional cap and gown. I had to go into a post-graduated situation alone. Yes, I had all these resources from school, but they didn't have their support either so I couldn't really rely on my teachers and my professors and my collaborators to help me with a launching point. So, I totally relate to that feeling of not getting closure, but I think it's really cool that you were like 'Okay, what's next?' Let's keep going because it's out of your control.

KL: For sure. I don't know, I think I would have gone a bit crazy if I stayed at home a whole year. (Laughs)

BC: (Laughs) Yeah.

KL: I think because what you're saying. I tried to always try to go to the next thing. I'm never satisfied. Once I'm doing something for a while, I always have to just switch and pivot. So it was driving me crazy that I just didn't know what was going to happen, but I guess it worked out in a way, you know? But, looking back at it, I was just worried about what was going to happen. Also, what was going to happen to the industry too. I was like, 'I don't know if people are going to want to go see live shows coming out of the pandemic. Do they value art as much in-person? Or is it gonna become this digital age of viewing art in technology?' With TikTok, and everything and all the stuff, it's very instant-gratification culture. And so I was worried that people wouldn't wanna go sit down and watch an hour and a half dance piece or something like that. But I'm really glad that we've come out of it, and people still wanna see it. I just didn't think we would be back here. It's such a luxury, too.

BC: Yeah, it's so precious and sacred. Film is its own medium, and I think, you've worked a little bit in film. Maybe because of necessity but also, that's actually now where you wanna focus your attention? To film and commercial? Maybe less concert?

KL: I definitely still wanna keep the concert. I think what happened was I wanted to really just open my repertoire to doing more stuff in the film industry. Just because I think it was always just kind of a childhood dream of mine to do back-up dancing or music videos and work on sets and stuff like that. It's just super super fun to me. Umm... pays really well too. (Laughs)

BC: (Laughs)

KL: I'm not gonna lie, you know? (Laughs) But it also just opens it up so that I do have more flexibility to not only expand my artistic pursuits but also make a living, you know? I just feel like as much as sometimes I wanna do only concert dance, it can be somewhat limited, sometimes, if things don't happen.

BC: For sure.

KL: Yeah, just opening up to possibilities and seeing where that takes me, I guess.

BC: And L.A. is the place, I think, to do that?

KL: Yeah, I was really intimidated when I got there. I didn't know what to expect. I thought that everyone obviously has so much talent there, and there's just so many people that I would kind of just get washed up in all that. But, it's interesting, when I got there, the contemporary scene, I would say, is very much I feel it's kind of its own niche and the commercial is separate from... or not necessarily separate but apart from the hip hop industry.

BC: Mmm, okay.

KL: I felt very accepted and supported there.

BC: Mmm. There was like a nice hug.

KL: There was mostly community. I mean, I'm sure it can be very competitive and people can't be that nice, but I definitely felt the love and I felt the support there. Which surprised me! Just 'cause I felt like I would be very lost, when I was going on there. So spread out, so many people.

BC: No, absolutely. There's a real merit to having a community. Especially if you're coming from outside of the country and trying to immigrate into this competitive, you know, very very well-known industry in L.A. of film, and T.V, and Hollywood, and all that stuff. And I think having that community of people who are gonna be like 'No, you can come too.' You know?

KL: Yeah.

BC: Doesn't matter where you're from. For me, it really goes back to: as artists, is the location of where we are so important? Because I think the work is so similar? Even between film and concert, there's so many skills that overlap?

KL: For sure.

BC: That it's kind of like, well, of course you could do both. Of course we can travel everywhere, and bring all the tools that we have. Do you find those mediums intersect a lot?

KL: For sure. I think because most of the people that I know that are in the commercial industry, very much grew up in a competition studio, very much was in that kind of world. So there's only a few that I know, one or two that I know, like close friends of mine that really came from a concert background or BFA background. And because I feel like a lot of people that I went to school with, they wanna move to Europe. And that's fantastic, I mean, that's still something I wanna do down the line too, and continue to do that. But I think there's been this a bit of divide, like it's a separate entity. Commercial and concert. And I just think, at the end of the day, dance is dance.

BC: Oh, yeah.

KL: Especially a lot of ballet companies, like L.A. Dance Project, they're doing a lot of stuff with film. Even in, you go see MTV Music Awards, they do a lot of balletic and contemporary choreography now. So it's really mixed, interdisciplinary, in terms of that way. Yeah, I want to contribute to that merge. I think it's just, dance is dance, at the end of the day.

