

Christopher Williams
with Alejandra Martorell

Alejandra Martorell: I know you're crazy; you're going to rehearsal, and your opening night is soon. Basically I just want to leave it as much up to you as possible, and ask you to tell me what you are working on. You can take that in a very particular sense or in a more general sense, like, "this is my thing," whichever way fits you right now.

Christopher Williams: Ok, sure. Should I just begin talking about that?

AM: Yeah!

CW: Ok. Hmm. Let me say that for this concert, I'm doing two things simultaneously: one is to show the world premiere of a work that I've been thinking about for a long time, ever since I lived in Europe. And the other is an ongoing project that will take a few more years to complete, which is about the Saints. So, I guess I'll begin... well, which would you prefer?

AM: The first one you mentioned.

CW: Ok. The first piece that I'm going to premiere here at Danspace is called The Portuguese Suite. I went to Europe to study when I was a junior in college, and someone, off the cuff, mentioned to me, "Oh, I think you might do well at the Jacques Lecoq School." So, I thought to myself, "Oh, what's that?" And ever since I returned, I seriously have to say that it's one of the strongest influences in my artistic career that I ever encountered. A lot of people think it's a mime school, but really... yes, you do mime; I can't deny it. But, really it's an artist's training. It's geared to allow you to find your voice and express it in the medium that you desire and feel strongest about. The first whole year of school is an audition for the second year, and they ask you back, or not. So, they asked me back, and I immediately decided to take a year off of college to stay because I was so into this process. During the second year is where they really ask you to develop your own work. The first year is a pedagogical training, where you do a lot of his style, and he's a really interesting pedagogue. He actually died the year I was there. I was in his last class ever.

AM: He died the first year you were there?

CW: My second year. During my second year was when he passed on.

AM: Wow.

CW: And that's also true of my senior year at Sarah Lawrence. I was studying with Viola Farber, and she died the year I was there, so I caught the tail end of these two incredible teachers in those fields.

AM: Oh my God.

CW: So that was really rewarding to me, and I have a personal desire to continue the procession that they were a part of ... through my own voice, obviously. Because they both were truly devoted to allowing artists to find their [own] voice, and they really weren't interested in teaching you rep or things like that. They just wanted you to create work, and that's what I've always wanted to do, ever since I was a little, little boy when I would sit and draw unicorns on a piece of paper, and then I'd have to get up and act it out around the house — much to my parents' chagrin. Really it was studying at Lecoq that got me into this focused world of combining a sense of theatricality with dancing and maybe even with visual imagery — with bodily prosthetics, with masks, with puppets. It invited me to combine two worlds that I had had a deep love of all throughout my childhood: visual arts and performative arts. And then, of course, when I studied at college that was the first time I had ever done contemporary dancing. I took ballet when I was little, but I started contemporary dance and I was so smitten and hooked by it that that became the forefront of my expressional tool, and then all these other things plugged into that channel, once I got through Lecoq School.

I went to school thinking to myself, "Here I am; this is my first experience abroad." I learned French, and the classes are all taught in French, and it was a marvelous experience for me to shift gears in my linguistic mind. So, I had to do everything in French, and I thought to myself on the first day of school, "Ok, there's a possibility that you might never come home from this. You might stay in Europe." I sometimes have a feeling that my work would be more received... well, not more received... what am I thinking? There might be a further interest and ability to support the work I'm trying to do in Europe. So that thought crossed my mind, and I thought to myself for fun, "Ok, so out of all these classmates, who is a possible romantic interest for me, so that I may be able to make some sort of beautiful tie and remain here?" The answer was nobody, ... at the moment... so then, I thrust myself full-force into the study, and a week later, the students arrived from Portugal, and it was a man and a woman, and when they walked into school, I thought to myself, "They are so beautiful; I need to know them." And I said to myself about the man, "this is it," and I actually pursued a relationship with him and won. I mean, I got it. We dated for the two years that I was in school there.

