

BA: So, welcome to another podcast, experimental podcast with Ben Ash and today, I'm delighted to be joined by Anna Seymour, who is a dancer. And we're also here today with Hari, who is a British Sign Language interpreter and is working with Anna in the space today and in this podcast. We thought we might begin by just asking Hari if she could say a little bit about how this process or sign language interpretation works in the space, just for our listeners.

Hari: Hello, I'm Hari - so you'll be hearing my voice today and that is on behalf of Anna. If you hear some slight pauses that's just to allow time for the interpretation to take place throughout this podcast today.

AS: And also, I'm Anna and I'm from Australia. So I moved to the UK six months ago - so good to let you all know that I'm still learning British Sign Language. So, I still have a bit of a mix with Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and BSL, so you may hear some pauses as well if I've thrown out some Australian Sign Language - there may be some clarifying there as well to check the British Sign Language as well.

BA: Yeah, lovely to hear that and be ready for that. Something that I wasn't aware of as we started working was just how many different sign languages there are so yeah, it's, it's good to know that. Yeah, so I'm delighted that we sat here today doing this as, you know, you're deaf artist working with a Sign Language Interpreter in this space...and we're just going to allow this podcast to take the time that that needs, just as it takes the time that we provide for it, hopefully, in the space (in the working environment).

So Anna, one of the first things that I wanted to say was, I really remember you from the audition because we both auditioned at the same time, and we met, I remember meeting you distinctly when we were walking back in after a lunch break together from being outside and you were saying to me, "I'm focused, I'm focused". I don't know if you remember this?...

AS: Oh!

BA: The first time I really became aware of you as we walked in, but yeah...

AS: *[Laughter]* I was there, I was focused! Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Always focussed. It's an audition, have to be focused. But yeah, it was quite intense that experience, wasn't it?! The audition process? Yeah...

BA: Yeah.

AS: Yeah, three days! Yeah, wow! Three rounds...

BA: Did you come from Australia for that? You came across the world for that?

AS: Yeah!...Yeah, so I flew over just for the audition. I just had a feeling, a real gut feeling that I had to come to London and do this audition, I just, yeah, had to! Yeah... But I went to Budapest as well.

BA: Oh lovely!

AS: So on my way to London I had a little brief stopover in Budapest and saw some friends there. So, yeah, that was really lovely.

BA: And I know from you speaking about your experience here, now that we've been working, what it must be like to be in London and not be able to go just over the water to Paris or something, which I'm sure, coming from Australia to live here and, you know, you probably want to nip out into Europe, but of course, you've joined -- we've started working in the midst of a pandemic. I'm still living here with my family, been working from home; and you're on the other side of the world from your family and your new friends. How's it...It's been up and down with me. How has it been for you, working in the pandemic?

AS: Ah, god where to start? Wow!...

I think...the start of 2020 last year - I was really just imagining that I was going to get my dream job with Candoco and I was going to move here. I've moved in with my parents for five months at the start of 2020 because of Coronavirus. So then...

BA: I remember you saying...

AS: That was just for I moved to London, and then I moved to London that was in the middle of the pandemic, and I just can't imagine all the things that happened at the start of that year, it's all just completely crazy. But looking back, actually today it's one year since we got announced - it was during lockdown in the UK.

BA: That's right. It's 23 March today, right? Yeah...

AS: So, it's been exactly a year so it's *really* made me reflect a lot. And it's been really up and down, *really* up and down, but I do feel it's come at the right time, it's right for me to be here. I've felt - it was really crazy moving over - it's such a big change. It's really new. Everything's different. It's a different culture, it's... Obviously it's to do with sign language as well, as we said earlier; a new job, new friends, new interpreters. It's a big, big change...

BA: And part of your work, which I'm learning -

AS: Yeah, it's a big change! It's hard, it's been really hard.

BA: Yeah. Yeah, being aware that part of your, your job in a way is, is also, to some degree, managing this extra layer of provision around sign language interpreters on a kind of weekly, daily basis - just that nuance of, you know, that being this other kind of layer of energy in a way that you're, that you're working with, which umm...I might not be so aware of, you know, myself in the space. Yeah, so I've just been noticing.

