

# HIP HOP

## DANCE ALMANAC VOL.2

Edited by  
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**FEATURING:**  
Julia Cheng

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# COPYRIGHT

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# JULIA CHENG

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**IA: Can you introduce yourself and describe what it is that you do?**

JC: My name is Julia Gar Yun Cheng - I'm gonna use my Chinese name. I'm a dance artist, creative director, choreographer. I like to create and challenge what performance, theatre or expression is with body, voice and sound.

**IA: I'm interested in the idea of Hip Hop as an alternate kinship, an alternative family, because it's people you choose...in crews, in houses and things like that.**

JC: Well, my first family was IP. Sorry, Immigration Poppers. A popping crew. They were... it was all from the love of just jamming and dancing; through that you made friends and it was a family that inspired you to be...well, great. First and foremost, they're great human beings, people with integrity and really amazing skills in dance as well, so you were inspiring each other on both levels of just being as people but the art form as well. Kinship for me - it's paramount in anything you do. Whether that be in a crew, or House of Absolute, I still see it as a family. I think that first and foremost, we're there for each other as people. That it's not a business commodity thing... sometimes that happens when

it's a commercialised product or job - then it can be very cut-throaty. I think that's necessary sometimes to make work and you have to have reliability and all these things but in terms of being there for one another that's key to me because everyone needs someone to relate to and someone to lean on. I think it's developing trust, empathy and compassion for each other, and that's what crews do, that's what houses do and sometimes people come from families that have that already. Some people don't have that and that's your family. That's your only family, you know. In terms of the scene, that's a massive part of it. It's the community part of it and being there for one another as well.

**IA: How did you get into IP?**

JC: Oh well...I knew Dickson from a mutual friend, and we also had the same contemporary dance teacher who took us as his students - Stuart Thomas. But I knew him from a longer time before that anyway, I was seeing him outside Pineapple in like 2003 when I first moved to London, and I knew of him. But then a friend, a member of IP called Anthony Leung invited me to a Saturday jam and said 'So we jam outside of Pineapple on Saturdays, you can come along.' I was like 'Cool.' Then I went there and I just jammed

with them and I met everyone else and then...there was this thing of everyone talking and visualising 'Oh, is Julia part of the crew?' It wasn't like, you know, I wasn't...it was more about jamming, spending time together and having meals together. It wasn't really battles then. There were a few things, like UK B-BOY Champs and things like that, Throwdown...it started way before me, I came at the latter end of it.

**IA: In terms of the House of Absolute, you mentioned that it's about being there for each other. What are some of the value systems that are threaded through the house?**

JC: Oh...lots! Listening to one another, giving space for one another. Accountability for things, being responsible for the things that you're doing for the crew; it's more solidity and a foundation of being. Being there for one another, that's the key thing. Trust and loyalty. For me, this has developed as it's come along, it's been five years now but personally for me, it's also letting go of attachment and things like that. Sometimes you think 'Oh this is our crew and we don't want it to crumble.' But sometimes things do crumble and you get back up and you inspire one another again and you build again. It's a way of...I think it's cyclical. You evolve

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together; we all change as people, we all come from different types of world cultures and we learn from one another. That's a key one too, to learn from one another.

**IA: How did you meet Hip Hop?**

JC: I come from Luton. So, when I was in Luton we saw an advert in the paper for a street

Then I moved to London and one of the dancers there said 'There's this studio called Pineapple, look at all these... there's different classes here, you know, I teach here sometimes as well.' I was like, 'Oh cool.' Then we moved to London, I went to Pineapple and I started taking classes in popping with James Painting, who was part of the original members of IP and passed

**it was that you saw that unlocked that?**

JC: I think that it was probably Physss. I remember seeing Physss and thinking 'I like that and that's the sort of style of Hip Hop I like.' But other people inspired me while I was watching as well...cause I was more into Hip Hop then and IP was a popping crew...I was the non-popper of the group. Then I came back from France and it would be the jams, going to jams and jamming with IP outside Pineapple, but then also going to the clubs with them. That's when the clubs were where it's at, you know.

**IA: Tell me about the clubs... what's the difference in feeling? The differences between jams, battles and the club?**

JC: I knew the clubs first. Although I went to watch Juste Debout, my experience of it was more...letting go and finding a freedom of my own in the club, being inspired by everyone else moving around me, seeing different shapes, hearing different music, bouncing off the DJ, DJ bouncing off the dancers and dancers bouncing off the space. Everyone was just like...everyone was having a good time you know. Tryna better their expression or find different ways...it was just everyone bouncing off each other. The cyphers... whether you're observing or a part of it, you're bouncing off something, so there's an exchange of energy. Was that the question you asked?

**IA: The difference between club space, jam space and battle space...**

JC: In the battles...the first sort of battles I took part in was...

**"Finding a freedom of my own in the club, being inspired by everyone else moving around me, seeing different shapes, hearing different music, bouncing off the DJ, DJ bouncing off the dancers and dancers bouncing off the space."**

dance class, me and my best friend. To be honest, I don't think it was...it was a street dance class, but it wasn't really Hip Hop...Hip Hop as I know it is now. But it was my first step and I was always really grateful for that stepping stone and that opening. From there, I...

**IA: How old were you?**

JC: Oh, I was eighteen. I was doing...actually, if I track it back...it's probably listening to my brother playing Wu Tang and Ice Cube; playing music that was infiltrating me. Going to school, you'd hear Hip Hop music, and I would love to dance, I'd go to youth clubs and go clubbing and stuff. But my first class in terms of movement and really thinking of it as Hip Hop is doing a studio class really.

away a few years ago. I just took loads of classes, but when I moved to France in 2005, I encountered Juste Debout and was like 'Oh my god.'

**IA: Next level.**

JC: This is what it is, like when I practice in my room I feel this is the language that I'm playing around with. I saw new...it was called 'New Style' one of the categories was New Style... you know 'New York Style'. But it's like Hip Hop and I was like 'Wow, the way that they're moving, I feel like that's how I understand movement.' Then I realised...I already knew those were the styles, but it just solidified it a lot more for me; it was a different level of freestyle that I saw.

**IA: Can you remember who**

Stylefest. But then it's more of a throw down. It's different because it's competitive, but it's not...it's social, a jam space and club space with everyone socialising and everyone getting down together, having a good time. Whereas, you know, you go to a battle, everyone's laying down their skills and everyone's tryna be the best they can be, to out dance the other person, or out express them in a way... that comes with different consequences cause already you've got a different objective. You're already having a different expectation of what you want of yourself. There's already that dialogue going on in your head...there's a different mentality and also, because you're getting judged and you have a set amount of time, it's a bit like a game, isn't it? You have to be knowing yourself even more so, whereas in the club I feel like it's about just letting go and there's less questioning. It depends, cause if you're cyphering in a club, then you're also battling, it depends how you see it...when I'm cyphering in a club and I'm going for rounds and rounds and rounds and rounds, I'm going for it you know.

**IA: 'This is round eighteen and I'm still here.'**

JC: Exactly. I guess there's always little nuances which bridge over it a bit. But it's very different. It must be different for generations that come up now and all they see is events and that's their first experience of it. They're younger and can't get into clubs. There's that whole thing of you have to be 18 to get into a club, so how can they experience that or begin to understand what that is?

