

Transcript Podcast - Myra & Shivani OSA

MYRA

Hello, I'm Myra here at Open Source Arts in Leeds. We are currently in the dance studio of Open Source Arts in Kirkstall. And I'm here with Shivani who's just been in the dance studio working on your creative practice. And we're going to have a conversation and find out a little bit more about that. So very, very big welcome to you, Shivani.

SHIVANI

Hi, thank you.

MYRA

Could you tell us a little bit about where you are at in your, um, in your career, with your creative practice, um, and what is your current creative practice?

SHIVANI

Sure. So hello everyone who's listening in. I am Shivani. I am a dancer. I started learning dance, uh, and very specifically Kathak, which is an Indian dance style.

I started learning Kathak when I was five years old. So dance has been in my life for as long, for a really long time. And I remember Even before I started taking dance seriously, I was always in all my school functions and all, you know, all of the dance and drama classes and extracurriculars were always about dancing and performing.

So it's been a big part of my life. But I did, uh, start taking it seriously in my teenage, I think I always just enjoyed dancing a lot. Um, and then I did some qualifications for Kathak. I got my bachelor's in Kaha before I even finished my university degree. And at around the age of like 22, I had just graduated and I was doing an internship somewhere, uh, at a firm.

But I remember being, uh, really disappointed with that kind of life. Um, and then I was like, something's not right. And I didn't feel quite happy with what I was doing. So, but I always had dance to fall back on.

MYRA

So that wasn't dance at that point?

SHIVANI

No, it was actually like a PR marketing agency. Um, but I was dancing on the side the whole time.

Um, And I decided that I wanted to do it. I wanted to pursue dance and give a creative career a chance. So, that's when I started taking it on a full time, more professional basis. But, in terms of dance, I had learned, um, Kathak, like I said, since I was five. I'd done a bachelor's degree in Kathak, um, and then I had also moved on to learn more, um, like a different interdisciplinary approach, uh, of Kathak with another teacher.

And then I started working with her at, at this point where I was not very happy with what I was doing. So I just started doing more things with her. So I was performing with her. I started substituting as a teacher for her academy. Um, she used to perform a lot, so I would do a lot of backstage work and, you know, learn.

How, how a performance is put together. So I did that for a long time and then I wanted to. a step forward as as more as an independent artist. I said, What would it mean for me to do something as an independent artist? What is what do I want to do with Kathak? Do I want to make performance? Do I want to teach?

What is it that excites me about it? So that's when I started looking for masters. And I found the main dance and creative enterprise at the Northern School in Leeds. So I packed my bags and I moved to Leeds from all the way from India. Um, and then it's been about almost a year and a half after, no, two and two years and a half, uh, now that I'm in Leeds and I've been spending time, uh, looking at Kathak, but with a very different lens.

My approach has really changed because I no longer look at it. as the form that I'd inherited. So, because Kathak and its history, it goes back, uh, in well in time. So we don't know where it started, but I can tell you that what I've learned in Kathak has come, has had many influences. And just because we inherit something a certain way does not mean that we have to continue doing that.

So, What drives my current practice is also locating myself in in the larger creative space and locating myself specifically as a Kathak dancer in the contemporary world. Where does this stand? Where do I stand? Uh, do I agree with everything that we, I used to perform? Maybe not. Why not? So there's a lot of, um, questions that come up.

There's a lot of reflection that happens and um, I'm also now learning to locate Kathak outside of its original context, which is very well in India or that's where it comes from But what happens to Kathak when it's practiced in a place outside of that in a different cultural context So yeah, that's where I'm at

MYRA

Wow Thank you.

Very interesting. And how, how are you finding placement in the city of Leeds with the Kathak dance form?

SHIVANI

It's interesting because I've met a lot of, uh, people who showed genuine interest in Kathak. So I use, I take, uh, open classes, open level classes for beginners. Someone who's just curious to know, someone who's curious to move maybe, and Sometimes they come in and it's, it's really nice to see how they are receiving Kathak, uh, as opposed to when I started learning Kathak and I was told that, oh, this is a part of your culture and you need to, and you know, what you, what the teacher says is the right way.

And that's the only way to do things because it is a classical, it's taught as a classical dance form. So it's highly codified, very stylized and every teacher or every, you know, sub style has its own aesthetic. So you have to kind of, you're taught to follow a certain set of aesthetics. Whereas over here, people are just curious to know what Kathak is.

