

HIP HOP

DANCE ALMANAC VOL.2

Edited by
Ian Abbott

FEATURING:
Lee Griffiths

COPYRIGHT

First published by Ian Abbott in 2020. Design by felp.

Editing © Ian Abbott 2020

The interview content and views expressed are the copyrighted property of the respective artist.

The right to be identified as the creators of this work has been asserted by the creators in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Any redistribution or reproduction of part or all of the contents in any form is prohibited other than:

You may print extracts for your personal and non-commercial use only

You may copy the content to individual third parties for their personal use, but only if you link and acknowledge (<https://www.hiphopdancealmanac.com/>) as the source of the material

You may not, except with our express written permission, distribute or commercially exploit the content. Nor may you transmit it or store it in any other website or other form of electronic retrieval system.

LEE GRIFFITHS

IA: Welcome to the Hip Hop Dance Almanac Volume 2.

LG: Thank you for having me!

IA: Let's talk about you, the producer of an Olivier award winning show. Describe that night.

LG: [laughs] It was so surreal. We found out we got the nomination through Twitter. One of the performers sisters was like 'Ezra have you seen this? You're nominated?' The official email went to our junk box six hours later. From then it's just been like 'What the hell? What does this mean? Who else is nominated? Where are they in their careers? We only created a 30-minute piece and we're up for best new production. We're an independent company and the amount of money that went into BLKDOG was a lot for us, but nothing compared to what is spent on those other companies. We were so nervous. I feel like I can't even...it was such a blur and I'd psyched myself up that we wasn't going to get it.

IA: It was a genuine surprise on the night? You didn't get any indications...

LG: In the pit...I thought that's where all the winners were. The two winners before us came from there and I'm thinking 'Don't tell Botis but he's not

got it, he's not got it.' It was a genuine shock, and then the camera's right in your face and it's very emotional. It felt like it was the pat on the back we needed to hear because I don't think we felt it from the Hip Hop community prior to that. Yes, since then the community has been behind us, but up until that point felt we felt very isolated. It's really helping us continue...

IA: Let's dig into community. Do you mean the community of dance, the community of Hip Hop, the community of London?

LG: I'm talking about the community of Hip Hop dance in London. All three I think. I've been involved with Far From The Norm's work for five years now and the company's been running for ten. As a dancer and as a producer...those experiences have been very different. As a dancer I always felt, and others did too, that we were always seen as the outside; we were never...we never followed the trends that were happening in Hip Hop. We didn't create sets and we didn't do what was expected of a typical Hip Hop crew. But in the theatre we were also different because we made this abstract, non-narrative based work which had a very contemporary sensibility, it was very theatrical and it didn't water down the form.

But Hip Hop heads were like 'Well where's the Hip Hop?' We were never laughed at but I didn't feel confident in the Hip Hop environment. So to be nominated there wasn't a big 'OMG they've been nominated...' but when we won, our social media went crazy. It went from people who are really our peers, to people who battle, to people who aren't involved in theatre at all, and they're all saying congratulations. I'm like 'How have you heard of us, and why are you acknowledging us now, but not then?' Is it the fact that we've won an award and suddenly that's opening up doors for other people? I don't know. Or maybe I do know but I'm not gonna say! [laughs]

IA: What difference do you think it's going to make to the company?

LG: It's given us a feeling... physically the company is exhausted and mentally the company is exhausted. Reckonings was a really big moment for us and there was a lot of things happening in the scene like young dancers passing away...there's been a sense of 'Why are we even doing this?' Botis' work is a lot about the relationship - or lack of relationship with his dad. There are a lot of personal factors motivating it...and this made us feel like we're doing this for the greater good.

**April
2019**

The Place Cafe
London

Whether that something is the Hip Hop community, or whether that is something around the people we're trying to reach through the work I don't know...it's made us feel like we've got to keep going. And it's the start of being really heard in some of those places.

IA: Can you talk about Hip Hop as alternate kinship, as family, as relationships that aren't blood?

LG: It's interesting. I think there's kind of the nucleus and then there's layers - the cousins and the distant relatives. There is a core family of us and I don't think we are as connected as we think we are...we're always at each other's shows and present for those moments, but I don't think we're as present when we need to be in the rehearsal process and we are not as connected as we need to be in the darker moments. That's probably natural because we all keep a bit of a closed door, but when the community does come together there is a real sense of 'us' and it feels rare. The Hip Hop community transcends race, class, gender, sexuality...it is about people who are invested in pushing the form across the spectrum all the way to the rawest underground forms.

