

**Christalyn Wright and Mariangela Lopez
in discussion with Clarinda Mac Low**

Clarinda Mac Low: I notice that you both have these complex titles that seem to seek to establish a world-view right away. Christalyn's is *The Struggle with Words, Attitudes and Great Expectations*, and Mariangela's is *In the Landscape of Rolling Heels*. So, either poetically or directly, it creates a moment, a sense of place, or a sense of an idea. I just wanted you to, one at a time, discuss this. Is this intentional or did it just happen that way? Your title has weight, so why is that?

Christalyn Wright: The title of my piece actually came up when I was teaching at the University of Maryland, at College Park. I was just doing a little project with these kids, and I was feeling like these kids always struggle, and they have these nasty attitudes, not nasty attitudes, against me personally, but they were struggling, "I am a college student; I'm trying to find myself", and not just in a dance sense, but in a life sense. Their attitudes were so "Argh!" I remember being in college and not having a clue about what my future would be or where I needed to go, but I was a little more relaxed. A lot of the students that I was teaching at U of M were working and going to school full time, and they were under a lot of pressure. So, like I said, it wasn't just about what was happening in the classroom, it was about their life. So, I started working with a couple of these students on this project, and I was like, "Oh, you know, let's do something. Let's just go in the studio and play." The original title came from my working with these kids, and some of the material that came out of that was interesting. What's happening in the world today, even as of today, I felt a need to address that again. This is from a perspective of what college students were experiencing at that time. All the many responsibilities they had in order to accomplish the good grades, to be on time for rehearsals, and blah, blah, blah. How can I adapt that to what's happening in the world and revisit that from another perspective? At the end of the day, it's all probably the same kind of...

Clarinda: Macrocosm/Microcosm.

Christalyn: Yeah. When I revisited it, the work that I'm working on now, it still has that thing of, "What are the stereotypes? What are people's aspirations? What are people expecting other human beings to do for them, and what do you expect them to do for you? What do you expect for yourself to do for yourself?" That kind of stuff started to evolve out of the work that...

Clarinda: And you wanted to keep it up-front, immediately?

Christalyn: Yeah. I like when things are up in your face. We don't ever look at ourselves, or look at what's really happening that way. We say, "Oh, I can't believe that happened", and we walk away from it. We're not necessarily always proactive about certain things.

Clarinda: Examining...

Christalyn: Yeah.

Clarinda: And you?

Mariangela Lopez: The title found me. I already had the idea of make a piece that presented a landscape, rather than a story, and one day I was in this cafe, and there were these used magazines. I was reading them through. I'm always using that kind of material when I'm in the creative process. I like when words and images just start finding me. I become interested. I got this magazine and I started highlighting these words, these different phrases in English that somehow were interesting to me. There was a description of a landscape somewhere in the state, and there was this phrase, "in the landscape of rolling hills." It was the hills of mountains, and I just thought it sounded beautiful. Then, I changed "the landscape of rolling hills" to "heels" of shoes.

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Clarinda: Oh, "heels?"

Mariangela: Heels. Heels of shoes. Rolling heels. Exactly.

Clarinda: Oh, interesting. I thought it was hills.

Mariangela: Exactly. It's *In the Landscape of Rolling Heels*, like the shoe.

Clarinda: Oh, that's interesting. I like that.

Mariangela: It's also referring to the... I don't think I have to explain more about it: *In the Landscape of Rolling Heels*, all that happens with us.

Clarinda: The moving...

Mariangela: Where your shoes take you. And then from that idea, there's a lot of... A shoe somehow is the attachment of the thinking of the entire piece. It's something that happens.

Clarinda: It's a connection point.

Mariangela: It's a connection, yeah. At this point, I don't remember what happened first, if it was that moment or the title.

Clarinda: That's great, and also, you bring in a lot of things that I was thinking about too. One thing I noticed... I'm going to ask this question. I kind of know the answer, but I want you to talk about it. It's about concept. Having talked to you both and watched you work, do you begin with a concept, or do you allow the concept to emerge, or is it some combination thereof?

Christalyn: I think it's a combination for me. Like I said, I came back to this title. I went into the studio in April or May of this year, and I just started working on movement, and it wasn't connected to that title, at the time. I was looking at it and seeing how different things were coming out, and I was like, "Wow, am I really frustrated?" There's a lot of push and pull going on. We were having so much fun in the rehearsal, so I was a little torn about what was actually happening in the process. So, I started working on movement then, and then I left it alone. Then, I applied to do DraftWork, and for whatever reason in the application I decided to use that as the title. That title keeps coming up. The work is not really that way, but I could see that that could be something to connect, and there were some issues that I wanted to address.