AS: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, and I've really realised something recently - that I've never actually worked with interpreters full-time ever in my life. I've never had full-time interpreters in my work, in my workplace - that's never happened. And it's *really* incredible.

BA: Okay, yeah...

AS: It shows how good the access here is at Candoco as well as in the UK, compared to Australia. In Australia - very very very limited access and limited funds for interpreters to be in the workplace, *especially* within dance - it's almost impossible really. So, yeah, almost impossible to have full-time, interpreters and if you do have a disability or you're deaf and you do need extra support, it's really really difficult. So...yeah, if you've got a disability. It's just that extra layer makes it so much harder in Australia and then coming here, I was really shocked that interpreters were there full-time. And at the same time you're also navigating that extra dynamic in the space by having that full-time interpretation there. Also making sure the interpreter is aware of the space, the routine that occurs in the space and how having that specific behaviour as well - to match the studio and what's happening... And some interpreters are really aware and they match that vibe really well, but some interpreters don't get that quite as well as you're having to educate interpreters -

BA: Yeah

AS: And also - on top of that, also educating the dancers about the interpreters in the space and how that will work. But I think we are going forward and we will continue to progress forward as well.

BA: Yeah. Thank you for, for sharing that. I mean, kind of in...because we're, sort of, in a general term, maybe touching on that now - one of the, one of the questions I've been asking all as we meet - and, you know, part of this podcast, my intention is that is literally that, as we begin to meet again in physical spaces - it's an opportunity to kind of get to know each other a bit more and to learn and, you know, in terms of learning, one of the things that I wanted to touch on was about this idea of inclusivity. And umm, so I've been asking a question about that, which is to, to ask you, you know, what does inclusivity mean to you? And how do you experience it working and failing...kind of, not working as well as it, as maybe we might wish, wish it could?

So, I just wondered what you might, what that might be for you in this moment?

AS: Yeah, yeah...I think the word inclusivity... Well really, I don't really use that word, to be honest, don't use that word much.

BA: You talked about access just now...

AS: Yeah, yeah. So for me, I think the context means how a person feels being in that space. So, if it's a positive feeling or if it's not a positive feeling. I think if a person feels welcome and safe in the space that they're in, to feel that they can express how they want to express and

they can participate well - I think that's really good. And that's good practice as well - of inclusivity - but it's really hard to achieve...really hard to achieve.

Hmmm, yeah... I think it depends as well on people's attitudes - absolutely! And people's awareness. And I think that here with Candoco, it's got lots of strengths, it's really strong and I think we're really focused on communication and that connection between the team - and that's really, really great to have that strong commitment here, and it's important for the dancers' wellbeing so that we are all looking after one another - because we've had a lot of conversations with management within the team always. And they are always great with checking in with me, and I know with other dancers as well, but always checking-in with how everything's going; what's working well; what do you need...

And it's really interesting because I feel more safe knowing that Dan Daw is with us. Now that Dan Daw is with us I do feel really safe having that Associate Artistic Director here. Yeah, I do feel really safe with that and also having that lived experience of disability I think makes a *massive* difference.

BA: Yeah.

AS: Just a massive difference to the feeling of connection and belonging and safety within the workplace.

BA: Yeah. So that's kind of shifted the context for you a bit, his, his stepping into that role?

AS: Yeah. Yep, absolutely. And what I *love* about Candoco is everyone is different and everyone had a different experience, different life experience, different bodily experiences and everyone's bringing something different into the company. And we've got a lot to learn from each other, absolutely! And we're still doing that.

BA: Yes.

AS: Still learning from each other

BA: I feel like we're, kind of growing that culture a bit...yeah, or like, continuing to cultivate those seeds that are already in growth.

AS: Yeah, absolutely.

BA: It's great that you mentioned Dan because recently we've been looking at the 30th year anniversary, and looking at some of the archive, right? And you, correct me if I've got this wrong - but you've been... Well, maybe you could say what it was that you were working on in relation to archive repertoire for the 30th anniversary? And, I think you have had a conversation with Dan in relation to that, maybe?

Could you say a bit about what you were working on?

AS: Yes *[laughs]*, So we've been working on a piece called 'Studies For C' -

BA: Yeah.