BC: Totally.

KL: They might take place in different mediums, but it all still comes from, stems from very much the same place of wanting to express yourself, and connection, and movement.

BC: Absolutely. All that good stuff.

KL: Yeah, exactly. (Laughs)

BC: Just going back a little bit more specifically about what you've worked on. Maybe we'll kind of say that we've closed the Germany chapter. You were freelancing and working there. And then, you came

back to Canada for a bit, and I saw that you were working with William Yong in “Choreographic Gems”, the Peggy Baker film. How did that process go?

KL: That was really great. I was just really humbled to be in the room with Peggy. I think she’s just a kind soul. And obviously, an icon. (Laughs)

BC: Oh, yeah. It’s so sad that she’s stopping... You caught her at a good time!

KL: I know! So what had happened was David Northworthy was dancing that role, and he was moving to Sweden for 6 months, January through June to rehearsal direct. So he needed somebody that he could recommend to learn his roles and stuff, and in a short amount of time. And so, I went in for a month, and learn seven? Yes, seven out of nine, little, kind of, gems.

BC: Oh my gosh!

KL: They weren’t super long. Maybe like 5 minutes or something each. But learned the choreography from seven different films. A handful of choreographers that were big in the 1970s in Toronto, that she wanted to, basically, restage their work. So yeah, it was really nice. The rehearsals were super intimate. There wasn’t that many people, and I got to really learn from her one-on-one. Which was just a treat. And I just I learned more of myself as a dancer in terms of also how I should carry myself in a rehearsal room too. And the amount of professionalism that is required too. ‘Cause I’ve also been in processes where it’s very free, and it’s more improvisation-based, and so the choreographers, they allow you to feed more. But with this type of work, things were already set. So I had to kind of walk into that. Learning it for what it was, and respecting the work for what it was too.

BC: That’s such a different process.

KL: Yeah. But, and then, it was funny with William because I actually met William in high school.

BC: Oh, no way!

KL: Yeah, ‘cause he choreographed a piece at Earl Haig when I was there. And so, he remembered me but I hadn’t seen him in like 8 years or so. So, it was a while.

BC: You’re like, ‘Hey...?’ (Laughs)

KL: Yeah, exactly. (Laughs) He was like, ‘Your hair is so long’, at the time. (Laughs)

BC: Cool.

KL: It was so great seeing him. He’s the nicest guy ever too.

BC: Talk about the way he uses film and concert. I find his process is so multidisciplinary. He’d be a cool person to lead a room.

KL: For sure. He really knows what he wants. He has a very clear idea of what he wants to happen in the space, and vision for that. And the filming process went very smoothly. We filmed it down at the Theatre Centre on Queen Street West.

BC: Love that location.

KL: It was nice. Right when the lockdown hit, so we were the only ones working there. (Laughs) In January, literally, a year ago, actually.

BC: Yes. Yeah, like Omicron lockdown. Wowie. So much has changed since then! (Laughs)

KL: That's crazy, yeah.

BC: I saw the performance that Peggy included in this year's "Choreographic Gems". 'Cause you also worked on the one in the summer, right?

KL: So you know the play that she did?

BC: Yeah, right.

KL: So, a lot of the choreography that was in the play is the same choreo that I learned.

BC: Got it.

KL: They had it already edited, I think, and she just wanted to release them as the play was taking place. Or the weeks leading up to the play.

BC: Very cool. I was watching these 1970s pieces and the choreography, you know, was very simple in my eyes, but I'm sure, at the time, seemed groundbreaking.

KL: For sure.

BC: And the concepts... Did you work with that big balloon?

KL: No, that was Shauna [Thompson]. She worked on that. But no, I would be in rehearsal and would see that. I could imagine, in the 70s, seeing something like that would be pretty groundbreaking too.

BC: Yeah. When you were trying to remount it or retell the story, did you find yourself... 'Cause you mentioned, it was all set. There's no room for improvisation... Where did you fit your own practice or your own artistic choices into that very rigid box?

KL: Hmm... that's a good question.

BC: If you could? I don't know.

KL: It was a challenge.

BC: Yeah, I bet.

