

Ben Ash - So, good afternoon, welcome. It's Ben Ash here again with this podcast series and this afternoon I'm joined by Anastasia Sheldon, who is with Candoco at the moment because you're a company apprentice.

Anastasia Sheldon - Yeah. Yeah that's right

BA - Yeah. And where are we today Anastasia?

AS - Where are we?

BA - Yeah.

AS - Literally?

BA - Yeah.

AS - We are in Siobhan Davies Studios

BA - Yeah.

AS - In Elephant and Castle in London.

BA - Yeah.

AS - We've been taking class in the Roof Studio which is gorgeous, especially on a sunny day like today.

BA - Yeah.

AS - Lots of wood, which is always nice.

BA - Yeah.

AS - We're the only ones here though, so that's quite, that's quite weird.

BA - Yeah.

AS - It's not busy at all. It's my first time here. So, it's, it's a really nice space

BA - yeah. Yeah it is. It's lovely. So, I mean we both kind of started, I guess around the same time. Did we, I think I mean last...

AS - Yeah

BA - sort of September-ish. I think maybe we staggered, like, when we started a bit because of how as a company, we went about being like COVID safe.

AS - Yeah, I started late or mid October.

BA - Oh okay, right

AS - so you guys had some time to, sort of, introduce yourselves, and then it wasn't like so many new people all at once. Yeah, but yeah roughly the same time...

BA - Was that like a delayed start for you in terms of when your apprenticeship would originally have been scheduled?

AS - Yeah so I was meant to start at the end of September, beginning, like, first of October

BA - Okay.

AS - Yeah, but that got pushed back I think for other reasons as well.

BA - Yeah. Yeah.

AS - So yeah, here we are.

BA - Yeah, and I guess, you know you've relocated to London to be able to follow this pathway at this point in time. It's been a sort of unprecedented time to be alive. Anyway, how are you? How's it been for you? Like, how have you coped?

AS - Well, I think I have coped pretty well. I think having something, having a... an obligation to be here like I didn't just move to London for no reason. So, having a reason to be here and having people to move with really helped. I've not lived in London before. I've actually never really spent a lot of time in London. But I have family and friends close by which I think has made it a lot smoother of a transition. And, but I guess also going into work every day, and making friends, I'd say fairly quickly has also helped that process.

BA - Yeah, yeah.

AS - Yeah I think if I just moved by myself with, like, new job, new work, new Friends, new everything, it would have been...

BA - Plus pandemic

AS - Plus pandemic.

BA - Quite a lot to cope with

AS - Yeah, would have been near impossible.

BA - Yeah.

AS - So hats off to anyone who has done that

BA - But you have spent periods, like alone, haven't you in the sense of being... I think at one point you were by yourself in your flat, while we were working from home.

AS - Yeah, so I was by myself for just over a month

BA - Okay, yeah quite a while.

AS - Yeah, in January/February, which I was expecting to be a lot harder.

BA - Yeah.

AS - I am not someone that likes to be by themselves. I love having company, even if it's just having someone in the next-door room. It is actually a constant battle because I am such an introvert, but I hate being alone. So it's this constant battle for me

BA - Drives... drives connectivity.

AS - Yeah, it's just. But yeah, I think I made a really, like, clear schedule and agenda for myself during that time and I kept myself busy. Spoke to more people on the phone this year than I have ever done in any other year of my life.

BA - Yeah.

AS - Yeah.

BA - Useful devices phones.

AS - Yeah, we had with... this pandemic came in the right age of technology.

BA - Yeah, wow, if I go back to when I were a younger. Yeah, we didn't have that. Yeah.

AS - Yeah, we... So I do feel very grateful for being able to keep really easily in contact with people

BA - So important.

AS - Now. Yeah.