Clarinda: That need to define yourself sparked something.

Christalyn: Yeah. Then I came to the title when I started to work on this process in the fall. Everything started to unfold itself, and I was able to go back to - not all of the material that I worked on in the spring - but I was able to address, or look at some of the movement again and shape it differently according to the idea that I wanted to present. I'm still evolving. Hopefully by November... I don't have a premiere date for it, which is good because the work-in-progress performance allow you to really get closer to your creative personal goal, and not to be forced into, "Oh this has to be this way. Fine." I'm looking forward to that. So, yes, it was concept and...

Clarinda: They came together.

Christalyn: They merged, which is not always the case for me.

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Clarinda: No? What happens otherwise?

Christalyn: Sometimes the concept is very clear from the time I wake up. My piece *Dreamscape* was definitely something that came to mind in a dream. I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted it to be episodic - all of that. I knew I wanted to make it a superhero piece. I knew I wanted that. I wish I had more time to play with that one too. Maybe I'll revisit that another way. I was very clear on that, and *The \$HO\$ Show* as well. I was very clear on concept.

Clarinda: So this is a little more process-oriented for you?

Christalyn: Yeah. I'm actually enjoying this a lot. I don't know if it's because of the dancers I'm working with, who are just amazing and great to be around, or if I'm just interested more in process now, a deeper way of working in my own process.

Clarinda: It's interesting switching back and forth, but why don't you talk now?

Mariangela: It's interesting because I guess it's the nature of what we're presenting for DraftWork, the nature of the fact that you have to apply, that you have to have a title in mind, but it's a work-in-progress. When I applied, Ishmael didn't know my work that well. He knew me as a dancer, but he didn't know my work as a choreographer, so I had to present this piece, which was already presented as a seven-minute piece. I always knew that it was a work-in-progress, but because every time I have to present work, it has to be produced and shared with other people, I'm not totally satisfied with what I want to say with that piece. So, I just thought this is a great opportunity for me to continue working on this piece and not just try another thing. So, just going back to your question, when I created this piece, I created it from one concept, which is the concept of having a landscape, where different things happen at the same time. I wanted to challenge the audience to either look at the whole picture as a whole, but also to look at the stage like a window. When you stick your head outside a window, you can see different events that might be related or not. Then the concept developed, and I found that it was impossible to do something completely different from one thing to the other, so there were similar things. I did a lot of different loops of movement that are happening in different parts of the stage, and people don't relate to one another in most of the piece. Now, I'm still working on the same piece, but I decided to start from scratch, meaning, I didn't start by bringing the piece back alive. I started from totally new images. I wanted to challenge myself to start from new images. How can I put them together with these loops that I have already done? So now I'm integrating these other images, and how can I play with that?

Clarinda: But the concept is continuing, basically?

Mariangela: Yeah. This little concept is there. It's very broad, just having this landscape, but then I feel like overall in my work, the way I work is that my concept starts developing from the process of working with the performers, and then having this great idea. Once I decide that I want to start working on a project, I can get inspired from having a tea, from watching a movie. Everything somehow, even on an unconscious level, there's a concept, or something that I want to say. I try not to conceptualize it, or I try not to find a true meaning, "Oh I want to say this." I believe that there's something that I want to say, and I just let it be.

Clarinda: That's what was interesting when I was observing. I felt like you were looking for a message, but it wasn't like you were going to say it. You were finding a way to communicate something, but it wasn't very specific, yet it was definite. Then you (Mariangela) were in a much more dream state. There's this dream logic, and it was interesting to see the contrast, and also how those things can end up with a similar results because there were very dream-like moments

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within yours (Christalyn) and very straightforward moments within yours (Mariangela). They overlap and then diverge.

Christalyn: But aren't we always in a cross between dreams and reality anyway? (Laughs.)

Clarinda: Yeah, but I think that's not always evident to people. I think it's interesting what you're saying about process. It's like you're letting in something subconscious, it seems.

Christalyn: Well, actually, a lot of the other projects that I've mentioned that I've worked on definitely evolved out of my dreams. They did evolve out of my unconscious.

Clarinda: Well, actually, that's my next question. How do these pieces relate to your previous work? That's what you're saying in some ways. It's all there in your subconscious, and it just depends how you access it.

Christalyn: How you access it. The process is just very different.

