

Chris Yon, Justin Jones, Jeff Larson, Zach Steel
with Jeanine Durning

Jeanine Durning: So, I'm doing this interview w/ Chris Yon, Jeff Larson and Zach Steel, (and Zach's not here yet) for their performance at La Mama in April called *Pear Cowboy Planet*. I'm going to start with some really obvious questions, but I'm going to start with the least obvious question, I guess, from the outside perspective, but probably not from the inside perspective, and that is: Are you using any of the process of Exquisite Corpse for this piece?

Chris Yon: We did use that process a lot in coming up with the material for the cowboy section, but not so much in the assembly of all of these parts, if that makes any sense.

JD: Yeah, I think that makes sense. Can you just explain and define what Exquisite Corpse is, just a really basic definition of it?

CY: Right. So Exquisite Corpse is a writing and drawing technique. In writing, you would write a sentence and then you would fold the paper over and just write like one word or two words, and the next person would continue from that and continue writing the sentence or a new sentence, and then fold it so that each person is collaborating blindly, and then by the end, when you unfold it, you have this story that's written. So in drawing, the original Exquisite Corpse is that you fold the paper in three parts, and one person would draw the head and the next person, without seeing the head, would draw the torso, and the next person, without seeing either, would draw the legs. So, obviously, it can be all kinds of drawings that are made that way. So we try to do that with making dance, in terms of collaborating blindly. How that manifests itself for us is that we were working in basically two pairs that hadn't really worked a lot together before: Justin and myself, and Jeff and Zach. And initially Justin and I would take turns, or I'd direct Jeff and Zach, and then I'd leave them in a pose and leave the room, and Justin would come in and then direct them some more and then leave them in pose, and then he would leave and I would come back in, and that was the equivalent of folding over the paper. Then we started to mix the pairs more, and do that more. It was mainly a way of generating material.

Jeff Larson: Yeah, that's true. That's the important aspect, because it really is a generative tool rather than a final form of any kind. Because from that point we would then usually switch pairs, or often what we would do is switch the pairing so that Justin and I would be doing material that Chris and Justin had developed on Zach and I. And we would pair up and rework that material on our own. And then you guys would rework material from me and Zach. Then we would show that, or maybe we'd tweak that a little bit and then try to blend that together, and then it just kind of spun off into a more free-flowing collaborative development.

CY: Yeah, and into this thing where there was always a rotating director so it became a very democratic process. So there was nothing that was considered sacred, and no one had an idea that they were being trampled on because everyone could just destroy what the person before them had made. Not destroy but...

JL: Destroy.

JD: Or appropriate it.

CY: Right, yeah.

JD: Do you think that it was more of a way of getting used to each individual's vocabulary and the way that they were working in a physical way?

JL: That's actually the greatest thing about the blind working, is that instead of getting a sense of how Zach creates material on other people—which especially for Zach because he hadn't worked with us before, and he was coming from a pretty much purely theatrical background—instead of seeing what he was doing and letting that immediately influence what we did, everybody still had this opportunity to sort of create their own kind of thing. And then the exciting thing is how those different aesthetics then... Well, first of all how they stand in contrast to one another, and then the awesome thing was how they blend. And I think that that's ultimately what, to us, is so exciting about the piece as a whole, is that it still contains all of those stark contrasts and then these amazing moments where everything sort of blends together in a way that I don't think we could have set out to create if we had said, "ok, well, we have all these different ways of working, and how do we combine them?" So it was really purely intuitive without it being intuition.

CY: Really immediate. The other aspect of that... So, we set these very severe time limits. We say, "Ok, so you have two minutes to create something, and then the next person comes in two minutes." So it's not a belabored process of trying to figure anything out. You just have to come up with stuff, and then everything constantly evolves to this point where there's not a single auteur that's... It doesn't look like it's made by just one person, even though it kind of does look that way.

JD: So why do you feel that the immediacy is so important in the process?

CY: A lot of that is just a very practical thing because you don't have a lot of time, or we don't generally have a lot of time to rehearse. So it's a quick way that in half an hour, we can come up with nearly 15 minutes of material. And then we just have that much to work with and can direct. Then the other aspect of it is not the immediacy, it's that it's just coming off the top of your head so it's just...