KL: I think... [pause] I would definitely say it was the very first process I've ever been in that there wasn't that much room for that. And I don't say that as a bad thing, it was very much just because the work was so concise and simplified that... This is the way to do it.

BC: Right.

KL: Especially with the way I like to move. I guess what I'm trying to say is... I remember in rehearsal and when David was helping me and teaching me the part, there was a section where we would kind of turn to the floor. And I'd be adding a bit more spiral and stuff like that. (laughs)

BC: (Laughs) The modern, post-modern...

KL: Exactly, yeah. But I feel like, you have to think about it. Back in the 70s, they probably wouldn't have been moving that way, you know what I mean? And so I think when I understood that, that I was respecting what was happening in that era, that I couldn't be adding things from the 21st century into it you know?

BC: Totally.

KL: Yeah, it was a challenge for me, in many ways. But, it was unlike anything I've ever done. I had to teach me to be very simple and just clear, instead of always trying to add more quality. and texture and all that. Before it was all that.

BC: Completely. I mean, being able to look at a piece of art for what it was at its time, and the intention of why we want to remount it now. I feel like that's an incredible skill to have, so that, if you can do the simple, and if you can pick up and execute... I imagine working with like Anne Plamondon or more contemporary, of this age, choreographers. There is now, also that extreme shift to: here I am now. In this space, I can do more own improv; I can be... more present of who I am in this moment. Did you find that with Anne?

KL: For sure. She has a very distinct, obviously, aesthetic and method, and function of way she likes to move the body and carry the body. Just 'cause it's very derived, very clearly, from her influence and experience with RubberBand and also with Crystal Pite. So she knows exactly what she wants. But, I feel with Anne, because I feel, in terms of the way I like to improvise, resonates a lot with how she likes to choreograph. And the type of movement style. It gave me a bit more freedom to contribute more. And also, she's super collaborative. So, she likes it when you take her movement. 'Cause she'll say, 'Okay we created this phrase. Why don't we take elements of this phrase, and you two over there, create something together and adapt this way?' And then, she'll tweak it. And then, you keep going back and forth until it becomes a very clear image.

BC: It keeps expanding, changing. Cool.

KL: Yeah. Not that I didn't, within the Peggy Baker process. I think it was just very different from what I was used to. For Anne's process, I definitely think I was used to more of that type of approach. Both people are contributing and feeding more into it. Versus, with Peggy, because it was also a recreation of something that already existed, I wanted to do the piece justice by keeping it very simple, and true to the integrity of what was originally created.

BC: You can do both. There it is.

KL: Yeah. Exactly. There's range. (Laughs)

BC: (Laughs) SO cool. I mean, when you get into a process, for me at least, I feel like I have to be a vessel, right? I have to answer to what is called, and the intentions of what we're trying to make. And sometimes, I do quiet my own choices. Keep them inside for the sake of remounting, for the sake of time, you know? So, just being able to find that freedom... I'm wondering too, as you've travelled around, I'm sure you've developed your voice from all of these different places. Even when you make your own stuff as a creator. Did you feel influenced by any of these places most?

KL: Yeah, I think in terms of movement quality, I think working with Anne, specifically, just because that was also the most recent, really shifted the way I looked at movement. Whether it was initiating points or... I think sometimes, especially when I get so familiar with moving in a very certain way, it's sometimes hard to push yourself outside of the box. And so I think with Anne, she really not only just took what you had but stretched it out, so that you can expand beyond your limits. And challenged your body more physically than it was comfortable doing. So, I think especially with floorwork or



whether it's improvisation, it gets to a point where it's so familiar for me in terms of my body, that it doesn't feel like I'm working that much. She really pushed me to stretch that more, and to challenge myself. And then that took me to just want to challenge myself more choreographically, as well, and creating.

BC: And you're gonna see her soon, in March, [working] on a film?

KL: Yeah, another film. And we're gonna be working over a course of two weeks, just remounting the piece that we had in Saint-Sauveur in the summer, and adapting that to film. I'm excited. I don't really know that much about it, so I'm just open to whatever is gonna happen.

BC: That's the best way to create.

KL: And then actually, later in the fall, she's gonna expand the piece that she has in Saint-Sauveur into a longer length piece for Danse Danse in the festival in the fall.

BC: How long was the original?

KL: The original was about 40-45 minutes, maybe.

BC: Oh, still long. And for physical work?