**IA: As a culture.**

JC: It's a bit like...how can we even begin to understand people who went through things in the eighties? Cause they were going through completely different social contexts of their life. You're not, you're twenty and we're thirty years from apartheid or even women having rights. All these changes...all these social and political changes that are paramount in the way that people express themselves, or the way that music's made; it's very different I think. Each generation has their different ways of experiencing Hip Hop culture. But it's community and togetherness...an elevation of your own...how can I say? How I knew it and how I've experienced it is that it makes... from encountering others and from the journey of learning to express yourself, it's about making yourself a better person from it...and helping others who also need that. I think that's the essence of what Hip Hop is. Hip Hop is about levelling up, levelling up everyone's consciousness, integrity, and I think that's evolved and changed because of the music scene but also the way that music is made. It's changed a lot obviously, but I think that's how it started, it was about combating oppression and it was a feeling for this...different feelings. There's not more feelings now, there's just different people doing it now.

**IA: Can we come back to that? From the club, to the cypher, to the theatre. You've been active in the theatre space for a number of years. What is that as a space for you? What is it doing that's different?**

JC: It's speaking to different

people. Speaking to different audiences that probably won't go to the club and see or feel something like that... they're experiencing and understanding a different culture by being in the different space. I also feel like storytelling, no matter... and this is for non-obvious ways of storytelling too - like fragmented and abstract storytelling - I feel like it's what we're doing in the club. It's like, 'Okay so how can we challenge what performance is and still be inspired by what is inspiring us?' I'm inspired by lots of different styles of dance because I came from Hip Hop, I was in a popping crew, so poppers were inspiring me all the time. I was competing in Hip Hop though. But now... taken under the wing of my teacher, I learned modern dance forms, but I was also studying drama, theatre and performance studies and French. I had all these different inspirations, and I come from a completely different culture. So I have my other stuff that is additional...I guess it was a way to bring those things together, create my own voice, say what I wanna say... and not be attached to having to be in one category or another category. It can be an open space. A blank canvas. I can incorporate live sound cause I love music, I love live instruments, and I wanted to learn instruments but I never had a chance to. My parents were great cause they gave us some singing lessons when we were younger, but that was only a small amount of our time...there's a part of me that wanted to sing when I was younger, there was a part of me that wanted to act, and then there was a decision that I made that was 'I'm gonna dance.' That was when I got scouted in the club

for a competition. I thought 'Actually, I'm not bad at this dance thing.' We did these community street dance classes that I told you about in Luton, we did community performances in the local town centre, in hospitals and in other town centres and...I've gotta say shout out to Eric John cause that's community.

**IA: Community development.**

JC: Yeah. That's also what Hip Hop is about, in its essence and what it stands for. It gave me an opportunity to perform, and I wouldn't say it's the best performances of my life, but it was where I was at. It gave me something and I thought 'I'm actually not bad at this.' It makes a difference. I feel like when you feel the difference, you feel. I guess it's movement itself, but also the audience reaction and things like that, you think 'Oh, you can make a difference with things.' You can change...you can shift space, shift emotions, shift energy within a hospital, care home or wherever. It can do good for people, it can lift people. Even more so now...if you can show connection with yourself, in space, onstage to a feeling that people tend to shut off or don't talk about or a subject matter they don't talk about...it creates so much space to be able to talk about things or touch on things that might be paramount to someone's life. I feel like a big responsibility to...I feel really privileged to even be here in this country, to have freedom of speech as a woman and to be able to do things. The fact that I've even managed to have such generous teachers, to do what I do and also grow up with parents who had...I didn't grow up in a very privileged situation. We didn't have a lot of money and the fact that I'm

able to do what I love to do...I feel really privileged so it's like 'Well, what...what are you doing? What are you saying with your work? What's it all for?'

**IA: Yes. What difference are you making?**

JC: I feel like theatre and art... art is activism and it does that. Whether it be a youth project or a performance, a professional scale thing, an outdoor work...I'm really interested in being challenged, to know what I can create and what different things can be created within that context so that it sings...for people to feel something, even if it's just being more connected to emotions, to be moved in some sort of way without it being like 'Hey story!' or 'Hey spectacle!' Or a spectacle that is like...what showcases can be like in Hip Hop. It can be very aesthetically pleasing. Great. It's a really great execution of movement with intricacy and musicality, but after that I'm like 'How can you push it further? How can you evolve it further?' I feel like how I perceive involving others is, understanding how expression can be expressed in other forms. Whether that be painting, wordplay or sounds. That really inspires me because I'm working with other artists that have a different perspective on...sculpting and whether he's talking or she's talking, I'm like 'That gives me a new perspective of how I see movement.' It's so crazy that you see it in film, or in photography, and you see it in that and I hear it in that instrument...I hear what you're saying but I express it through physicality. I feel like that feeds me and makes me think in a different way; it opens my mind up, and when you collide

two people who have different forms who are masters within their form, what does that create?

**IA: Is that like with Alex Ho?**

JC: Yeah. He comes from a very classical...his is another level because...he's British Asian also. I don't collaborate with many British Asians who have been brought up in this culture but he also understands where I'm coming from cause his parents are from Hong Kong as well. He's had a very different upbringing because of his classical training in music. I haven't had any classical training at school or anything.

**IA: You've not done ballet since three?**

JC: No. It was more like my teacher taught me contemporary dance when I was 23. We had very different upbringings but also we have similarities because of our cultural similarities. Also other composers that I've worked with like Simon McCorry - making live sound cause for me - I'm passionate about how we use live sound cause it's a bouncing thing. You know that thing I told you about the club - it's a bouncing thing of how you get that live, instead of a pre-recorded sound. That interests me because something happens when it's live.

**IA: You have to pay attention.**

JC: Yeah and you've gotta have a connection. There's a connection because there's another person involved on stage. It's another level to what the audience feels...the vibrations of the performance. If I had budget, I'd incorporate live sound all the time...but it's

not always possible. I've been really pushing for that a lot for the last five years or so...that's what's got me into the theatre world, and I've had a lot of people approach me as well.

**IA: Saying 'I've seen you do this, can you do this?'**

JC: Yeah. I've been really fortunate that it speaks to different people and different artists. Then I'm like 'This artist is really good actually.' I've been really fortunate and I feel really privileged...how can I make every second count? I think it's also from when you lose people...like James. When you lose people...your peers even more so, it gives you a kick up the backside to make sure you're doing some shit.

**IA: You don't want to waste anything.**

JC: Yeah. There's a bit of that...I don't want to be on that scale of 'I have to do it cause I have to do it and it's all gonna fall out and slip out of my hands.' Then I'm just like 'Ugh.' There's a balance...a balance of making things happen and just doing it. What can you lose out on? Invest in whatever you do. If I'm out of pocket and I've gotta pay myself, I just do it cause that's how I want it. That's my mindset all the time...just make it happen. If you really want to do something, there's ways to do it. Money doesn't have to be the obstacle. There are people that are willing to help you...I think I've had generous people in my life.