We lived together in Paris, and it was one of the most romantic experiences of my entire life. So, that's the first moment I got an introduction to Portuguese culture, was through this lover who absolutely fascinated me. His name is Luciano, and the piece is dedicated to him. I went to Portugal with him to visit his family at one point, which was very hard because they were not accepting of our relationship. We didn't even tell them. He introduced me as his "American friend." So, I spent Christmas with them.

AM: Oh boy.

CW: I joke with people that me in Portugal is like standing in front of a Catholic mountain. His family was very, very religious, and I had a lot of trouble. This piece is born from two things: 1) my personal Fado. What Fado is, is a style of Portuguese singing. It's like a halfway point between crying and singing. It's a lamentation, but also just an expression of daily life, and it started in Lisbon in the streets. I think it began in Bairro Alto, which is just a part of Lisbon where there are a bunch of cafes, and people would just gather around, and they'd sing their Fado or their fate, their destiny. Of course Luciano took me to the Casa do Fado in Lisbon, and oh my God! I just can't even tell you the experience I had. Just to see these regular people just stand up and sing their hearts out about their daily life experiences, and the experience of love, life and death, basically.

AM: Is it a class-based thing, where its origins are with working people?

CW: Kind of.

AM: It sounds a little bit like old, old Tango...

CW: Yeah.

AM: That grew up in the underground...

CW: It makes a lot of sense. One thing I'm printing in the program notes is something that a Portuguese man wrote about Fado, and it's something along the lines of, "There's just an innate understanding of life, love, loss and suffering in Latino cultures", or even in Greek culture, for example. This Mediterranean feeling... is more palpable to those people, whereas Americans are a little bit more detached from it, coming from the root of Puritanism, etc. I had the extremely strong experience that that was true. When I was in Portugal, the rhythm of life was different. I felt a deep underlying current of just weight and "terra," the earth... in the blood. There are things about this piece that just jump out at me: it's earth, blood, love, and death. (Laughs.)

AM: Sounds good.

CW: Often Fado is a love song in a way, and it's often bittersweet. One of the original songs that I'll be using—it's actually the first section of the piece—is a history of Fado sung as a Fado song. It talks about a sailor leaving someone behind, and singing out into the wind, and that the voice was carried to that person, and her heart leapt into her mouth, that kind of thing. Basically, this piece is a personal expression of my own Fado, of my experience with Luciano and having to leave him.

AM: And did you workshop this piece along... through time?

CW: A little bit. I performed some of the solos and duets for the two male characters in the piece in Colombia, because my partner is Colombian, and I feel very strongly that the two male roles needed to be played by people of different ethnicities. So, that's why I chose a Colombian dancer.

AM: And you're doing the other role?

CW: Yeah, exactly. So he's kind of like the Portuguese sailor, and I'm the American sailor in the piece. It's just a transposition of my personal love story with some poetic license, related to the nature of the Fado songs. Also, I joke with people that this is my musical. I've been told and taught, and I believe firmly, that singing is an intensified form of speech. And the best singing is when you just intensify the spoken voice, in my opinion. That goes along with a lot of early music singing as well. You don't add a lot of vibrato or bravado in your singing, you just intensify the speech to the point that it's a very pure tone. Although Fado is very filled with bravado, I feel that the dancing in this piece is an intensified version of the emotion in the song. So, that's why I joke about it being my musical. We're dancing the music. I feel very strongly also about the connection of music to dancing. In this piece it is very closely linked. I am having the dancers dance to the Portuguese syllables often. Every detail is very clearly choreographed that way. However, in some of the work that I've done with early music, I like to play with a different relationship to music every time, but the relationship is very strong and clear. What else should I say about that?

AM: Before we go into the other piece, I'm very curious about this cross-cultural thing. Obviously the way you pronounce words in Portuguese is very clear. It's rare, I think, for an American to really let another culture in, and the way you sound, to me reflects that you have really exposed yourself to it, and grown with and adopted, and really just let it run through your blood, even at the linguistic level. Did you go to France without speaking French, at first?