JL: I think that what it is, is that in the immediacy you stumble upon so many more ideas that are very, very, very far from... Even after you've generated a certain amount of material, the ideas that you come up with as we worked in that process were so far from what we were working on already that it keeps the process very elastic. I think that

especially in terms of having four sort-of-equal collaborators that is essential because it keeps a sense of balance, and it keeps us all on our toes. It keeps us all very much engaged in the work that we're developing. So I think that's the most important part of it. The immediacy is important for us as collaborators more than anything else. I mean it's good for the piece but it's really good for us because if we weren't able to get in a room together and actually stand being around one another for periods of time it would have been...

CY: It allows us that immediacy of keeping a task there. It avoids any interpersonal problems that would... It's almost like we do it so there is no personal interference. That it's just really about making things, rather than about dealing with... It doesn't feel like we're using these ideas because there's never...

JD: Just to say that the other, the fourth collaborator, is Justin Jones, who is in Minneapolis right now. And Zach Steel is on his way. So, what are the other ways that the collaboration sort of manifests itself, other than the use of this process of Exquisite Corpse?

CY: You mean what other...

JD: Well, when does Chris as director or Jeff as director come into the forefront? And when do the rest of the collaborators go into the background?

JL: I think that that's hard to say. It always feels very fluid and I think that the tendency is just simply that someone will step to the foreground in terms of... Well, ok, in terms of once we start taking one bit of information and putting it together with three other bits of information, it usually will be the one person... that just sort of happenstance of... oh, ok, well this is...

CY: One person generally just tends to take the lead.

JL: Yeah, although it was rarely a decision. I mean we would always be open to sort of like "Ok, I'm going to sit out and work with the three of you on these seven bits of choreography or improvisation that we're working on."

CY: And the four of us just in our generally mischievous nature... When there's two of us and the other two aren't around, we just are very conspiratorial and then we'd just come in and say here's what we're doing today. We came up with this great idea and you weren't here so...

JL: Yeah.

JD: Is everybody usually up for that task, or is there any tension involved in that decision-making?

JL: Very, very little. I would say ,generally. In fact, I think that’s the fun of it, part of the play of making a performance for us. I think that’s why it remains...

CY: In that sense we’ve been very lucky that no one ever gets offended by that. But it’s weird, everyone always feels comfortable to come in and do whatever they want. Zach came in one day, and he and I had rehearsal by ourselves and he goes, “Chris I’ve been working on this silly thing.” So he got a chair and started acting like he was falling asleep, and sort of flailing himself out of the chair and it became this whole theme of the show, sort of like sleepovers.

JD: So that brings me to just a kind of general, basic question and that is, how does the content sort of reveal itself within the process? I mean, how do you allow it to reveal itself?

JL: Well, I guess we could speak to it very specifically because I feel that it would manifest itself differently in a different process. But in terms of this specific process, I feel like we landed on this little prince. We did a lot of improvisations too that were outside of the room of Exquisite Corpse, where just someone would have an idea, and Zach and I would be directing, and we would sort of set up a scenario for Chris and Justin, and work with them. And we would give them a set of tasks that they would... It was more like theatrical improvisation, where they would just be going through a scene and having it hit these certain points and then we would take movement that they did, or dialogue or whatever, and we would just say: “Ok, we recognize what was noteworthy in that.” And try to tweak it or play around with it and then move on. It’s hard to trace all of those, like the mom character and the cowboy character.

JD: Do you get married to themes that come up, or do you allow them to sort of leave the process organically? Or, how do you bring in disparate elements and how do you feel that figures in to the overall content of the work? Or, does that matter to you in the process?

CY: Everything’s open in the process. For us that’s the most fun thing: taking disparate elements and finding the connection. For a long time it was just like, you know, even just having a title like *Cowboy Loves His Mom*. And then the cowboy’s an ambiguous thing. He doesn’t ride horses. Basically there’s nothing that really makes him a cowboy, except that he likes cowboys. And the mom is just a broad mom figure. And then, as other things came in there, we started making sections and these characters started to deepen.

JL: I feel like a lot of the narrative elements sort of tumbled upon us all at once and it was pretty easy to kind of integrate any material that we had developed up to that point. Or, I guess, pick and choose. But also, almost anything is in because there are really definite scenes that are narrative, and then the pieces that are less narrative – the sections of the piece would we have an understanding of their function in terms of setting up the narrative scenes or hub coming right after a narrative scene. It just gives us a sense of – ok well now we need to do this in terms of telling more of a physical story about these characters.