**IA: That first street dance class, through to 'Sonic Transmissions.'**

JC: Were you there?

**IA: Yeah.**

JC: Wow! Great! I didn't see you.

**IA: Talk to me about that arc. From there to landing at the ICA, a place where dance has never been before in terms of that curated series. What was that like?**

JC: Do you know what, I'm still digesting it. I haven't had much time to digest and process it but that's been one of my conscious objectives...to challenge spaces that have lots of social divisions within it. Or omit specific social classes from being the main programme of something. 'Yeah, you can come visit, you can have a tourist night, you can have an evening that's specifically focused on African or Asian art, right?' But what about the regular programme what you're sharing across the year?

**IA: Not just Black History Month.**

JC: Yeah, exactly. How are we having equal ground and just as much forefront, visibility and space to share what we do? Being in spaces like museums or the V&A - I did a project there last year - and now ICA is bridging what hierarchy can be...the hierarchical structures in art institutions. I mean, I don't wanna talk about...yeah, I mean, obviously diversity and that's always what people are talking about, like 'Inclusivity, diversity.' That's a massive thing that Arts Council England have been doing...diversity, cool, I get that, but it's also like...marginalised people. What about people who have lack of access? What if their spaces aren't accessible to all people? There's lots of marginalised groups and I think how are we making space for things to happen? The only way you

can do that is to make things happen. It was Skin Deep that approached me a couple of years ago to do an evening with them, and I was like 'Sure.' But then I had a really bad injury...I fractured my spine and I had to call it off. They also had a change of space, but in the end they approached me about ICA and I was like 'This would be much better as a venue.' ICA had heard of me because I was nominated for the Arts Foundation Futures Hip Hop award. They were really interested in my work. I think that as a platform is important, cause that was the first time they put Hip Hop as an award category as well...the ICA was where the award ceremony was held. The Arts Foundation award has also been quite paramount in bridging these gaps cause or any sort of spaces that acknowledge space for different types of art, or communities. I'm not just Hip Hop movement, I studied theatre and I'm interested in that. However I feel like I'm trying to make opportunities for other people to come with me too.

**IA: It's not just the night of Julia, it's The House of Absolute which is a collective of incredible female artists. Where does that come from? That generosity and altruism.**

JC: Maybe it's my upbringing and my parents, the way my parents taught me. But also, it's my teacher. My teacher's so generous. Stuart Thomas. I didn't have money to come and do class sometimes and he'd be like 'Just come, just come to class.' Even now, he doesn't accept money if I do his class...I just feel like his...the wealth of knowledge he has and he just wants to share it. I think that life is so short. Why

not share what you have with people? Yes...some people might abuse it and there are boundaries that you need to lay down sometimes, but in

I'm choreographing and performing, then there's other projects that I'm assisting, and there's a play I'm performing in and co-creating also with a

and not tryna run so much. I'm tryna create a balance of what pausing, doing and being is.

**"I think that life is so short. Why not share what you have with people? Yes... some people might abuse it and there are boundaries that you need to lay down sometimes, but in the end, when it comes to the creative industry...you have to work you butt off."**

the end, when it comes to the creative industry..you have to work your butt off, have so much thick skin and be able to deal with rejection so much. You have to work so hard, so many people study it, but then don't even go into it cause it... or they invest a bit of time and then they end up giving up and not being into it because it's so hard to sustain. It's really tough...even now it's tough.

**IA: There may be a perception that you've made it with the ICA and V&A commissions and collaboration...but that's not necessarily the case. What is it like to be Julia?**

JC: Now?

**IA: Right now.**

JC: I'm running around in so many...my brain is split into 10 because I've got so many different projects going on. Different projects that I'm co-directing, performing in and choreographing...then there's other projects that

British East-Asian playwright Daniel York-Loh. I'm just split because there's all these separate...all these different amazing projects that I have on until next year. There's a project that I'm working on with a hundred young people for the Royal Academy of Dance as well...that's not been announced publicly yet...so there's all those things and at the same time House of Absolute is still in my mind. How are we creating the stuff for...I mean one of those projects is a House of Absolute thing, but people's budget can't afford everyone, so sometimes they need only two dancers. In my forefront after ICA is...I need to put in the funding bid, so that next year we can create a full-length work.

**IA: Warrior Queens?**

JC: Yeah. Warrior Queens...the whole piece and then tour it internationally the year after. That's where my mindset is right now. I'm running and pausing, running and pausing,

**IA: Hip Hop as craft, the practice of it. What are your thoughts around that?**

JC: Can you ask that question again?

**IA: Hip Hop as a craft. It might be a continual practice, a mindset or a theatricality. Craft as a set of behaviours, of actions. I'm interested to hear your thoughts on that because we never really hear Hip Hop spoken about as a craft, as a developed skill.**

JC: I can only speak for the dance element of it. The craft of it...how I craft it normally and how I train, is in the club, training sessions or jams. It's like a deep study of...for me, it's the study of the psychological input or visionary embodied movement in relation to sound and music. And so...I try and break down different ways of doing that when I'm on my own. Sometimes in the club or when I'm with other people I'm actually thinking of different things that I'm doing to explore...and so I feel like that craft, people are always doing...finding their expression through the foundation of whatever style they're training in. When they're breaking down like every single little different movement quality or texture or mannerism or behavioural quality; if you're thinking about waacking and punking what's the inspiration and where? What's the feeling? There's so many layers to it, to study and practice on your own...there's the sculpting and craft in the moment of it. Some people do it in the studio, some people do it a lot of times at home as well. For me it's not always with Hip Hop music. I like to be

training with loads of different types of music. Waacking is not always disco music, that's not always the music that's inspiring me in that moment. I think it's that self-study and training. Sometimes for me that's reading a book, sometimes that's watching a documentary. Everything infiltrates from what I'm receiving or looking at or studying, it all goes into my dance. I'm influenced by other styles of dance as well. There's Hip Hop, there's funk styles, disco, punking and posing, waacking, but then there's also contemporary dance. I really look at the study of movement as a craft as well. I think they merge, because it's all mixed in movement, but also in your mindset of how you're approaching things. People from the Hip Hop scene, in my experience, have a rawness and upfrontness about who they are, and how they conduct themselves. It's less sugar-coated. Whereas if I go to other realms of creating, there's a lot more sugar-coating. It's like...an exhibition or whatever, it doesn't have to be, but I feel like from touring with a commercial job...not that I love commercial work. Sometimes it's inspiring, sometimes it's not so much. That's probably me being a bit biased and in every world there are people who are a bit more upfront and there are people who are a bit more closed off, or have a bit more of a façade. I really do think when I go to a Hip Hop event or I'm with my people, I'm like 'Oh, yeah this is what it is.' In a way more human, just straight, you know? And I appreciate that. I appreciate people just being straight with how it is. Maybe I appreciate it cause that's how I am...I like to be straight with how I feel about stuff. Direct and transparent.