BA - Yeah... And so, like, you know, seeing as we're just sort of touching on time, and stuff like that. In this period where we were working from home in the recent past, because we're not really doing that so much now we've actually started to come back into this physical space and share space with each other. But we began to look back on the archive, Candoco's archive, as a way of beginning to focus around the 30th anniversary, company anniversary. And I've been asking our peers and colleagues just to talk a little bit about what they were, or are still continuing maybe to do in relation to

Candoco's archive and the 30th anniversary. 30th anniversary. And so Anastasia could you let us know like, tell me a little bit, and our listeners, what you've been doing in relation to that.

AS - Yes, so I don't really know what I expected to find, when the idea was proposed to us but I don't think it was what I did find. I, yeah, just watching through a lot of the pieces, actually, and we haven't spoken in depth really about a lot of them, I don't think.

BA - Not yet.

AS - Not yet. No. But I was actually, like, quite shocked by the role of the different dancers. And I guess like the style of the pieces as well. Just in comparison to now...

BA - Yeah, that contrast

AS - Yeah, it feels like the company has come so far has really developed a lot. So I'm looking at a piece called 'Studies for C' with Anna, our other dancer. Yeah. And, which is a really... It's a really fun duet but it's quite a tragic, like, story in relationship

BA - What could you say about the sort of the relational aspect to the work?

AS - So it is massively relatable to these current times. And so, it is two people who can't live with each other but can't live without each other. And they are in this constant, like, almost state of tension and trying to navigate their relationship and how they manage that. And each other. And also fighting this need for each other's company, I guess, whilst also trying to be independent. So, the tension between them is quite high throughout the whole piece. And I think we've really played with, like, our relationship and, like, story arc, through... We haven't finished learning the whole piece yet, but so far we've had a lot of conversations on, like, our roles as a disabled and non disabled dancer, like, the story. Well, tell the story but I guess that piece now sort of follows me and Anna is having to adapt to my movement and sort of, like, predict what I'm going to do. And so it's that, so she can't quite- almost needs to, like, study me the most. So in order for us to develop the piece, like you just need to keep going and going and going with it. Which is really interesting as well because yeah I don't think I have worked like that before it's not ever been "okay someone follow another person" it's just been

BA - a like...

AS - a shared...

BA - So when you say 'follows', do you mean like physically in the, in the space that you're in together or... tell me more about that.

AS - I'm sure there will be moments where it is literally, physically in the space. So in the, in the original performance, the dancers, Dan and Miriam...

BA - Yeah

AS - Miriam was adapting to Dan. She studied a lot of his body language and movement, and she had to understand that, I guess, whatever movement Dan did, she knew what exactly what was going to come next depending on what he did in the moment. And the idea was that Miriam, the non disabled dancer, would be adapting to Dan as the disabled dancer.

BA - Right.

AS - And, and, which felt like quite a radical, like, yeah, decision to make.

BA - Yeah.

AS - Rather than it being the other way around. Obviously, that role has now been reversed again. So there's a very open conversation happening between Dan and I, and Anna and I about how that changes the piece or... yeah.

BA - Yeah. And that's great you mentioned that because Dan now has- Dan is now working as.. assistant artistic director?..

AS - Yeah

BA - I'm not good with titles, but he's working with us in

AS - Yeah he's like co-director or something

BA - And he was originally, you know, in that cast as a dancer so you, you have access to kind of embodied information.

AS - Yeah, feels like I have access to the whole archive of this piece just by speaking to him and. Yeah, it just made such a difference. Being able to talk to him about the piece in the context and how it was made and yeah it really just added that extra detail to the performance and us being able to really understand the movement as well.

BA - Yeah.

AS - Yeah.

BA - Thanks for letting us know how that's going. I look forward to seeing, seeing how it unfolds.

AS - I look forward to performing it.