IA: Who is in your nucleus?

LG: Far From the Norm's nucleus?

IA: No, Lee's nucleus.

LG: Lee Griffiths nucleus...? I think it goes...I've got people like Ivan Blackstock, Botis, Vicky Shulungu from Spoken Movement. Chris Reyes from Alias London. That's my immediate go to. Then in a slightly wider sense I have

the support of Kenrick...Tony more recently, I'm building that relationship. They're defiantly artists. From the producer side I'm definitely building relationships with other producers or managers that are working in Hip Hop, but it's a lot slower because I was an artist first and I built those connections up. Getting the seal of approval as a producer is slightly slower because they're not as visible and not as present in those moments where the community does come together. But I'm building the relationships with Annie and Sri at Zoo Nation, Georgina who's working with Ivan and I'm seeing support within Hip Hop theatre. I think that's a different conversation maybe.

IA: How did you meet Hip Hop?

LG: I grew up in Cornwall and I loved dance...in a form sense not in a genre specific way. I joined a school of dance... and as much as it's got a very village feel to it, it's introduced me to what I do today, so I love it dearly. Disco, freestyle, Latin American, rock and roll, very dated styles; it wasn't until I went to college, sorry secondary school where I met a lady called Joelle Goodwin - she was my dance teacher. Up until then I'd only had contemporary dance teachers at secondary school and she came in as this Hip Hop teacher, decked out in all the clothes...she was an amazing lady who was more in the music video side of Hip Hop and not theatre. It was her. She introduced me to the culture of it in its widest sense. Not the dance side of it, that wasn't until college. I was lucky that my dance teachers had gone to London and trained, graduated, come back and bolted down. But even then...

it was still dated because as a scene in the South West you had to constantly go to London and travel back and a lot of people in the South West weren't doing that.

IA: What are some of the things that are troubling you at the moment?

LG: With my Far From The Norm hat on we're preparing to tour BLKDOG Spring 2020 through to Autumn 2020 and that's a massive jump for us. We're a really young company... we're all under - how old am I? - 28! I'm the oldest! We have no real infrastructure...there's me as the producer and there's Botis. That's it. We've got commissioning partners and producing partners. But that's it. I have so many questions on how to approach this. All the conversations that come up about how to cost the show, or everything. I've got so many questions around the touring logistics of it. I know I could speak to someone like yourself or speak to Eva at Sadler's Wells but I don't want to feel naïve but I want someone to guide me as well. I don't feel I can go to any of recent Hip Hop NPO's because I don't have those relationships with producers. What else is troubling me?

IA: Are you touring it as it is?

LG: No we're developing it into a full show in July so it'll be a full evening of work. Whether that's a double bill or a full-length version of BLKDOG...but it'll stem from the Reckonings version. What else is troubling me? Producers. When you were talking about family... with my Artists4Artists hat on I feel like we're developing artists and they may be at the stage where they're almost ready to develop an artist

producer relationship; soon we're gonna be at a stage where they will have to build relationships with venues and will need producing support. I don't have a pool of producers to recommend them to. So one of my concerns is that Artists4Artists and Breakin' Convention is providing artist development for artists to grow, but is the landscape ready for them? That's a concern for me.

IA: What's troubling Lee?

LG: My son. Financially, it's really difficult. Financially and time wise...I don't have enough of either of those to do what I need to do. I'm working with CRXSS PLATFXRM, which is Ivan's thing and I'm being paid for everything I'm doing but it's not enough for the work that needs to be done. I'm paid just for the events and the activity that needs to be done to tour BLKDOG...but it's everything else that needs to happen in order to make that happen and that is not paid. Then when it is paid, I've got a two-year-old and no one is paying for nursery. Everyone's always promised they're going to pay nursery but they never come through on the final budget. And then it's like, I'm squirrelling away bits of time when he's asleep, or in the evening and there's no 9-5. I'm desperate to find a work-life, personal life balance.

IA: The impact of you being a parent...how has that been within the community?