CW: I had studied French all throughout high school, and I took one semester in college, because they required that you take the language before you studied abroad. I also studied art history in Paris, while I was doing the first year of school. After high school, I was in the Advanced Placement French class. I have a very strong attachment to music and language, and it came pretty naturally to me. I also just love trying to be perfect in pronouncing and embodying another language and culture. So, French... it took a while when I was actually there. I lucked out because my first year I lived with a widow who didn't speak any English. She had a room in her apartment, and I just had to communicate with her, and over time I began to be fluent in French. And then, because I lived with the two Portuguese students, I was just begging them at every turn to throw vocabulary at me. It's funny; I can't really conjugate verbs, but I know a lot of Portuguese vocabulary. (Laughs.) Over time, I would learn it better. If I spent any time there, I bet it would come pretty close to me. It was also just interesting to me... the music of the language itself is innate to how I'm treating this choreography, for example.

AM: That's very subtle. So, I take it you studied at Sarah Lawrence, and that means you didn't have to major in anything specifically.

CW: That's correct, and that was a boon to my experience because...

AM: So you were doing visual arts and dance primarily?

CW: Actually I was doing medieval art history and dance and Latin. (Laughs.)

AM: Ok.

CW: Visual art for me was in high school mostly. I was in the honors art program, and I almost went to an art school. I prepared a portfolio of my paintings, actually. Then I decided, "No, I need to keep performing," because I was in the drama club as well in high school, and I just loved... I went to Sarah Lawrence thinking, "Ok, I'm going to be an actor on Broadway." (Laughs.) And then, of course, Viola taught me about contemporary dance, and I said, "Ok that [Broadway] is definitely not for me; that's not the right path. So, I realized that there was something much more exploratory and investigative and experimental, even profound, in exploring dancing as opposed to this kind of prescribed musical theater performance which I had done in college. I'm not... don't get me wrong, I'm just saying that there can be experimentation in both worlds, but it seemed like in contemporary dance the slate was freer, because a pre-verbal state leaves much more opportunity than one that has a fixed linguistic score to it.

AM: Just one last background question, when you were at Sarah Lawrence—and I imagine you were making dances—were you making more pure dances that had no visual or medieval art influence? Were they more separate worlds?

CW: That's a really good question. I actually returned from France, having done the Lecoq School, for my senior year of Sarah Lawrence, at which point I was making the most dances, so I had already been bitten by the bug of the idea of combining my medieval art history with my visual art background and my dancing at that point. The first dance I ever made at Sarah Lawrence was influenced by Pliny the Elder, for example.

AM: I don't know that...

CW: He's an antique author—antique meaning Roman antiquity, in the very early medieval period... wrote a treatise about nature, called *The Natural History —De Historia Naturalis*. I'm interested in things he said such as, "There are cannibals with dog-heads that live in the East," things like that. It's just so curious at a certain time period to see what people allowed themselves to believe and feel and think without any of all the things that have influenced us to currently think about our world and its limits. At that period in time there were a lot more unknowns to the general public, so if you said there were dog-headed cannibals living in the East, you believed it! And you didn't go there because you were scared of them! That kind of thing. That's what interests me... that kind of state where the human imagination is allowed to run wild in your everyday life, not just in art. I try to keep the imaginative space alive and brilliant and vibrant in my artistic space, and in my daily life I don't get a chance to see that as much. I believe in unicorns still, but most people don't. It's that space that I'm really interested in, and how it came to be that we got here from there.

A tiny aside is this legend of the unicorn, for example. It was said there were ferocious one-horned beasts in India, and there were all these depictions of delicate, gorgeous creatures that lay their heads in the laps of virgins in the West. When someone described seeing a rhinoceros for the first time to someone else they described it as a ferocious one-horned beast, and the only thing the listener could compare it to was their preconceived Western concept of the unicorn. So, the confusion over the nature of the unicorn in reality and legend becomes quite interesting. There seems to always be some tangible explanation for all the very fantastical entities at that time that got filtered down to us. I guess that can lead me into the second piece.

AM: Exactly.

CW: I began working on this project, which is solo portraits of Saints because I was just completely taken by their legends, and the mythology surrounding each character. Some of them are quite fantastical, and that really interests me, of course. I began with the women's piece, *Ursula [and the 11,000 Virgins]*, which you took a look at...

AM: Yeah.