BA - Yeah, that'd be great. So, yesterday I was in a situation with you where we were doing some little interviews for another sort of social media thing and as part of that you were recounting how you became aware of Candoco as a

company, and kind of what it meant to you which I was really interested to hear but I just wanted to touch on something, briefly, which is around this term 'Inclusivity', which I've been asking everybody to speak to, partly as a way of trying to, I think, learn more about how I can be effective within that. And understand what that means. And it seems to be like quite a broad... like quite a lot of things seem to kind of come with it. But what I would like to ask you is if you could maybe share kind of what that term means to you, and where you experience it working and failing?

AS - Yeah. I wouldn't say that I've had such a huge, like, experience or, yeah, a lot of like flavour for inclusive work in regarding purely to things that either I've made or been a part of. I think that is partly because of, like, my inexperience in the industry.

BA - Yeah.

AS - Like, I feel like a baby to the industry. But I think also for some whatever reason, it is still quite a, like, a radical thing which I don't think it should be. But it still feels, like, quite new, in quotation marks, like, "concept".

BA - Yeah. And in progress.

AS - Yeah, it's definitely still a work in progress with, like, yeah, and a large portion of the industry, and like in general.

BA - Yeah.

AS - What does the term inclusivity mean to me? I guess it would mean, like, considering a lot of options, availability and accessibility within work, if you're just talking about, like, your dance work or...

BA – So a consideration

AS – Yeah, yeah and like an acknowledgement as well. Yeah, I think there's a lot of progress to be made, but there's also this, like, really delicate balance of like how much progress can you really make in one research process or like one piece.

BA - Yeah, that's something that is kind of coming up a little bit as a theme is. It's kind of dependent, or is it dependent upon context? Or context seems to become operable, in terms of how inclusivity is working or not working or understood. At that point in time, maybe.

AS - Yeah, maybe. Yeah, it feels like this huge, like, task that we asked, like taking on and taking in our pride as well. And, yeah, I think there's a lot of good coming from it and being produced and. Yeah.

BA - Okay, thank you. Okay. So there's a couple of things for us to, to kind of cover. But what I'd like to do now, if it's okay with you, would be to ask you to, to show me your collage which for listeners who maybe haven't heard the

earlier podcast, there's a kind of loose, like, practising to do in advance, which is to spend some time kind of exploring a collage of home in relation to touch or the sensation of touch and perhaps how we've worked meeting each other but with the absence of touch across these months.

AS - Yeah. So, I've got a few pieces...

BA - Do you need, like, something to lay them out on?

AS - I can sort of lay them on top of each other.

BA - Okay. I'll just move this back to the very end.

AS - Yeah, fine. So, we have this..

BA - Could you sort of describe it? What's there?

AS - I can do my best. So I've got an A4, like, piece of card.

BA - Is that cartridge paper?

AS - Yeah, it's, it's from. It's from my brother's old, like, school artbook or something like that he didn't finish. And I've taken. So everything on here is purely like if you were to close your eyes and run your hand over it, it would be like a...

BA - ...Tactile...

AS - ...feeling sensation. So I've got some embroidery thread. Just sort of like glued in a lump, lumpy pile

BA - It's like green and yellow.

AS - Yeah, green and yellow embroidery thread which I was just finishing some embroidery yesterday and these were just like the clippings, I guess I just shoved them on.

BA - Yeah.

AS - I've got a matchstick. And I'm not really sure why.

BA - Okay.

AS - But it just...

BA - Yeah

AS - feels like it either has a use it has a very like purposeful tactile use when you're lighting the match.

BA - Yeah.

AS - Or... I've also sewn on some thread.

BA - Oh okay, it's so it's sewn in

AS - It's sewn in. It looks like it's drawn. So I've sewn some overlapping squares

BA - You know, to me it looked like very thin wire.

AS - Oh okay

BA - These, kind of, squares.

AS - Yes. Yeah, I, yeah. So you can sort of run your fingers over that and you can sort of stretch the, the thread around. I don't know what these are called, but like when you, if you were to buy bread?

BA - Okay, like those ring things that you wrap around the plastic that at the end to keep your bread...

AS - Yeah, you like twist the wire

BA - Plasticized coated wires.

