

**MADE IN NBC** dance  
on  
tour

# In conversation with

**Josh Martin**  
**The 605 Collective**  
and

**Amber Funk Barton**  
the response.



## 1 Why do you dance? Or, why do you keep dancing?

**JOSH MARTIN (JM):** Depending on the tone of voice speaking it, I like this quote – “*The real reason I dance is because I want to explode.*” – *Bill Evans*. Although, if I were to write it myself, I would probably word it “I dance because it’s the closest I can get to the sensation of exploding without having to go through with the real thing.”

I dance because, for me, pouring pure physical and emotional exertion into a creative and cerebral effort allows me to feel I’m using my entire self at once. I keep doing this because, as with anything, the deeper you get into it, the more you realize you are still a student. Like any math or science, every solution leads to a new problem. There is always more to learn. For me, dance is one of the very few activities I’ve found where the infinite amount of possibilities is not overwhelming, but encouraging.

**AMBER FUNK BARTON (AFB):** I dance because for as long as I can remember I’ve always been dancing. I can’t imagine doing anything else. My first memories of dance are not in a studio, but around the house as a child. It is how I best express myself. Without understanding why, certain aspects and concepts of dance and movement, for lack of a better expression, just make sense to me. Dance is an intrinsic part of who I am and has given me a satisfaction that I have found hard to duplicate in other aspects of my life. I feel that it is “what I’m supposed to do”, if that makes any sense. It also gives me an outlet to escape. If I am not dancing or creating I get very restless and agitated.

## 2 We’ve defined contemporary dance as dance that is created and performed by dancers working now. What is going on in dance right now that is exciting to you?

**JM:** Dance is just like fashion, it has trends, and a rise and fall of recycled ideas constantly pushing their way to the front or fading to the back to build up again. What’s exciting to me is seeing the definition of “contemporary dance” being taken for a wild ride. I think that’s a good sign. It means, maybe, just maybe, that either new forms have arrived or that existing forms are being mixed to a point of non-recognition. Either way, they are all being thrown into a debatably all-encompassing genre of dance, “contemporary”, which warps and expands to fit absolutely everything happening in dance these days. I’m also excited by hip-hop arts, which by this question’s definition are indeed part of today’s contemporary dance. I think it’s a wonderful and notable thing that, in a very short time, a current and happening “folk-dance” has infiltrated itself (in some way or another) into almost all areas of the dance world.

**AFB:** What is exciting for me is to see the development of many young dancers and emerging choreographers, especially in Vancouver. It is interesting to see how contemporary dance, in Vancouver, can be so many things and therefore a true expression of its creator. Creatively the west coast is rich with possibilities and varied in choreographic voice. Many creators are experimenting and integrating other mediums of art into their creation (such as film or lighting design, for example), and for me this sparks my imagination to further possibilities of how to create dance and connect with the audience. I also feel that there is a real return to a hard core physicality of movement, and more exploration into the possibilities of what the body is capable of and how its formal technique and training can be manipulated and/or pushed.

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### 3 What's your favourite thing about touring?

**JM:** Live performances are incredibly wonderful things. No matter how hard you try to keep a show the same, each time it's performed it's brand new, never to be replicated or seen in that same way again. When you tour a work, it becomes so clear that a performance is a living, breathing, hard-to-control creature with so many variables that it's best to approach each new stage and audience like it's the first time around. And so, aside from a love of Canada and traveling through it, my favourite thing about touring is that it keeps the work alive and transforming. Every performance offers a new stage, and I'll adjust my steps to fit a new space, in slightly different lights and with slightly different timing. I'll make new mistakes in some sections but execute some great moves in others. Each time I do this, I'll be in a different city filled with different people, who will watch what I do from a different point of view. As an artist, you learn a lot about your work by putting it through this repeated process.

I think the audience often forgets how significant they are to a live performance. Performers truly can sense the ebb and flow of an audience's focus or energy. On tour, you start learning about your audience as the show unfolds; before the lights go down, you already know if you've made that connection or not. I've made some great connections on tour and have always been able to take home a new perspective on what I do.