Clarinda: That's interesting that it's a similar source, but the process of getting there...

Christalyn: ...is very different. I think it's also just with experience, and I think if you really want to stay true to being creative that you really have to be able to tap into other things within yourself that you might not want to address. I don't think my work is necessarily always very emotional. I think it can create emotion in other people, but my goal is not to break the dancers down to a point that they're like, "Oh, I gotta leave here now." I say that, but then, the first day of rehearsal I had them read the subtext of the piece. There's no text, as of now, spoken in the work, but I have some subtext. It's just words that make people uncomfortable, words like "nigger, bitch, black, Condoleezza, Iraq," those kinds of words. I had the dancers read them. I didn't tell them what the words were. I just told them, "Can you just read this?" They were like, "Gasp!" The first word was "nigger," and the dancers I'm working with are white, so they were like, "Oh!" I was like, "Just say it. That's the point. I want you to see how it feels, what it provokes in you, and how you react." Then, I took that subtext, and I gave them a piece of material, and I was like, "Think about the word that made you feel really uncomfortable." It was amazing. In the first rehearsal I almost started crying. I'm not even going to lie. I was like, "We have to always read this before." I wasn't trying to get them to emote anything, but I wanted to come across this uncomfortable...

Clarinda: You wanted them to be in a state of being as they were doing it.

Christalyn: Yeah. That was my first rehearsal, and they were shell-shocked. They were like, "I can't believe you made us do that!" Since then, I felt like I had to readdress that, to get them back to that same place without... I don't like playing mind games with people. It's not about a mind game. It's a texture that I'm looking for.

Mariangela: It's a quality that they might express in the movement.

Christalyn: Yeah, it's something that I want to be clear in the movement, without... I don't want it to necessarily be about us saying those words. I don't want that. I want it to show up in the body, where people can understand it, really utilizing dance as a nonverbal form of communication.

Mariangela: There you go.

Christalyn: Because that's what it is.

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Clarinda: Right, right. That's what I feel. Well, you can answer the question about your previous work, and then I have another question.

Mariangela: I'm going to be brief with this. I guess this is something that the people that I work with... My performers, always say, "Oh my God, we're always a little bit lost during the whole thing. The process is so all over the place, but somehow at the end you put everything together." Now it's so funny because in other previous work, everybody gets so nervous, especially people that are working with me for the first time, and now the people that have been working with me for the last few years...

Clarinda: They're like, "Don't worry."

Mariangela: Yeah, totally relaxed - almost too relaxed. I need you to be nervous so that I can get nervous, so that I can get this piece done. The other similarity and challenge that I have and that I like to work with is that I don't use professional dancers. In my work right now, I have one actor, one web-designer/takes-ballet-classes-for-fun.

Clarinda: Oh, I know who that is.

Mariangela: Yeah. I have one other computer woman, who wasn't there the day that you went, but she's very tall, thin and amazing-looking, and she also takes Cunningham classes just for fun. My work doesn't have any of that kind of movement, or if it ever has that kind of movement it's not for aesthetic purposes.

Clarinda: Right, it's as a statement of some kind.

Mariangela: Exactly. I have Monica, who is a video artist. Kioka is the one person who is actually a performer, though not a dancer. It is challenging sometimes for me because as a dancer, I do have an exercise and I expect a certain reaction that to me is very... I know how to react because I know my body in a different way. With them it's different, but it's also very inspiring. It teaches me to see the futility of movement, the futility of life, the futility of this little everyday...

Clarinda: Because we've refined it so much...

Mariangela: Yeah, and it has to be really quite simple. That has been in my work since I decided to create work. Choreographing work, what really inspired me was to work with non-dancers. So far, I've been working with just one or two dancers here and there.

Clarinda: Just to mix it up.

Mariangela: Yeah, just to mix it up a little bit.

Clarinda: Well, actually, then you've just kind of answered the next question I have, but you can say more later, but I noticed that both of you want to use the kind of unique characteristics of your performers. What draws you to this and how do you deal with that participation? Also I want to talk about ethnicity because I know that you're (Christalyn) directly addressing it. I don't know what your (Mariangela) relationship to it is. Is there a relationship to the ethnic makeup of the company? I've always wanted to ask that in general to most people because I think it's loaded in one way or another, and I know that you (Christalyn) were talking a little bit about it already, but what draws you to do that and how do you then approach that collaboration?