AS - Yeah, so I've just got two small pieces that I've, I've got one swirled into...

BA - spiral form...

AS - Yeah. And the other is just sort of like in a wave.

BA - Yeah, like...

AS - They're just glued down. I've also got some paper flowers, which are yellow, purple and blue, which I got in a birthday present, and they were just sort of thrown in like confetti almost. So I've got a pile of them at home and I just don't know what to do with them. I might glue them around the house one day. But I've got some of them on the paper for now. I've got six of them on the paper and in three of them I've got some buttons glued onto the centers. I've got some light blue tissue paper, which again was from a birthday present. It's just that was like crinkled up, and again glued down. Very tactile, pleasing sensation.

BA - Yeah.

AS - What is this?

BA - I think it might be a coffee cup holder? No..

AS - Oh, it was a... You know those, like, sewing kits you get in a, like, hotel or something like they just come in like little boxes I've just turned the box inside out and...

BA - Like card

AS - Yeah, so when you press it. It's got some...

BA - springs, some tension...

AS - Yeah, some sponginess. So that's what's on the page

BA - Would you describe that as the base layer?

AS - Yeah, so I did this first. And I collected, just like random things. And I guess with the embroidery I really... Like, that's a, something I do quite a lot as, like, a relaxation, like, for my own pleasure, but, like, I'm using my hands.

BA - Yeah, it's craft.

AS - Yeah. These are things that I use my hands for like, I wrap presents with the paper. I sew with my hands. I'm tying up the bread with. Yeah. The buttons, like I do up my shirt with buttons. I strike the match. So these are all yeah things that are, like... Does that have a name? Like they're... not handmade but it's like handwork

BA - Handwork, I think is what we should say.

AS - Handwork

BA - I think that's a great, a great, a great term. Yeah.

AS - So in the bag...

BA - I feel like this is gonna go on and on, as there's loads in there!.

AS - There's not...

BA - I mean it can do, there's no hurry.

AS - All right, so we've just got some dried...

BA - Ah, beautiful

AS - plants. I don't know what this was. Like, I don't know if it's got a name or anything.

BA - It's bound to have a name!

AS - It's got to have a name!

BA - Most things do!.. But it's.. it's not a grass is it? Initially I thought it was, like, a grass. But it's more on a little branch isn't it?

AS - Yeah, it's almost like a wheat...

BA - Okay

AS - but it's not wheat.

BA - It's got these tiny, tiny, kind of, I don't know if they're like flowers, or seeds, or something.

AS - Yeah. And these really thin leaves. It's very dry.

BA - Yeah

AS - It's all, like, a brown colour now.

BA - Where did it come from?

AS - So, I was given a bouquet of flowers. And after they all died, this is what I do, it's really bad. I save the flowers and I hang them upside down. I've just dropped that and it's gone everywhere.

BA - Don't worry.

AS - We're gonna have to clean the studio.

BA - They're beautiful.

AS - So I hang them up and I dry them and I've got quite a few of them in the flat at the moment just hanging around. So you've got another branch, which is...

BA - That's really sort of colourful.

AS - Yeah, it's, it, I just love what it looks like. It's got these like yellow pom poms- tiny little pom poms.

BA - They're, like, the pollen...

AS - Yeah. Which surprisingly doesn't come off that super easily. But the leaves do drop. So I think I've made a trail in my flat of, like, where I picked them up... Quite obviously I've just got a postcard of five women in their underwear, and they are like, laying, and, on top of each other and in like full body contact which is just something that I really miss.

BA - Yeah, they're sort of stacked on each other.

AS - Yeah, skin on skin. I've got a little origami orange dog.

BA - Aw.

AS - Again, handwork.

BA - Yeah. You made it?

AS - I didn't make it. I'm not very good at origami. And I got some runner beans in a, like, packet, because they're really fun to like shake around and squeeze the packet it's really, *packet shaking sound* really pleasing

BA - They're quite heavy. Quite heavy aren't they?

