

[FRESH ARTS PODCAST] EPISODE 5: SHOULD I OR SHOULDN'T I START A NON-PROFIT?

This is transcript of Episode 5: "Should I or Shouldn't I Start a Non-Profit?" from the Fresh Arts Podcast Should I or Shouldn't I, hosted by Reyes Ramirez, which was published on November 11, 2020 featuring Emanuelee "Outspoken" Bean and Marlana Doyle.

Reyes:

Hello, and welcome to "Should I or Shouldn't I," a Fresh Arts podcast hosted by me, Reyes Ramirez, where we explore the decisions artists make every day to succeed in their creative practice. Today, we're asking, "Should I or shouldn't I start a nonprofit?" We have Houston creative, Emanuelee Bean, a.k.a. Outspoken Bean, and executive and artistic director founder of Houston Contemporary Dance Company, Marlana Doyle, to discuss. How you two doing?

Bean:

I'm good.

Marlana:

Doing great.

Bean:

Yeah.

Reyes:

Great. So, again, I know you two, I've spoken to you two before,

but just so our listeners know, Marlana, can you give a really quick rundown of who you are, what feeds you, what inspires you?

Marlana:

Yeah. Hi, I'm Marlana Doyle. I'm the artistic and executive director of Houston Contemporary Dance Company, which is a nonprofit repertory dance company. We are the only repertory dance company in the city of Houston, and excited to be in our second season. I'm also the president and CEO of the Institute of Contemporary Dance, which is an arts/dance space located off of Houston Av. in the First Ward Arts District. Glad to be here.

Reyes:

Great. Bean.

Bean:

Hello. I go by my last name, Bean, but professionally, Outspoken Bean. I am a performance poet, a writer, and I work for writers in the schools as their outreach, or not outreach, as their community connector. I've been doing poetry slam and performance poetry for a long time now. I write a lot of my own work. Well, all my own work, I write that I produce and perform. Happy to be a part of this. Thank you, man.

Reyes:

Of course. One of the reasons why, in forming this podcast and making this one of the main questions that we wanted to talk about, is because, in our experience and in mine as well, I

think artists are most acquainted with the context of a nonprofit, of a 501c3, because that's who they're employed by, that's who they're paid by, or that's who they work a lot with. And then when they hear grants, they usually connote that with a nonprofit receiving those grants or what have you. So I guess one thing I really want to first start off by defining, or at least getting to know... We invited Marlana Doyle because you have a nonprofit organization. We invited Bean because you don't have one, yet you do so many, many things in the Houston community. So I guess my first question is, and if, Marlana, you could address this first, is why start a nonprofit?

Marlana:

Well, that's a good question. With my tenure with my previous employer, we were a nonprofit, so I kinda had the knowledge of 17 years of being with that organization of how a nonprofit works, but not getting the whole financial scope of it, just with the transparency of the organization wasn't quite there. So starting the nonprofit was something that I knew I needed to do on the national level for dance to get larger grants, like you're saying, larger funding, and to have another side. The Institute of Contemporary Dance is an LLC, so having that as my business and then having this as my nonprofit just made sense for what I was trying to do quickly after leaving my previous employer and starting these two things. But we were fiscally sponsored with Fresh Arts. Someone said, "You need to get a fiscal sponsor. You need to kinda get in." So Fresh Arts is such a great organization to kinda help facilitate those first couple

months for me, how this all works. And we did apply for 501c. I did get a lawyer to kinda help me with that application. It's very long and intense. And we just received our 501c status in March, right when the pandemic started. But it does help us. The benefits are definitely for connecting with the community, for educational purposes, for us to get some grants and funding, also for donors. They really need that tax deduction, which you can do with Fresh Arts as well. But we just wanted to kinda be an independent, the board and I, 501c. So Fresh Arts was a great way for us to get started. But now that we have that, we are now navigating in what that means for our organization and for the dance company.

Reyes:

Yeah, and then, Bean, I think, kinda the opposite question for you. You have EVERYTHING plus. Rather, Plus Fest, which stands for the EVERYTHING plus POETRY Festival. You work with WITS, Writers in the Schools. You're a community educator. You do so many things. I guess my question is, well, why haven't you started a nonprofit? Or why do you wish to choose to remain independent? Yeah.

Bean:

I mean, I don't know, man. A big part of my reasoning of not doing it is the upfront cost and the cash a lot of times was a big part of it. And the ideas would come, and I would just partner with someone and just do it with that person. So that's a big, big reason. Another reason was because I saw it as like,

well, if it's a business, then I didn't want the issues that came with a nonprofit. Like right now, I'm in the process of making the classic LLC rather than what it's been, which has been like a DBA type of thing. And I just saw that more along the lines of what I wanted to do, and my LLC can still partner with nonprofits. Another reason that stopped me is, I knew my mom was gonna create it, was gonna create a nonprofit. So I just went along with my mom's. I just use hers now. And that was big. That's also been kind of a part of it. But before, it was just like, hey, if the work was already done, then I'll just use someone else. You know what I mean? I'm gonna be doing everything else. I'll just use other people. And I didn't mind paying. Like the two years I was with Fresh Arts, I didn't mind paying whatever the cost it was to be a part of it, and I still got what I needed done done.