**IA: You mentioned waacking a few times there; you went to New York. What was it that attracted you to Tyrone, New York and that style?**

JC: It was actually my teacher, Stuart Thomas, he said 'You should learn waacking.' Actually I was like 'Oh.' Then in the clubs at the time there was one Japanese girl Sayaka in a cypher, who would do a bit of waacking and punking and I was like 'What is she doing? That looks kinda cool.' Then my teacher said 'You should learn waacking.' I was going to New York to learn modern dance cause my teacher's teacher was one of the founding members of Alvin Ailey...so I was already going there to learn contemporary movement, and I thought 'I'm gonna learn waacking when I go there then.' I was like 'I don't know who to learn from, but I just know that there's this style.' At the time Jeffrey Daniel was around and...I was taking him to eat at a Chinese restaurant...

**IA: Go on...**

JC: I took him to Greenwich and then we went to Chinatown and we had some food. I said 'Do you know what, I'm going to New York and I wanna learn waacking.' He was like 'You know what waacking is? People think that it's like this...but do you know what waacking is?' He put down his chopsticks and he went [pause] 'That's what waacking is.' I was like 'Oh wow.' He said 'I think you've gotta see my brother, I'm gonna give you his name and contact. You've gotta see my brother, Tyrone.' I was like 'Okay, cool.'

**IA: Wow.**

JC: Then I went and when I

got to New York I went to take class with Tyrone. That was the connection. It was great and I found it really empowering. I found the musicality really intriguing and interesting. I found a femininity that I've not tapped into before...or I found a connection to my femininity... my feminine side, I should say. This thing of just owning yourself and an extravagance. He took us to a drag club, a drag queen evening and he was so generous with what he gave us as well. He showed us so many images and took us out so you could see the essences, the mannerisms and the extravagance of a drag queen show. It was the hands...he was saying 'Look at the hands.' It was a really insightful experience, and hearing him talk first hand about friends that he'd lost and the community that had been oppressed. That was their space to meet people but also just to vibe with each other...it was never a competitive style. The form of the dance came from people, the pioneers...and most of them weren't living. There's only one or two even now who didn't pass away from AIDS. I came back with a renewed kind of 'I feel inspired.' I thought 'This is a style that I should know.' Then after that I think Aus came - one of his main students at the time... doing some masterclasses. I took some classes and from that visit...I didn't know that they were looking for people to form International House of Waacking in the UK. They contacted me, and I was then part of IHOW UK. I thought 'Wow, cool.' It's Tyrone's house. He was doing a lot of stuff and waacking was going around the world, there was a resurgence at the time. We did a few...we trained together and we're very individual

people, amazing individual artists. So individual that sometimes we're not together because we've got so many other commitments. We did one sharing with Tyrone, and then we had a pause or break from training sessions...and after a break of maybe two months it never resumed. I think everyone had their own commitments and it wasn't meant to be in the end. I still had a passion for the dance... and so I would study it and do it myself and travel around a lot...like I said at the ICA I didn't have a people to train with in that style...so I would travel a lot and then I was thinking for a while 'Let me start something...maybe I should try something.' At that time also I was...I was part of Fiya House for a couple of years and then I left. James passed away and I thought 'Do you know what? Do something.'

**IA: Now's the time.**

JC: This was a clearer message than anything...do something and make use of your time. Pass anything that you wanna pass, knowledge that you have learnt but help the next generation if you can. Maybe there could be an intro, people might be interested in waacking. So that's how House of Absolute was born. From me approaching a few people... and it wasn't called House of Absolute at the beginning, it was just a few people and I connected to them and said 'Do you wanna train?' We trained in the underground in Charing Cross and then we had our first showcase when D-Lo invited us and said, 'You know you can do your first showcase.' We did our first showcase and we were talking about a name...actually the name itself also came from my teacher; he would just

randomly call me sometimes and I'd wrote down what he had said to me one time, he said 'Julia, I'm just calling you cause...House of Absolute. I think that's what you should call your crew whenever you do your thing.' I was like 'Okay,' That was like years before. But I wrote it down somewhere. So when we were all tryna discuss 'Should we get a name?' There was me and three other girls, and we were like 'hmm yeah'. I suggested some other things and then I found the notes, and I said 'What about House of Absolute?' And they were like 'Oh I like that! I like that!' And I was like 'Okay.'

**IA: 'We're the House of Absolute.'**

JC: I just thought make a logo...search for the best person to design it. It wasn't a great logo at first and then the second one was...I thought 'This is bangin', this is good... slick.' It came from there, and then finding those different people who I felt had the right vibe to be a part of House of Absolute. Those people have left because they're on different journeys and that's cool as well but I really appreciated the fact that they also helped when they were part of it and helped evolve it in some way. I'm always really appreciative of that. Everyone moves on in different ways and that's another part of my thing...talking about attachment and not feeling like 'Oh...it's everything! It's everything!' Only last year has that changed to be honest. Now I'm just as determined and just as motivated to create with everyone and push it to the max; I'm not devastated if...I think there's a balance within that also of creating as much opportunity and having ambition within that for

everyone and not feeling like I have the responsibility for everyone.

**IA: You don't have to hold it all...**

JC: Yeah. We can all share the weight. That's been a great transition with the house.

**IA: If there are three people in your orbit, who you go to time and again, who are they and how have they been influential on your journey?**

JC: Are you talking about just dancing, or at every level?

**IA: Every level.**

JC: I'd say Stuart Thomas, for sure. He's my teacher and my mentor. He's just a great being and he's always there for me. It's hard because sometimes you have your family, but you don't...Stuart understands what being an artist or creative person is as well, and that's really important...he's definitely one. The second person is my best friend, Serena Williams, who's also part of House of Absolute. We went to high school together so we've known each other since we were twelve or thirteen. We went to college together, uni, lived together and now we're doing things with House of Absolute - she's always had my back. Always, always and...always helped rationalise me if I'm irrational! She's always there because she's just there and we're both from Luton...what's that my teacher, Serena...I think probably my sister and my brother...I know you said three people but my brother and sister count as one person [laughs] or me.

**IA: Is that the brother with the Wu Tang?**

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah and 2Pac and Ice Cube. My brother and sister are massive because they were there for me so much...my parents were working so much when we were young, but they were always around. We would be very young at home, but they would...they would take that role of parent in a way... although they're big brother and big sis, they had more responsibility. I really have so much love for them. Even if sometimes they don't understand the artistic side of things...if I'm having troubles, I'm like 'Bro, can you help me out?' They're always there for me...three people and that's plus one! There's loads of people, loads of people... some of my dark times where it's hard to pull myself out of things, it's been my sister who

**IA: I'm interested in Hip Hop and self-care. Because you don't often associate the two; there are also a few more theatre works that are looking at mental health and Hip Hop and I'd like to hear your relationship to self-care as well as Hip Hop and mental health.**

JC: Oh my gosh, there's so much. There's so much because...obviously there's Hip Hop, but I feel like actually, in terms of...OK, if you're talking about Hip Hop, there's this thing about being able to speak about things when you're feeling weak or vulnerable. I think that's also for men...there's this machism, a strength thing, that man sort of thing, which is put on men in general, but in Hip Hop it's a lot more. I feel that's quite

**“There's this kind of machism, a strength thing, that man sort of thing, which is put on men in general, but in Hip Hop it's a lot more. I feel that's quite unhealthy, and I always try and encourage male friends of mine, who are older, to express themselves and share those thoughts.”**

has been able to just be...we have a connection where she will just call me...