Christalyn: The dancers that I'm working with... Kelly Bartnik I've been working with for the past 5 years, and actually Alicia White and Rachel, I've worked with for a while. I met them as students

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at James Madison University. I went to set a piece and then Kelly moved to New York, called me, and I was like, "Do you want to dance with me?" Then I brought Rachel and Alicia White on later. Alicia Ramos and I worked together on a different project with Niles Ford. There was another dancer who I used to work with pretty consistently who wasn't available, so I called Alicia Ramos because I just think she's just an amazing little dancer. She's small, but she's a little powerhouse.

Clarinda: She's our size. (Laughs.)

Christalyn: She's a powerhouse. I also like to work with dancers who can pick up material and be able to bring themselves to it. I don't collaborate in the sense of, "Ok, you go and show me what your interpretation of doing a flat-back..." I'm just making up stuff, but you know what I mean? I'm actually like, "We're going to flat-back on 4, layout on 3, pas de bourree, pas de bourree, jazz hands."

Clarinda: Nothing you do actually looks like that. Let's just put that in the record.

Christalyn: Nothing looks like that.

Clarinda: I've never seen jazz hands, except in irony.

Christalyn: Exactly. So, in that sense, I give them the material of what I'd like them to interpret, to be who they are doing it. You don't have to look like Christalyn doing it. You have to look like you doing it. I think that brings another level and a unique quality to my movement vocabulary because there's something about it that's synchronized, and there's something about it that's very unique and individual. I really like to do that. People are often like, "They dance like you." And I'm like, "But that's not my intention. My intention is to give you movement, and how you live in it..."

Clarinda: Seeing it in process, this particular one, I felt like they both looked like you and didn't. They really didn't look like you.

Christalyn: I know. That's what I like.

Clarinda: It was great. They looked so different from each other.

Christalyn: Yeah, but you see the line.

Clarinda: Right, they're connected because...

Christalyn: It's really interesting. Did I answer the question?

Clarinda: That answers the question.

Christalyn: I'm done then.

Mariangela: So, you mean ethnicity in terms of...?

Christalyn: Oh, yeah, we didn't talk about ethnicity. My own personal choice is to use different types of women. This is the first time for me that the majority of the cast is white. All the women are white except myself. This is the first time that's ever happened. I like to keep it balanced and mixed, just because the world we live in is balanced and mixed. I think right now with the work being in such a beginning process and in-progress... Eventually I hope to have a more diverse

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cast because I think it's important. If we're going to talk about certain issues, it can't just be... I want to get out of the black and white thing.

Clarinda: Yeah, it's more interesting than that.

Christalyn: It's more interesting, and eventually it will have a better impact, or a different impact because people go right away to the black and white thing.

Clarinda: In the U.S., definitely, yes.

Christalyn: Actually, I think more in the world than we think.

Clarinda: Well, these days... London, Paris...

Christalyn: I think it's important to have a diverse cast, when possible. When they are available and they will take your two dollars for train fare, and your twenty dollars for a show. Shoot.

Clarinda: That's a whole other discussion.

Mariangela: Well, I'm going to just continue with the ethnicity part of the question.

Clarinda: You kind of answered the other part of the question.

Mariangela: Yeah, exactly. I guess because for me, it's never been an issue to worry about or talk about. I don't know if it has to do with where I'm coming from and the fact that I'm from Venezuela. I'm Latin American, but I never had such an idiosyncrasy. I never felt 100% identified with one culture or the other, and I moved to the States when I was 18 years old. In my country everybody is pretty mixed. There are people with blue eyes and light skin and dark, but I don't think there is this problem. The problem is more about classes than about the color of your skin, I think. In fact we have the words "negrito" and "negrita." Here, you cannot say "black." It's not politically correct, but over there it's a cute way, or a nice way to say hi to someone you know that has dark skin. For me, it's never been an issue, but somehow it's just the people that I run into and the people that happen to want to work with me. I try to have them mixed...

Clarinda: Mixed in every way. Well, that's interesting because yours is diverse in a different way.

Mariangela: It's diverse, but on the other hand, I try to have different kinds of people, not according to their skin color, but more about the personality that they present on stage that has to do with the way they look somehow. It is sort of the stereotypical thing: someone's tall. I do have different people, different looks, and they somehow move differently also. I like that.

Clarinda: It's certainly a very diverse cast you have now. They're like a subway car actually.

Mariangela: Exactly. The other pieces I've had casts of 15 people, of 18 people.

Christalyn: Wow.

Mariangela: This time it's seven people, and it's not that big.

