

## Horizon Radio: International Working Transcript

Hello, and welcome to Horizon Radio. Horizon is a new international performing arts showcase at the Edinburgh festivals. Horizon Radio is a chance to delve deeper into the practise of the 2022 showcase artists, and get to know them better.

What you're about to hear is artist Malik Nashad Sharpe in conversation with Horizon consortium member Paul Russ, exploring how international travel and collaboration impacts their work. We hope you enjoy listening.

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**Paul:** Well hello listeners, it's delightful to be in conversation today. My name is Paul Russ, I'm the Chief Executive and Artistic Director of FABRIC, which is a new organisation formed by the merger of Dance4 in Nottingham and DanceXchange in Birmingham. It's a great pleasure to be one of the partners who form a consortium delivering Horizon performance based in England as part of the Edinburgh festival season this summer. As part of our programme we're having a series of conversations with the artists participating in the programme and it's a brilliant pleasure to be joined today to have a conversation with Malik Nashad Sharpe, and before I ask my first question, I come to you Malik to introduce yourself.

**Malik:** Thanks for that, hi my name is Malik Nashad Sharpe and I am a choreographer and movement director and I guess a dancer in general, based in London, yeah that's me.

**Paul:** That's you, well I think that this conversation is going to reveal that there's a lot more to be said about who you are in your practices and how they are located. Our conversation today really centres around the kind of international dimension of your practise and maybe we start by just, I suppose, saying that you are an artist, and a person that grew up in the US, and in recent times have found yourself located and now living in England, but in lots of ways relying on an international context in its many forms to sustain a practice. Um and I wondered whether you want to say anything about that kind of journey, and how you find yourself what working internationally might mean.

**Malik:** Okay sorry, um so, for me like the kind of um, I think the beginning of my story stems from like my upbringing really, my family's from the Caribbean, and I think Caribbean people have like a whole history of migrating that's just like very much a part of the fabric of Caribbean identity, and experience, and that's always been my experience. I grew up in New York but my family was also not from there and ended up there through a lot of other places and migration routes and so I think I just always had an interest in just like, going around, or an experience of just like, I remember having to go to a lot of different places to visit family members, for example and just like, you know getting up and going to see your family that lives in Toronto, or going to your family in the Caribbean, or um, and so I think my interests really stems from that, and of course you know, now that I'm an artist I have a life that allows me to do that, for my work, but I think ending up in this kind of career path or ending up in this place that I'm in, it actually stems from like long before you know my decision to

like try to be an artist. So yeah I don't know if that makes better that answers your question but it yeah I think it's been a part of my life for as long as I can remember, and now it is also my job, I find that quite interesting, like how that happened.

**Paul:** Yeah, yeah, I mean I think I'm hearing, I suppose the questions that are coming into my mind are about the notion of being international in perspective is just innate in you, and in your, kind of growing up, ultimately there is an internationalism in your perspective and in your lived experience, and I suppose there's then something for me about, um maybe, I'm thinking are there questions of, well then it becomes a necessity to be international in one's outlook? And maybe you might just speak a little bit more about the curiosity, then, that you have for the kind of international dimension, something about the curiosity of what happens in those international contexts, really.

**Malik:** well yeah, I mean, at a very impressionable age, like when you kind of go around, and have to see like how your family or family friends live in other contexts and spaces, it just kind of, that is my framework of understanding, and so, it does feel really important for me to maintain that, because I see the values of that, or I saw the values of that, like being able to see at a young age, for example, like very basic things just about how other people live their lives, and all the subtlety that it entails, you know like I remember when I was younger going to St Vincent, where my family is from, in the Caribbean, my cousins teaching us how to play cricket, or like, you know because in The States like we don't play cricket really, so I didn't know how to play or what the rules were, you know, so there's all these little things that you, you know you pick up, and you see that are just some really valuable like you know, you learn different skills, you learn other ways of communicating with different kinds of people um, and also you gain a wider perspective I guess and a broader respect for the world itself, I think, especially at a time where borders are becoming more pronounced, or more like intensified or something, like 'I am this, and I am not that' or 'we are this and we are not that', it's just it feels kind of antithetical to everything that I know in my life and so I just tried to live my values I think and you know respect you know how my my family and my context, how you know we've come to be, it's like it's always been a part of who we are, and there's nothing wrong with that, nothing bad about that and actually I think it's good, it's good to get information in every single kind of way, all the subtleties, super obvious things but also yeah subtle things, about what it is to be around people and practices in contexts that are different to your own, you know, um yeah, it's super important I think, and yeah, it's a value.