**IA: When she senses that something's needed?**

JC: Yeah, yeah. We say that we have this kind of...this twin connection, you know.

unhealthy, and I always try and encourage male friends of mine, who are older, to express themselves and share those thoughts. Because actually, it gives space and permission for other people to express themselves in the same way. To be like 'Yeah, I feel vulnerable.' In terms of self-care, I think

within...especially like battling or competitions...it's our body and it's our expression and we're getting judged by it. Sometimes it can feel quite... you can...your self-esteem and your confidence can go down if you don't get through pre-selection or whatever. If you get burnt in a battle...I think it's really important to have, for everyone to have their own way of re-centring themselves and not getting swayed by everyone else's thoughts. That's in general for everyone anyway, that's everyone. But in the dance world, it's even more so because you're getting judged. Everything's image-based and everything can be fickle sometimes as well. You have to really hold your ground and be rooted in yourself, knowing what your expression is. That's taking time for yourself and maybe that's those still moments. We're running around a lot, we're doing this and that... in society in general we're not spending enough time just being ourselves and accepting ourselves the way we are. We're just identifying ourselves as dancers...or we're identifying ourselves as a Hip Hop judge, or identifying ourselves as a choreographer. All those labels are just ways that people can define us and for people to try and understand us, so they can put us in a category to understand us. It's not... sometimes it's not harmful. It's not like they're having an intention to be harmful, but it does box people up as certain things sometimes.

**IA: It 'others' people.**

JC: Yeah. In general it does that anyway, but I feel like... really knowing yourself and continuing to have space for yourself is really important;

not to be dependent on other people's opinions of yourself and to have value for yourself. That happens a lot. I feel like there's different systems and ways that we measure our likeability or our validity in theatre or creating or performing...my self-care is taking time and scheduling time that is just for me. Like I said earlier, making that class for myself, I take myself out, I don't need to teach, I just let someone else lead me.

**IA: That seems quite rare...do you say to yourself 'No, this is a thing that I continue to prioritize?'**

JC: No, it's really important for me. I knew that it was something that I needed to do, but it was last year. I'd been really, really sick and unwell and that really made me realise that I can't keep going at this speed. I have to have space...it wasn't just last year. Last year made me more so, I think from when I've been really having the time to appreciate silence. I've been really fortunate to be able to have long periods of silence, and clear my mental state so that I'm able to sit with myself. A lot of the time we're not, as people, able to sit with ourselves so much. We're thinking about the next thing, then the next thing, so much already on the next thing, the next thing. We're self-critiquing, and I'm known to be a perfectionist...I don't wanna be like that cause I'm...that's OCD and that also comes from fear. If I'm being...I can be pedantic with things because I'm like...'Just let it go man.' You know it's gonna be a bit rough sometimes...

**IA: If it's not this right time, that's OK.**

JC: Yeah! It's like, so what?

What's gonna happen if I haven't...nothing's gonna...

**IA: The world's not gonna stop turning.**

JC: Exactly. So then it's just letting go of a lot of things, letting go of the expectations of things. Being present as much as possible and not worrying too much about the future or holding on to things that you've been hurt from or have been painful...tryna just come back refreshed later at the time. Sometimes that doesn't happen, but that's what I'm tryna do.

**IA: Clear the fog.**

JC: Yeah cause then...then there's space to actually be creative as well. You know when you're dancing or creating a work or performing, there's so much of yourself that you give to audiences, or that you have to generate so much energy. In a battle, there's so many rounds and there's so much you have to generate.

**IA: Constantly up, up, up. Just turn it on.**

JC: Yeah, and it's like forty-five seconds...go! One minute...go! It's like...that's something to train, that's the craft of training as well if you're gonna go in a battle or in the performance world...you have to get yourself ready. When you come out you have to have time to be able to come out of that also cause we're so open. You have to find ways to be able to seal up everything that you've come out with.

**IA: I found it quite strange at 'Sonic Transmissions' because they essentially put you onstage with a mic straight after both of your**

**performances. There was no decompression time at all.**

JC: Do you know what...I've never done a programme like that. So in theory, it seemed like 'Oh yeah, we'll just have a short talk after.' Then two days before I was like 'Hold on, how am I gonna do this actually? Cause this is quite a lot.' Moving forward, I don't think I would programme it like that. I'd probably do it with the questioning and talks at the end or at the beginning... so I have my time to get in my place. That was, that was a lot. I didn't anticipate it to be as much as that. I was like 'Oh... and I need to do the costume changes as well. How can I work the costume changes out?' Cause they normally do it with musicians, so it's the first time they've done it with movers so it's different...I don't know if it's different actually if I'm being honest. Maybe it's programmed different. I was quite ambitious with the programming...I thought 'If I'm gonna make something, make it the best!' Let's just do it the best we can...maybe I could have done one less piece or something like that...but I thought it was successful. Something to build on and a great way to reconnect to everyone after some time away. Reconnect with our audiences and our supporters. We have some amazing collaborators and amazing people that support us.

**IA: You worked on the BBC Young Dancer this year. What was that like? You're giving advice and mentoring... you've spoken a lot about what you've received from others. How do you pass it on?**

JC: To be honest, I've been doing a lot of youth work since

I've been creating work but I don't really talk about it that much...or maybe people don't see what I've been doing, but I do a lot. I've directed quite a few youth productions and worked with lots of different types of young people...teaching is a massive part of my output and it's a really important thing for me...I learn a lot from the people I teach as well. So...BBC Young Dancer. I've been mentoring a lot of people for a long time, from people that have been almost in prison to people who have learning difficulties, people who are gonna get expelled from school and people that wanna dance professionally. Hmm...I was asked to be a mentor for BBC...actually I judged one round of the BBC Young Dancer first, but I don't think that was televised...then from that they asked me if I would mentor the street dance category dancers that had gone through. I was like 'Great, yeah cool.' They assigned two people to me, and then...it's the same as any sort of other mentoring that I've done to be honest. My approach is the same...how can you find ways of communicating certain things? I guide people, but actually let them walk through it themselves. So I'm not telling them to do something...it's a journey that they have to find themselves; you just say 'Hey, there's that direction there, there's a direction there.' It's opening opportunities from your perspective and showing my own experience...how do I question myself, how do I draw from things? I try and question my own processes to be able to communicate that to someone else. Perhaps it might work for them, perhaps it might not because they're a different type of person. It was a great experience. It was quick but it was great. What you can

do in a short amount of time. I always find that with teaching workshops or working with young people. The people you work with sometimes can make such a big difference and add to the conversation. I've also starting mentoring

scene...so many events that I see...this one today I thought 'All the people that you invited are guys. All the people that are guests are guys.' There are people who are noticing those things. There are men who are noticing those things

**"So many events that I see... this one today I thought 'All the people that you invited are guys. All the people that are guests are guys.' There are people who are noticing those things. There are men who are noticing those things as well as woman. But there are people who aren't still."**

for Breakin' Convention's Open Art Surgery this year which is great. Next year I'll be doing a bit more, I was just added to the team in the last process that they did. I have been part of the process as well and it's great that there's a different side cause lots of it has been like, three guys and now to have a woman as well...I think Michelle has mentored sometimes, but it's good to it balance out.