LG: Within the community? That's difficult because I don't think I have a lot of peers who are in a similar situation to me other than Emily Crouch from Artists4Artists; I know of performers who have had children but I think it massively

changes the trajectory of our career. I am no longer dancing because I have a son. We couldn't find a logistical

I'm in Hip Hop but because I'm a mum. Again, you're at the lower end of the pecking order. I think when can I look

"I am no longer dancing because I have a son. We couldn't find a logistical way of having two parents in the studio...but also at the same time we were at a place where we needed a full-time producer, so I stepped into that. I think it's that...I don't have any role models in my community to go to and say 'How did you do that?'"

way of having two parents in the studio...but also at the same time we were at a place where we needed a full-time producer, so I stepped into that. I think it's that...I don't have any role models in my community to go to and say 'How did you do that?' I'm sure they're there...I just don't know who they are. There's no one I feel that - I don't know - provides guidance to that.

IA: This goes on to self-care and mental health. That's something that is getting some exploration on stage by some artists at the moment. I'm interested in hearing your response to self-care and mental health in Hip Hop and how you look after yourself.

LG: I think I can relate to the self-care element on a personal level over mental health. For me personally I'm right at the bottom of my priority list. Not just because

after myself? As soon as the pressure and the work load ups...maybe it's a really simple thing to say that I feel like my self care is doesn't exist. I have two very close friends who are in dance and support me and Botis as a family unit and I feel awful for continually relying on them. I don't have a wider pool of people. Because I feel like I made that decision to have a son and I made that decision to be a producer...I made that bed and I have to lie in it. With mental health...I think in Hip Hop...I think Far From The Norm are...we're not struggling but we are aware physically and mentally what we put our dancers through and I'm always trying to pre-empt where they will be in a process and what care is in place for them. Even if that's making sure they have access to the One Dance UK health packages; last year we bought that for them so they can access that whenever they needed to. They put some

money in, we put in 70%. Apart from that Far From The Norm is about open conversation and open dialogue. Botis is good in that respect. He knows the artists enough to know when something is happening in the room and there is an open door policy where we sit regularly and we chat about where everyone is in the room. Physically and mentally. In dance and in life. I'm asking what do people need from us to ease or support that. I think fortunately we are in a healthy place and part of that is I think that the dancers are being paid to do what they do and there's not an anxiety or tension about pursuing a career and not being paid.

IA: Has that not always been the case?

LG: No. I think it's only in the last two years that all of our dancers are living off a career in dance. Previous to that we were all juggling, the majority teaching and I think teaching has a big impact on your mental health...because you're continually giving, which is rewarding but I found it personally draining. You're often in a room where kids have been told they have to come and do a dance class and they don't want to be there. It's the battle to get them to engage and then you doubt what you know and doubt how you're delivering the class. All that creeps into you and it massively impacted the rest of my day...if I taught a class in the morning, depending on how that class went, that effected my rehearsal in the evening. I was upset that a kid in North London had said they were gonna stab me - it was scary. So when you go to rehearsal in the evening and can't focus it's because I'm still in that moment. So if

the dancers know that they're going to be in the studio from ten until six, they know that's a safe space and Far From the Norm aren't the type of company that dictate what dancers do. I'd like to think they feel they can say 'I need to step out' or 'I can't come in today.' They can approach us with where they're at with their mental health.

IA: You're exploring things around mental health with BLKDOG and there's potential triggers...what safeguards are you putting in place? We don't know what is in everybody's past...

LG: A lot has come out through the creation with dancers in the company and Botis is very sensitive funnily enough. He doesn't just plough through it...he will really stop and give that individual that time to physicalise or verbalise it and the company will respond/not respond and support if we need to. Then we move on. We are definitely aware that if something like that happens, if something is triggered for someone, then we need to let it unfold in a way that is therapeutic for the dancers and that is OK.

IA: What's your strongest memory of dance?

LG: Ooh I have a few. They probably change day by day.

IA: What is it today?

LG: Today is. Only because me and Vicky were talking about it on Monday. We took a piece to 60 Sec...Far From the Norm took a piece to 60 Sec.

IA: 60 Sec?