AS: And that's a duet between Dan Daw and a dancer called Mirjam and I think that was created eight years ago - and that was my first and only live Candoco performance that I saw. So I was here for Candoco's Summer Lab they did eight years ago...yeah, and I saw Dan and Miriam perform 'Studies For C' - perform the duet live - and I was... Wow! It *really* hit me it had such a huge impact.

BA: Okay

AS: And I hadn't seen something like that for such a long time and I just thought ' Oh wow, I love that, I love that duet!' And I remember thinking, 'I would *love* to perform that!' - I just really felt a strong connection with the work.

BA: Yeah.

AS: And then...

BA: What did you, what was it about it that you felt connected to?

AS: Ah um, I... could just see my emotion, and my life experience there.

BA: Right.

AS: Just that frustration and the feeling of feeling trapped as well...and the dependency on someone else. And it was just...And having everything change very quickly and the feeling of feeling quite scared and all these emotions wrapped up in this performance - and I felt, at the time, they were so relevant to my life and for those reasons that's why I felt so connected to the piece. And then this year the opportunity came up for me to learn that duet - 'Studies for C' - and I just thought 'Wow! It's so relevant to what's happening now in a strange way, but in such a different way - because of Coronavirus, because of lockdown so... all being very isolated, having that frustration...very much being in limbo, and that's all been our lives for now, a year and...yeah...

BA: Yeah.

AS: So, I just felt that I could really relate to that work. And I was so excited, really excited to be working on that.

BA: And who are you working with on it with in this time?

AS: So I've been learning it with an apprentice dancer called Anastasia.

BA: Yeah. And what was the working process? What did you do in the working process?

AS: Yeah, umm...so we were both watching the performance on video and then we were talking with Dan as well. Yeah, so, asking him specific questions about the work and the piece. And he explained various things about it. We learnt it over the course of a week, or parts of it over the course of the week. So, we spent a week on it just talking about...our relationships, our connections with the piece; our different experiences between us - myself and Anastasia - having those conversations while we were learning the piece. And then we had a sort of sharing with the company as well, which was really nice.

BA: Yeah it was. It was a lovely day. When we got to see what we've all...

AS: So nice! Just to do a little bit of a performance as well!

BA: Yeah, I mean, and I thought that was great to see -

AS: Yeah

BA: - and one of the striking things about it was that you had begun to work in contact, a little bit. Yeah...

AS: Oh yeah!

BA: And it's been one of the sort of signature themes about beginning to work in this company together at this time - that we've worked, kind of, in the absence of touch...um, and that, I think, has shown me a lot about the sort of threshold that we would maybe -

AS: It's been weird, hasn't it?

BA: - where we'd normally cross that in this kind of environment, like, pretty early! So it's been quite new to have that as something that's not included, like, it's been excluded for a very good reason, I suppose.

Just to check for a moment how we're doing in terms of time whether we need to take a pause?

AS: Yeah, all good.

BA: We're good to continue?

Okay, lovely. So... what I'd like to move into, in relation to touch, is to ask you if you could begin to - in a moment - to maybe show me, and describe to me the collage that I asked you to make, which was a process - for anybody who's listening for the first time - I asked Anna, and everybody else who's taking part in exploring this with me to consider touch, and maybe the absence of touch in the working environment, or even in our own environment at home across this pandemic and lockdown. Touch being something that we learn through very early that we both give and receive information - as 'impression through touch' - that we can literally take an

impression of somebody or give an impression. And I've asked Anna if she could make a little collage at home, really just, kind of, considering the sensation of touch, and just see what that process was like. So, how would it be if you... Could you produce your collage for us now and maybe, sort of, walk us through what's there?

AS: *[Laughter]* Yes. So, thinking about learning through touch - I think that was one reason why I'm so tired from working full-time; back with interpreters as well, because we were doing less work on touch, so I could receive less information through that - so it was all coming to me vocally. And...

BA: Wow, yeah!

AS: I was so exhausted because of that and I love... I love touch and working through touch. I'm a dancer, we're all dancers, so, of course! And creating connections with people through touch as well. Love that.

BA: Yeah, thanks. It's really good to hear how that might have been something that impacted you in an extreme way, I guess because without being able to use sound as a sense for information you might be more amplified in your other senses as a way of literally staying in touch with what's happening?

