

Artists/Curators Series: Chase Granoff and Chris Peck from Live Sh—

interviewed by Levi Gonzalez

Levi: Okay! So I'm here interviewing Chris Peck and Chase Granoff, who are the organizers of "Live Shit"—that's the name you prefer, right?

Chase: No, we don't really have a preference for the name.

Levi: But you prefer "Live Shit" to "Live Sh---"?

Chase: Either is acceptable.

Chris: The official name of the series is, "L-I-V-E space S-H dash, dash." Although the Chocolate Factory is fond of writing three dashes, sometimes three dashes and an asterisk.

Chase: Yeah. We don't understand why they do that, but that's acceptable as well.

Levi: What's the story behind the name?

Chase: We had thought of a bunch of titles, "Live Shit" being one of them. And we gave that title to Brian, one of the directors of the Chocolate Factory and he was cool with that title, but decided that because a lot of publications can't print titles with curse-words, we should put *sh* dash-dash. And we kind of liked it because, you know, it could be "Live Show..."

Levi: It's a little open ended.

Chase: Yeah.

Levi: It's kind of playful, too.

Chase: Yeah, and it's just a title, you know. It's really not the thing.

Levi: So how did the whole thing start, where did it come from?

Chris: I had gotten to know Brian Rogers [co-director of The Chocolate Factory] a little bit and he approached me about this idea of doing a late-night thing. Maybe after a show, or something like that.

Chase: And preferably music at that time, right?

Chris: Yeah, that was the original idea. And I was into that, and I also knew from running concert series like this before, that it's not something you want to do by yourself. It's just a lot easier and there are a lot of benefits to having a collaborator. So, I started talking to Chase about it, and we just started coming up with ideas about what it could be ...

Chase: Exactly.

Levi: What were some of those ideas?

Chase: I think we thought it would be kind of what it has become. I mean, since I'm a dancer and I make performances, but I have a lot of interest in sound, and Chris is a composer and a musician who has collaborated with a lot of dance and theater, and we both have interest in

visual art... That was kind of our idea: seeing that all these disciplines have more in common than they have different. And also just exposing audiences—potentially you have the ability to attract people that would only go see experimental music to come check out some kind of new dance. They might not be aware that that kind of work exists, but more than likely they could be into it, it's just not their context.

Levi: It seems like there's an increased emphasis on this resistance to labeling something by genre.

Chase: I personally don't feel resistant to be labeled. I think it's not the resistance to classification, as much as it's trying to see what you do past being a specific discipline.

Levi: So, not so much a reaction to a limitation but looking at yourself in a way that's not as limited.

Chase: Yeah! It's like letting yourself go for whatever you're interested in. You don't have to necessarily know how to do it. I can pick up a guitar, I can play the guitar, I don't know how to *play* it, and I'm not going to call myself a "musician," but that's not going to stop me from actually doing what I'm interested in trying to do.

Chris: Yeah, I think it's been a reality—a widely known reality—for quite a long time that people have interests that cross traditional boundaries of genre or medium. I feel like we kind of all know that. And it's confusing that those boundaries still exist. Even if we recognize that those aren't the most important distinctions we can make about an artist, they still exist. It's still important to get a review in *The New York Times* so that you can have that to put on your funding thing, or whatever. Right?

Chase: And *The New York Times* won't give you a review unless you classify; they need to know what section they're gonna write the review in, which critics to send.

Chris: Right, like you think about the dance section and the music section. And how much stuff really is on some sort of line between performance art, music, dance... Where does that stuff end up going?

Chase: It goes to "Live Shit!"

[laughter]

Levi: I noticed one email where you guys wrote: "curated and organized" (or something like that) and I was wondering about that choice of language.

Chris: I think initially we felt like we don't want to take ourselves too seriously. And I was thinking about this last night 'cause we had this group, Brainstormers, come in—they're a feminist art-collective that does a lot of political stuff, and they were administering this quiz, and at the end you had to mark off whether you identify as an artist, or as a "fan," or as a collector, or as a curator—and I was trying to decide whether I should check off the curator box...

Chase: I did!

Chris: I did, too. Well, I mean we're both laughing as we say that. Like, the idea that we're curators in the sense of the person that curates the [Whitney] Biennial is a curator. Or, in the sense that the person who curates performance at the Kitchen is a curator. Like, what do we really do? We sit down once every couple months and go, 'hey, who do we know of that we want to see what they are working on and who do we think would be cool for a show?' And we come up with a list of names, and we split it up, and we write a lot of emails trying to determine what these people are going to do, try to facilitate their technical requirements, and then we show up a

little bit earlier than the audience for the show and we set up a PA and a video projector, maybe, and run around trying to get extension cords and clip lamps—*that's* being a curator? I mean, it is in a sense, but I think that's why we put it in quotes. It's not like we're the gatekeepers to some sort of precious resource.