LG: It's a really short, eight minute - not sixty seconds

- piece of work that was set to classical music. We were looking at energy basically and it was created as a bit of competition piece which we presented at Breakin' Convention. We entered a competition in Germany, some international euro where there was a 5000 euro prize. I had a weird out of body experience...me and Vicky had to do this duet and when I came off stage afterwards I was like 'I don't remember that performance at all.' I didn't understand where I was or what my body had done. I knew I had messed up on something...but it was like my body was flying and it was like I was not there. I couldn't feel the audience and I couldn't feel the dancers. Vicky sensed that because we were the only girls in the company and we had a really strong connection on stage. I found out I was pregnant two months later...when I found out I was pregnant...that's why that happened. Something else spiritually...it felt like something else inside of me was leading. That is always a really eerie sensory experience; it was less about applause from the audience, but my body in that dance went into another like dimension. I swear! I promise you it happened!

IA: How did Vicky sense that?

LG: I don't know. I think because we were the only females in the company, we had a really strong bond. In Norm we have a really strong bond on stage and we can really sense and feel - I'm sure all performers do when you have to give someone your energy on stage - when someone is injured, or someone is struggling, or someone is really gassed up in that moment and you

want to feed into all of those. There was always something with me and Vicky, just a natural connection. Maybe it's a female thing? Maybe it was the movement we were doing that connected us...we were always looking at each other, there was always eye contact. There's a respect and empathy between us and I think that is heightened on stage.

IA: What is it like to be you?

LG: What is it like to be me? Expect to have greasy hair all the time. And tied up in a top knot. I think I'm very lucky. That's super hard. I feel like I'm very blessed to have my son and to be with Botis. To be connected to artists and to do Artists4Artists. To have my best friends be Far From the Norm dancers. I feel like that is my family and that is my community. To be me, in amongst all of that, is very special. I get to witness a lot of things and be a part of people's journeys and processes. All of those things.

IA: Any more?

LG: I feel like...I can't think of the word...I have a...what's the word I'm looking for? In certain situations, I can use that I'm a female and that I'm a White person...my privilege. There we go. I feel like I am in a privileged position to utilise who I am and where I am for the wider community. I think through me, being White I'm not seen as alien or a threat or a risk, and I'm going to advocate for my peers in Hip Hop regardless of that sort of tick box and stuff.

IA: So you're using your privilege as a White woman?

LG: It's interesting; if I go into a

meeting on behalf of Botis on my own, the conversation is very different to if Botis is sat with me.

IA: Let's talk sliding door. Lee goes in on her own.

LG: I feel like I can be very clear about the business side of things. They trust that. When the artist comes in and the artist is talking very 'blue sky thinking' they might be confused about where they are in their process or where the end goal is. They can't really sell the piece, or the vision.

"I'm aware of my privilege, maybe I use it more. I feel like the work is saying enough for Botis and that I don't need to dress it up or take any of the 'It's not a risk, yeah we're not unprofessional, yeah Hip Hop is on a par with everything in your programme.' I'm not begging for anything."

I do that in a very different way and I can talk about Hip Hop in a different way to the artist. Some partners warm to that more than the creative way...maybe that isn't Hip Hop specific. I think also there's a thing of personality wise, I'm happy to stroke egos and I'm happy to entertain people, as long as we get what we're after. I'm fine with that. Some of the artists I work with aren't interested in that. There's a balance to be made...I don't know really what I'm trying to say. I'm aware of my privilege, maybe I use it more. I feel like

the work is saying enough for Botis and that I don't need to dress it up or take any of the 'It's not a risk, yeah we're not unprofessional, yeah Hip Hop is on a par with everything in your programme.' I'm not begging for anything. The work speaks for itself. In other situations maybe with Artists4Artists, it's riding off the back of other relationships we have as Emily, Joseph and Lee. Where then it is a little bit trust us, just trust us. I'm always interested in why they trust us. Is it the background we have? Is it

just we're able to sell it more? That we have experience? I think it changes with each experience that we have.

IA: Can you talk a bit about how you enable a lot of different people. Norm, Ivan, Artists4Artists. You're a magnet for a lot of activity in this community. Can you talk about the conscious choice to be that magnet?

LG: It's not a conscious choice at all! No! I just want... it's going to sound so hippy-dippy...I want to see us, and

that's not Ivan and Botis and Artists4Artists, I want to see everyone on that spectrum of Hip Hop theatre do the best work. I think maybe that's where the magnet comes in...I am willing to give time to artists where I'm not being paid to sit and have coffee them. I'm happy to give time. Yes, I have a son, so my time is...I can do when he's asleep. But I've always said to artists, come over, he can play and we can chat. I think that's where the magnet comes in. In terms of the organisations that are there to support artists, they haven't got the capacity to do the groundwork. I don't know whether I'm a magnet or just a fool. It works both ways. They're a magnet to me and I'm a magnet to them.