KL: I know, yeah. We were onstage the whole time. She definitely incorporated a lot of elements of voice into it, and microphone. So it wasn't necessarily all dancing, but we were all present onstage contributing to what was happening. But she wants to create a longer, like phrase 2 of the piece and the plan is to present that at Place Des Arts in the fall.

BC: I love Montréal so much.

KL: It's so great there, yeah.

BC: I feel like there's a... and I'd love to hear your thoughts too, there's such a wonderful community and support around artists. Specifically, I guess, movement artists, 'cause I'm a bit biased. But, the general public is so much more entrenched in watching art and, kind of what we were going back to about, the pandemic kind of pulling us out of live performance. I was in Montreal in the summer, and I was like 'Everyone seems to really want to see live performance here'. I don't know why, but just the fact that the *quartier*, the street there, is filled with buskers every night and stuff. I don't know how you felt being in that scene?

KL: I loved it. I think Toronto lacks on that department, in many ways. (Laughs)

BC: Completeeelyyyy. (Laughs)

KL: Yeah. I had a friend that was in our cast as well too, and she held an art installation in her apartment with her husband.

BC: Cool.

KL: They have a dance studio in their apartment. It's that kind of vibe. And everyone's coming in and watching it, talking about it afterwards, sharing drinks. It's very just chill, and just artists and just enjoying that, and part of that community. I don't know if this would happen in Toronto, and if it did, it would be very different.

BC: Yes.

KL: Montréal just feels like... I think it's because live art is so ingrained in their culture and the DNA that it's not so much like, 'Okay, we're going to have to step away from work to be able to do this'. It's very much balanced with what their lifestyle is. And so, I love it. Every time I'm there, I just really enjoy myself.

BC: Yeah, you're willing to go back?

KL: Yeah, for sure.

BC: That's so cool. Going back to a little bit about your own creative process. You made a solo for *Common Ground Dance Festival*. I didn't get to see it, I was so mad, but I'd love to hear about how it felt to be in a process with just yourself.

KL: (Laughs)

BC: I'm sure you had other collaborators but, what was that like to be just with you? (Laughs) After so many community groups stuff.

KL: I will say that I'd rather choreograph on somebody, and for people, than on myself. I get frustrated with myself.

BC: Me too. (Laughs)

KL: It takes me a long time to settle down on what I want in terms of movement. 'Cause I'll improvise for a long time... I like this element, I like this element... but then, when it comes to actually setting things, I get really impatient with myself and antsy. So that's always a bit of a challenge, but I think when I did do this one I wanted it to be improvisation, but I wanted it to be all set. And so, everything I was doing in terms of my pathways, and the formations, and cues within the music score was obviously set. But I wanted, because it was also very immersive and close to spectators watching, I wanted it to be very spontaneous in that way.

BC: Cool.

KL: Yeah, I always feel a bit better improvising. (Laughs)

BC: Yes... I know what you mean. (Laughs)

KL: But it's definitely a challenge. I think it showed me that I want to be a choreographer that can settle on movement, as well, and be a bit more concrete with ideas than always just rely on improvisation. I think improvisation is great, but I think sometimes it's become too comfortable for me that it's hard for me to really have concrete ideas and set something.

BC: Gotcha. I mean it's so great for practice, right? 'Cause you, for me at least, I feel like I need to get out of my head a little bit and get more into what my body is instinctually doing. So I'll usually incorporate improvisation into just practice, not usually when I create. And I think there's a difference between creating and analyzing something, and sometimes for me those two processes get really muddled together. So yeah, just going off what you said about frustration in the rehearsal with yourself, how did you come to make those concrete choices? Was it from the music? Or was it from just the fact that a choice felt so set, and you wanted to recreate it each time?

KL: I would say when I was creating it, it was definitely the music.

BC: That's so interesting! (Laughs)

KL: Yeah, I had a friend of mine that created the score that I actually met in LA too. I had him create the score and I would work with him: 'Oh I want this part a bit longer, I want this a bit more subtle, less busy'. And then I used components of my own voice, actually, in recording. We kind of distorted that in there as well, too.

BC: Cool.

KL: Because I knew those cues, and I wanted that in the music, and I knew how I wanted it to sound, the movement was very much impacted. Those set choices were impacted by those very specific parts in the music. And then, when I worked with Simon [Renard], who was in Marie [Lambin-Gagnon]'s piece. As well, from Montréal.