CW: I wanted to do two things. One was... I've always thought that the solo form in dancing is one of the hardest things to pull off well in choreography. So I gave myself the challenge of making over 20 solos. (Laughs.) Because I thought, "Ok, how can you make the solo form really ring as a form?" I thought, "Ok, you have to justify it." You have to justify the reason for it being a solo, and then I realized that these Saints are just extremely powerful individuals. They are [each] a single person that stood against something that was in their way. It doesn't concern me that it's about faith and religion. What concerns me is this idea of a single person who had an extraordinary experience and stood up for what they believed in. And that I think is a message that should reach all of humanity. That's what gave me the idea to do this whole project, and I decided to continue the project and make 15 solos for men in a piece called *The Golden Legend*. I'll be showing 3 excerpts from *The Golden Legend* on this concert, along with 2 excerpts from *Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins*. I really want to take my time building *The Golden Legend*, because with *Ursula* I was on a shared program, and I didn't have an immense amount of time to make it. I was excited with the results, but I thought, if I had been given a little more time and production value, that I could really make an interesting piece. That's why I'm treating this like a long extended project. I will continue to work on this for the next year or two, and hopefully do a full production of *The Golden Legend*, which will be all 15 male solos together with live early music, sung by singers from renowned choirs who perform early music often, such as Lionheart and Anonymous 4. There will be live singers from both choirs in this concert as well.

The Saints project is about creating the power of the solo choreographic form. So, I'm just interested in exploring that form to its fullest. In the Suite and in the Saints project, I'm very interested in this idea... I've been working a lot with choral situations, so I have a chorus of people against individuals. I'm really interested right now in how the chorus, or the traditional Greek chorus concept, can function as a filter for looking at an individual perspective. I'm even interested in how unison as a dance format can become a filter to look at an individual. If you have a single person on stage, that's one thing, but if you have a soloist against a chorus, that's another thing and it creates a perspective on that individual. You'll see that theme repeat again and again in this show. Almost every solo from *Ursula* and from *The Golden Legend* has a choral aspect to it.

AM: Which is a development on this, because in *Ursula*, only one or two have it.

CW: Correct. I'm going further into that choral concept. I've discovered that, for me, that's another way to feature the individual. It justifies the solo even more, and arguably it becomes a solo no longer, because there are other people on stage. But I'm trying to argue the point that it's a further form of featuring an individual. So even in the Suite, the piece is really a bunch of dances for 2 men, solos and duets, with the addition of a chorus of 7 women, and they are kind of representing Carpedeiras in my mind, which are these paid funeral mourners. It's a very Portuguese concept that comes originally from ancient Egypt. You said one thing I could talk about is what I'm doing in dance right now, and that's kind of what I'm looking at: this concept of how to incorporate these two tried and true forms: the solo and the chorus.

AM: How is the way you think about the movement material for each different in your mind?

CW: Well, that's a great question. For the soloist, I try to go into the context in which they're dancing. For example, in the Suite, I go into the context of what's human, what the human experience is for that particular character, and I'll make movement based on where I'm coming from with that. Whereas in the chorus, I'll often think of the movement as something, which is its own entity, but that can set off or compliment the movement that I've created for the individual or duet, for example. There's almost a more internal drive for the soloist's movement, and then a spatial or external drive for the choral movement because I know it's going to be set on many different bodies in a spatial pattern. So, that's one thing.

AM: What about in relationship to the audience in terms of what their connection outwards is for the solo and the chorus, because it seems like the chorus is looking in to the soloist, and then... is the soloist looking to us?

CW: Well, actually, in these pieces, I'm interested in exploring all of those roles.

AM: In the Greek tradition, it's sort of the other way around, right? The chorus is interpreting...

CW: addressing the audience, yes.

AM: ... or making you follow the story.

CW: Totally true. There are moments of that in this piece. However, I'm not sticking to that. I'm looking at all of the ways I can use a chorus and a soloist, or a

duet situation in alternative ways. Honestly, because I haven't completed *The Golden Legend*—it's still in progress—I haven't even explored all the ways in my mind yet. So this is still experimentation for me. In the *Suite*, the music really governed a lot of what I was doing with the chorus and soloists. So yes, there are moments of all that kind of exploration going on. To be honest, I'm still looking at all the things it can do. I haven't tried everything. At this point in the game, I have to do the show, so I've set the choreography, but there are still plenty of things in my mind that could be explored with that.