Christalyn: I like working with smaller casts. Well, I shouldn't say that because I haven't worked with a large group of people in a while, but I like working with six to seven dancers because I think you can A.) Get a real schedule for rehearsal and B.) I think right now with the type of work

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that I'm doing, it's just aesthetically more pleasing to the eye, for me. I feel like it's nice because you can really see things in a different way.

Clarinda: There's an intimacy, but also a pattern-making possibility. That's interesting. There's so much flow; this is good. The next question I have is about structure.

Christalyn: I do not believe in structure. Just kidding.

Clarinda: Yeah, right! (Laughs.) What I'm thinking about specifically is the use of unison because I notice you both use unison, but it seems very intentional, rather than, "Oh well, I'm making a dance, I better do something in unison." There seems to be intention to it. So, you can talk about any way that you make structure, but maybe start with that as a focus. How you think about unison? How does that go with what you're trying to do in the work?

Christalyn: Wow, I've never really thought about that actually.

Clarinda: Oh really? It seems so intentional.

Christalyn: There are definitely moments that I want to be unified, but it's more... Hmm. I have to think about that.

Clarinda: Think about it.

Mariangela: I have to say for me, when I started I became really fascinated with creating thesis, or inspired. I've never worked for example as a soloist. It's something that I want to do in the future as a challenge because I feel like it's just a fear of facing myself and what I can and cannot do with me. So, I just take people and take inspiration from what I seen in these people. Structure-wise, I'm interested in an image that I bring to a group of people and how this group of people can interpret the idea. Some unison can come from that, which is mostly energetic. This piece doesn't have much of that yet. This is more gestural, and the unison is more dance-like, but it's more really upfront dance, like a video dance or something. That's the type of unison, but the other unison is energetic unison - either it's a frantic moment or a moment of searching one another. There's no movement pattern that I've taught, "Oh you have to do this arm and this thing down here." It's more about the energy that I create en masse. I face the structure when I have to finish the piece. I'm like, "Oh dammit."

Clarinda: So you have a lot of little objects.

Mariangela: Yeah, I have my little objects. The way I structure my pieces is almost like a film because I do things by scene, but it doesn't necessarily have to be a solo, a trio, a quartet... I don't picture things like that, but like moments. I always have an airport scene. I don't know why there's always an airport scene in my pieces.

Clarinda: Maybe you spend a lot of time flying.

Mariangela: Probably. This airport scene, it's more like I picture them as a scene, rather than... Sometimes the scene has a unison energy, and some of them are more about individual moments.

Clarinda: How do you string these scenes together? What's your logic?

Mariangela: It's the trust that somehow all these images...

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Clarinda: It's a feeling logic?

Mariangela: Yes. It's a feeling that somehow all these images belong to a world that I'm constructing unconsciously. What I find interesting is not actually the images that I preconceive, but the transition from one image to the other. That's the most challenging part. It's the part that right now I'm struggling the most with. I already have this piece preconceived, and I have these images that I'm trying to put in-between, and it's really hard to just cut and paste in this kind of work.

Clarinda: Yeah, I understand. How does it fit in the whole? Yeah.

Mariangela: Yeah, so you have to create another layer and something else.

Clarinda: This is very familiar to me, just to interject myself, the idea that you create these scenes. For me it's a rhythmic structure. I just have to feel the rhythm is correct.

Mariangela: Exactly.

Clarinda: Back to you Christalyn. You don't have to talk about unison if you don't want to. I just thought it was interesting because it did seem more intentional than it apparently was. I guess it was more intuitive, but talk to me if you've thought of anything since.

Christalyn: I haven't thought of anything. I was going through the whole piece. Marya Warshaw told me once that the structure of my work always ends up in a circle, or a circle is always present in my work. It's actually in this as well. That's the only thing I can think of that's pretty consistent as a structure for me. Unison phrase, I think, is both intuitive and intentional, but right now I can't think of the intention of it. For some reason, it's not playing in my head that strongly.

Clarinda: I think it came to my mind because there was a moment where you were like, "I want you all to be together but different." I thought, "Oh that makes sense. That's a good use of unison." I asked partly because I have something of a dislike for unison because I feel like it's thrown in there for no reason, and I didn't feel like that with you guys.

Christalyn: No, I definitely wouldn't throw unison in. I try not to throw anything in there just to fill up space. I think it was interesting after you came to rehearsal, and my friend was there as well...

Clarinda: Helga.

