

Charlie Prince and I both went to Arts Umbrella to train in their post-graduate dance program. Even though our time never overlapped at the school we always kind of orbited around having a really nice friendship. Both of us were so busy we were never really able to find time. I have been seeing and hearing all the incredible things Charlie has been busy with after his time in Vancouver. I am so inspired by his tenacity and clarity of voice. We live on either side of the country, so finding a moment to talk outside our schedules was complicated. After a few failed attempts (very much on my part) we were able to find a moment to connect over Skype and talk about his craft.

Hey.

Yo it's good to see your face! Crazy...

It's been a long time. Like 2 years?

It's been umm... it's been a year and a bit.

The last time I saw you was in Vancouver. So I wanted to ask about your time here and what it holds for you.

Vancouver... The first time I was there was when I hitchhiked across Canada from Montreal—I was 18. Little did I know would be moving there a couple years later. The city always carried a dark and deep place in my heart. Something about the way the landscape registered in my body—it never made much sense. It was kind of a mythical collage of different shapes that didn't really fit together. The forest, the city, the ocean and mountains; it had a dreamy state to it. But all of a sudden I found myself making the decision to live there for two years... and they were two years that were very very intense for me. My time in Vancouver was filled with deep joy but also a deep difficulty. I laughed a lot there but I also suffered. In retrospect, it gave me the chance to become more solid within myself, which I now feel.

It's tough as well during a time when you are defining yourself to feel out of place.

I felt that when I left Vancouver I also left the possibility of my relationship with the city and the many magical creatures it houses. It was difficult for me to leave, but by letting go some of the things I had worked hard on, I took the risk of saying I'm just not gonna give a fuck like I have been told to.

Do you feel like you know now why you are dancing more? And could you elaborate on why you choose dancing as your vehicle?

I have always carried a deep love and fascination for the human body. I grew up as a competitive swimmer and basketball player, which forged a great relationship to effort and physicality. I also studied music, and even in this context I felt very connected to gesture and the journey the body takes when playing an instrument or conducting an ensemble. Dance seems to make sense; my body is the medium through which I receive and am received by the world. The body is our medium that translates experience, whether consciously or subconsciously.

I am beginning to find... umm I don't want to call it a more political purpose because I don't want to be explicitly political with my craft, but what I am realizing is that regardless of what I do it is going to be positioned politically. I am, for many people and institutions, defined as an Arab artist above anything. This carries many connotations, especially

given the state of the Arab world today, which is increasingly being defined in the mainstream media by war, a refugee crisis, and radical Islam. I want to be recognized for the quality of my work, not by an identity that has been imposed on me.

**It's interesting that you say you don't want it to be political but that it becomes political because of what people may expect from you? From knowing you and seeing your work I think you twist social expectations into something else that is uniquely yours, unexpected and personal. All of your experience with different kinds of practices and different ways of being, do you find that they have helped you be more able to get closer to something that feels true in your dancing and in your body?**

Coming from Lebanon & the Arab world, I definitely feel the responsibility to present another image or another perspective on who we are, not just to others but also to ourselves. This is where I feel the question of the body becomes important; the body is, I think, at the core of how we either embrace or oppress people in the world, especially in the Middle East. The body is a place of conquer, not just women but also men. Our concepts of masculinity are quite stiff and stagnant; men are expected to be virile and macho and not in tune with their sensitivity and emotional landscape. But what happens when you see a man expressing himself through his body? This is a reflection I have been having a lot this past year as I return more often to Beirut for work. The necessity of presenting a different image of the body to a country that has been through so much war, bloodshed, oppression, and all the horrors you can or can't imagine—to the point where there is a sort of suffocation of the self in order to maintain inner order. A lot of youth in Lebanon come from several generations of trauma—many also experience this trauma in their cellular memory. I can't tell you the opening I have been witnessing in people when they see dance. It's infinitely moving.

**And you've been noticing this from going back home and performing in Beirut?**

Yes! I feel that I am a part of a larger movement that is taking place in the region where we are liberating each other from old notions of the self and of the body. I say that because it's not just happening in contemporary dance also in music, theater, photography, etc. For example, there is this great band—Mahshrou' Leila—whose frontman is openly gay. They are very woke and have a very progressive and engaged mandate. You know they are really stirring shit up. They've been unfortunately banned from performing in Jordan recently because they were allegedly inciting “sexual deviance”. This is a sign of their power; they are a threat to the government's conservatism, so they were banned. Lebanon is an interesting case; we live in a globalized world where people are constantly travelling and moving around. Many of the Lebanese diaspora is starting to come back and with them they are bringing new ideas new ways of doing. And this is bringing about small changes in how we see one another. I left home 10 years ago, and now I am starting to slowly return and being given the opportunity to share and hopefully make changes in the way people think and do, no matter how small. This is why working with the body and through the body carries a weight and power. I'm excited to deepen the dialogue between my body and the region. Surely it will be difficult, but it's well worth it.