BC: Oh, I don't know them.

KL: But yeah, he came in as an outside eye, like a dramaturg, to kind of watch a couple times. When he came in, he really helped me to find more concrete ideas, or take what I was already doing and making that set. And so, I think I work a lot better with that, than with myself.

BC: That's fair.

KL: Sometimes with myself, I allow myself to get away with things. This is fine, but it's always nice when you have someone else who doesn't really know that much about the work. They know a bit of it, to be able to see it from the outside and offer an alternate perspective.

BC: It's important too with the setting that is at the Lee Lifeson Art Park. I think, at least from my experience, you're getting spectators who maybe haven't been introduced into dance, or are passing by and just kind of like [saying] 'What's going on?' You know? I can imagine having someone who's an external perspective gives you so much more information about how it's gonna be perceived.

KL: For sure. I just feel also, especially after going to school, especially in Boston, that was the first time where I took a dramaturgy class and we talked about that and studied a bit more of dramaturgy [meowing in the background] and its presence in Europe as well, too.

BC: Hi, cat. (Laughs) He's like 'Dramaturg?'

KL: Yeah, exactly. (Laughs) I don't think every work necessarily requires one, but I think... [more meowing in the background]

BC: (Laughs) He's like: 'Yes it does!' (Laughs)

KL: (Laughs) I almost kind of think of it as a therapist, you know? In a way? For your work? You don't always have to wait for yourself to get trapped necessarily to be 'Oh wait, I need an outside eye now'.

BC: I see.

KL: I just think therapy could be great for everybody, you know? I think a dramaturg, some processes they might serve more than other people in a process. I think it's just very healthy to have an outside eye. It just can bring so much more layers and texture to the work. Because I think when you're so focused and you're wanting to create something, and make something happen, it can be very hard to see outside of that, you know?

BC: Completely.

KL: Especially when you're so focused. In my experience, by working with somebody else, it's helped to open me up even more. And not just settle for what I want.

BC: So, within all of those choices that you made, and then you bring in someone else and it's like, 'Okay! Now we have a bit more of a clear path'. I love that. That's cool.

KL: I think even someone like a dramaturg who's not a dancer too. Sometimes, that's very interesting. I think it's great when you work with other dancers that can be an outside eye, but I think someone [who's] familiar with movement, but who's not necessarily a dancer, and so that can even bring a bigger perspective into things too.

BC: That's so true, I didn't even think about that.

KL: Just also because they don't have all these preconceived notions of what dance should look like or what's aesthetically pleasing. But really what, as a viewer, honestly, how they resonate with it. Seeing something for the first time. And so, I wanna do more work and collaborate with people in that sense.

BC: Sweet. Very cool, very cool. I love hearing about your process. Yeah, and just the fact that you go back to music, I love that! (Laughs)

KL: Yeah. (Laughs)

BC: So, you've worked so much, you've been in so many different places. And now, what we're really here to talk about is that you're making the jump to LA for good. Hopefully.

KL: Hopefully. (Laughs) We'll see!

BC: It's all hypothetical. Honestly, wherever you end up, it's gonna be fine. You have so many skills!

KL: Awh, I appreciate it! (Laughs)

BC: Yeah, what made you come to this decision?

KL: When I was in Berlin and I was in lockdown, I was just journaling a lot and reflecting on what I really wanted to do. Jumping into commercial was, by no means, [saying that] I don't like concert dancing. I love it just as much. I really think it was just really me opening up to want to do more. Whether it's taking concert dance and being in environments where it can be put on film, or it can be put on a pop artist, and in a music video that's a bit more abstract, and conceptualized, and just kind of your typical, you know, pop music video.

BC: Justin Timberlake might need some contemporary dancers, you never know? (Laughs)

KL: I mean, the dream right? (Laughs)

BC: (Laughs)

KL: When I was reflecting, I was like 'Man, that'd be really really cool'. And I don't know if it's going to be what I want to do for the rest of my career, but it's just where I'm at right now. And I think, whether that's in LA or somewhere else, I don't know, but that's what I'm trying to aim for. I think I'd

rather try it and not like it, then say I never tried it. And so, I really want to just open up, and see what the possibilities could be.

BC: Mhmm. The time is now 'cause you never know when there's gonna be another lockdown, you know?