JD: Is it because both you and Zach come from mainly a theater background so there is a real agenda in developing a theatrical narrative in the work? I mean, is the framework of this piece structured around narrative?

JL: I think all of us have a strong sense of narrative and it's different for everybody. Zach really understands it sort of intuitively as a performer, as an actor, and I think that I understand that as a sort of director and shaper, as does Chris.

CY: And that's sort of the spectrum. For me, it's like really just concept-based or how to enter these ideas or represent these ideas of a narrative. And Jeff is very good at tying these elements together in terms of how they make sense. And Zach is ultimately amazing at embodying them or representing them through this character, so it all comes together.

JL: There are all these different aspects of what we have to offer. And Justin is really the most abstract, really thinks about things in terms of rhythms and colors and sound. He goes just from completely like out-there shapes and just, you know, scrawling and scraping, gets to "what is this saying?"

JD: Was that part of the reason that you guys decided to make it a real clear collaboration? I mean, because in a sense all processes are collaborative. Does the aspect that you're naming it a collaboration change the nature of it for you?

JL: It did for me because the three of us—Justin, Chris and I—had worked on... I had come into a project that was developing two other works that they had done together. Then, the three of us kind of collaborated on another duet for the two of them that I just directed basically, which then became an evening of work of these three duets, which is sort of the father for the beginning of *Pear Cowboy Planet*.

CY: To define it as an actual collaboration is important because in those early processes that Jeff was helping us on it was like, "What is your role?" We don't understand. You're like our director, but at the rehearsals you build a lot of material with us. And then you leave, and then we destroy it all, and you come back and are like "What the hell happened?" So we finally convinced you to perform also. And that just changed everything. Where you had more at stake and all of us were able to really... It wasn't just me and Justin against you. It was like the three of us. And then, at times, you and I against Justin. That's off the record.

JD: Somebody has to be against somebody.

[Zach Steel arrives]

JD: We were just talking about the nature of collaboration in the context of this work. Do you have any thoughts about that?

Zach Steel: I find it's hard to collaborate when you're coming into a project with one person's particular vision for everyone to focus on. It's hard for the other collaborators to measure what amount of participation is requested from them, and when they're fringing upon someone else's sacred ideas, and when not. But in a situation like with these folks, we didn't really have that much before we started working with each other. It was created with all four of us together during the process, so it was very, very natural and very easy in that way.

JD: I've brought up another question earlier about the fact that you and Jeff come from theater backgrounds. Do you, from your perspective, feel like this is a theater piece or a dance piece? And/or is it not definable in those terms? And/or is that important to define in those terms?

ZS: I think someone who is a theater person, you know, the normal theater person who came to see this show...

JD: And what is that?

ZS: You know a drama person, a person who went to drama school—an actor or director or playwright who came to see this show—would say that this is a dance piece, because there's so much dance in it. I'm not sure, but maybe a dance person who came to see the show would think the opposite. I think of it as a dance piece as well, because I'm doing so much dancing in this. What I focus on mainly during the piece is my dancing.

JD: So you don't focus on character at all?

ZS: No, not really.

LAUGHTER

JL: To refute everything we've been talking about.

ZS: I knew I would come in and do that.

JD: Do you think about character?

JL: No. It's fun because I think what Zach is saying is totally true. Although we were talking about how Zach has a really strong sense of character and he's this really venerable presence as a performer and an actor, and I have more directorial theater background too... But maybe we were talking about this, that the amazing thing about performing together in this show, especially the one scene in particular where we're improvising with each other, is that I feel less that I'm playing a role, and more that Zach and I are improvising a scene that we've improvised together many times before. The interesting thing is not the characters so much as what is alive in our interaction as we're doing it.

The characters are very present but they're not sacred. Again, it's this exciting thing of the immediacy. [It] lets you discover elements that are much more distant from your character than maybe you would discover if you were concerned about...

ZS: Staying true to the character.

JL: That's what I was going to say.

JD: What about you?

CY: Do I care how it's defined?

JD: Well, yeah, that was the initial question.

CY: I think that that's not necessarily important. I would just say it's, like, "performance."

JL: How do you feel about the acting?

CY: The acting aspect?

JD: Do you think about character?

CY: I think about keeping a straight face; it's hard. I think about anything besides what's going on onstage when these two guys are (making quotations with my fingers) "acting" or "keeping their interactions alive." (It's all alive; it's all in quotes.)

JL: Making single quotes with my index fingers; I can't wait to read this.