Reyes:

Yeah. When I ask that question, I don't mean it kind of like, well, why haven't you done that? It's more of like, well, more along like, I don't want one. I don't wanna start a nonprofit particularly myself, in my stage, in my life. I work with nonprofits. I particularly right now work with Fresh Arts, 'cause I know it takes a lot of work. And before we get to that, I guess another question I have is, Marlana, what do you feel are the benefits of the route that you've taken regarding starting a nonprofit? I mean, you've mentioned before access to funds, but I guess another question is, that kinda goes in line with that is, starting your own nonprofit, directing your own

nonprofit, the artistic direction, deciding a lot of factors, so, yeah, what do you feel are the benefits of starting a nonprofit?

Marlana:

Well, like I said, I mean, it's definitely access to grant funds. But then, looking at the other larger dance companies in the world that are nonprofits and what they can accomplish, a big component of what we wanted to do was educational. But now, because of what's happening with COVID, we're very limited. Obviously, can't go in the schools, can't do that. But having the 501c kinda does help with particular investors and funders and grants to know that we can give back to the community as much as we can. And as far as the difference between, and I know we're gonna touch on this later, but running the business and being artistic, I just oversee. I hire the dancers, they know their schedule, they do their art, and I hire the choreographers. Being a repertory company means we bring in artists. We've worked with Bean before. We bring in people to collaborate with. Because I don't make the dances, I just oversee what the vision is of the organization. So having those other voices come to the table and make the art, and then me run the business side of it, the executive director side of it, is beneficial because I'm able to do both. But I do think that the 501c really does help expand the dance community, being a repertory company. And then, like we said earlier, it's just access to funds. And there's just, I don't know, it just puts us in a higher echelon, I guess, of dance organizations that are in

the world, not just in Houston, to be a nonprofit. And having an LLC, like Bean was saying, kind of on top of that, it didn't make sense for me to have two LLCs. And the LLC does give back, in a way, because it donates space to the company, the nonprofit, because we have the space with the LLC. It just seemed to work when I was in my transition. And some days, I'm like, "Should I have done it this way? Should I have all made it a nonprofit?" But it's working. It's just, it's a little bit more work for me 'cause it's two different things. Different taxes, different paperwork, all the things.

Bean:

Other reason, because I don't like doing taxes. I don't like it at all. If I'm to be honest, I'm like, oh, I'm not a nonprofit, so... I'm profit. I am profit. So taxes was a big part of it. A big reason why I don't get asked this often, I used to, of like, "Why don't you leave WITS?" and a lot of it is because WITS has provided the stability for me that has provided stability as far as financial, financial bedrock, being part-time salaried, and I'm still able to do my other work. Stuff like that has been beneficial for me. And also, it wasn't like I was working. I'm a writer and I'm working at a writing organization, so it kinda led into it, and that writing organization gives me a lot of freedom to do what I need to do, whereas a lot of my friends aren't blessed to have that kind of predicament, have that where they're working in the field of what they wanna do, doing something that they wanna do, like coaching and such, but being able to just travel for my work, would not probably benefit with

them and stuff like that. So a big part of it is 'cause I created bedrocks for myself elsewhere.

Reyes:

And I think that's kind of, it's a really great point. I've had the sort of life where I've worked at three or four different nonprofits, either doing contract work or part-time work, where I've been like an arts administrator/ copy editor/teacher, and they're all with nonprofits. And it was great, but I can only take so much of a strenuous schedule. I think, in your case, you said earlier that you're okay with working with other organizations, you're okay with using their nonprofit status or fiscal sponsorships and navigating all those different business models. Can I ask you kind of what the benefit of that was? And you hint a bit at having that financial stability, but is there other stuff that also goes into making that decision of, or other benefits that-

Marlana:

Time because I hadn't put in the, create my own, to create my own nonprofit. So when I'm able to, when I'm talking to... A lot of times, I need space, you know what I mean? And I really don't know what my nonprofit would be. I've been told by other people what it should be, but I'm like, well, I don't really wanna do it. I don't really wanna do it. But a big benefit for me was space, a lot of times, man. My first year of doing Plus Fest, it was with the organization that was a company. It was a art gallery that was a company and a nonprofit, and they gave me the

space they gave me. So that was my partnership at that time. The second year, I did it with y'all, with Fresh Arts. But I could have used Buffalo Bayou, Buffalo Bayou... Now, I forgot the name of it. Partnership. I could have used their nonprofit because they were one, and I needed the space and they gave it to me. They gave me the space for free. And then last year, I used y'all only. And that was so I could get money from sponsors. And they did not feel comfortable just giving me directly the money. So the benefit of it has been like, I'm not having to do that paperwork that it comes in for the tax purposes, really, man. And then I'm able to, like, if it's already set up, I'm able to just use it. Even with my book that just came out, I did that all by myself, and I did it through my mom's nonprofit. You know what I'm saying? The money came from source A, went directly to my mother, and then it came to me, and then I went on and did what I had to do with it. And I didn't have to... I'm just gonna keep using my mom. I'm just gonna keep using my mom, or, depending on the pay, I may still use with Fresh Arts. But it just came to a sense of, I didn't start it, the benefit was it's already built, it's already made, I'll just tack on right then. And it was beneficial for me at that time.