IA: And you were talking earlier about work-life balance...

LG: That's where I'm silly. In question two I was like 'yeah work life balance' and in this question I'm 'Come over for coffee.' I always do that...I book it in the diary and then I go shit I shouldn't have said that, I shouldn't have agreed to do that...but I hate letting anyone down, so that has an impact across the rest of the day...it's not as easy as rocking up and having a coffee. I don't think I've had any negative experiences where I've had to cancel...they understand that I'm not working for them and they're not working for me; we're meeting mutually because we're excited about something. It's when artists don't understand that and it's only happened once. I felt like the artist I was working with didn't understand what it was like to be 'me' and a work life balance, it was more...I want more and more. I was like 'I've given you my max.' I'm doing

Artists4Artists, Ivan and Botis I can't give you any more. It was never enough. I think it was a power thing.

IA: There are two Hip Hop camps, the purists and the evolutionists. Where does Lee pitch her tent?

LG: Evolutionary.

IA: Why?

LG: Because I'm always expecting...wanting to see something new. The purists are like we've seen it, we've experienced it. We always have to go back there and feed off that...I know that and I'm familiar with that, but I wanna see what else we can do. I'm inspired by challenging and developing the form, the subject matter and where we place the work. I really respect the purists and I think the evolutionary camp do too. I'm not sure the purists respect the evolutionary camp...which is interesting.

IA: Who or what is getting you excited at the moment?

LG: Chris Reyes. He's getting me excited because an artist I feel he isn't relying on and doesn't feel he is entitled to funding. He is putting in place a system where he can fundraise to make his shit. I think a lot of artists have an idea and go 'Right I'll apply to the arts council.' I'm excited by him and how he is fundraising his own work in a way that benefits the community.

IA: How is he doing that?

LG: By doing his social nights. It's a format where people can come and enjoy a celebratory moment, a social moment. It's not too heavy, it's not too expensive and you don't have

to think too hard. It's about the music and it's about the dance. It's the relationship between those two in that moment, those improvisation moments. We don't have anything like that. That's how he squirrels away money to do his art. It's not selfish because the community is still getting something from it. Ivan inspires me massively because I feel like he is so forward thinking in what Hip Hop theatre is...I'm sure he wouldn't even say he's a Hip Hop theatre artist. How he positions his work, where it's digital, the collaborators he brings in...I think he is a visionary, a one of a kind artist. I'm really trying to think of a female now.

IA: You can come back to it if you want. [pause] I'm interested in the edge and the centre as a concept. I'm presuming Hip Hop is on the edge...but with Ivan, Dance Umbrella commissioned him to make a musical, bringing him closer to the centre. I'm interested to hear your thoughts on Hip Hop, edges and centres.

LG: I'm aware of who those artists, organisations, agencies and festivals are. I think we have to be smart as a community on how we engage with them...whether that's for our own impact as artists, or for the wider impact of our community. I think that those organisations that are bringing us in...I'm hoping I think all the ones we've engaged with as Far From The Norm or Artists4Artists there is some kind of track record in that they want to engage with us. It doesn't feel like a tick box exercise or a need to fulfil this quota or criteria. When it has been, or I can smell a bit of a rat then I choose to disconnect unless it's going to

benefit us. Edges and centres. What and who?

IA: I hear some people complaining in the Hip Hop world, that they want to be like this or that style of dance. They are resourced, they are at the centre. That sort of edge/centre relationship.

LG: I don't know that I can give you any more examples. There is a power to being on the edge in that relationship with our contemporary counterparts. Because we are able to say 'Look...we're a minority, we're paving our own way and you just need to support it.' At the same time we don't have access to the resources at the centre, so I do think we need to have more of us in that centre. We can exist in both. I don't think Hip Hop theatre will ever really be in the centre. Because it's not that genre, it's still young and in the context of how it's been birthed, it isn't in mainstream culture. We need to exist in both. I think it's artists that need to bring us in...our peers need to bring us in, on recommendation rather than being cherry picked.