JD: So, something that I wanted to ask that's not quite fully formulated in my mind is a sense of what I've seen a lot in your work, Chris, because I've seen a lot of your work, but I've also seen in the cowboy piece, because I only saw that section. It's this sense of multiplicity of events going on. That if you were able to see the thing over a period of time, like a long period of time, it would seem like it was developed and had an organic process. But because of theatrical time there's this way in which the work is constructed where you squish all of these events and stack them really close together. And because you're seeing it in real time, I think that from the audience perspective, you want to see it as a logical progression, and it doesn't manifest itself that way. So I think that's where a lot of the humor in the work is, because things seem logically illogical or illogically logical—whatever combination of that is best for this question. And I just wanted to talk about that aspect of the work: the sense of theatrical time and real time, and the concept of logic in the work. I guess that's a lot, but you can just address whatever.

JL: This is maybe a slightly stilted way of talking about it, but I feel that Chris and I last year, which is well after we started working on this material, sort of stumbled, in doing some research for other things, sort of stumbled across...

CY: the idea of logical depth.

JL: Yeah, this idea of logical depth, which essentially is sort of like taking a core sample of the earth, say, and then instead of looking at it like this, like you're talking about it in geological time or real time. You know, and turning it and looking down at it, or turning it on its side and looking through all the layers. And then sort of maybe poking something really sharp and small into it, so that you can actually really see down to this really far away layer. And then like brushing away part of that, but each time that you do that, each time that you take that same core sample and look at it again, you are showing different aspects of all those layers, so you're now looking at it horizontally. So your head's not going from left to right but you're looking back, deep.

CY: I've been explaining this a lot. My image about the core thing is that you have a clothesline to your forehead, and it goes off and transparencies are hooked to it so that you're seeing through everything. All the different layers at different times come to the foreground. Everything really is existing simultaneously; it's just how you choose to look at it. If our show is a painting, we're just showing you one way that your eye might follow that painting.

JD: **Do you feel that that's the role of the director to... I mean that is the role of the director. But do you also feel that it's the role of the audience to participate in that way?**

CY: We hope to give as much information as possible at the same time so they can make those connections. I don't know if it's necessarily clear on a single viewing that there's all these connections and that everything's really... Really the show could be like ten seconds long, because we're just doing the same things over and over again, but you're seeing it from a different angle or with a different focus.

JL: I feel like it actually has a lot to do with the performance, and it doesn't rest so much on the audiences, this whole idea of looking through so many things all at once. To me what that means is that in a moment where Zach and I have an interaction, and Zach says something and I respond to it, and the trick of that is that I may have responded to him the same way like 80 times before. But then, in the next moment, his response back to me might refer back to something that we said a long, long time ago, and to us that means something. So that brings us into a whole different level of performance, and then... I don't know.

CY: Everything's endowed with a history of what came before. Just in the way that you can look at a jacket from a vintage store, and you see the jacket and all you see is the jacket, but also, in that jacket is that it was just sold from someone. Somebody was getting rid of their grandfather's clothes, and when that grandfather wore that the day that

Kennedy was shot, and all that history is there even though it's not explained. So, that when we present something that seems illogical, it has a logic or a history. The thing has been through so much that we don't need to justify it. It's in the world, and so it should be taken for granted.

JD: On a performer level, it seems like from what you were saying, Jeff, that there's something that brings the performer more into the present with having all this historical background, so it's not just trying to execute something but that it's...

JL: It's living.

JD: I think that's a really key element in performance.

JL: Yeah, I do too. And I think it's something that people often. I think it's the main struggle. I don't know as much dance. I haven't danced for very long. But I certainly know that the actor is constantly frustrated with the thought of trying to bring myself freshly to a new performance, but also to fulfill this sort of obligation to be a good performer, and to the text, and to our particular production. There's a lot on your shoulders, and so I feel like a lot of energy is put into satisfying those expectations, and I think the exciting thing about—and this is part of what you're saying—this is the goal no matter what you set out to do. But what happened for us in a wonderful way is that we've stumbled upon an equation that allows us to do that, to sort of live the moments freshly and pretty freely. I mean, I rarely feel constrained within this performance.