**Paul:** Yeah I mean I think it's wonderful to hear, those, the way you talk about that and also it then becomes no surprise that you developed a whole set of collaborative relationships, across the world really, I wonder whether you wanted to maybe just talk a little bit about your collaborations, how they manifest, and ultimately how you sustained them.

**Malik:** well it's all very, you know, yeah I'm gonna try to demystify like how I do the things that I do. I think because I'm so used to making connections with people across cultures it really starts there it's like, um, you end up in a context where you, I guess you're not seeking out difference but just being unafraid to kind of be in a place where you're encountering difference and going into those conversations like with individuals or contexts that are different to the one that you might know and just making connections with people, and

being open to where that takes you and where that might not take you I don't know like, for me it always stems from relationships, um, I have like a kind of long term collaboration for example with my collaborator Ellen Furey who's a Montreal based choreographer and um we met in a residency in the United states, um, you know pre the election of Donald Trump and Brexit, and um there is kind of, there's some tense kind of, it was a tense context, it was a context for a lot of different people gathered, but it didn't work very well or didn't gel or I feel like you know this kind of pronouncement of like 'I am this and I'm not that', you know like the kind of intensifying of borders between people and cultures and contexts was really like predated in this residency somehow, so you just find people who are like 'I don't know about that, I don't know if I want that', or and you know I met Alan and you know I had no idea what it would be you know I was in the residency for very particular reasons, none of which had to do with like potentially working in Montreal or working with a Montreal artist, but ended up making really good friends and having a really long standing relationship with someone who's based in Montreal, and you know decided to make a piece together, which I don't know, like went places and then, but it didn't happen with a really big plan, like I didn't plan for that and, it's the same thing you know, what I'm doing now in Montreal like I'm working with another Montreal choreographer, named Sasha Kleinplatz, and I'm dancing in her work and I met Sasha, through, you know another person that I met in Montreal and you know I kind of just try to build relationships with people, with like-minded people but also people who are completely different to me, and um yeah give it space to grow and flourish and if it becomes something it does, and if it doesn't that's also fine, like you know I have some really good friends, I used to teach English in Japan that's a whole other thing that I used to do before I even became a dancer, I was an English teacher in Tokyo, and I met people there that I still talk to today you know I still am really good friends with, and if I get the chance to go you know, you know the borders open a little bit more, I would love to go back and see you know how my friends there have grown, and I don't work in Japan right? But, I still maintain and keep those connections alive.

**Paul:** So in a way just speaking to, well you naturally gravitate to the people who um speak to you, that you speak to, um and I mean more than just the kind of transaction of speaking, you know ultimately the set of values, and you know the curiosity they have about their own practices, somehow they chime with yours and the sustaining of that is born out of actually just committing to that time and space together, um yeah, and I wondered whether there might be something slightly more pragmatic to ask really about sustaining those international relationships, just about the opportunities it opens up for you in terms of um really being able to think about the broadening of resources that support ones practice, is there something you might talk to you there?

**Malik:** I mean this has been completely essential, so I think the infrastructure for being an artist in England in my experience has been pretty good but it doesn't come without its limits for what you can do or for what's possible either you know in every context in every place has its possibilities and its limits, and you know, England has its own set, France has its own set, Belgium has its own, do you know what I mean? Every place has its own thing. I have found it really important to build work across contexts and countries because it just enables more possibility for what you can do and as a choreographer that's all I ever really want is like more possibility, you know like that's the thing that's like exciting about being able to make something out of nothing with people, is to expand what is possible, um and at