So sometimes the class is very specific to a certain kind of movement because I can see that they are, really enjoying it or sometimes it's like, no, I can see that they really want to move. So I'm teaching them more stuff and teaching them, uh, something that, um, you know, would be more exciting, maybe something more upbeat.

So I think I have, um, also discovered a lot about dancing and Kathak while here, because it makes me, um, it, When I see someone else who's just as curious, I bring that curiosity into my own practice and that's really great because I get to revisit a lot of Kathak, that a lot of those exercises or many of those movements like I've not done it before.

So it's kind of quite exciting in that sense.

MYRA

So the teaching facilitation has really been a part of informing your practice really?

SHIVANI

Yes, I would say so. And, um, I think I'm also just taking the time to get to know other practice practitioners based in Leeds. Not all of them are Kathak dancers, but even if they're contemporary dancers, maybe they they're more into community arts.

So, I'm really just also trying to find my audience and what is it that people here want to learn or want to, uh, want to explore. So yeah, that's what I've been spending my time.

MYRA

And it's always really nice to hear a bit more about people's drives and passions. Why do you do what you do?

SHIVANI

I don't want to do anything else.

Um, I have tried doing a lot of things. Um, like I said, when I first started, I had finished my university degree in economics and I thought I would join like a marketing agency or something. Um, and I thought, yeah, okay, you know, I love dancing, but I'm going to do it on the side. didn't want to do it, didn't want to do anything else.

So, and because dance has been such a big part of my life and I think that was the way to go. Also, I, I should mention that, um, the reason why dance is such a big part of my life was because I had some exceptionally good teachers and, um, the way they trained me. and the kind of opportunities that I got by being their students.

And we used to do a lot of community festivals and, you know, performances like that. And I think that was, you know, that give you, gave me a confidence boost. Um, it made me more, um, certain of myself. especially when I was young and a teenager, that kind of really anchors you in, in your own being. So I do have to thank my teachers for giving me that push.

They saw that I was a, you know, I love to dance and they gave me those opportunities. They gave me the encouragement. They did instill a certain discipline when that was required. Um, so yeah, I think, It doesn't happen just by yourself. It requires encouragement. Also, when I was younger, it was a lot of my parents taking me around to rehearsals.

Uh, you know, that's also, uh, something that needs to be acknowledged where you have a support system that's encouraging you to achieve a potential. And when, when you've seen yourself do that at a young age, um, I'm like, Oh, I, I really like to perform, although sometimes I have done a performance a night before I have, you know, tests or quizzes at school the next day.

So how do you manage time? How do you manage the stress? It all kind of prepares you for life. So as I think having that experience growing up was really good. So. When I did make that decision to do it full time and independently, I had a lot of experience already to fall back on and that helped with it.

So it's, yes, it was passion. Yes, it was drive, but also rooted in very firm, like experiences that I'd had.

MYRA

They're kind of sort of practical on a, on a very practical level that life experience really helped.

SHIVANI

I would say so.

MYRA

Yeah. Nice.

And at this point in your, in your career, you've, um, just been successful.

Well, yeah, just relatively recently been successful in, uh, receiving Arts Council, DICP, developing your creative practice funding, which is brilliant. Really great. Um, big congratulations on that.

SHIVANI

Thank you.

MYRA

And that's what's brought you to the dance studio here, um, at the moment.

How did you, how did you decide that it was time for you, uh, in your, in your career to apply to the DYCP?

SHIVANI

So I'd heard of the DYCP before and I had Um, definitely read up about it, spoken to a lot of people, and actually someone had told me that DYCP is the kind of funding I should go for. Um, and there are a couple of others, maybe smaller parts of funding that, that's available on, um, around, you know, the developing of practice, um, on that, this thing, but, uh, obviously the DYCP is a much larger fund.

So I'd heard about it before I had given it a bit of thought. It was just about being ready. To take that step, uh, in my, in my journey, I think, uh, I did spend a year and three months or four months, um, in, uh, after I graduated from my MA, a year after that, I've, I've been trying to teach. you know, trying to do some community performances.

There was Leeds 2023. I got a couple of opportunities with them. So it's not like I was not doing anything at all. It was like I was working on my creative practice anyway. But I then realized that having a set amount of funding in which I can rent out studio space, um, for six months, um, for a duration of six months is going to give me, uh, a significant boost to what I'm already doing.