ZS: It also allows you, when you're performing, to forget. To not worry about your relationship with the audience so much. Or like how the audience is perceiving you in the moment. And just focus on the game that's being played on stage, that we have set up, and that I've set up with my fellow players. And, you know, playing the rules of playing by the rules or not, or breaking the rules of that game. And seeing how that affects the people on stage and it's all-consuming in that respect. And instead of thinking about us—what's different or not good about what I'm doing right now—what does the audience think about it.

JD: It seems like there's so many levels of engagement in the moment that there's not time to be concerned with that.

CY: We're very aware of when the audience does respond.

JL: You mean with sound?

CY: Right.

JD: Like groan-noises or laughter?

JL: Or crying, or just general sobbing.

JD: So what is the level of engagement in terms of this mischievous nature that you feel that's in your work? I mean, what kind of personal attachment do you have to that?

CY: The best part of the thing in terms of the rules of engagement, or this game, is that it's just constantly creating new things to have to deal with. And we're just making the game more fun.

JL: Zach is nodding.

ZS: Jeff has his hand on his forehead, cheek.

CY: What's... what is this?

LAUGHTER

JD: There's something just... mischievousness, and how...

JL: mischievousness.

CY: Oh right, MISchievous.

JD: Long vowel. When you put it that way -

CY: Now that you've pronounced it right.

JD: Is it really misCHIEvousness or MISchievous?

CY: Probably either one. You mean in terms of each other, or how we interact?

JD: I think it's also apparent in the product; it's apparent in the work itself. I mean, there's something about what Zach was saying, about "am I going to stay with the rules of the game in the moment or decide not to", and how that affects the performer, the other performers. And then that in turn affects the way that the audience is perceiving what's going on.

ZS: There's definitely some sort of, "I know what's going on"; there's only four people in this room who really know what's going on, who really know what's going on now, onstage, between us, and what we're all thinking. And there's something cool about that. It makes you feel cool.

LAUGHTER

ZS: That's something I've been struggling forever since high school, so yeah, I like it.

CY: There's a duplicity among us.

JL: But there's also moments where we, even without vocally agreeing on certain things, which we do a lot in rehearsal, sort of acknowledge certain aspect of the performance, or a thing we've chosen to do obviously in terms of the choreography. We do that a lot because none of the choreography is improvised, but in terms of the...

CY: None is improvised.

JL: In terms of the improvisation in the show, I think there's a lot. There's a wonderful balance of what we know and can rely on about what the other person is doing, and what our interaction is. Also knowing and trusting that the other person may just take the big leap and go somewhere completely other than we could ever expect, which is kind of amazing having rehearsed and performed this thing so many times, at least for us compared to anything else we've done. I mean, I've definitely worked on this project longer and performed it more than I've done anything else. The fact that when Zach and I get into the sleepover scene, I still feel as though he could surprise me in any number of moments. And that that's going to spin the scene off into some wonderfully unexpected place. Or that we're going to revisit a whole series of familiar moments, and realize them even more fully because we have that history. So, it's just a great kind of see-saw effect between those two competing impulses to work with the other person on building up what you've done before, and then also to work both with and in opposition to the other person's expectations, and take things to a whole different place. In those moments, we're very aware of how the audience is responding to it. I definitely feel like Zach is, especially in the first scene. Is that true?

ZS: Aware?

JL: Aware of the audience as you do that first scene?

ZS: Yeah.

JD: I wanted to add a spin-off on this thing about improvisation, and why does it seem appropriate in this work to improvise on situations and not necessarily on movement?

CY: It would just be dumb.

JD: No, I really want to look into this because I know that there's a sort of specificity in that, for you particularly Chris, because I know your work.

CY: Justin and I are both actually very, very anal about movement, much to... I mean, I know sometimes it's a drag to drill movement, but that's just something that's very much an interest for us. And also, we actually kind of loathe improvising when Jeff and Zach make us do it. So yes, we all get along, but everyone takes their medicine too in the process. There's both. We all have to do what we have to do, but all of those things are represented so it achieves kind of a great balance. I feel like the improvisation that does

exist wouldn't be able to flourish as much as it does without being anchored by the things that are already set.

JD: Do you feel like the "choreography" (I'm using quotes) is the anchor to this piece?

LONG PAUSE

CY: No. I mean it's all...

JL: No.

CY: It keeps it in balance in a way that their improvisations very much inform all that happens. It colors things in a different way each time.

JL: I guess there are moments of the choreography that do ground the piece, for me anyway. I feel like *If It's Magic* in terms of the piece as a narrative and as a whole—not that the narrative is the only whole of the piece—but I feel specifically *If It's Magic*, that the choreography of that...