AS - Yeah, they're, like, big. See? *more packet shaking sounds*

BA - Are they the sort of white and red speckled things? I'm thinking like Jack and the Beanstalk.

AS - Well, we could open up the packet. It might go everywhere. But I can't plant them yet because it's not the plant growing season.

BA - You can plant indoors in April.

AS - Yeah

BA - And outdoors from May to July.

AS - And last- I've got lots of branches in here and I've also got, I've got some more origami, a little like polka dot star, which I also didn't make. But I was given. Yeah, so this is my... touch.

BA - Yeah. And how...

AS - Considerations.

BA - How was it for you as a, as a sort of thing, thing to do for a bit?

AS - It was so fun! I think it's, I think I've really made up for the lack of physical contact with, like, hand-like, hand activities. So that I'm getting I'm receiving like some kind of sensation.

BA - Okay.

AS - So I feel like that's kind of what this is like...

BA - Like a record of that.

AS - Yeah, it's like a, a little archive, I guess.

BA - Yeah. Wow!

AS - Yes, like, even just, like, planting the seeds and doing, getting, getting a bit dirty with the soil. Yeah. Yeah.

BA - Well, thank you for, for, yeah describing that for us and walking us, walking us along that path of handwork

AS - Thanks, yeah.

BA - Handwork is what we arrived at.. Yeah, it makes me really want to do my own kind of version which I've not got around to doing...

So just a couple of things to touch on really before we draw to a close, but one of them was a kind of - if anybody's listening to one of these before they'll sort of know where we're going with this but it was kind of - like around, around the side around the back way of coming at something which I just experienced as being like a really refreshing kind of way that something happened and it was happening in, in the autumn when we were working with Janinne Durning's work. And I think it's around a score that we practiced and worked in, called experts and one morning, we had actually done a kind of warm up practice where we'd been working in, in the, in the floor and working with rolling. And, and then we had done experts and Joel, then spoke and sort of said something along the lines of "if I were to meet my maker now I'd be completely happy to sort of lie down and roll around on the floor as being something that I'm really good at. Like I'm good at this thing without having to hide, having to prove I'm just, I can do this". So, as a kind of round the- round the side and round the back way, rather than being asked you know what are you good at. But if you were to, like, meet your maker now or wherever, whatever it is for you, what would be the thing that you would say "well I'm, I'm happy to do this, I feel good doing this"? Like this, as is.

AS - I- something that- I mean, as I think about this, I'm sure I'll think of other things...

BA - Probably.

AS - but immediately, I, I really enjoy making things for other people, and doing things for other people.

BA - Okay.

AS - So, I'm not saying I'm like I'm really good at present giving or anything...

BA - 'Enjoy' was really, like, operable..

AS - When it's.. Yeah, I think when it's going somewhere, and it's like I'm making this thing to have a life with someone else or for something else. That, that feels really good for me. And I'd say that I do that quite a lot. Kind of with

different things. Yeah. Yeah. That's, that's sure yeah I feel like I'll definitely think of something else later on but, yeah, that's something I...

BA - Making things for other people. Yeah, making something that's gonna go on somewhere

AS - Making something gonna live somewhere, that's gonna live to do something for...

BA - Okay.

AS - Yeah.

BA - Great! Thank you. And then, so just to round things off, the other kind of sort of playful tasks that I asked you to do, maybe you forgot but I don't know, was to consider kind of being in a context like this where, you know, we're having a chat or you're being interviewed, or whatever and, and, you know, rather than being asked the question where you feel like "Oh" you have a different response and that response is like, you know someone's either asked you a question or they've opened the door for you to speak about something and they want a felt thing that happens for you is like, yes I'm really glad that you've asked me that because that's actually something that I want to speak to or I feel like I have something that I know that I want to say about that. And it wasn't so much that you needed to like, let me know what the question was you imagined that you might have been asked but to be with what came up for you as a response so what came up for you in a sense of like 'YES!!'?