IA: What is missing in the infrastructure. To enable Hip Hop theatre to flourish?

LG: We've got no leaders to enable us to be in positions of power. In the mainstream cultural establishments, where are we? We are all artists or producers. There's no one we can go to as an artistic director of a venue that has come from our background, that we can go to. I feel like that's a problem. Venues will programme based off of the artistic director's likes or tastes, sometimes based off what the audience will come to see, or what they already programme. If we were to

have someone to advocate for us in those conversations then that's how we're going to progress...but that's not going to happen for a long time. The power is who is going to be that conduit in those conversations. I think it's people like Artists4Artists - that's a group of people, speaking for people in the industry. I also think there are people who are shape shifting into wanting to work with Hip Hop more and I'm never sure why. I think there are people who have shifted into that community who haven't come from that background.

IA: Who?

LG: Eva from Sadler's Wells. I think off of relationships with Botis, she is more aware now of the Hip Hop community. We've now got Kwame whose had a Wildcard and that's off of Breakin' Convention...she's had access to lots of different conversations and therefore lots more artists are on her radar. I think her predecessor - Emma Gladstone - had Ivan. So she's potentially an advocate for us, but...

IA: Is it White female programmers picking Black male choreographers?

LG: Oh Ian! No. Maybe. Not in Eva's, maybe in others. That's very interesting, I'm trying to think of any others. Yep, she's a White woman. I'm thinking of people but they're all White.

IA: What role does race play in your work?

LG: As Lee? I feel like I am surrounded by White female producers and Black male artists. Mine and Botis' relationship with Far From the Norm. Mine and Ivan's with CRXSS PLATFXRM.

Artists4Artists. White women and Black man. How do we consciously shift that? I'm dying to work with more female artists regardless of race. That magnet isn't there yet. No one has come to me and I've not gone to them. It makes me feel when am I in a position to choose? Who is leading on development programs? Who is on development programs? Should we be more conscious of race? Yes, I think we should be. But I don't think we should choose someone over someone else because of their race. I wish I could ask 'So you agree?' Then we could have a conversation. I don't have that experience. I'm a White female and if I speak to Victoria Shulungu - a Black female producer...I'm a White human producing for Botis, it's different struggles we're up against. I can't pre-empt what those are for her, all we can do is we can empower each other and advocate for each other. Maybe it's that, it's understanding that who else, that doesn't look like me needs to be in a place where they can advocate for me. How do I help that journey?

IA: Can you talk about Artists4Artists? How did you get involved, and what are some of the highlights?

LG: I was making work as a choreographer and I came across Just Us run by Joseph Toonga. I'd heard of Joseph because he'd worked with Botis or Botis had worked with him...they did an R&D together. He'd run a programme called New and Notable, so I applied for that as a choreographer. I met Joseph, worked with him and presented a piece of work at The Place. Joseph and I continued to work together and we presented a night of Lee and Joseph's work at

Greenwich Dance. It was at that point that Greenwich Dance pulled us in to talk about the stuff we'd curated together and we had a wider conversation about 'where do we access support?' and we both couldn't answer that question. We both had very different experiences - he went to The Place, I went to uni. He's a male, I'm a female. Our race is different, we live in different parts of London and between us couldn't think of a lot of places to access support, resources or guidance other than Breakin' Convention. We were like there isn't anywhere... there should be somewhere... maybe we should get some artists together and talk about this. It was a question that I had never been asked and a question I'd never asked other artists. We pulled together twelve of our peers and we asked the question around the table and we were like 'Shit everyone's thinking the same thing.' We had people like Kofi Mingo from the underground battle scene, a DJ wanting to get into theatre. People like Duwane, who was already on a trajectory and had some kind of Arts Council England support. There were people at different stages, who still had no kind of support. So long story short, the East London Dance ideas fund came up, so I put together an application and I got it. I said to Joseph well we're gonna have to pitch now and a relationship flourished from there. I think the community realised, wow, this is a hub that is run by artists and understand the needs of the community. We all pulled in the contacts and resources we already had. I had a relationship with Redbridge Drama Centre via Botis and we needed a venue. Joseph had a relationship with Greenwich Dance, so they

helped fundraise and then we brought Emily in who had the producing experience - I was producing part time I suppose then. Since then some of the highlights have been running...developing - it may not sound like a highlight - but it is when artists have walked away saying I now know how to do this. We've produced work...whether it was good or not is up to the audiences, we presented a piece of work at Laban. Emily and I have gone on to produce for artists who have come through Artists4Artists. Me with Chris Reyes and Emily this year with Kloe Dean. I think one of the high points has been being able to have conversations with artists and say this has enabled me to do the next thing or if it wasn't for Artists4Artists I wouldn't have the skills to handle this.