JD: Is that a section?

JL: Yeah, it's a section of the piece and the music for it is *If It's Magic* by Stevie Wonder. And it's a trio between Zach, Chris and I. And I feel that that dance for me is very grounding in terms of what's comes before and what's about to happen. It's a really important bridge in terms of the story that we're telling, and I feel that we couldn't get to the last sort of climactic scene of cowboy without that happening.

JD: Is the last climactic scene mainly text or...

JL: Or section, rather. There's a story, a sort of fairy tale/parable that begins the scene, and there's a lot of choreography. It's basically two duets. We have this very clear progression around the stage just saying two things over and over again. And when we came to that bit with Zach and I, in the process, it was a really exciting, unexpected moment. It was one of those things that sort of feels like "wow, I can't believe that we came up with such a..." If I were to describe the idea, I feel like it's sort of unexceptional, but in execution it was unbelievable. It was really so exciting; it was exciting beyond description.

CY: It's like this magical thing in terms of those collaborative things. Independently, one person couldn't have directed that and then put it together.

JL: No way.

CY: It just occurred, so there's like a weird fifth person.

JL: Yeah.

CY: We're like Voltron - totally Voltron.

JL: Just separating ourselves and giving ourselves. It was like a ten-minute assignment where Zach and I went away. We had two separate spaces, and Zach and I went away. "What are we gonna do?" We just kind of...

CY: Yeah, I'm curious.

JL: [We] threw something together. I mean, we didn't do much of anything, then we got in the room and actually did it. It was revelatory in terms of opening up the possibilities. What's the point of all this? Is that. Oh! But the larger point, I think, is how we then make that really sort of amazing but very strange bit of performance, accessible to an audience. And how do we make it fit in to a larger whole? Because it doesn't intuitively, necessarily fit right in with what we had been positing with the rest of the piece. And I think something like this really simple, sort of beautiful trio that we do to this very melodic song kind of creates the perfect sort of bridge between what comes before it and the poetic, unexpected scene...

CY: Section.

JL: Section.

JD: **So, is there a cause? You keep talking about the cowboy section. Is there a pear section and a planet section?**

CY: For as much as we like to talk about everything just being the same thing and integrated—all many layers and the same thing—it's a very segmented show. The pear section formerly had a longer title which is *Three Duets in the Form of a Pear* [sic], which is a dubious homage to Erik Satie, which has a piece of music called *Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear* [sic]. And this piece that I made in college with the help of our friend Jeff, and we wanted to revisit, and then decided that it kind of really stunk, and it was very much like "oh, we made that in college but there were things that were very important about it for us." So we just went there and sort of demolished this thing that we thought was very important to us. It became a very personal thing for me. I went out early in Minneapolis before everyone else came and just was like, "who the hell are we now?" Ok, so the whole piece sort of references everything we've ever done, and like completely mutilating it.

JD: **It's interesting; it reminds me of the concept of logical depth.**

CY: Oh yeah.

JD: **Just that process of the historical aspect of a moment.**

CY: And in a sense, it's based on all of that material, which is historical but also like there's this...

JF: Also our friendship.

CY: Personal history, and so then it just turns into this big bear thing, just completely amoebic, amorphous thing. And then just sort of going crazy, “crazy” is the wrong word.

ZS: Goes off on his own.

CY: Goes off on his own—thank you Zach—which is what happened and so it's very much getting over or moving on from that and realizing this show which has been a big dream of ours for years is also just to sort of bury our youth a little bit, sort of destroy it, and kind of move on. Maybe not for you Zach, but definitely for... I'll go ahead and speak for Justin and myself. So that's what we're doing there. And also trying to come up with a prelude that's basically what it serves as to this cowboy piece. Which is basically a story of one young man, and his dealing with tragic things in a very fantastic way. And then the show closes with this solo that Justin does, which he made very much in the vein of... Like he left New York and he went on this tear and it's basically the most amazing thing I've ever seen. He could be...

JD: Is that the planet section?