AM: I want you to talk about the puppetry and the extra, non-human parts because I think that's very different. We don't see that very often.

CW: Yeah. Actually that is something that really dawned on me after my studies in Europe. I remember the day in the Lecoq School when he said to us, "Tomorrow you're going to come in with a new body that's not your own, and you're going to work with it as though you were that body." So we just had to make something that wasn't... we stuffed our shirts with pillows; we added extra arms, things like that. It was quite amazing to imagine yourself extending your own anatomical limits. Really, what's interesting to me about that is that the puppet, or the object that is added to the human body, such as a mask or a prosthetic costume, takes you into an extended range, is what I feel. I'm very excited about that. Although I love watching just the human form dance and always will, I'm especially interested in pushing the limits of human range. A puppet can fly across the stage for a 10-minute sequence, and the human body cannot do that. So, really, it just gives me more colors in my choreographic palette, and that's why I'm so fascinated with it. The other thing is that I've always been kind of a dream-oriented person, and I love to live in the realm of the fanciful or of the supernatural because the mundane can really get me down. It's hard for me to live in New York City. This urban drudgery that takes place when you're forced to survive in a place like this is very, very grueling... corrosive on my soul. I really try to just allow... even people... the general public... to come to my shows and live in a supernatural world for a moment. Just take a moment where you can escape the known realm. Go into something that you don't know anything about. Go into something that you only ever dreamed could happen. I just feel so strongly about that in this world. People don't have any time anymore to imagine. There's no space left to say, maybe there are small bears with wings in the forest. We don't wonder that, because we say, "Oh, that's impossible."

That's my one strongest connection to the middle ages: the mindset that there are things out there that we don't control, that we don't see and we don't know. And maybe we need to protect ourselves from this crazy unknown world, which could turn on you at any moment. Their choice of the over-arching, endless grip of Christianity is something I don't agree with, but it was only a response to all this

unknown. People needed comfort in a world where all of this could be existing and you don't know. So, that's what's interesting to me, that's my main connection, that and the artwork from the period. I just find it so beautiful because there weren't that many emotional expressive outlets available either, and the only ones that really allowed you to do that were religious song and religious painting or sculpture. So, people and monastic orders, for example, illuminating a manuscript... poured their souls into this thing. They spent fifteen years of their life working on a couple pages. I thought, "Wow, that is something to be treasured."

AM: The preciousness of something human transcending into beauty, which was only supposed to be, and was, a divine, unattainable thing. Because life was grueling. I mean, talk about grueling!

CW: Horrible! Oh, yes! It was absolutely horrible. People joke with me that I was in a monastic order in an earlier life, and I kind of believe them because I have the same situation in my heart that they must have experienced. I mean, obviously, mine is a much simpler, easier life because we live now, but it's so interesting to me. I just can't stop imagining that.

AM: That's fascinating. There are a couple of questions swimming in my head. One is about what you just said. Just in terms of what makes you... these pieces that are formed in your head... they are sort of image-based, I would imagine, and they are also formed by accumulated knowledge or exposure that you have, or experiences that you have. How do you decide what you must do next?

CW: Oh, yes.

AM: What's that extra... ?

CW: That's a great question. I think up till this point in my career, it's been governed by what space I'm being presented at, and which dancers are available, honestly. I really don't have the resources to just do the piece that I want to do. I don't think many choreographers in New York have that. Even the most beautiful and best among us are struggling right now. It's unbelievable, so that's why I have a kind of storage of 10 years of ideas in my head because I just have to go with what I'm given in the current environment. I was lucky enough to meet a Colombian visual artist at Djerassi while I was there for a residency, and she said, "Would you like to come to Colombia and do some work on a new piece, and also collaborate on a piece with me?" So I presented a piece called *Piedras* with her there, for which she built sculptures. And then I decided I'd need another ethnicity to do the full *Portuguese Suite* eventually, so why don't I audition Colombian male dancers, and that's how I meant Andrei, who's dancing in the piece.