AS: Yes, yeah and working with two different languages all day everyday - English and British Sign Language - and getting the information in sign language, but also translating the sign language into English to be able to store that in my mind to be able to access exactly what the dancers are accessing and the language that the dancers are exactly accessing... So trying to take all of that into my body and my brain exploded! *[Laughter]*
So, my collage...

BA: Yeah

AS: Well, first, thank you so much for asking me to make a collage. It was such a great thing to do and just visual art...I'm not great at visual art...

BA: That's okay.

AS: But I love connecting with my body and my movement. But yeah - visual art is not my medium, but I just thought, yeah, give it a go! Throw some things together and see what happens...

Ba: Great! Lovely. Can you tell me...?

AS: So yeah, I'll try and describe -
So I have three... Well, it looks like I've got three different kind of beach chairs there. *[Laughs]*

BA: It does!

AS: I think that's because that's my desire for the beach. I'm manifesting my desire right there!
[Laughs]

BA: And they're, kind of, made of...like, a folded foam that's kind of sticking up - like a blue...blue foam...

AS: Yeah, yeah.
And then, I love this part, the bubble -

BA: Sort of large bubble...

AS: - bubble wrap. Yeah. Yeah love that!

BA: What do you love about it? What is it about it?

AS: Oh, just that...reminds me of when I was little, to be honest. And I was popping bubble wrap, all the time, constantly, and I used to love that feeling of doing that when I was younger. And also, it makes me think about joints massively, and how our joints move and rotate, and that real fluid motion that they have within.

BA: Yeah. You saying that just makes me want to put my fingers in it, and feel that motion underneath, that, kind of...the pressure.

AS: Yeah! And then also we've got that part there - because of libraries, I really, really miss the library. Two things I really miss: the library...

BA: Yeah,

AS: ...and the beach.

BA: Yeah, okay.
Is that the library here? The library that's outside Mountview?

AS: Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah!

BA: Because we're working at Mountview at the moment in Peckham, so it's the library here, I think...

AS: Yeah. Yeah, I was just looking through pages and I was like, Peckham Library is right there! Blah blah, distracting but...

BA: So the library is something that you mention?

AS: Yeah. I do miss the library. Also, it's good meditation I find...

BA: The library space?

AS: Oh sorry, no - the making of the collage.

BA: Yeah, yeah,

AS: Yeah, I found it *really* meditative, and it really helped me through, kind of, processing what's happened in the last year and thinking about that.

BA: That's Interesting. Yeah, it's something that I like to do. I mean I don't have a practice of doing it at all. But I just...I don't know, it just sort of came to me as something that we might do. But, I mean... I've mentioned this on another podcast, but just to say again as I feel it's important to share it with you, I did actually have the opportunity to do some research - I was just on my own, I think, like, 11 years ago or more. And in that I ended up with these, kind of, just different shapes in different coloured papers, like triangles and squares and diamonds... And I used to just...not stick them down but, like, move them over each other or rearrange them and because I did it on the floor, it also began to rearrange how my body was in the space - and it was just something I really got into spending quite a lot of time doing. And it didn't actually, kind of, feature in what came out of that research as a thing, but it was something that fed into me landing in...in somehow in the centre of myself at that point in time.

AS: Wow! Really cool.

BA: Ah, well, I don't know - it's just...

AS: Really cool.

BA: It was just what I was doing.

[Both laugh]

AS: Well, maybe it's going to be your new hobby...?

BA: Well, I really want to make my own I can't. I must find time to get around to do my own, my own collage...

AS: Yeah!

BA: okay. Um, so we just got, like, maybe two or three other topics that we'll touch on within the remaining time before we bring this to a close.

AS: All good.

BA: So, Anna and Hari - we're just checking in around how we're doing for energy. I know that I'm certainly somebody who can get a bit verbose and not stop talking. So hopefully you'll let me know, to slow down or stop.