**IA: It doesn't always have to be Ivan.**

JC: [laughs] Yeah. Ivan's great, you know. It's just having a different voice.

**IA: Different voice and a different set of perspectives.**

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And a woman. That's something I really wanna advocate for. Our

as well as woman. But there are people who aren't still, and I see the international scale of things and I'm just like 'Wow.' There are female dancers out there how come you didn't... they're doing great things, how come no one's saying that? It's probably come from somewhere else, someone not thinking about that, and I'm like...every time I see those things I screenshot them and catalogue them so that it reminds me to work harder to open the door to other women or other people who don't get that opportunity to do things normally. It also comes from that mindset...I didn't get opportunities sometimes, so I had to create my own opportunities. If I can open the door wider for more people to come in...

**IA: What is troubling you?**

JC: What's troubling me? In relation to?

**IA: In relation to dance or Hip Hop or...it may be an extension of what you've just said, the lack of representation of women...**

JC: Are you talking about like everything? Personal and kind of general contexts?

**IA: Yeah.**

JC: What's troubling me? I don't have things that are troubling me, but some things that are on my mind are like...how can you be sustainable? How can artists be sustainable? How can House of Absolute be sustainable? Those things are on my mind, because finance sometimes is hard when you need to think of shows and you have to put your own money in. Then there's your freelancer rules...you have all these other aims to try and create things with people. There's that thing of funding. [laughs] My main thing is that there's lots of voices and not enough space for them to be heard sometimes. I think how can we create a space where everyone can have their own voice...everyone can be visible without feeling like they've been put to the side? That's the thing that troubles me in general. I don't like that awkwardness in general...if there's a situation that I'm in at a party or a dinner...I can just sense awkwardness, I can just sense seclusion from a mile away. So when there's seclusion or people put aside because they're slightly different...I really notice it and I try and include them. I think that's probably because of my upbringing. I noticed that I was very different. Maybe that's why. I've been sensitive to not want people to feel that way

in any sort of situation. I want people to feel comfortable and welcome and not 'the other'. Whether that be talking about immigration, or freedom, or that's about someone being welcomed in a class, or a cypher or if someone wanted to jam with us. It's all those... they're the things that...yeah. That.

**IA: An awareness of difference.**

JC: Yeah, and inclusivity. There's so much division and there's so much fear of the other anyway in world-scale... how can we do our little... me, how can I do a little bit to just...even if one person, make them feel more included. Even the offer at least, they might not want to take it but at least open your hand out and say 'Do you wanna come in? Do you wanna join our cypher? Do you wanna come and jam with us? Do you wanna have a tea together?' It's seclusion but also some people feeling solitude or loneliness...that's another thing and I don't like that people feel like they can't speak to anyone or that they're on their own. That they're going through everything themselves...because it's not. Everyone is going through the same human emotions and human conditions. We're all in the same boat but everyone doesn't share it. Everyone puts on something because we just have to get through it, right?

**IA: Put the mask on or the fence up...**

JC: Yeah. Just get going and run again, it's like...let's just be honest with how we are. 'Are you actually alright? You know, it's okay. Why are you not feeling alright? Let's talk about it.' That's really important. That's the thing about listening.

Listening is about having your own voice and feeling visible and feeling heard. I think that's the foundation. That's the same with dance. If you're exchanging with people, being able to listen to someone, you give each other space to go to places like this.

**IA: What is your strongest memory of dance?**

JC: Ooooh! That's a good question. Single?

**IA: Single, strongest memory.**

JC: Strongest memory. Not the oldest, the strongest?

**IA: No, the strongest. There's one that would have flashed up straight away.**

JC: [pause] Well...I think it..it went to different things, but I think the strongest one was winning my first battle. It was at Throwdown, and it was my second battle I entered. No, third battle. The second battle Throwdown was a Hip Hop battle and the first...the first that I entered I lost in the final to Clara. In this one I battled Cindy Joyce a dancer from Paris, Kevin...Ricardo and then I battled Turbo in the final.

**IA: Turbo?**

JC: Yeah. Then...then I won the battle and I was like 'What?'

**IA: There's some scalps...**

JC: I thought like...oh, I was like...I was really happy. I remember thinking...yeah, I just remember thinking, being really like 'Oh my god, that's cool.' I was actually not thinking too much, I was just thinking about...just when it was there. Not thinking too much about the next one. I wasn't thinking like 'I need to win!'

**IA: 'Three to go, I've gotta keep some big moves for later rounds.'**

JC: I wasn't even...I didn't know who was battling. When they called my name I just got on with it. 'OK, go back out, walk back in.' I think it was also because I'd only just started battling as well... it was a new thing for me. To win a battle was like 'Oh my god, I won that!' It was a big thing for me. It gave me a bit more confidence to do more. I thought 'If I can do this and I've just started, I can do more.' It also gave me more pressure actually...it was like, 'Oh my god, if I can actually win, then I should be...I need to...'

**IA: Somebody could get go 'Right, I'll take her down.'**

JC: Yeah. But I was really, really happy. That was a great moment. I remember Alper who's from IP...he was on my side. It was nice that he was just sitting on my side, rooting for me. Just one person and there was so many people. I remember my first battle where I lost in the final to Clara but Carlos was rooting me on. Carlos is not here any more, but he was also a member of IP...he passed away this year. The camaraderie, that support, the people that stay on the side lines supporting you from afar. People that are not even here any more, but they're still in your heart and you still carry them every time you're moving or doing anything. That's massive. You learn so much, and I feel like I've learnt so much from people who aren't here any more, more than when they were here. That's crazy...that makes me even more 'Well you better appreciate the people that are here.'

**IA: There have been so many deaths in the community in the past couple of years...**

JC: It's crazy. I feel like that won't change either. As the circuit gets bigger, as everyone gets to know each other even more, it's a wider, bigger community, everyone will know each other, and

really nourished the scene, the UK scene...it wouldn't be what it is without them. There's people that have done lots of grass roots thing. People would look forward to jams or the next event because there wasn't much going on. But now there's so many things on all the time. We're spoilt for choice. It was those

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actually there's so much going on. There's accidents that happen, there's trauma that's creating illnesses...it's not something that we can run away from. We have to be able to accept things like this, and as we get older we will always be losing people even more.

**IA: Death will come every year.**

JC: Yeah. So how do we deal with that? That's a massive journey of what I'm going through...how do I deal with losing people? It's not easy but...there's been so many great, great people that have

things really helped re-inform, build passion and build the inquisitiveness of the next generation. I appreciate that was missed when that 80s bridge was not there. It's really important to keep nourishing that in whatever way we can.