KL: Oh my gosh. Yeah, exactly. I don't know necessarily that it's that deep, for me, I think it's just where my mind's at. Whether it's LA or not, I hope it works out.

BC: Yeah, hopefully [with] this potential visa, it opens you up to everywhere in America. And there's so many different sectors of dance. I mean, LA, for sure, is definitely, in my experience, so film and TV-oriented, but there's also a contemporary scene there too, and a concert scene there too. Is it New York that's also [an option] or, I don't know, maybe like Missouri? (Laughs) Something smaller?

KL: (Laughs) I would definitely love to work in New York too. I think I see myself more so living in LA, just because I like the overall vibe as well there too. I think New York is great, I think sometimes it can be quite hustle and bustle, but I would love to go work, and do projects here and there.

BC: Cool, kind of jump around?

KL: Yeah, but I think in terms of the US as a whole, I think it has a lot more opportunity in terms of commercial and film and TV and that's the industry that I want to expand my repertoire.

BC: It's the spot, it's the spot. And like you said, you have a community of people. I feel like they're just waiting for you to come.

KL: Oh, I appreciate that. Yeah.

BC: You know? I hope it all goes well. I feel like within the visa application, from what I've heard from other folks, it's all about persevering and finding ways to stand up for yourself. I don't know if you have any stories from that process already, or if someone was listening to this who also wanted to go on that journey, what kind of advice would you give them to keep going?

KL: Specifically if they wanted to go to the US?

BC: Yeah.

KL: I would say that if there's a few days out of the year, during your time that you're going through the process, that you don't want to do that, I would say don't. I wouldn't go for it. It can take some time, you know? I would say that it has to be a very consistent goal in mind and thought. I would say go through it. I just think that the people that I know that are based there now, throughout their whole time, they really really wanted it the whole time, and they just kind of kept going. But, I would say, if you're passionate about it and that's what you know you want and you're going to do everything you can to get it, just to keep going. I'm just a believer that everything kind of happens at the right moment in time. When it's supposed to happen, you know?

BC: This is the time for you.

KL: (Laughs) I hope so, I hope so.

BC: I hope so too. I mean, there's so much in your resume and in your history that I feel like you could bring to that scene there. And also, we're at such a pivotal point in contemporary dance, whatever that word means, that it is changing, in my opinion. There's fusions, there's different mediums being

involved, technology being involved. So it seems like this is time where, if you are living in LA or if you're living in a culture hub of dance and art, we might as well see work from all artists, not just from LA based, you know, who have been doing it forever. You know what I mean?

KL: For sure.

BC: I guess I'm trying to say, as a consumer of art myself, I really am looking for artists who are coming from different places, who are coming from different methodologies, who are bringing to the mainstream something that isn't mainstream.

KL: Yeah, that's what makes it richer too.

BC: Completely.

KL: Because, otherwise, we're just going to be doing the same thing for decades! (Laughs) I don't think we need another pop hit, or we don't need necessarily a really really cool music video, or piece. What I think builds our community is bringing in elements from very different facets of it, instead of just the same formula.

BC: Couldn't agree more.

KL: I don't know if, at least for me, I don't know if I would be comfortable calling myself an artist if I didn't constantly evolve in that way. 'Cause otherwise, it's just kind of you're replicating, and you're just kind of trying to recreate something. I think in my opinion, and maybe there might be people that disagree, but I just think that the true essence of an artist is someone who really is not ever satisfied. They just want to continue creating and want to continue expanding their skills, and their way of viewing the world. And that can be represented in choreography, or art, or painting, or film, or whatever the case may be.

BC: Ouuff. That's huge. That gave me chills.

KL: (Laughs) 'Cause otherwise, if we're not changing and if we're not shifting the way we view things, and adding more experiences and more depth to things, then... what are we doing, at the end of the day? (Laughs)

BC: Replicating.

KL: Yeah, exactly.

BC: Mhmm, that's so huge. That's such a major, for me at least, way of making. It goes back to intention, and not wasting anyone's time. Especially if you're going to be collaborating with so many different facets of artists too. Yeah, intentional artmaking is a huge huge thing for me, so I'm glad that you also see that.

KL: Yeah, I think that's just really important. I think that's also always been a driving force for me, is just to continue challenging. 'Cause I think I could really feel it, physically and mentally, when things are just sitting, and they've just been sitting for a while. It's time to shift things up.