AM: Then you brought him for the project?

CW: He decided to move to New York, subsequently, and that influenced my decision. Ok, he's here, it's time to do the *Suite*.

AM: That's great.

CW: So, really, that's how it works. I must state my deep gratitude and thanks to the Foundation for Contemporary Arts because they gave me a gigantic grant recently, and that is the only reason why I'm able to do the full version of this show right now. It would be out of my own pocket otherwise, and I do fundraising with individual donors; I write grants all the time, but you might not get them. It's just craziness.

AM: The other question I had goes back to what we were talking about before. It's about puppets and prosthetics, wanting you to talk about it. I worked for a little while with Bread and Puppet Theater...

CW: Oh, nice. In Vermont?

AM: Yeah, in Vermont.

CW: Great. That's neat.

AM: That's my only influence of puppetry, and Peter Schumann would talk about how the puppet—and I'm thinking of the puppet as a shape outside of you, even if you are manipulating it—has a kind of direct line to expression that's not tainted by the human and that can be more profound somehow. The deformity and the unrealness of it, the non-realistic depiction, can be much more expressive. But the prosthetics, when I was hearing you talk, seem to be more in the realm of physicality in terms of the human body, and really breaking the norms of what the human body is, which is kind of a different principle. They are different principles in my head, and I wanted you to talk about maybe other ways of looking at it than the way I'm looking at it.

CW: Sure, yeah, yeah. What's interesting about that is that every time I've experimented with prosthetics so far, I've talked about it in the way that I talk about puppetry. For example, if I'm going to have fingers, which are ten times longer than my own, I have to puppeteer those fingers because it's an object that's added to you to which you give movement. What is puppetry other than an object into which you breathe life? The fact that it's attached to my body is not quite a huge leap than a puppet, which is held in the hands or attached to strings and you

have a control. In mask work as well, you treat this object like its own entity and you let it have its expressive life, which you're talking about, which is not not-human, by just giving it the background of its nature. You don't wear the mask, the mask wears you, so that it can live in its way. If I have a really sharp, pointed nose, the nose speaks so directly about what's going on. It suffices to just change a single angle in that nose and it reads very differently (whereas in my own face, if I tilt my head, maybe you'll notice my eyes rather than my nose). It's very similar to puppetry in my mind. The wonder of puppetry also—I love what you said... Shoot, I don't know the exact verbiage you used, but there's a kind of innocence to the puppet where it's not human, but it's directly doing its expressive thing. Nothing attached. No human residue. It's its own entity, and I think that's one of the beautiful draws and terrifying things about puppetry. All of a sudden I have this...

AM: He's looking for something. Ah!

CW: This tiny guy. I mean...

(Shuffling noises.)

AM: (Laughs.) The guy is purple.

CW: He's attached to my body. (I'm not fully wearing him.) He has an expressive range, which is influenced by my motion. However, they're purely innocent on him. All I'm doing is moving a bunch of wood and rubber around via strings attached to my head, but you believe it's this little guy looking around, right?

AM: (Laughs.) Right.

CW: And that's what I find so fascinating, is that it's never the puppet that is actually moving. It's the human being doing it, but because it's a bunch of wood and objects, you don't have the human residue attached, so you can manage to move your human anatomy in a way that removes it from all attachment to human anatomy, and that is so curious. And it's really cool. So that's one of the reasons that I've always wanted to continue to use puppetry in my choreography. It continues to allow you to take the human anatomically limited range to another place. How many times have you seen someone raise their arm from low to high in a dance? But, how many times have you seen someone raise their arm from low to high and a little puppet arm does something different than what's happening, and you notice the connection between the two, and you also notice the difference. Again, it's these wonderful filters—a selective process of filters through which to look at an already limited anatomical structure.

AM: I marvel at the fact that you're a puppeteer, and that you, as a performer of dance, are so rich in your human expression. I mean, very, very human. I'm thinking mostly of Tere [O'Connor's] work...