one point I would have said like I would have never even survived, you know, Paul we've talked about this a little bit beforehand, you know and I don't know if we should talk about this now but I have a lot of guilt, you know what I mean, like I have a lot of guilt about like getting resources, it's something that I struggle with and so at one point I would have said like it was impossible for me to build work without having international collaborations because I'd have this weird thing in my brain that's like 'don't take all the resources in England' and so I would just say like actually no, like I need to try to be letting other people get those things and, I don't know if I feel like that now, but I did for a while, like really strongly, and so I would really rely on international collaborations to help and also I think like when you're a choreographer working with like an experimental kind of practice, sitting across contexts is good because how an audience responds to something in England is completely different to how an audience responds to something in Vienna, and I think it's important to bring forth those interactions, but sometimes it's harder in your context if you're like trying to push things that are maybe not being seen in that context in the same way or, sometimes it actually helps when you're like 'Oh well actually I'm being supported by these organisations and these places' which obviously means that there's some merit to this like experimental question, experimental questioning that I'm trying to bring forth in my own context.

**Paul:** right, but even I think you were just talking to, that you know maybe is it something peculiar to this particular context or is it, is it how many countries would consider artists maybe that practice based in their own countries that if somehow the international context reflects back that there's an artist that resides in that particular place that's of quality, cause they're engaging with them, it kind of, it supports the work at a local and national level.

**Malik:** completely.

**Paul:** is that something that you hear your international collaborators say about their context too?

**Malik:** umm maybe not as elegantly as you said it, but like in a way yeah I think at the end of the day, you know what we're trying to do is to build bigger and more ambitious things for our own contexts but also for everyone, you know like we're trying to you know create culture and that is, I don't know like that is a worthwhile endeavour for any entities, any country, any local context, um and yeah I think we yeah, I feel like we talk about it more in England, than I have experienced, coz I think also the tradition in a lot of the places where I work, I think there's just a different tradition around like art making or something, I can't really put my finger on it but, it's more like 'of course we would do that' in other countries, you know what I mean like what is a country if we don't have that? you know.

**Paul:** well I would, yeah, well I, just to chip in there, so I'm just wanting to maybe think about you, a little bit, and you just mentioned maybe something around ambition and just wondering where your international ambitions might well be, like you're active that's really clear, but where those ambitions might be, and whether you're exploring interesting new relationships or you have relationships that you'd like to explore you know just something that maybe talks to the present into future, yeah.

**Malik:** for sure I think that um there's so many I mean I'm so open about things like that because I'm really, at the end of the day, I guess as a maker of performance the thing that I'm really interested in is putting work in front of new audiences that's the thing that I find most exciting about you know being an artist is like being able to reach completely different contexts and people and an exchange of ideas and space together that I find super valuable and so some places that I wanna go, like if we're getting to the nitty gritty of places that I really want, I'd love to go, I would love to find my way somehow into like Asia um and specifically like places that I'm curious about, like Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, um Thailand, Philippines, Hong Kong these are places that I've always been, some of those places I've been lucky to travel to, and it just excites me about um just being there, and I don't know experiencing what it is to be there and I'm wondering what my work would say in a context like that. I think in Europe places that I have not really kind of spent a lot of time in, I think like some of the central European countries, like Czech Republic, I'd love to go to Czech Republic, Spain, Portugal, I mean really I'm active and I'm busy, but there's always context that I've not reached even in the countries that I do have relationships with, and in, like I come to Canada so regularly but I've never been to Vancouver, you know, or I've done work in France but I've never had a show in Paris, I mean I have had a show in Paris, but I'm not have like I'd like to have more shows in Paris, you know what I mean, so there's always you know...

**Paul:** course. Yeah I mean I think that there's something about, you know what's really present at the moment is that there's a number of uh discourses, our minds are more attuned to thinking more responsibly about the planet, we are thinking about those areas of the world that just get ignored because ultimately they don't have a market, maybe um, or cultural sectors that have a kind of liquidity which enables them to work internationally, just thinking really about whether you're active in any of those conversations, or have desires for bringing about maybe different thoughts around what it might be to work internationally.