BC: Completely. I can't wait to see where you end up.

KL: Awh, I appreciate that. Thank you.

BC: And how you bring everything that you've learned into this new artistic world that we're, post-pandemic-ish, living in. And coming up as well, before you leave anywhere, you're teaching at Cawthra in February.

KL: Yeah! That was very recent, just came up actually today. So I'm excited! I think it's been a while since I've taught, and also it's been a while since I've set movement on students and stuff too. So, I'm really really excited.

BC: Oh, so it's a choreographic process?

KL: Yeah, so two of the classes. One's a performance class, and one's for the Grade 11's. And so, I'm choreographing a piece for their upcoming showcases later this year. And then, I'm also teaching a series of a few master classes, just here and there. But, I'm excited because I feel like I've had all these ideas kind of balled up, especially during the pandemic, and I haven't really been able to get them out. I've also created a few homemade films, here and there, and just ways to just stay busy, but I just have all these ideas that I want to get out, and I'm excited and just grateful I have a platform to be able to share that with other people too.

BC: Mhmm. Get all the journal entries out.

KL: Yeah, especially because that's such an age in high school. You might come from a very ballet or competition or technical background. But, I think if we can implement the strong sense of finding yourself as an artist, and what you want to create instead of, just, can I do the move? Or can I be technically strong? There's so much more into being a performer and dancer. So, if I can share that with them, then that would be fantastic.

BC: Yeah, being able to take what you've shared and then share it with others? It's the best feeling. And it brings us forward into making sure that we're not going back to past ways of moving and constantly expanding. Yeah, love that.

KL: I want to challenge myself to be in a place where I'm not so comfortable. Where I have to really stretch out. Think out of the box, not to be cliché, but think out of the box. (Laughs)

BC: Totally. That's really really cool. I hope that all goes well.

KL: Thank you, yeah.

BC: Is there anything else you want to promote? Or if you're teaching anywhere else?

KL: Yeah, I hope to sub a bit more over the next couple of months, for sure. [pause] I actually kind of wanted to ask you a question. (Laughs)

BC: Oh my gosh. Turn it on me, sure, yes!

KL: I guess, this is just been something on my mind during the pandemic, but when it comes to auditions, or applying for auditions, or being in a position where you feel you're assessed as the dancer or an artist, and having to do them, multiple at a time, over and over again... I'm just curious to see, for you, how you've been able to cope mentally.

BC: Mhmm.

KL: Also, with knowing my worth as an artist. And that sometimes, even though it might seem not personal, it can also feel very personal because you've devoted so much time to the craft. And how you've navigated that.

BC: Mhmm. Talk about therapy.

KL: (Laughs)

BC: That's something I'm still trying to mentally stabilize because I do get so attached to a certain job, a certain application, certain residency, whatever it is. Because it's passion, right? That's where I start. I start with feeling excited about something, or wanting to do my best for this thing. And so, if I do get rejected or if there's something that doesn't happen the same way that I wanted it to, I get defeated. I feel this sense of as if I'm wasting my own time.

KL: Mhmm, okay.

BC: I think it's hard to know exactly what jobs, what applications, what people to work with, when I'm still trying to develop my own voice. And emerge as an artist. Yeah, that's so true. I think if I'm being assessed, and put "in a box" for that one thing, I do have to quiet that little voice in my head that's [saying], 'You should be all things! And expand out of this box!' Sometimes I have to be a thing for someone, right? Or for something.

KL: Yeah, self-talk is such a big thing, and it could really work in your favour or work against you, I think sometimes too.

BC: Ouff, yeah.

KL: Not even just taking class or whether it's an audition or something. If my mind is not there, and it's not right, and all these thoughts are going: 'You don't know the choreography', 'You're not what they're looking for', 'There's better dancers in the room...' All the stuff that goes in and out. If I don't quiet that down or at least turn the notch down, it's just going to overtake me. It's a big thing. I think it's an ongoing process for all of us too. I think it's never something that we will ever concretely figure out, you know?

BC: If I do, someone should tell me that, that's not the right place to go, you know? (Laughs)

KL: Yeah, for sure. (Laughs) I just also find it so interesting how auditions work. They're very quick. Especially if you're auditioning for a company. Whether it be like *Ballet BC*, especially a lot of these contemporary ballet [companies], like *Ballet Jazz [de Montréal]*, or something like that. You go and take a ballet class, they cut you after the class. You go into your rep class, and they cut you after that. Based off on the last 4 hours, they're gonna assess the last 10 years that you've been working, or more, up to get into that point.