**AFB:** I love touring because it gives life to the works we create and allows us as dancers to really explore and conquer the dances we've been given. Usually, we work so hard and then at the end of the process get a four performance run if we're lucky. Touring allows you as the creator and performer to dig deeper into the work, to keep discovering new ways to move and interpret it.

I love the privilege of being in so many different theatres. Each one is different and has a completely different energy; this effects the work and adds new information to how it will be performed. I love talking to audience members and hearing how the work affects them in different cities. It's exciting to hear different interpretations of what they saw and how it made them feel, and truly satisfying when they connect with what you've made and are genuinely interested in what you have to say as an artist.

### 4 Who are some of your important artistic influences (dance or otherwise)?

**JM:** Being part of a collective, each of us bringing our own ever-changing tastes and new discoveries, has made for very eclectic sources for new ideas and paths in our work. I would have to say that the group of artists I've surrounded myself with have been my most important artistic influences, as they have had a direct impact on the way I approach dance.

The 605 Collective finds a lot of inspiration for what we do through the music we listen and dance to. We're on a constant search for new sounds to move to and always share our favourites with one another. We use an eclectic mix of both popular and completely off the map finds, and these tracks are often a starting place for creating the movement and rhythms developed in our work. For myself, *Audible* was first created when I was discovering the "Monome" community and, in particular, its sound artists. A monome is a reconfigurable grid of buttons that, with open-source software, can be used to manipulate sounds, loops, and music in a variety of ways. I fell in love with how organically this device could be used to control a very electronic, very inorganic process. Brian Crabtree (Monome's creator), Daedelus, and Portable Sunsets are all monome users.



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- Josh

**AFB:** So many but I'll give you the short version! In terms of dance, from a very early age I was really inspired by Joe Laughlin's work. I saw the work he created at the Banff Centre for the Clifford E. Lee award when I was fifteen and I've wanted to make dances ever since. Other choreographers, to name a few, that I enjoy are Crystal Pite and Dana Gingras but I could go on...

As a dance maker I'm interested in stories and have a natural tendency to incorporate narratives in my work, so I love to read a lot of fiction. I think my favourite author right now is Audrey Niffenegger. I also love the stories and films of Wes Anderson. I like to people watch. And my current guilty pleasure is Lady Gaga.


## 5 You both know each other quite well as friends, and you dance together a lot. Josh, what do you think we should keep an eye out for while watching Amber's piece, and Amber, what do you think we should watch for in the 605's piece?

**JM:** Watch for change. Because I'm in the piece, I haven't actually seen it before, but I can speak a bit from inside the work. I think Amber was very successful in creating a world in which these two people are defined enough to be followed throughout the work, while still leaving the details of the relationship and the characters non-concrete. For me, this balance makes the dance more fascinating because the roles are in constant flux; the performers are transforming with every shift of sound, light or movement.

I would encourage viewers as they watch this work to remain undecided as to who these people are to one another and when this is taking place. I feel this allows the piece to reach further into the places Amber was aiming to go. Rather than create a streamlined narrative from minute-one, I've found that approaching this work as a collage of abstract moments, letting the mind wander to different possibilities, has made it really interesting to perform.

**AFB:** I love the sheer honesty in 605's work. It is truly physical and virtuosically functional. It is both entertaining and artistic. In my opinion *Audible* resonates with audiences so well because not only has the company been able to create such innovative movement and sustain it, but they have balanced this by tapping into the vulnerability and humanity of their subject matter. I think *Audible* allows audience members to see themselves, or mirror how they can and might feel without being overtly literal. I have seen *Audible* on the outside many times and I always manage to catch something different each time. It is a great definition of collaborative work and a performance experience that can't be easily forgotten.



A black and white photograph of three dancers in dynamic, mid-air poses against a teal background. The dancer on the left is a man in a sweater and dark pants, leaning forward with arms outstretched. The dancer on the right is a woman in a t-shirt and jeans, also in a dynamic pose with arms outstretched. The dancer at the bottom left is a man in a suit, crouching and looking up. The background is a solid teal color with a vertical orange stripe on the right side.

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**Made in BC** - Dance on Tour is pleased to share contemporary dance with BC audiences, connect dance artists with presenters, and increase exposure to dance.

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