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MARGARET KOVAL: Hello, and welcome to "We Roar." As coronavirus continues to challenge our resilience, we're asking Princetonians everywhere to share how they're experiencing the pandemic, how they're adapting and planning, and how their unique perspectives can enrich our own thinking. In this episode, we hear thoughts from a dancing professional about the future of performing arts and the physical impact of social distancing on most of us.

REBECCA LAZIER: Hi, I'm Rebecca Lazier. I'm a senior lecturer in the Program in Dance, and currently the acting director of the Program in Dance. It's been wild to see the choreographic take on a life outside of the dance studio in this larger scheme of spatial distancing rather than social distancing. We're thinking a lot about these ways of how to keep social connectivity, keep social linking, keep socializing alive with physical distancing.

And I was walking down the streets today, and I'm so profoundly affected by the ways in which we're interacting even with this distance. And one of the interesting things, the way we look at spatialization in dance is the scoring of what spaces between two bodies, what it speaks to. And here we are, as a community at large right now, all agreeing we need to stay six feet apart.

And yet when you're walking down the street, it's quite fascinating to notice in that agreement two people are coming towards one another, which one is doing the six feet apartedness, and which one might be staying on a track. And at times, you catch someone's eye, and you both agree, and you do that do-si-do. At other times, I've seen someone coming down the street in a wheelchair or a stroller and pushing carts and pulling carts, and I'll automatically do the six feet myself. So that, as the community, we are supporting each other.

But then there's other times where someone's in their daily jog, and they want to keep their tempo, and they have to keep their line, and they're not budging there to help the community in that moment. So I think it's really interesting to notice how we're participating with each other in that moment because it's very much a community agreement right now that you walk down the street, you walk into the world. And we are all attempting to distance ourselves in this do-si-do and this dance.

And even just watching how it's changed from the first few weeks of when the first time I read the word social distancing to now, and people were much closer. And we've learned as culturally just to start allowing for that space between us. And yet, I've also noticed that people are allowing their eyes to shut inward and towards themselves,

rather than at the same time let themselves see each other. So those lenses of watching how the body can speak when it's really far apart, and then how the eyes can engage when you're still far, I feel like that's something that we can be thinking about.

I live in Brooklyn in New York City, and everything's shut down. It's a very different city than if anyone imagines what Brooklyn might be, and all of the bustling restaurants, and all the people around. All the bodegas are closed by 5 o'clock. So the scene out there is desolate, otherworldly.

And so I am in my apartment with my three kids and my husband, and everyday they're all doing homeschool. And I'm working full time, and my husband's trying to work. And we're all moving around our own social distance house to try to make sure we're all on our Zooms at the same time and carving out little spaces and trying not to interfere in each other's learning and working.

And then I am very much craving the outdoors and moving in space with freedom. And yet at the same time, I'm craving curling up in a ball and being as small as possible and not going anywhere. And so that tension is interesting to notice, that in this confinement and care for the larger society, I have both the wanting to go run in the forest and jump in the ocean, and then I have this, I just want to curl up in a ball and surround myself with my children and never leave.

One of the things as a dancer, and an aging dancer specifically, aging person, pain is really interesting to deal with because I often have little injuries here and there, and my body can be hyper-sensitive to that. And so I've noticed that the stress of this moment has upped my body's hyperactive response system. So every little ache and pain has feels like this massive — oh my God, I've re-injured this, oh my God, I've re-injured that. I haven't, but it feels like that. And so dealing with that unwinding of the psychological and truly physical manifestations of how pain becomes a whole-body experience.

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On a very basic level, this is devastating to the arts community. Established artists have overnight lost all their future income, period. These are people that we try to get to Princeton, and we can't get because they're so busy, have now had things — and some say postponed. Postponed is a little odd still because, actually, you're not getting the income in. So six months of work for some artist has just evaporated. And so I think on a very individual level, it's devastating.

I think it's also going to be super interesting to see all the small dance companies, the small theater companies, even the large dance and theater companies are going to have sustainability problems. But on the economic level, there's going to be a complete upheaval in the arts world. The hopeful side is, there is this incredible new website that popped up, I think, overnight called Dancing Alone Together. And every day they have over 23 classes that are streaming online that you can engage in. And the resourcefulness, and the adaptability of everyone, and the improvisational skill is pretty remarkable.

So I see that, yet there's also a fatigue of sitting in front of the screens all day, because we're doing it for our work. And so then is that going to be the recuperative thing? It's very different than an evening out with people around you, witnessing live instruments and feeling those sensations, and hearing those timbres, and feeling your body vibrate, and smelling the smells.

So I think the loss of audience right now is the resonating emotional loss I'm feeling overall of performance. And I can appreciate a video of a performance, but it doesn't feel like it's the same. I definitely feel there'll be a deeper appreciation, need, hunger for dance on many levels, on that very personal, I just need to be moving and moving my body, to I want to be going and seeing performances, to wanting to see dance in all of the spaces, not just theatrical spaces and site-specific spaces.

I think the physicality of dance, as I was saying earlier, has a specific way of working. And I think that the core of the body moving in time, in space — those sort of basic underlying tenets — will just be amped up because we're going to be wanting the freedom. And I do think that the do-si-do that we're going through right now is going to build and build until, I hope, we can get released into being together again.

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