CY: The planet section, where Justin does his solo and basically it could be like *Rite of Spring* performed by one person, but without the music. He's just that rhythmically intense, and has since developed a very theatrical aspect to it. And the collaborative nature, in terms of the rest of us sort of contextualizing this raw thing that he made, into this planet-destroying dance. Then the ultimate context ended up being Justin and I got very fascinated by the Voyager Golden Record, which are the two records that were put on the voyager spacecraft and into interstellar space. They've just passed Pluto, and what they have on them are all these sounds and images of Earth. And it's describing what life on Earth is like, but on a very functional level: equations and just “the earth's diameter is so many kilometers” and “this is the picture of a woman giving birth” and “this is what a woman is” and “this is what a man is” and “this is what animals are.” Then it has greetings from the children of Earth in every different language. It's like “hello from the children of the planet Earth,” and then it also became this whole thing... I think it was around Justin's birthday, so there was all these connections to it. So if we could send a Golden Record into space of what we would want them to think, aliens, about Earth, is this show that is basically our lives. Yeah, so...

JD: So you feel like it's a record of your lives?

JL: Well that, and maybe not.

LAUGHTER

JL: I think what the show... we talked about it in a number of ways. And one thing is that the idea that the cowboy piece sort of is representative of one boy's story on the planet Earth in a particular time. In a way it's sort of an "everyboy's" story, to a certain degree. It has that sense of universality. And I think that the idea of placing that in a larger context is sort of, while within the piece we focus very clearly on Zach and his character for the most part, to then step out and sort of look from a much, much, much wider angle at just the tiny little, delicate thing that that story is in a sort of universal context.

There was a young girl who's talking to us after the show, who had just done this workshop with Chris and Justin, who said that she thought that Justin's solo was a sort of pantomime. She said it was sign language, and the rest of the show was an explanation. She said [imitating the girl] "Justin, I think your solo at the beginning was like you were doing everything in sign language, but then you realized that no one understood your sign language so you started over and did a play." We were like, "thank you Katie. You're only seven, you're brilliant." So there was something kind of amazing about that.

JD: So I'm going to just ask this question that is about, if you have multiple collaborators from different backgrounds that are relatively unknown, do you find it harder to market the work and also find a venue in which to present it?

JL: Good question. So, I think my feeling is that that was a big challenge for us in presenting the whole of this work. I mean, there's a lot of dance-theater going on, and there's a lot of interest in dance-theater, and it's the big buzzword, or physical theater or whatever. But for us, I think what we're doing is even sort of further away from a dance world thing. And I think that that was something special that we were into that presenters were wary of. "Well, I don't think this is what our space is about. It's not about this kind of thing. That other space is about that, so maybe you should go talk to this person," or "we'll show you a different venue, but it's just not right for." I feel like this was something that we can wholeheartedly get behind, that is very well developed. You know, when we presented it before was incredibly well-received.

CY: Part of the thing is that we have misguided—not necessarily misguided—wishful idea that we were like "Ok, we're going to do this show right." Doing this show right means doing it in a really big theater and being able to hire professional designers and being able to raise money for it. You know, we're trying to skip a lot of steps along the way that most people seem to need to go through. But then we realized that we have to scale down in a way. And really it ended up to our benefit because we struck at the very core of it. And then we were lucky that Nicky Paraiso didn't even ask. He was like, "what do you want to do?" He was like, "do whatever you want," you know? And it's just like having that trust and that's rare to have.

JD: I think it is a larger issue of when you feel absolutely supported at the foundation of the work, I think it affects the process, you know? It affects the freedom with which you feel you can pursue things. I don't know if that figures into how you worked on things, but in any case, I just wanted to ask this other question maybe as a sort of closure, or entry into a closure. How do you feel that you have

changed by this collaboration individually, either from a director's point of view, or an actor's point of view, or a dancer's point of view, or performer's point of view?

ZS: Well, this was my first collaboration with Chris and Justin, and Chris is the only person for whom I've danced. So that has opened my ability package to much more. I can do a lot more moves. But also I have broadened my thinking on what theater is, and the ideas of beginning middle and end, and how much [I] actually don't have to rely on those things so much to create a legitimate piece of theater, and “non-linearizing” my work. It really has helped me with Yoda. Also, another thing it has helped me with, hold on I just lost it, oh, rehearsal process thing, which is: these three guys are very, very willing in rehearsal to come up with something that everyone's so very excited about and it's so great and in the next moment just say, “well, ok, let's destroy this thing that we've just created that seems so great, and see what else we can do. Maybe we can reach another level with it.” To never stop and never be happy. Not that, but...

LAUGHTER

ZS: Never be complacent with something even though initially you might have a very positive reaction to it. It might just be a building block for something very new that you would never think of.