CW: Which, I have to say is one of my favorite things to perform.

AM: It's just an incredible range. Because the stereotype would be to think that you can do one or the other.

CW: Sure, and that's why you hone that craft.

AM: But it's really fascinating to look at you with a puppet, and then think of you in Tere's work, and, whoa, that is really like two different people.

CW: Oh, cool. That's one of the things I pride myself on. I mean, I've had the wonderful fortune of having an incredibly wonderful artistic training in my life, in all of these pursuits. I was trained in music. I was trained as a harpist. I sang in a medieval choir when I was younger. I took dancing; I took gymnastics; I did some sports. I did visual arts; I did sculpture. I did all of this stuff. I happened to have teachers who just encouraged me to the fullest extent in every possible range, and I just ate it up. I was a sponge. I just developed myself in all of these areas simultaneously. While at Sarah Lawrence, I decided, "All right, you're going to combine them because you cannot bear to let go of any of them... because the channels that you have built into this expressivity, into your nature, it would be like cutting off an arm for me to drop singing, or to drop painting." So, that's the wonder of contemporary dance, is that you can put it all into it. We don't have a word for that. We call it... I don't know... "contemporary dance", right?

AM: Yeah, it's a poor word.

CW: Yeah, it's a poor word. So, when I say to people, "Yes, I'm a contemporary choreographer..."

AM: They're imagining...

CW: What I want them to understand is that I'm an artist who creates worlds... performative worlds. I guess you could call it performance art, but it's so much dancing.

AM: It's very different from that tradition.

CW: Yeah, it's all based on movement.

AM: Which is a great thing to hear you say. You've answered a question I had not articulated, which is that you see all of these elements converging in a very wide interpretation of what dance is, and it also reminds me of something Yasuko Yokoshi once said...

CW: Nice.

AM: ... which is that, "In dance you can do anything."

CW: You really can.

AM: Because it's like theater, except you've included dance... abstraction... the possibility of complete abstraction, of dance.

CW: Exactly.

AM: ...with all that legacy. There is music because while you watch, you can listen, and it goes on and on and on... There's media. She said that, and I feel you are definitely saying that too. Though you are coming from a legacy that is much more uncommon.

CW: Very true. I look back, and I think, "How did I get so lucky to have developed all of that?" I mean, it's quite incredible. I've had a very charmed training, in my life, in that way. I'm just so thankful. It's also that some people in this world just know what their vocation is in life, and I've always known that I am an artist, and I just can't... I can't deny it usually. I could try to do something else, but I would fail because I know that my work is in art.

AM: That's beautiful, and not a lot of people have it. When you have that, it's the thing that you have to make a commitment to yourself that you're not going to not be responsible for that.

CW: That's right, and every time I work with younger people, or experience younger people doing artwork, I impart to them... I say, "This is something that you could really do. If this is what it is, then you've got to take it and go with it." A lot of people get encouraged or not; and if not, they lose it. The reason why I am an artist is because I was encouraged and continued to receive that encouragement from family, loved ones, and teachers.

AM: Where are you in terms of where you want to be?

CW: Yeah. I'd say, where I see myself is that I'm really early in my career, and that I've got about 10 years of ideas in my head that are just going to

systematically keep coming out. The way I make dances is that they almost occur to me fully-formed in my head, and then I just try to translate that into reality on a bunch of people because I always have the visual seeds of how it's going to look before the dance ever happens. Either that, or there's a piece of music that I just have to choreograph to, that kind of thing. Honestly, if you looked at my notebook, it has a list of all the pieces I want to do, and there are many.

AM: Is there anything else that you want to say?

CW: I don't think so. This feels like it was extremely long, and I feel a little indulgent to talk about myself so much.

The only thing I would say is to make sure that people know that I want people to get what they get from *The Portuguese Suite*, and they don't have to think about it as my personal love story. I want it to be more universal than that, because Fado is. The more personal a singer is about their experience, the more universal it can become. I've heard that said many times, but I really believe it.

AM: I believe it too. Absolutely.

CW: I just wanted to make that clear.

AM: Ok great.

CW: Thank you.

AM: Thank you.