Chase: And I guess in a lot of contexts, curators are thought of as a kind of “taste-maker,” you know, they're these people that can really make or break someone's career, or they can really bring somebody to the spotlight; but in a much simpler kind of spirit, I think a curator—all it really means is you can just be interested in something and want to attempt to give an opportunity to that person because you're interested or excited about what they offer an audience.

Levi: I was going to ask what is a curator, but we kind of just talked about it. I think it's good to stretch that term. Does it always have to be exactly like the curator at the Whitney Biennial? Someone in a position of authority saying 'here's what's new in American art this year.' I feel like with “Live Shit” there's not a vertical relationship. It's much more casual.

Chris: Which is hard to do.

Levi: Yeah!

Chris: It's hard to keep that other shit out of it.

Levi: Totally. I agree.

Chris: It's something that we talk about, especially as we're trying to get better about doing publicity. I think we're also conscious that especially in New York, it's easy for things to get out of hand, as soon as it's like twenty or thirty people coming instead of fifteen to eighteen. We're really interested in maintaining it as a very low-key atmosphere for people to try things out.

Chase: For the most part, our audiences tend to be really excited and involved and engaged by what is going on, and a lot of times people said, 'oh, woa, I was just trying something out and I wasn't sure how I felt about it, but now I'm excited to continue working on this and see where this might develop.' And that's like the best thing that you can get, right, in putting together a little show—that you get the artist excited about what they're doing.

Levi: We're back. After a lovely dinner that Chris prepared for us...

Chris: ...during the last segment.

Chase: This is called, “Cooking with Live Shit.”

Levi: I wanted to ask about the fact that you're doing this together as a collaboration, and how important is that to the event itself?

Chris: I think that it's really important. We wouldn't have even come up with the name without us sitting down and having a conversation about it. Also in terms of this goal of trying to create an environment for cross-fertilization between different communities, it's important to have two people who are putting up feelers in different directions.

Chase: It's really difficult to maintain diversity if you're just organizing something on your own.

Levi: It also seems that it pulls away from the idea of the curator as a kind of powerful position. Just by having more than one person, it's about, as you said, a kind of conversation.

Chris: And it diffuses responsibility as well.

Levi: Do you lump people together in specific shows?

Chris: Yeah. I think we try to put together shows that have a variety of different kinds of things. Maybe there's one thing that's kind of a music thing, or there's one thing that's maybe more of a dance thing. But you know a lot of those decisions are made for us by the fact that people are busy and usually it just works out. Maybe the goal isn't just about having things that are in different genres or mediums, but that are things that are from different scenes, or different communities.

Levi: I like that there's something casual and problem solving about it, as opposed to some sort of grand statement. It's not about imposing a larger meaning on choice-making, but just the act of making choices.

Chase: Yeah, I don't think we have an agenda per se. I really think our only agenda is this attempt to give opportunity and to maybe pair things that wouldn't necessarily be paired together. We want to be interested in everything that we show on a personal level—so I guess our personal aesthetic may come into play but that's kind of unavoidable—

Levi: Sure.

Chase: But many times people have done things that I haven't been one-hundred percent into, but that doesn't really matter. It's more exciting just to be like, 'oh, man, these people came and did something.' It's really that simple.

Chris: I don't know if I agree, personally, that I'm totally without agenda. And that's 'cause we're both people who have strong opinions, strong tastes, and all of that, but I do think that we are interested in trying to subvert whatever agenda we might have by certain decisions we make. Part of the agenda is subverting the agenda... We're more interested in that than trying to ensure that each show is amazing, or that it's really worth your three dollars. [all laugh] And you know, making the trek out to Long Island City, which isn't that far, but psychologically, it's far.

Levi: That's something I like, because you get so used to a certain cycle of dance venues that you're always going to, its like getting stuck in a loop. It's refreshing to go somewhere you don't normally go to see something.

Chris: Yeah, being in Queens... there is something about the relationship that Brian is trying to cultivate with the community there, and we do get people from the neighborhood who are not the kind of people that you get when you are doing a show in Bushwick or in Williamsburg or in Chelsea. They're not the same people who would be wandering in, and we've had really interesting conversations with some of those people, and that's cool.