Christalyn: Helga. When she said that she could see things longer, I realized that I had way too much material already. I was like, "Whoa, I need to look at this again if you feel like you could see things longer then that means I have thrown too much in the mix instead of a single..."

Clarinda: That's coming back to what you were talking about at the very beginning - that the idea of "work-in-progress," just having someone view, even if they don't say anything. You changed something before anybody said anything, but just having us there watching changed it. You were both talking about the fact of "work-in-progress." This is something to bring out. This is a valuable and absolutely essential thing for people making performance work, to have the sense of the reaction of the audience before the whole thing is cut and dried out there.

Christalyn: Yeah, and that's one thing I love about work-in-progress showings. You're given an opportunity to play out, get feedback and not have the stress of having to have this amazing final presentation. You still want it to be good. It's not an excuse not to show good work, but it is definitely an opportunity to play out in front of people.

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Mariangela: Get feedback.

Christalyn: It would be nice if more places did works-in-progress to lead you to the premiere date as part of being presented because I think it's just a good way for the presenter to really get to know the artist and get to be part of the process. Marya does that at BAX, if you are an artist in residence, but a lot of places don't do that, and I think it's so valuable to do that. You build a relationship in a different way with a presenter, which I think is just more valuable.

Clarinda: And maybe with an audience as well.

Christalyn: With an audience as well.

Clarinda: They can become more involved in the process of, "What is this work?"

Christalyn: Audience members love to give you feedback.

Clarinda: Unless they don't say anything at all, but when they're part of the problem-solving process, then they like it. After complete shows, they're like, "What?"

Christalyn: Then they feel bad. "Should I say something? Is it too late for me to say something?"

Clarinda: But when it's in process they're like, "What if you did this? What if you did that?" Sometimes it's really useful and totally like you never would have thought of that.

Christalyn: What she (Clarinda) was talking about was that when she came to see my rehearsal, I had a totally different beginning than when she left because I was like, "I don't like that section. Something about it is bothering me. It used to be at the beginning. Let's try it at the beginning."

Clarinda: And all I did was go (makes a gesture) like that.

Christalyn: And to me it completely changed the piece that quickly. I think works-in-progress showings are valuable.

Clarinda: Or just having people sit down in front of the dancers for ten minutes.

Christalyn: For ten minutes and make them go back and forth for 30 minutes, for a 5-minute dance.

Clarinda: I didn't think of the travel time.

(Tape stops. Restarts.)

Clarinda: Hi, we're back. We're in Christalyn's car. The next thing I wanted to talk about was the relationship to sound. How you approach a soundscape? What does it mean to you? How do you work with it? It doesn't have to be hugely detailed, but what does it mean? Does it have meaning to you? Is it important, or do you somehow... whatever comes to mind.

Christalyn: Music is very important. The one thing I can't stand is bad music to a show. You see, "Wow the dance was beautiful, but the music was horrible." I've been lucky. I've been collaborating with Todd Richmond from Topaz Arts for the past 5 years, maybe longer. Basically I invite him to rehearsal, or I take him selected pieces of music that I think would be interesting and he's like, "Ok, let's do this." Or, for the *Dreamscape* piece he was like, "What about this bowl

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of water?" It's a real nice, easy collaboration to work with him, and I love a collage of sounds and not just a whole piece of something. I'm really trying to figure out a way to choreograph something to like a Beethoven piece, but it always ends up getting put out of the piece, the final music. I don't know what that's about.

Clarinda: Interesting.

Christalyn: I'm inspired when I hear it. I'm like, "Oh that's great," and then I'm like, "Cut it out."

Clarinda: The European canon - too monolithic. (Laughs.)

Christalyn: I love sound. I love working with a collage, and I try to make it supportive to what the work is and not make it overpower. Music can also overpower what is happening.

Clarinda: When you say "good music," what does that mean to you? What does it mean to have a certain sound? What is the sound do that makes something supportive for you?

Christalyn: Something supportive that's not distracting to what you're looking at.

Clarinda: So it creates an atmosphere that supports that particular kind of...

Christalyn: Particular work or movement, the content. I guess that's hard to explain: bad music. Some music is just not appropriate. I shouldn't say that either. In my opinion, it's not appropriate for certain dance pieces. It's just like, "What?" If it's there as a campy theme, or it's intentional, it has to be really clear because then it's...

Clarinda: It's a powerful force and it sounds like you're aware that it's a powerful force, and you want to utilize that.

Christalyn: Music is very powerful. It can really ruin things. If you go to people's websites and the music is like "DANG DANG DANG!" You're like, "Ahhh! Turn it off!" It's the same thing as watching it.