So, this week we've started working again in Jeanine Durning's material, practices as a way of revisiting a work that she's making on us. We are looking forward to her...to being back with her hopefully in...in the late spring. And, yeah, today we've been working on something called 'playing music', as well as 'objects game'. But I wanted to speak about something that has happened with another of her scores, called 'experts', and I was really drawn to this moment, because it, kind of, went round the side, and, kind of, in from the back or something, rather than, like, head on. And I just found the way that it happened quite, quite beautiful and it's to do with, kind of...like... being asked for 'what are you good at?' - but without being asked that. So in this score, 'experts' we, kind of, step into expertise without doubt or hesitation. And on this particular occasion, we'd done a 'tuning' practice (where I think we had been rolling) and then we'd done 'experts' - and Joel then said, "Well, if that was it now, and I was to meet my maker, you know, the big man, I'd be really comfortable to get down on the ground and say I'm really good at this...and just roll around and be like, this is something that I'm good at something I feel comfortable doing. You know I've got nothing more to prove, nothing to hide. I'm going to do this one thing that I'm really good at." And I love that because it, kind of, just went around the edge of it somehow.

So I wondered, like, for you, what would that be?

AS: Oooo, yeah...That's... With experts, the rules for that, the score for that...with the 'experts' score... Wow! Mind-blowing for me, completely mind-blowing for me! And yeah, it's all about confidence, for me, and commitment as well.

BA: Yeah.

AS: I think that's where I can find barriers within the work, and I find it really helpful thinking about how I'm approaching my dancing in a specific way - because if I'm not feeling it inside; if I'm unsure; if I'm unsure I can do it; if I don't quite know what I'm doing - I have to really find that confidence to just go and do it. And I've seen a big change in that... Sorry I've gone slightly off topic there, but what...am I really good at...? Ummm... I know I'm good at things, a few things, but yeah, it's hard to find what they are...

BA: Yeah.

AS: Um, I...hmmmm... I'm really, really, really good at being very visceral and physical and really - I love working with my body, really moving in the space we're in and...my body... Also, that collision or connection with other bodies, other dancers and the contact and ah, I love that. I *know* I'm good at that.

BA: Yeah. What does that feeling of 'knowing I'm good at' feel like in your physical body?

AS: Ooo! Er...

[Both laugh]

BA: Maybe there's no, like, one way of saying what that is, but you know it, right?

AS: *[Laughs]* Yeah, it's hard to... everyone's looking at my facial expressions! *[Laughs - AS makes thinking sounds hmmm, hmmm]* I'm showing a lot through my facial expressions, not really through my words maybe as much.

BA: That's okay.

AS: But yeah, it feels...feels effing good! *[Laughter]*

BA: Feels effing good - there we go! I know what I am good at because it feels effing good. Yeah, great! Thank you for confronting that.

[Laughter]

AS: Yeah, just the pleasure, absolute pleasure as well of feeling that feeling.

BA: Lovely, yeah...Have you got more to say?

AS: I'm also very good at fingerspelling...

[Laughter]

AS: - in sign language. I spell very fast!

BA: Do you?

AS: So I'm very good at that. *[Laughs]*

BA: I would have no way to calibrate like, whether that's like something that you're really quick at or not. I mean, I just notice incredible, kind of, dexterity and articulation in...in this, kind of, physical language of, of gesture. And yet it's so precise and there's so much clarity and nuance in it as well - it's very, like...

AS: Yeah

BA: It's like wow, how did that happen?!

AS: *[Laughs]*

BA: Okay. Gosh! Well, I think, you know, because we had a bit of an intention to, maybe, stay within a slightly shorter timeframe today. Because of this...because of taking care actually - so that we don't get too tired. So, without worrying too much if there's something that I've left out - because this is just a framework or a score - I'm trying to go about this in the same way that we might go about a score we're researching in the space where we haven't really planned, what's going to happen, but we might have a clear sense about where we might begin and what we might touch on through it. Something like that...

So, I think the last thing I'd like to touch on, ask you to spend a minute with, is another riddle. I really like riddles, in...particularly in, kind of, the body you know... Our coordinations are, kind of, like riddles...

AS: Okay -

BA: Maybe because they, they tend to kind of provide information that I hadn't expected might come forward. And with that, again, I asked you to go about this other, kind of, creative task at home. And that's to ask you if you imagine being asked something in an interview or a conversation, or the person that you're talking with, like, opened the door for you to speak about something, you know, sometimes our experience of that is like, "Oooo I don't like that question. I don't want to talk about that"; um, but sometimes it might feel like, "Yeah, I'd love to speak about this, I'm really ready to talk to that - it's something I feel passionate about".