AS - This was a - I did think about this.. And it was one of those moments where there was too much. There's always, like, too much choice like when you don't know what to order on the menu. There's too many things. And so, you almost don't want any of it.

BA - Yeah. A bit overwhelming.

AS - Yeah. So, I feel like there are - I have not found like the one thing that trumps everything else.

BA - Fair enough.

AS - But I think there are a lot of, like, topics, like, conversations that are like yeah I could, I could speak about this..

BA - Yeah

AS - I feel quite passionate about this. Would you like me to...?

BA - Why not!? Why don't you just, or do you want to, like, select one and speak, speak to that for a moment or why, why that feels like something that, that's a topic for you that you're...

AS - Yeah. Well I guess - Okay, so one of the subjects, sort of more in relation to rather than like completely changing the tone of this conversation.

BA - Yeah

AS - and would be more in relation would be like art and crafts and, yeah, this like playfulness within, like, education.

BA - Okay.

AS - So, I yeah I would say that it's really important for, like, children, like all the way until they're like 16, to really be encouraged to do stuff with their hands and work. This is something that I grew up with, like a lot at home, I think just not living in a city and, like, I couldn't, like, walk around the corner to a friend's house or something. I had to- not make-do, like I did, I wasn't deprived as a child, like I have a younger brother and he was great entertainment and was really patient with all my activities and he was also younger than me, so, like he didn't really have a choice. He had to take part. But like, just spending a lot of time outside and sort of making nothing but, like, they could have been anything.

BA – Making..

AS - Yeah. And it was a big part of my like education until I was 18 as well, just the school that I went to really encouraged that.

BA - Yeah, great.

AS - Yeah. That's something I could really speak to a lot of headmasters and mistresses about and promote, I think. Yeah.

BA - Yeah.

AS - Would you like me to say more than that?

BA - If you've got more to say. But you don't need to either..

AS - No, I think if I start talking about it, I'll just go on.

BA - Or maybe that's like another conversation.

AS - Maybe it's another podcast in the making!

BA - I mean it's a topic that's dear to me and I think, I think it's through my arts practice now- and by now, I mean, like in the last sort of 15 years or so, where it's almost like recognising that actually yeah this has, this has a thread to like an earlier time that I can- I just like.. I found permission and ways.. through meeting it through other circumstances I suppose.. for it to surface within, you know, a dance context and for it to actually be like really valid and really

useful and informative within the creative process, I think, particularly when I look at the work that I've made myself within Dog Kennel Hill project where kind of the.. the use of sort of things that come to hand as objects has been like a big, big concern.. a big theme over time, and I was saying - I think in another interview but - I think one of the resonances I felt around proposing this as a task is that I had spent some time on my own, with a week of research, where I had worked with these geometric paper shapes. They were different like coloured cartridge paper and like square or triangle or, you know, like, I don't know, a rhomboid or whatever these sort of Pythagorean geometric forms are called. And I'd worked with them on the floor, almost like a collage where I was overlaying them, and relating their faces and angles to each other, but because I was working on the floor with it and, kind of, just, sort of, my face was near it my body was in the floor, it began to kind of change where I went in the room in relation to what I was playing with.. it sounds like really simple, but I got a lot out of that..

AS - Yeah, sounds like it was a lot of fun!

BA - And it was like a solitary thing. I did it on my own and I guess I asked if you could spend some time alone, doing something similar.

AS - Yeah. Yeah.

BA - Well, Anastasia, thank you for agreeing to take part in this is really great.

AS - Thank you!

BA - We're rounding off the week. It's like, for coming up to five on a Friday night

AS - It is.

BA - Yep.

AS - End of the week.

BA - Yeah.

AS - It was great!

BA - Yeah, thank you so much! Safe journey and...

AS - Thank you.

BA - Thank you.

AS - Thank you, that was a lot less stressful than I was anticipating!

BA - Oh good.