**IA: There are some people who are purists, who believe in the preservation of the original foundation and forms, and there are some people who are evolutionists who want it to evolve and shift things. I'm interested in your thoughts on this.**

JC: Everyone knows that I'm

very experimental and I love to push boundaries of what this form is. So, of course I'm about evolution cause everything has to evolve... you can't stay stagnant or the same. Everything has to change, even if you don't want it to and you're attached to it being that way. However, it's so important to know the essence of where it comes from, the roots, and the history of where it is, otherwise you're missing a massive gap of what it actually stands for and what it is. It's important to have that preservation of the knowledge and the history documented, archived and spoken...having conversations with people from that era to understand the context of where it came from, really changes the way you move. If you re-do a movement knowing the context it completely changes it...it's not just learning it as a move. On top of that put the feeling on it and then, on top of that it's evolving it and doing it in so many different ways that it's your way after. For me they have to exist together...in a way. One can't exist without the other. You can't have the evolution and not know the history...you can't really just be 'Purist, purist, it's just this', cause then how does that evolve? How do you push it after? How is there a different way of making it? I guess it's different...now you're making me think about martial arts.

**IA: Which is pure...you learn the technique. You've done wushu and...**

JC: Yeah I learnt a bit and I learnt Qigong...I'm learning that now, and tai chi. That's very engrained in history...in the forms. However, I do think that it has evolved. If you look at MMA, that's an evolution of what different types of

martial arts are and it is quite different...it's a different way of presenting what martial arts is as well. There's a lot of philosophy behind it and...I think...let's just go back to Hip Hop. The styles are steeped in foundations which have been created from people and the music. They come from eras of music that have created people to move in a certain way as a response. It is important to understand all the different levels of what that is... but then, it is really important to have your own expression of what it is, otherwise you're just a carbon copy...and you have loads of carbon copies everywhere and it looks like one universal language rather than individuality. I'm all for people evolving the form, but it's important for them to be able to know, take things, root things and have dialogue. That's a respect thing as well. Pay your respects to where it comes from and have consideration of what people went through to get... to be able to dance that style. What about all the people in the clubs that were getting called 'Punks' who were looked down upon because they were dancing in a certain way...that was their way of fighting against that. It's really important to understand that there's certain contexts.

**IA: It doesn't exist in isolation.**

JC: Yeah. There's different styles...like popping, which was inspired by the different things they saw...like animation on TV or toys back then. How the toys moved. Waacking and punking and posing that's all inspired by what people... their environment at the time. Different cartoons like Loony Toons they're different and the animation is completely different to what we see now.

So then the characters are different, everything. I grew up with Loony Toons, but now people probably don't. If you say that, how are they gonna understand what it is like... unless you watch it? But they need to be pointed in the right direction and then they might reflect on what they watch now, or what they watched growing up that inspired them. A long answer to your question but...I think there's space for them to co-exist. You can't have one without the other.

**IA: I've got a few more questions...but I wanted to give a space for you. Is there anything that you've not spoken about that you think I wanna mark this, I wanna put this down. It might be another memory, it might be a person, an interaction...this is a space for you to say...**

JC: For me, I've gotta give a big shout out to D-Lo. He was really...and still does...try to make a lot of events for people. Sometimes he's not the most organised person and I've had my spats with him. But the heart...and where it comes from I really respect that. The energy that has been put in and the result of what has happened from creating so many different types of events for the scene has been paramount. He might not be the person who is making all of the events now...but there was that key space and time that he organised a lot of things. He'll say to you himself that 'Do you know Julia pushed me and do this or whatever.' We had a little spat once. I think that all the people that...not just him...make things happen on a grass roots level. DJs that play for less money than they should be paid, the people on the doors. Those people that

invest in the community and create just so people can vibe together and come together...

**IA: Was there a particular event or period of time that you're thinking about with D-Lo?**

JC: I'm thinking about Jo Jo's. At that time...and I gotta shout out to DJ Jimbo as well...it's the DJ that brings the crowd. He's in Japan now but...they had these house nights every Sunday, and for me, it was like...my Sunday thing was to go there and just jam. That was pivotal for me; part of my learning and my journey in the club. Dancing. It was more of a house night but you'd have all different types of dancers in that space. It was beautiful. It was a really beautiful era. It was something that was consistent...so you'd know every Sunday there was that space to go to. Then when Jimbo left - he moved to Japan cause his family are Japanese - it kind of stagnated and we didn't have that any more. That was a really golden era. A lot of people will remember Jo Jo's.

**IA: What is your relationship with music? You've touched on it multiple times with the forms, the scenes, the vibe...can you talk about how important it is and what it does for you?**

JC: I'm gonna start with Hip Hop first. Hip Hop was my first style and my first love and still is my first love. I loved the fluidity, the flow and the content of what people were talking about.

**IA: In their bars?**

JC: Yeah, it was like...social change. It was elevating what they were saying to people. I loved that flow and bounce of

old school Hip Hop. For me, that's also what why I stopped doing Hip Hop battles, cause when the music changed in battles, I couldn't feel it. I couldn't really feel that new school-y kind of rhythm. That Jo Jo's era got me into house music and house jams...I went to New York and went to house jams as well as waacking and contemporary dance. House dance teaches you another thing, you get taught lessons from the music.

**IA: What does house music teach you?**

JC: It teaches you to connect to your heart...it's like a spiritual. It's got so much spirit. It's a spirit dance. Krump is a spirit dance...I don't practice krump but it's the same sort of feeling. House is that and then popping's like...with funk, I love the isolated sounds in popping music and funk music. Then disco. It's orchestral and there's so many different things going on...it's live and recorded instrumentation. It doesn't have this eight-beat, four-bar thing which is just so stagnant. There's vocals and it's soulful, then it's fast and it's uplifting. Disco music is so uplifting because it came from an era after such tough times... which is why a lot of people probably like disco music and every wedding or party you hear samples of disco music. There's jazz and oh my gosh...how jazz is for me... just amazing. It's like improv, it's a freestyle cypher. That's what jazz is...it's so eclectic and there's no set pattern. What other styles are there? Live instrumentation, vocals and sound. What is that then? If you strip down music to it's bare bass lines...how can you respond and find the in-between space of what music is when you break it down

that way? When there's more space...how can you interpret that space? That's where my inquiry is with music. Yes, we can have melodic structure, yes we can have all these beautiful sounds and things we can bounce off, but what if there's actually less of that? How can you still...can you still respond in a way that you still connect to yourself with it? Without the beat to drive you. That's how styles have been created, lots of styles have created, they have come naturally from a response to music; what I'm looking at now is...I can do that, I can dance on the music, but can I respond to something that's live and go in any direction? Can I still go? Can I still be connected? Can I still be with that person who's making it? How connected am I with that person? How responsive? How empathetic? How much am I listening? They're just life lessons in the end...that experiment itself is teaching you how to be a person.

**IA: The attention and being and listening...**

JC: The sensitivity and the openness to be willing to follow or willing to lead sometimes. That thing with a musician or a mover...that relationship is really interesting for me. Then all the other art forms...but sound is a slightly different thing. Moving and sound...I can't remember what your question was...