So I definitely took time to establish what it is that I want to do, how it's it that I want to do. Um, and then, and then I applied for the DYCP. Uh, but it's, I also know that without the funding, I would probably not be able to achieve what I want to achieve. So it's sort of. critical that I have that funding and that does go into the application as well.

You need to express that when you write the application.

MYRA

And what do you want to achieve?

SHIVANI

Um, so I've just recently had this conversation with one of the mentors who are also a part of the DYCP. Um, so I think what I'm really focusing on is being able to describe what my practice is you Um, at the end of six months, uh, Because like I said, I've had a lot of diverse experiences.

I've done Kathak, I've done a bit of contemporary dancing, but I'm also interested in experimental theater and I want to, you know, so it's, it's like I've done so many things and so many things interest me and I, I really, I'm excited to try very different things, but there still needs to be some method to that.

So at the end of, um, six months, I would like to say, Hi, I'm Shivani. This is my practice.

MYRA

Okay.

SHIVANI

If that makes

sense.

MYRA

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah. Great. We're looking forward to seeing what you come out with. How did you, how did you go about putting together the application for the DYCP? Because different, different artists will have different life experiences and, um, different art forms.

And I'm sure we'll kind of approach that Um, the application for funding in very different ways. How did you go about putting together the application, deciding what you wanted to put in it?

SHIVANI

Um, I definitely spoke to people who had, uh, previously, uh, got the DYCP and I read the applications as well. So I definitely took a lot of, you know, notes from how they wrote it and what they put in, uh, into my application.

Um, I think the main exercise, and it, this kind of also answers the previous question is that you really need to know what you want. To do with that funding because it is competitive and there's no, there's no right way to do it or there's no fixed way to do it. It really depends on what you want to do.

So if I said that it is critical for me to be in a studio, to be dancing, to move, to move in different ways or to move in the same way. Same old way, whatever that is, but I need to be in the studio for me to develop my practice. And hence I want to speak, I want to, uh, hire studios with, um, open source arts and I want to And then obviously I go back and have a conversation with Open Source Arts and say, What can we do?

This is what I'm doing. So I've had conversations with all the people that would be involved in the application. And but then it first started with knowing what I wanted, which is like, I need space, because I'm a dancer, I need to move. And that is critical to me developing my practice or not just developing my practice, but also developing my skills and my performance.

And All of that and that that's going to help me reach that point at the end of six months So that's the starting point and then you go around have conversation saying, okay, what can I do? Okay, that's 10 weeks of you know studio time. That's amazing Oh now what will I do in those 10 weeks if I do get that?

That also you kind of need to have an idea obviously things change over time but You need to do that in your head first.

MYRA

How long do you think that process took you to think about?

SHIVANI

Um, so, okay, so I wrote, I submitted the application in December 2023 and I've only got the funding in March or April when I heard from them.

So, I didn't have an hour by hour or a session by session. Um, plan as such, but, um, I think just writing the application, um, I, I still took a month before I submitted it. So having all those conversations, getting, you know, and then schedules and budgets and thinking of all of that together, uh, definitely a month.

MYRA

How did you go about working with the other people and knowing who to go to for different parts?

SHIVANI

So, of course, I've worked with Open Source Arts before, so I already knew some of you here, and I knew what the space looked like and felt like, so I was like, no, I want to come back here because I like, I feel nice when I move here, so it was one of the, you know, choices.

But, um, I also looked at the fact that, how am I, because this is all funded, I'm also looking at, okay, can I get to the studio easily? Because, um, do I need to take transport? When I get here, if I need to get transport, am I also putting that as an expense in the DYCP? So, also looking at, and because the DYCP isn't like a full time job.

It's not, it's not like a salary that you get. It's just one of the things that you will be doing among other things. And you still have to continue your practice on the side. So, How, how much, um, am I going to be able to do this? So the way I've done it with, uh, Open source arts is like I'm coming here twice a week instead of one whole day.

I'm dividing that into two half days or, uh, two sessions over the week. So I'm like, do I have time to do that? Do I need, you know, so it's a lot of, uh, scheduling and like logistical as well. How does that fit in with your other schedules? Do I have to teach class this evening or something like that? How does it really all come together?