Clarinda: Well, you're a musician, so I think you're more sensitive than a lot people.

Christalyn: Oh, you consider me a musician? Oh, thank you.

Clarinda: So you (Mariangela), I don't know if you're a musician or not.

Mariangela: I'm not a musician, but I've always been working with a collaborator also. The past two pieces that I've done, (three with another one, but not the one that I'm thinking of). I've been working with a friend of mine, Ernesto Klar, who is a sound designer, a composer. He actually did the soundscape of this last piece, but because of his extremely busy schedule, he is not going to be able to keep playing with what I have so far. The music was played live. So, talking about music collage, what I like about working with Ernesto, is that while I work with images he... We work together, I tell him the images, and he interprets those images into sounds, into different kinds of soundscapes. Then, he plays those things live with his computer, those different soundscapes, and those soundscapes can have a piece of music. For example this last piece, I feel so bad that I don't remember the name of the composer, but it's a composer of the Hitchcock themes, and he sort of decomposed this already done piece and mixed it with voices from French films and other films and other sounds from other people. We have different, as you say, sound collage, and they come in and out, and I take a lot of cues from the music. I tell him that I need a certain sound there to know what's going on, but yes, definitely I agree with you too. The music

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is a quite important element. It's so important that I'd rather sometimes not have any, if I'm not sure yet. On the other hand, I'm very drawn into music in terms of songs, songs that I relate to. I get really inspired by these songs, and sometimes they are in my pieces intentionally, but sometimes they are just a source of inspiration. For example, I have this section where it's very pop-like, dance-like. It would be too much to have music that would drown the movement, so I will probably not use the music, even though it inspired me to do that, and even though I love it. I don't have to show the whole thing.

Clarinda: Music is almost one more image for you.

Mariangela: Exactly.

Clarinda: I think we all respond to it. It's so prevalent in our environment. I think in terms of sound, rather than music, but music itself, organized sound is all over, it always playing somewhere, so I think we can't help but respond to it as material. Then it doesn't always have to be there.

Christalyn: Actually, in this particular piece, I'm interested in taking the music in and out more. I feel like there are moments that should have no music, which is an interesting. Like I said, I'm in a new process.

Clarinda: Why do you think this is happening?

Christalyn: The new process?

Clarinda: Well that and also your relationship to the sound. Yeah, the whole thing. Why the whole new process, but what is the place of silence in that then?

Christalyn: I think the place of silence in life anyway is that we all need to be able to listen to what's happening, not always like, "Blah, blah, blah, blah!" Really just stop and listen. I think that's one thing as a choreographer that I really feel myself evolving more, and I think that's why a lot of my processes change. I'm really trying to listen and support that and figure out ways to support that transition. I don't know if I want to be performing all the time anymore. I love it. I have been very successful and have worked continuously, but now I'm like, "Pass the torch." I don't want to be 50 and be like, "I'm pissed." I want to have a nice transition into what I'm creating. Really listen. Something about listening that comes to mind.

Clarinda: That's how your process changes.

Christalyn: I think that's allowing my process to change, and my attitude, everything.

Clarinda: We've reached the end of my questions, so is there anything that either of you want to say about the work that hasn't come up yet, and is there anything that happened here that you want to comment on?

Mariangela: Well, just following what you were saying about being a choreographer and a performer, and that transition... The process that I'm going through, and that I think I'm going through is more a struggle, a big question: What does it mean to be a dancer? What is it to be a dancer for me? I think I've asked that question a long time ago and that's how my training changed and my focus changed and what I do changed. As a statement for my last pieces, I've been giving myself a task in the pieces where I perform. I do something very specific, but I try not to see what I've done or what I have directed. It's some kind of a statement-struggle. In the last piece for example, *Wonders of Progress*, through the entire piece I have an elegant dress on, like

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a sequined dress with high heels, and a handkerchief on my head, and I'm just sweeping the floor through the entire piece. That's all I do. Meantime, there's a piece happening, but I never know how they did it.

Clarinda: Oh, I see. So, it's almost like you're completely involved in a task that doesn't allow you to be directorial.

Mariangela: Doesn't allow me to be witnessing what's happening. So I run into people, and people run into me because I never practice my part, because I have to direct the piece. So, it's always part of the piece that someone falls, or that I'm sweeping right when there's something important about to happen right there, and I am there, and it's like, "Oh, damn." This piece that I'm doing now, I'm just turning like Wonder Woman in a way, for almost the entire piece, until I just can't do it. Usually I run into people.