JD: That's a lot.

JL: That is a lot.

ZS: Yeah.

CY: I've been changed. It's been such a gradual, the last five years. And working with Jeff and Zach as a performer, I feel like I've learned a lot from being around the two of you. I still have not mastered the straight face at all. I've gotten pretty good, until Zach said Vaseline the other day.

JD: I think what that does—having seen this section—is it gives the audience a chance to acknowledge that there is some complicity going on, and there is some sort of game-playing going on onstage and so the straight face vs. the person that is the bumbler—not to say that you're the bumbler Chris.

CY: Thanks, Jeanine.

JD: No, I think that what it does is it's an organic way of allowing the audience in.

CY: Yeah. No, I rehearsed laughing, but I know what you mean. What else did I learn? I learned a ton about diplomacy, very functional things about being a human dealing with other humans. How to relate to people and what compromise is. And it's the same thing with getting attached to what you think is a brilliant idea, and not holding things sacred,

and just realize that everything is an evolving thing. And of course I've gained great friendship... from Jeff, not Zach.

LAUGHTER

CY: Those would be the main things. As a creator, from being with you and Justin, and I being very theoretical and heady... We think we know how to make dances, and to have two other guys come into this process, your thought processes and how you decide to make things are so unwittingly out of the box that it's really... I give you credit for being really, really intelligent. It's been really exciting just to learn new ways to do things and view things. Thanks, guys.

JL: Well, it's hard not to see this process as representative of where my life has developed and to not see it as representative as just sort of a big change in the type of work that I'm moving forward with. Because I think when I came to this piece, Chris and Justin and I had worked together, and Zach and I were doing a play together that I was directing and Zach was performing in. And so that was our big first interaction. I think this piece really first of all pulled me away from theater, from a directorial path in a longer view of where I might have been heading. And more and more I feel like I still have a lot of those inclinations. I think even now we're collaborating on another project that I'm kind of spearheading and instead of it being a directorial thing as I was imagining—it's another project that's been spinning around in my head for about ten years. And instead of it being a play that I was supposed to direct, it's become the project that I'm collaborating with these guys on. And that just feels much more natural in terms of how we work together. And it also feels much more apropos of what's going on in the play. And of course, most importantly, how we both interact with each other in terms of our process and then in the performance. And I think that's the most important lesson: is how does your relationship manifest in process, and then in performance. And it just all seems to be a lot more integrated than I ever viewed it in a purely theatrical setting, which is really exciting. Not to mention that I've since—I guess as a performer—I've basically become a dancer and not at all an actor anymore. I don't do any plays. I mean, not that I dance for a lot of people, but I've done a number of things with Chris and I'm starting to feel very comfortable in that world, and all of a sudden my life is a dancer.

JD: **This is something that's interesting to me, just where does dance really fit into choreography? I mean, it's only a part of the experience. And is it important to have trained dancers to do this work? I don't know what this question is but this seems pertinent to your collaboration. And the dance really is only a portion of the choreography if we're thinking about the overall experience.**

CY: The trained dance thing is totally irrelevant in this type of collaboration because we're just working with who we have in the room. It's not, "we need some people who do a lot of turns."

JD: **Right, but there's also that you chose each other. So, I mean, on some level it's a non-issue. But I think it's a question that sort of is an obvious one in this context.**

CY: When we first started working on this, Justin and I had this, and so we didn't say that we were doing this collaboration. We said, "Justin and I are directing a piece with two guys," and the whole thing was so narrow-minded. It was like, "oh it's great that you guys decided to work with actors." "What does that have to do with what they're doing?" "They're moving around." "Why are they being dancers?" And for a while I think there used to be, at the beginning, more of a disparity. Like, "Oh, Chris and Justin are actually kind of trained and Jeff and Zach are actors." And more it's been like a new skill for Justin and I to be able to actually look like we are dancing with them, and we are meeting them. Where it doesn't look like anyone... It's just four guys onstage doing stuff, rather than, that there would be any disparity or you know. Does that have anything to do with the question?

JD: It does and it's not really a question. It's a thought sort of floating out there. So do you guys want to say anything else?

ZS: I'm ok.

JD: So don't be calling me later and saying, "Oh, you know I wanted to say this thing."

CY: Do you still have that tape recorder? Do you still have an hour and a half where we can talk about it?

JD: Ok that's it. I'm going to shut it off.

ZS: No wait!