**IA: It was about your relationship to music and you've definitely answered it. This year I've Si Rawlinson's Red Ink and Chris Reyes' SEAN - which are two British East-Asian narratives coming out in the theatre. You mentioned British East-Asian earlier...how does that**

**sit within the wider Hip Hop realm? Is there a bigger British East-Asian Hip Hop scene...is there a subgenre?**

JC: I don't think there is a subgenre. Hip Hop is inclusive to all different cultures. It comes from a coming together of marginalised groups in the Bronx and Hispanic and Afro-American people...that space where they came together because they were a bit more alienated from society. I feel like Hip Hop in the UK, what it is...it's a coming together of all different walks of life, no matter what culture you come from, you have a place to be able to be accepted within it. Yes there are East-Asian dancers, there are Black dancers, there are White dancers, there are dancers evolving or looking at theatre work, or looking at their style of dance and expressing the theme or researching the theme of identity because there are things out there...that are close to them. To express is something important and they wanna make work...I think there is space for all of that within Hip Hop. I welcome people challenging what the form for them is, and what theatre is. Marso, he's French and he's been pushing it for a while, looking at breaking and contemporary dance. There's people who might be purists and think like 'Oh yeah, that's not the thing' but then there might be people who are like 'The evolution.' There's always that conversation isn't there? I'm just doing what I'm doing. There are things for me that are important...growing up for example, I didn't see a lot of people that looked like me in the media, that looked like me in images or on TV. Unless I was looking at a Chinese series that we'd get on a tape [laughs] and imported from Hong Kong or China. So...that notion

of difference, which keeps coming up, is that...I always think I'm doing everything I can do to be the best possible thing...if I was a young little girl who's of my descent, or looks a bit like me, she might be feeling a bit...she might be a completely different East-Asian - not Chinese at all - but I look a little bit like her or...I'm a woman, it could be a girl, but if it's ethnicity, if they see someone like them, it opens up a possibility. When there's more, there's a vision and you can see it in front of you. Then it's open...it's possible. With all these different types of people...I feel like you're always advocating for your roots; I feel like - not just looking at people who are an ethnic minority - we're all sharing our roots just without my face, our skin tone. We're saying a message somehow just in our presence. People see us on stage or in a space...you go to Hip Hop events and you see so many...at Skin Deep or the ICA, you saw all these different walks of life and people talking to lots of people. That's what I think Hip Hop is. There are different cultures, subcategories of Hip Hop and people doing different things, but we're all actually doing the same thing. In terms of British East-Asian artists...I feel like we've got a lot of work to do to push it there. In terms of pushing more space for our voices to be heard. I'm not just saying that in theatre, I'm saying that in music and in dance in the UK. I always see Hip Hop as quite an inclusive and diverse space. People ask me about diversity and I would say that sometimes it's a bit imbalanced with gender.

**IA: It's heavily male.**

JC: Yeah...but I've always been really welcomed in the Hip Hop community. I've never felt

different, in that way, in being Chinese should I say. But in other situations, I have. That's all I can say on that subject. It's great to see other people doing things, seeing Chris and Si. All of the people pushing Hip Hop theatre. You know that's also a genre...what is Hip Hop theatre? That's another question.

**IA: It's a big question.**

JC: That's another question. That's another interview. I say 'Hip Hop theatre' because that's probably what's being used as a terminology now, to describe artists who bridge the Hip Hop form in the context of creating stage work. It's performance. It's just performance and theatre. It's theatre work, it's a stage work. It's performance, you know? Then it's like, definitions again. 'Is Botis Seva's work contemporary dance? Is it Hip Hop dance? Which part of it is? Which genre is it?'

**IA: It's arbitrary really.**

JC: Yeah, 'Do we put it in the contemporary dance part of the programme or do we put it in Hip Hop?' We're gonna always have that and I feel like when you know what you're playing with or what is going on in the structures of...what sort of system it is, then you can navigate yourself and not take things personally. Actually you don't have to be so precious with things sometimes. Some people just interpret it as that, because that's what they know...that's what they know and that's how they're seeing it...because of their perspective, because of their upbringing. Sometimes it might feel like it's ignorance, but if you've not been exposed to certain things, then you are gonna be ignorant.

**IA: How you gonna know what you don't know?**

JC: Yeah. Then there are some things like...you have a choice and if you choose to be ignorant. Here's the thing... if I show you what it is and you don't want to speak to that person about it and you wanna stay in your tunnel vision, that's one thing, a completely different thing. Some people... we're all so different, if Bournemouth or South Wales or remote islands in the UK don't have access, then they don't have access to certain things. Their version of street dance is gonna be a different version to what comes from the roots.

**IA: It'll be the thing that they know...**

JC: Exactly. You can't hate on that. All you can do is try and inform as much as possible, what you know as yourself is as much of the truth as possible. Even then, your truth might be skewed because it's based on other people's opinions. Once you have one person's truth, there's always other voices that you haven't heard yet...

**IA: You've got this truth and this truth and then there's this truth.**

JC: Yeah...like waacking. I had one teacher and the last one was like 'Just learn from everyone, learn from everyone.' Try and get a well-rounded version of what you're tryna learn. That's what I feel like. Don't stick with one. Try and learn from other people. They will share a different story with you cause their experience is different.

**IA: Talk to me about nourishment. Where do you****find nourishment?**

JC: I find nourishment with my family. Big time. If I have a day off, I spend some time with my nieces, I'm just like...they're just babies.

**"I have amazing female role models...my aunties are so strong and they go through so much adversity. They're just power-women making things happen and doing things...I get nourishment from hearing their stories and I get nourishment from seeing my gran."**

**IA: Aunty Julia.**

JC: Yeah. Aunty Julia. My family recharge me a lot and they ground me so much. I have amazing female role models...my aunties are so strong and they go through so much adversity. They're just power-women making things happen and doing things...I get nourishment from hearing their stories and I get nourishment from seeing my gran. I get nourishment from stories of when I didn't exist and I hear how hard people have had to work and how they have overcome things... and they're still making it happen. My grandad came here in his fifties, just to give some opportunity...just to be able to feed his kids actually, on a base level. That's why he moved here. He couldn't speak English but he came in his fifties. You're uprooting your life and homeland when you're in your fifties. That's a big thing. That is what nourishes

me and makes me motivated. House of Absolute motivate me. They give me...when I see everyone and I think of them, I'm just like 'Do you know what, let me try and make more opportunities, what can

I do? What can I do more?' My nourishment is spending with loved ones and friends and travelling. Just being in a different space, cause London can get really heavy. Spending time with myself...having a quiet time for myself is really important. Tea. Tea really nourishes me. I love tea! Just appreciating a cup of tea and inviting someone round your house that you haven't seen for ages for tea and a biscuit. The simple things. The club. Sometimes when I really just need nourishment...it's the club. As my teacher always told me, dance is always there for you. That is the key nourishment...although last year when I couldn't dance...

**IA: How did that affect you?**

JC: Oh my gosh, it was...I learnt the most about myself last year when I couldn't dance. I realised that 'My crutch is dance.' I found different ways of expressing

myself and still having...I found ways to value myself without being a dancer. Or only being valued because I can move or because I couldn't earn money. You can't do nothing when you're sick and you can't rely on other people. It takes a lot to dig deep to find your own self-value and worth. I had to go through that journey of understanding myself better and not just using examples to give myself that acceptance of myself in a way.

**IA: Does that still mean you're you?**

JC: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Sometimes you need time away from creative spaces...it takes a lot of energy. Talking to people, having conversations like today with you. It's been great being able to talk to people. It's refreshing.