Clarinda: You get dizzy.

Mariangela: I get dizzy, but it's this feeling. I'm going through the transition that you're talking about: performance to choreographer, where I don't even know whether to call myself a choreographer or a performing artist. Maybe my work has to do with movement, but my intention is not really to make dance pieces. That's something that's more and more clear to me. It's not making dance pieces, but performance.

Clarinda: I have a constant thought about "What is dance at this point in history?" In our Euro-American history, what is dance? I am certainly not dance, but I can think of no place else that I fit.

Mariangela: Exactly.

Clarinda: I think all of us run the gamut where somebody could object to it and say, "That's not dance." I mean *The \$HO\$ Show*...

Christalyn: That's not dance.

Clarinda: But it is. It's only dance. That's all it could be. I think it's more like, we're trying to find definitions for ourselves, but maybe it's the definition of the other thing that has to change.

Mariangela: It's difficult. When people ask, "What do you do?" Of course, I am a dancer. I am a choreographer. So, people always ask you these things that are totally related to dance. Broadway is the first thing that they say or ballet.

Christalyn: "Why don't you do Broadway?" Do you think I've never auditioned for it? Come on. Why aren't they doing me? Why isn't Broadway doing me? (Laughs.)

Clarinda: That's what I want to know. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

Christalyn: Mariangela made a comment when we were talking about race and ethnicity, that it's different in Venezuela. It's interesting. I think that there's definitely much more diversity in this country now, and it's definitely more of a melting pot. People have merged together. There's no real one race anymore, but we still have a long way to go with race as an issue. I'm more aware of it in this country because I live here, but I think it exists everywhere, still, but in a different way. American racism is very specific.

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Clarinda: Well, it's very specific and actually, parts of it are constantly shifting, and parts of it are very stable.

Christalyn: We need to break up the stable part.

Clarinda: That's something that you're constantly thinking about because it's something that's always projected upon you.

Christalyn: It's projected upon me because I'm a black choreographer, a black woman making dance, performing. That becomes an issue automatically. Not necessarily an issue, but...

Clarinda: It's noticeable.

Mariangela: My issue becomes, because I'm a Venezuelan choreographer, and I cannot apply for many grants, so my issue in where I come from and how that in a way limits me is in that part of it, that I'm not American.

Clarinda: That you're an immigrant, which is a different kind of relationship, going back to racism.

Christalyn: Back to race.

Mariangela: It's something that I'm aware of, and that I worry about as a person, but as an artist it's not necessarily something that I address. It's interesting that I was invited last year to a talk at the Laban Institute, for me to talk about dance and politics as a choreographer. I said yes, but I was wondering, "Why did they invite me?" I guess it's because I create dances with a big group of people, and what I'm interested in is not the race, but about how this society makes everybody look the same, or wants us to all think the same way, no matter what race or form you are. They force you to look one way.

Christalyn: Banana Republic. J. Crew.

Mariangela: Behave one way.

Christalyn: Target. K-Mart.

Clarinda: We could go on, but capitalism and racism are so intertwined.

Christalyn: They are so intertwined.

Clarinda: Intertwined evils.

Christalyn: When New York opened K-Mart, I'm from the South so I was like, "Ooh good!" and then I was like "Oh, K-Mart, in New York?" Then came the Krispy Kremes, and I was like, "Oh crap." Barnes and Noble, I was like, "I'm going to have to leave New York."

Clarinda: Because everything's the same.

Christalyn: Anytime I go outside of New York, I'm like, "I'm in Anywhere, U.S.A.," and now I'm like, "Wow, New York, is Anywhere, U.S.A."

Clarinda: The last bastion of diversity is falling.

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Christalyn: It's been almost 20 years since I moved here. It will be 19 years in September, yeah 18 years now. I've seen this city change, and I can't imagine people who grew up here. They must be just mortified.

Clarinda: We are.

Mariangela: Oh, you're a New Yorker?

Clarinda: I am a New Yorker.

Mariangela: Wow.

Christalyn: Just for me in these 18 years... 42nd Street... When that changed I was like "Ooh!" But then it was like, every corner: Starbucks, Barnes and Noble. There used to be so many cute little boutiques and little off-the-wall places that are just gone. It's crazy.

Clarinda: We're under the thumb of global capitalism. We have to stop talking because people are going to be like, "What are they talking about?"

Christalyn: We went off on a tangent.