BC: That doesn't seem fair at all.

KL: Yeah. So, I just find that concept very interesting. I find a lot of the way that the industry [moves] now is that, people just want to work with their friends, and people just want to work with people that they trust. And I find that's more of a genuine exchange to me than necessarily dancing in front of a panel, and then suddenly, you were the one that we're looking for. You know what I mean?

BC: Mmhmm.



KL: I feel like it's shifting many ways, but of course, there's going to be that. There's always going to be that...

BC: That hierarchy? 'Well, I'm the producer/creator/teacher, you're the dancer, and you're below me.' I definitely noticed those power structures, especially in auditions because it's that high-pressurized setting where, at the end of these 4 hours, they need a person/a group of people.

KL: Yeah.

BC: They have such an important job. So, humanity kind of gets taken out of that equation.

KL: For sure.

BC: So sad, you know?

KL: Yeah. Someone put it to me a while back. I think auditioning is really much an audition both ways though too. Just because they like you, you might not like them or you might not like how the company operates or the vibe and everything.

BC: Right.

KL: So, they all have to be a great fit for you as well too.

BC: Mhmm, great reframing.

KL: Just 'cause I feel like... We have so much value and worth by even just showing up and showing that we're serious. So to have environments where you're talk down on because you're young and they think they can say whatever they want to you. I just don't think that's serving anybody, you know? And I also think the thing of saying, 'Oh it's not personal, it's all about numbers and we just need to find somebody. But, it's always going to be personal because you personally got your way there to make yourself you know present at the audition. It matters to you. You devoted yourself to being someone who can master their craft. So it's all personal, you know? And I think for me, if you're bummed out or you get hurt about something, that's healthy; that's normal because you care about it. Doesn't make it easy, but I think it's better than saying, 'Oh, it's fine. I didn't really care anyways'.

BC: Right, that's so true.

KL: Like as a defence mechanism or something.

BC: Yeah, just kind of like, 'Okay, forget about it, forget about it', and move on.

KL: Unless you really didn't care. (Laughs)

BC: Yeah, like a throw-away audition. (Laughs) Awh, thank you for that question. I feel like I don't get to talk enough about this. This feeling of being with my personal choices, and owning up to them, and keeping myself accountable, even if they don't go the way that I want them to.

KL: Yeah, like I'm still good, even though they don't think I'm good.

BC: Oh yeah. Ouff. Ouffffff!

KL: 'Cause if you didn't think you're good, then you wouldn't have showed up to the audition, right?

BC: Completely.

KL: So you have confidence in yourself of what you can bring to the table, you know? You know yourself better than you over the past, you know, how long that you've been dancing. For someone to say, I've seen you for a few hours and I know exactly who you are, is, you know, that's completely BS. (Laughs).

BC: Sooo limiting and boxed in.

KL: Yeah.

BC: Awh, yeah. Thank you for that question. It's a great way to finish. (Laughs)

KL: (Laughs) For sure. Oh my gosh.

BC: Everyone go audition and make it matter to themselves.

KL: Yeah, yeah!

BC: Before we do head out of the podcastland, where can people find you if they want to know more about you?

KL: Instagram. kevinmatthewlau (Laughs) Just to plug in. (Laughs)

BC: Ouuu, why triple underscore?

KL: Apparently double underscore and single was taken, so I'm gonna go to triple! (Laughs)

BC: (Laughs) That's so good. Hey, three times's a charm! (Laughs)

KL: Exactly, yeah! Mostly Instagram. I also have a [linktree](#), obviously, on my bio there. And I don't really use Facebook or Twitter or anything of that sort, so that's probably the best way. Or also email as well too, which you can also find on my Instagram too.

BC: Sweet, I'll link all that below.

KL: Perfect.

BC: Thank you so much for your time. All of your offerings too. I'm excited to listen back to it, it feels like sooo therapeutic.

KL: For me as well too! Very much so. It's just really nice to talk about this. I just feel like conversations like this isn't talked about enough. So, thank you for having me. I really appreciate it

BC: Thank YOU! Yayyy... [fade out]

[Outro music begins]

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'Til next time.

[Outro music fades out]