Chase: Yeah, it's decidedly not a dance series, "Live Shit" and the Chocolate Factory is decidedly not a dance venue. You know, exclusively. And I do think that that's important.

Chris and Levi: Yeah.

Chris: And just the Chocolate Factory being a newer venue—it's only been around for a few years. I think it goes even further than the separation in the dance world. If you can compare it to similar kind of variety show formats—P.S. 122 or Galapagos—like, our friends Jeff Larson and Andrew Dinwiddie have this "Catch" series at Galapagos, and we talk with them about stuff, too. I think there's an expectation just with going to Galapagos. There's an expectation with going to P.S. 122—it's not necessarily that it's going to be dance, it's something that's a little more complicated, just because I think these venues have a history related to performance art, or being at a bar.

Levi: They have identities, somehow.

Chris: Yeah. And I think we're somewhat free from that. [The Chocolate Factory] has a feeling of being very raw. I was thinking about this last night; last night we did it in the basement [space], and it really feels like an empty space. I mean, it's literally empty, there's no lighting rigs set up, there's no stage, there's no chairs set up for the audience—it's as empty as it gets—though at the same time, a very fertile space. So, to me, that's an ideal space to be trying things out, a laboratory kind of environment. On the one hand there's no support for what you are doing but you also have this freedom to set up the space however you want. Last night we had three different things and we had three different arrangements of chairs.

Chase: Yeah.

Chris: And I think that stuff is really important.

Levi: Have either of you done anything like this before in terms of “organizing and/or curating” before this experience? Why did you want to do it—what attracted you to it in the end?

Chris: I ran an experimental music series in Ann Arbor when I was in school on and off for a couple of years. It was always me and one other person, and it was a few different people over that period of time. And I think I learned a lot through doing that, for sure, about what was interesting about it and also how to make it manageable. Made a lot of mistakes, but also had a lot good experiences and I think that became part of how I could see myself as a creative person, as a member of a community, and as someone who could help foster community in that way. That's a thread that ties together a lot of things that I do as a composer and as a collaborator with other sorts of artists. It's another way to do that same thing of trying to create a situation where people can have some sort of experience that's not an everyday experience. And it's a cool way to do that, because you don't have to be the artist. [laughs] Because that's a lot of responsibility. And I think just experiences that I've had working in theaters, especially as a composer doing music for dance performances and touring and all that...Well, I've had good experiences and bad experiences, and probably like most people, I've had more bad experiences than good experiences, but those good experiences are so good—when you can go into a space and there are technical people and other people involved in the organization who are helping you make something happen. And my experience has been that there's actually an inverse relationship between the budget or production level of the space and the kind of experience that I have. I would compare working in an all-union house on Broadway to working in a black box theater that focuses on very experimental stuff. Or going into a studio theater that's not even primarily a performance space. And they have five lights, they don't have a PA, but there are people there that are really invested in creating a space for performance to happen. I've been really inspired by some of those experiences, and to me, this is the way to do it. We have Brian and Sheila at the Chocolate Factory who are generously allowing us to do this, and who give us free tickets to their shows in exchange. And manage selling the beer, and we split the door with them.

Chase: I personally never had an experience putting together a series or a show before Chris invited me to do this, but I think the interest was an extension of what it is to be an artist. I think that part of being an artist is not just taking opportunity, but also providing opportunity. Not just utilizing space, but creating space for things to occur. So I think that's a big part of what it is to put together a series. I'm not filling the space with my effort, but I'm providing a space for *you* to fill with your effort. I think that was the excitement. I'm into thinking about things critically or thinking about things subjectively, and then making decisions based on that. Even sometimes trying to make the decision to go against your subjective thought. I think that's a big learning experience in organizing a thing, that a lot of times you might not like something but you want to ask that thing to happen anyways—it kind of opens you up to new ideas.

Levi: Great. Is there anything else you want to add? Anything?

Chase: I would like to provide the “Live Shit” mascot: for those of you who don’t have the enhanced podcast version of this interview, it’s a horse with a cowboy that has a yellow suit, a white hat, and a pink cape. The horse is white, and he has an orange tail and mane. This particular toy or mascot, rather, I believe was purchased in Paris. Is that correct?

Chris: Uh, yes, I acquired this object on a recent trip to Paris. And it was partially destroyed during a performance.

Chase: And now you can listen to him. This is a performance of “Live Shit!!!” at Chris Peck and Jon Moniaci’s home in Greenpoint Brooklyn! [loud mechanical noises, whistling, slide whistling, neighing, etc]