Uh, so that was how I worked with. The space aspect, but, um, I'm working with a mentor, uh, called John Britten, uh, and we had gotten in touch again, two years ago, um, I was just interested in his work and, uh, I'd seen some of his, uh, work theater work in, when it was shown in India. So I knew of him. I used to follow him on socials and I used to get his newsletters.

So I already knew what he was doing. But when I got in, first got in touch with him. I was fresh out of, uh, my MA, so that was not the right time to start working with him. But now, two years down the line, I went back to him and I said, Hey, this is what I'm doing. And this time I can also, I have the, I could have the funds to work with you.

So then we had a conversation saying, Okay. What would I want to do potentially? Where am I at? Similar conversation there, but I told him where I'm at, shared some, some videos and some links and, you know, and then they said, okay, let's do this. Then we discussed about how many sessions we'd have, how, you know, what would the fees be like that went into the application?

So, uh, a lot of conversations, a lot, many emails, but also some, um, Relationships that were already in the works and that kind of then happen more like you I get to really work with them instead of just having conversations

MYRA

yeah, and it sounds like yeah the clarity and the the reason for doing something is being uh, critical really in Being able to put this application together and you have to know what you want.

Otherwise Um, you wouldn't really Um, was it john? John wouldn't have necessarily had anything to respond to, I guess, if you didn't have a very clear, um, direction at that point.

SHIVANI

Yeah, so I think, and because it's self led and you are leading your own experience, you are deciding where it is that you want to be, um, at the end of it, I, I think it matters to know what you, you know, what you want out of those relationships that you've built and how this funding is going to help you take, take even those relationships to the next level that you build with every partner that you're working with.

MYRA

So, yeah. Nice.

Yeah, and it's quite unusual, I think for, or it's more, I say it's, it's more usual. We, we see typically that's more usual for, um, someone who's received funding, maybe DYCP or otherwise to come to the studio more for one week, one Monday to Friday week. Um, rather than splitting it over the, over the 10 weeks as you are of two days of.

Two hours. Yeah. Um, each week for 10 weeks. And, well, I think you've explained, um, I think you've explained well why, why that suited you. And I think it's, yeah. It's been, it's great to hear how you've been able to, um, tailor your application and, and, um, do it in a way which makes more sense to, for you as well.

Is there. Or what would you, what would you like to share with other people who may be thinking about applying for, or in the process of applying for, DYCP?

SHIVANI

Um,

I would say, uh, speak to other people, if you can, who are, well, in your field, maybe in your specific field. So if I'm a dancer, I've spoken to other dancers, so I know what they worked on, so I know what is, uh, What is getting funding or what arts council is looking for to when they give out these funds Um, I think the arts council also publishes uh after every round they publish a list of the people who they've funded in the previous round, so You can read What it is that gets funding so you have to be a little smart about it as well um because It is a competitive, uh, fund to get.

So, um, and I, yeah, I think I faced this, uh, when I was writing, where it's like, they have a character limit. And it's not a lot. So you might expect the application to be really long. It's not. So you may start off saying, I want to describe my practice. I think the first question they ask is describe your practice.

And then you go on to write an essay. And to be honest, it's three paragraphs and you have to be really, really concise. So, uh, that's why maybe reading other people's applications or speaking to someone in your field might just help you tailor your, you know, expectations while writing the application as well, because I think that definitely helped me.

Um, also, if you think you're ready for it, go for it. You know, there's, there's really no, no one's to say whether you are or not. It's you who's going to decide. And yeah, good luck.

MYRA

Good luck.

Lovely. Well, thank you very much Shivani. That's been, that's been really, really interesting to learn more about you and your practice and where you are and where you're headed.

SHIVANI

I hope it's helpful

in some way to the people who are listening in.

MYRA

I'm sure it will be. Shared experiences is always helpful to hear.

I'm sure it will be. Yeah. So thank you for sharing a bit more about you and we're very much looking forward to seeing where you go and, um, yeah, see what comes, comes next.

SHIVANI

Thank you for this lovely space. Is that good?

This

is so awkward. Awkward ending.

MYRA

The ending. Starts, starts and ends are always a bit different.

SHIVANI

Nice one! Woo! Did I answer all your questions?

MYRA

You did, absolutely. It was really good. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Really good, thank you. Yeah, you shared a lot.