**Malik:** I mean I am so open for that and I'm so down for that. Places like, I'm naming places where I think there might be like an existing market, but I'm also super open to and excited by the potential of new markets that are not that have not been opened because of, you know, for a whole host of reasons specific to those contexts, but yes I'd love to perform the Caribbean, I'm Caribbean, I have Caribbean heritage, but like I don't go there with my work and I think there's probably a lot of economic reasons as to why that is but I would love to be in those conversations more, I think I have some things to offer that conversation, you know, from an artists perspective I think it could be valuable, so if anyone's down I would love to.

**Paul:** well I have no doubt there that um that's the case. I suppose there's also something isn't there that your practices as an artist, as a kind of creative, go beyond the kind of, um go beyond how Horizon might be framing or supporting you frame your work in Edinburgh, you know the performance and choreographic practices and your dancing practice is present, but do you want to maybe talk a little bit about your broader practices and how they might connect, internationally to, and why it's important that they are connecting internationally.

**Malik:** I mean, I wear so many hats, it's like I make work, I make work you know by myself, I

make work in collaboration with others, so there's like different practices there within the same kind of field. I do movement direction a lot for theatre, so I work a lot in just like you know capital T theatre with plays, um, doing not really 'choreographic' I would say, I mean I would say it's choreography, but to the you know to the naked eye it wouldn't be looking like choreography but, um and then just like consulting, um and yeah just being a part of conversations like on a kind of senior level um in organisations or institutions just offering my thoughts and ideas and things that I've accumulated, just like, in my very particularly set-up life that I've got, um that I think are, I think I don't wanna like pat myself on the back, but I think they could be valuable, um yeah.

**Paul:** yeah, well I mean I think that um, it is important isn't it to, I think sometimes to reflect that, you're not just in that kind of making and showing um role, that actually that the work particularly in the context of, someone like yourself, the work and the um, the practice that you have is, is impacting in conversations in institutions, it's impacting in the dialogues that are happening internationally about how work is being made and how artists are sustaining themselves, and I think I'm hearing a lot about the way in which um, your relationships that form are inviting, um a learning and collaborative practice that helps others form different forms of connections, and you know, so even I can talk about my work at FABRIC, and know that now, there's a connection to Ellen, in a way that there wouldn't have been without you, um and that's just one very small example of a set of um, agencies that you bring into those conversations, and that format of your work, um, yeah, I mean, it's full isn't it? And I'm really excited that, um He's Dead, gets to um be part of the programme in Edinburgh, um it's a, I mean is there anything particularly about that work that talks to the international, and that sounds a bit strange maybe as a question but I'm just wondering whether there's actually something about the work in of itself which is informed by...

**Malik:** Completely. Completely, I mean, aside from the subject matter itself just like, being an American in Britain, and asking a question about like an American artist, cause the whole kind of work, for me began with the question was Tupac depressed? And I was conscious that I was bringing that conversation into, like a British context, um, but then there's also just like when I came to the idea in the first place, like the idea itself, um stems from like a trip to Japan, I was working, doing a little bit of research in um Tokyo, at the Butoh Archives, and I would have never even stumbled upon like, this question, if I wasn't doing my research there because that's where it started, I was, my Spotify algorithm turned me onto Tupac, whilst I was doing research in these archives, and I was watching a lot of like archival material, um because I was really interested in like the body and pain, or what the, how, what's the physical mechanics of the body in pain, or the traumatised body and so, um, that started, when I was in another context doing research for something I had no idea would turn into this, and so um, it feels like really the very basis of the whole work stems from being able to make an international connection and to be in a different context, um and I don't know if it would exist without that.

**Paul:** It's um, it's a powerful thought really isn't it, that actually, what we're, what you're holding in that work and in the practice um, is formed and continues to be informed by a kind of necessity to well be operating internationally, um and that actually, um any kind of notion of border or boundary, or, you're kind of just working through them, and finding important connections for the work, um and I suppose listeners are going to need to be

thinking creatively about how they engage and um, know that you're going to be the curious inquisitive one, kind of wanting to meet people who have a desire to be in those questions and in those conversations with you.

**Malik:** Sure.

**Paul:** Well I'm going to kind of wrap it up, if that's OK, a been a joy as ever to see you and be in conversation, um and I look forward to seeing the work in Edinburgh, as I'm sure many of us will.

**Malik:** With you as well, thanks. Yay.

**Paul:** Thank you.

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