So I asked you to maybe imagine in advance what would be that subject, which helps you to feel like, "Yes, I'm passionate about that and *this* is what I would speak to".

So, I mean, we checked in around this this morning, because you had a question about it, but what came up for you? What was your response to that?

AS: Mmmm... Wow! Ummm...

I love it when I can talk with someone about what it's like to live as a deaf woman, as a Deaf female...

BA: Okay...

AS: Because not many people know about Deaf culture.

BA: No.

AS: And so there's a *whole* deaf community and it's got a beautiful culture, beautiful language, beautiful community. And, it's really rare to meet someone who knows *exactly* that world and *exactly* what's happening in that world. And I *love* talking about sign language and the history of Deaf culture and linguistics as well; the history of linguistics, history of sign language where that's come now and laughing about things that hearing people do as well and just really having that relaxed conversation about that. And having that feeling of belonging as well. I love when people are really open. Yeah, just really open about their life experience. And, yeah...

BA: Do you have those... I mean, you say you love being able to talk about that culture. Do you get to have those kind of conversations or the opportunities to talk about that in all the places that you feel like you want to?...Or are there circumstances or contexts where that's not included?

AS: Oh, such a hit and miss. It's not... It just completely depends on where you are, who's there...

BA: Yeah.

AS: ...what situation you're in... For me in London - I've only been here six months - so I've only actually met two deaf artists, but I met one deaf artist recently and we had such a great connection straight away. And it was just an amazing feeling, absolutely amazing feeling to have that instant connection with someone...just talking about - he was a deaf actor that I met - so we were talking about, kind of, Deaf politics and different films that we've seen, different performances we've seen and our passions as well. Yeah... And I really like to talk about different movement practices as well.

BA: Okay.

AS: So martial arts, for example, I love martial arts,

BA: Yeah?

AS: Yeah, really similar to dance, I find,

BA: Have you practised martial arts?

AS: Yeah *[Laughs]*

BA: What did you do? Well, what do you...

AS: Well, before lockdown. I was doing a lot of kickboxing.

BA: Really?

AS: Yeah *[Laughs]*

BA: Yeahhhh

AS: Lots of Brazilian Judo, as well...

BA: Jujitsu?

AS: Jujitsu... And yeah, really getting into that. But yes, there's other things I want to do but lockdown... I want to pursue martial arts, but haven't been able to because of lockdown...

BA: Right, yeah...

AS: Yeah. I like - as well... Well, it's important for me to talk about - well, this is quite heavy -

BA: Okay...

AS: - Quite heavy topic, but important for me to talk about domestic abuse and sexual assault as well. Especially now, there's a lot, just a lot of anger about that. And for Deaf women as well and women with disabilities, they're more likely to experience sexual assault. And so that's something for me that I really am interested in being involved in those conversations. But yeah, that's a heavy topic...

BA: Yeah, it is, and it's...yeah, it's part of it's... Yeah, I think, you know, we know that there's been an increase in that sadly in this pandemic, in lockdown and living at home. Yeah, which I guess it's, like, everything that we don't yet know about the kind of huge effect of this, sort of, change in terms of how we've been...the change in our behaviours that we've done to try and protect... The idea of, sort of, trying to protect ourselves and stay safe as we've got other other layers...

AS: Yeah...

Well, it's... One good thing about this time is we are learning so much more about different people, different people's experiences. I think we're really learning to be more aware of that and just more kind to people as well. Life has slowed down and we've given ourselves that chance to learn.

BA: Yeah. Big hopes, big hopes...

AS: Yeah. Yeah, and I also love..

BA: Connections?

AS: So I love these, kind of, these random instances that come along, and these different coincidences -

BA: Ah, coincidences...

AS: - that we'll all be having - 'everything happens for a reason' type thing...

BA: Yeah.

AS: And you'll meet someone, a random person, and, and it will just be little things like that and

there'll be a reason that that has happened, that run-in has happened...you've met that person for a reason and I just love those little coincidences that we come across in life.

BA: Lovely. Well, Anna, thank you so much for agreeing to take part in this today.

AS: No, thank you!

BA: It's been lovely to sit down and get to know you more through this, and, and Hari - thank you very much for facilitating this for us and...yeah...

AS: Great, thank you so much. Thanks so much, Ben

BA: My pleasure.