**Do you find working in Beirut resonates with you more?**

I could have worked a lot more in Europe this year; I was offered several company jobs that would have required me to stay put in Europe. But I've decided to remain somewhat nomadic. Even if it will be more difficult to jump around between Europe, Canada, and

Lebanon this year, it's a symptom of my desire to be everywhere and do everything all at once. But I believe in this work and, most importantly, I believe in the people I'm working with at Maqamat Dance Theatre in Beirut.

**Kind of jumping back a bit. As I am hearing you talk your work seems to have a lot to do with this idea of imposed definitions and expectations. Do you think it's connected?**

Absolutely. I mean, I really think what we are is the meeting point between what we think we are and what others think we are. I believe this is the closest mirror that we have: the sum or the crossing of the two.

**I was talking about abstraction recently. And kind of how funny it can be when you "abstract" something and it becomes much clearer. Also that abstraction has started to take recognizable forms. And just how impossible it is to be truly abstract with a body because a body in space already speaks so clearly.**

Yeah... when I say abstract I mean that the language that we speak kinetically is not a language that we have codified, and it's cool, you know? Like with the English language you can say "I went to school today and I ate an orange." With dance you can't really do that!

**Yes absolutely. It can be funny, and frustrating to try to be so literal. What do you feel you need to be able to dance?**

Um .. I need a ground first of all. What's coming into my head is a sense of stillness but also a sense of time that I can negotiate with myself. This is a habit I acquired maybe at Arts Umbrella—to give myself lots of time, which is funny because often in dance the first thing you hear is that you have no time. Basically I don't like to be rushed.

**Fair, it's not a nice feeling.**

And it's a luxury that I think I want to be able to deserve.

**I think you do...**

But I'm totally with you that it's impossible to hide the clarity of what you are doing. And I really believe offering this clarity is an act of generosity that I want to remain very faithful to. Do you know Lucinda Childs?

**Yes.**

I had the chance to meet her when I was performing in Venice, which was a really big moment for me as she is one of my favorite artists. Her work is...

**It's incredible!**

We were talking about that space... that space where your intention meets the interpretation of the person witnessing your proposition. That space, she called it a sacred space, is one that you shouldn't try to control or to manipulate. I had asked her if she is a spiritual person, because when I see her work I feel like I'm completely

entranced, that I'm almost praying. And she said "no, not at all." This was my interpretation meeting her intention. It is a really beautiful space that we should just allow to be. This brings me to a more political issue—there is a bit of a dysfunctional practice I find in most cultural institutions and funding bodies, where in order to present a work you have to be so clear with what you want to do and what you want to say and why and how and who before you even do anything. It's unfortunate as it leaves a lot less room for surprises and the unexpected. Besides, it's almost impossible to have this luxury. You know? Unless you lie.

**Hah yes! It is a challenge but also sometimes a gift to give yourself a starting point. I was hoping you could maybe talk a bit about the connection for you between music and dance.**

I've been exploring making my own dance-work in the past two years, and it's a bit of a Catch-22 to have the skill to be able to make music for the universes I try to create. I think it's because I'm not able to reach this distance that one usually has with a piece of music. This distance is what I believe allows for surprises and for a kind of unknown—for raw reactions that I think you can only have on things that you don't have control over. I have tried to kind of subvert that by just recording something really quickly and forgetting about it and then coming back to it a few months later to see how it affects me. Like conversing with a part of yourself that was once there but you forgot about. So that's one side. In terms of dancing I have always been very connected to bass and to pulse. And it's a reason I really love electronic music. Bass also really gives the air texture—the molecules become thick. For that music becomes a really physical experience for me.

**What music have you been listening to recently?**

Recently, it's funny I haven't been listening to very much music, so my relationship to music has been a bit strange in the past few months. I've been trying to take music as texture. In the same way that you would feel a piece of cloth between your fingers. I have been more interested in the actual sound frequency, which is a bit strange I guess. But I am slowly coming back to the simplicity of song, maybe it's all the travelling. There are artists I always listen to, like John Frusciante, the ex-guitarist of the Red Hot Chili Peppers. He is a solo artist in his own right, and the way he plays guitar is something that just always resonated in me. His solo albums are some of the most beautiful, haunting things I have ever heard. But some artists I've been into recently nevertheless; Soap Kills, El Rass, Rhye, Les Halles, Mei Saraswati, DARKSIDE.

**What is the most recent thing you did that you are proud of?**

The most recent thing? I think the past few days have been really special as I have a couple of friends who are going through a difficult time. It felt very nourishing to really be able to commit my entire being and energy to them. It is important to me to feel like I matter in their lives—especially if we're going to be far from one another. And, in a sense, it's all that I need to live for—to be there for the people I love, and this makes me more proud than anything.

To have taken the decision to do that you know?

**Where do you call home?**

For me home is in and with people, - I wish I could have a physical place where I could call home but I haven't had that yet. I mean, I can feel at home anywhere. I have had to

learn how to do that. But it's definitely within my relationships. with people... and with certain people.  
I find myself and my belonging in other people. I think we're animals that really need each other.