IA: You're a stick of rock. If I cut you in half, what are the words that run through you. What are the things that mean the most to you?

LG: Respect. Am I going along the right type of lines with these words? Respect. Representation. Perspective. Community.

IA: Tell me about respect.

LG: To feel like we as Artists4Artists and me as a producer are valued. For what we are offering or contributing to an artist's project. I've definitely been in a position as an artist where I haven't felt respected at all. I've felt that I was giving more and driving the artists vision. That was because that artist didn't value themselves enough. He didn't respect himself enough to give everything to that project. I respected him enough to not drop him in the shit and

expose him for what he did or what his process had been.

IA: What about perspective, what does that mean?

LG: It's working with people that have shared values, maybe a little different, but are articulating it from a different perspective.

IA: Any other ones?

LG: Representation for me is about working with people that don't all look like me.

IA: Can White women make Hip Hop theatre?

LG: Yes. They can. I can do that myself if I wanted to go back into that space. But I'm not interested in working with someone that is a tentacle of me. I can't remember the other word I said...diversity? No...I hate that word. Representation, respect, and perspective...did I say one more? Community. For me that's about when you get given an opportunity, and it's maybe a little bit higher. A little bit further along in your career. It's not about forgetting everyone that helped you get there. Across your collaborators, your teams it's about 'I now have the budget to pay for all the best dancers in the world I'm going to bring over dancers from Germany.' It's about those people who rehearsed with me in Dagenham and did it all for free, that's what I mean when I talk about community. It's not forgetting why you are where you are and how you can lift people up.

IA: Is there something that you've not spoken about that you want to put down, or have recorded?

LG: I think the motherhood thing we've touched on. Actually, the advocacy we've touched on that and we need more of that from different types of people, not just women.

IA: Tell me about your relationship with music.

LG: I'm really blessed to have a really great relationship with Torben Lars Sylvest...who I met through an ex partner, doing all the naughty stuff, which I'm not going to say because my son might read this some day! Living life! He was a beat maker. I needed someone to make music with me for my work and he massively changed what I like listening to and how I unpick layers of music when I'm listening to sound scores in a theatre. I'm always thinking about Torben. I'm lucky because I was brought up in a very musical household, we didn't play instruments but there was always music playing on the radio and I always try and have that in my house. There should always be something in the background...I find that's where my self care comes in, listening to music. At the moment it's a lot of R&B stuff, slow jam.

IA: Current?

LG: No, 90s. Don't ask me about current stuff now because I just don't know.

IA: When you're listening to music from that time what does that do?

LG: It holds a moment for me and it's that out of body experience where you can...I remember being my 16 year old self listening to that music and it's really cheesy but there's a way that the lyrics or the melodies express for you

something that you don't want to say, or physicalise in a dance way, you just wanna sing it. I'm going to sing along because it really means something to me. I'm going to sing along in my head and then I've said it.

IA: What is it about Torben as a composer and beat maker that makes him so special?

LG: It's his ear. The attention to detail he has about taking a pedestrian sound and translating it into a musical note. I'm like, how did you do that? It's magic. I think he's very much like Mikey J. You say I want a piece of music that sounds like da da da da and he produces it just like that so you can respond to it. That's amazing. But then you get into the back and forth of 'What about this, or what about that and pitch and adding that sound?' It's another world...I wish I knew...I need more insight into it because when I try input it's 'Can you turn that volume up? Or can you take that note up? Can you turn the bass up?' It's so basic. There's never an imbalance in Torben's work. It's always complimentary. There's times when it's outdone the work on stage but it's always complimentary in the way it is delivered. He deserves to be paid a lot more and he's very giving. He's like a magnet at the moment. Everyone knows he's good and people with not a lot of budget will approach him and he will agree because he's a good guy. I keep telling him you've got to say no. But he will do it because he knows there's not a lot of people that would do it. I have a lot of respect for him on that level.

IA: Can you talk to me about audiences and Hip Hop theatre? What are some of the things that you notice,

who is coming, who is consuming this work?

LG: For Artists4Artists the people who are coming is the community. It's artists, not audiences. With Artists4Artists we're starting to get a bit of a following...an audience who are interested in the language or the culture. But I definitely think our following is the community. Botis' work is completely different. Whether that is Botis' work or Hip Hop theatre, as a following. I think Hip Hop theatre as a following is Hip Hop.

IA: What's the difference with Botis' work?

LG: He crosses into contemporary dance and theatre. Therefore audiences that will watch contemporary dance and theatre don't feel alienated by having Botis in that line up. Maybe that's because he's open to having contemporary dancers in the process and not being restricted by form. Maybe that allows audiences to experience other forms in it. They don't necessarily feel like they need to know about the culture to access the work. We need to do a lot more audience development work.

IA: Where does class sit in the work you do?

LG: I think the community all come from the same background, we're working class. What's interesting is when we come into the other arena...talking to artists and talking to venues who seem to be from another class. We switch. We put on the voice. We email in a certain way. You try and speak their languages.

IA: Any final thoughts?

LG: No [laughs]

IA: Last time we spoke, you spoke briefly about a

down, I was drawn to him over the others in the company. Their experiences are so different to ours but there was

"I think the community all come from the same background, we're working class. What's interesting is when we come into the other arena...talking to artists and talking to venues who seem to be from another class. We switch. We put on the voice. We email in a certain way. You try and speak their languages."

Tunisian B-Boy. It sounded quite interesting...can you talk a bit about that?

LG: It was a relationship that happened a long time ago. I was very fortunate that the team asked me to go to Tunisia for two weeks and support the creation of a North African collective of dancers from the four countries coming together to create a piece of work. It was kind of directed by Hakeem. He wasn't one of those dancers. He was the key holder in accessing all those B-Boys. He was the event organiser, he was a B-Boy by trade but he runs a company called Art Solution, and Art Solution were the company that Hakeem was collaborating with to make this work. We brought the boys over to London and when Botis got a Wildcard, he said Lee I'd love you to present a piece of work. I said I'd really like to work with Chouaib because every time he got

a level of respect between us that I didn't have with many of the other dancers. It may have been an age thing or a male/female thing...the respect for females is different out there. We had real intellectual conversations and I was drawn to his movement language. So we brought him over, created a solo on him, and presented it at Wildcard. It was loads of conversations about what do we do now, where do we go now? Unfortunately the politics mean that his funding has been cut with the British Council and he's not able to run those kinds of workshops any more. He's been through some quite difficult things recently with his family and lost that contact a little bit. I know it's still there and it needs to be picked up on again. They're so talented out there, but they don't have the infrastructure we do and we're saying we have a lack of it. They are so free of restrictions in terms of how they move, whereas

in the UK there are a lot of boundaries and there are a lot of people wanting to pigeon-hole us. It's embedded in their culture...his Tunisian culture and their traditional dances... that's his groove.

IA: It's not 'I've learned Hip Hop...'

LG: No it's 'This is what I've learned through my upbringing, my family and being here.' I just happen to also be immersed in Hip Hop culture as a B-Boy. I don't think we see that as much in Hip Hop in the UK. I love that he has no fear about 'I don't have any studio space so I can't rehearse.' They just do it there and that can be anywhere. But at the same time, they had no concept of warming up, cooling down or looking over after their bodies and I'm like whoa whoa guys, you've done six days back to back of rehearsals, let's slow down. They're so hungry for opportunity and they've got no time to waste. They're incredible guys and I'm very thankful Hakeem took me over. I need to get back up on that. 2015 was the last time we've did anything together.

IA: Thank you.

LG: Thank you.

IA: Was there any tongue biting?

LG: When I sit with you it's interesting. Because we have had so many conversations where it's me and you talking... is the thing still on...the conversations you and I have there is a trust there...even if I'm not articulating that in the full way.

IA: There's a shorthand...

LG: You have that with me and I know that sometimes you have the same views as me and that helps me flesh out what I'm trying to say. It's difficult when someone is doing that look that you're giving me now which is 'continue' and it's like 'Do you want to chip in and help me?' This is needed though...there's nothing like this. I look forward to seeing it typed up!