Reyes:

Yeah. And I think that's an interesting kind of thing to bring up. I know, in regards to, like when I work for different organizations where I'm like, yeah, I'm an educator here, I'm an editor here, and I'm a arts admin here, but I think kinda one thing that gave me the ability to do was like, well, this one

isn't really working out for my schedule, I'm outta here. I'm gonna end my contract. But, Marlana, it's not so simple with you. I mean, you had to devise an entire mission, you had to put in the paperwork, pay for the fees I imagine are associated with that paperwork. Could you go into that process a little bit of what it took and, yeah, how that serves you now?

Marlana:

Yeah, I mean, well, while we were with the sponsor, with Fresh Arts, fiscally sponsored, I talked to a lawyer. My board chair knew a lawyer who has done this form before. It's like the 1025. I might be saying that wrong. It's the nonprofit form. And, being new, it's just a lot of questions, a lot of back-and-forth. It's very, very intricate, very extensive. It took about four months to get it all together just because we were new and what is the mission exactly? All the things that we needed to plan. I mean, the first thing I did when we got the fiscal sponsorship from Fresh Arts and continued to go forward was to find a board. Find a board, put a board together, do a mission, have a board meeting, vote in the bylaws, do all those kind of things that you need to do for a nonprofit, because on your 501c application to the IRS, you need to show that you have a board and who those people are. So we did that, and then we continued with the lawyer and applied in January, and then got it back within 40 days. I pushed. Kept calling the IRS, talked to someone directly in Dallas, and just wanted to make sure that all that was coming through. And then receiving it was kinda the icing on the cake. It was the mission of the board was to get it

in the first year, just to get us into the right space. But, with that being said, it's hard right now because I still can't apply to many things because I don't have a 990. And I just applied for my first 990. Actually, my CPA just sent over the invoice to pay it and sign it to go off to the IRS. Because a lot of grant applications, just keeping this in mind if anyone's thinking of a 501c, require at least three or four years of 990s to apply for anything that's larger, say, over \$10,000. You need to show the financial stability of the organization. So having Fresh Arts or having Bayou Partnership, these other things in the city, are beneficial for anyone thinking about getting a 501c, 'cause that's what we're kinda talking about here, or how you do that. So I still have my sponsorship with Fresh Arts because we do have money coming through Houston Arts Alliance, which is what we applied for. So it's just that battle of those first couple years. Once you get through two or three years of your organization, then you're good to go. Which I'm assuming Bean's mom has been a nonprofit for awhile because he's able to utilize that. And I think the difference here between the Bean and I is the Bean is doing the work. He's the mind, the brains, the spoken poet, the guy that shows up to do the talks, and I'm just kind of in the background, helping facilitate the dancers and the dance. So that's kind of the limitations of starting a nonprofit is just having all those things and the taxes and the IRS and just staying on top of it. So I don't know if that helps with that question, but that's kind of where-

Reyes:

It helps too well.

Marlana:

where I'm at.

Reyes:

I mean, it sounds like a lot, but, again, I mean, we can get into, again, you've talked about the benefits, but also, again, yeah, there are trade-offs and there are limitations to any amount of decisions. Bean, could you talk about that as well? I know, as an independent artist myself and not having a nonprofit or any kind of organization that I'm tied to in terms of what I founded or what I'm legally accountable to or anything like that, for you, what are, I guess, some limitations in your experience of, let's say wanting to do the things you wanna do, but remaining independent?

Bean:

My biggest limitations would have to be the time that I make for myself to do said project. It's not necessarily... Because whatever I need to do, as far as where I'd need a nonprofit, I just find the person, right? And, like you were saying, I'm pretty much the person, when someone calls my assistant, I'm the person coming. You know what I'm saying? Neo-Classic Experiences is me. It is Outspoken Bean. Yeah, the limitations is me. Did I fill out the application? Did I go through the guidelines? Did I get it proofed? Did I find who I'm gonna partner with to make sure that this said project happens? That falls on me. And when

I do drop the ball, 'cause it has happened, unfortunately, it's not even on the nonprofit I'm working with, 'cause their stakes at that time, it's extremely low. They just need their paperwork for whatever. What you're talking about, whatever number that was, Marlana, I have no idea what you're talking about. I have no clue. That's also something else I just don't wanna add into my bandwidth. Maybe I'd get an idea where it's like, it would be best, I should do a nonprofit. But even by that time, I'll just use my mom's. But I just don't see anything where it falls into that for myself. The limitations are on me, on what I do.

Reyes:

Yeah, I think one interesting thing between you two is that you're both, you've had experience as educators. And I've had experience as an educator myself as well. And I think one common thing I've seen people think of nonprofits is that you kind of have to be a form of education, right? Where, oh, start a nonprofit, mostly what you experience out there are education bodies or educational institutions. And this is kinda a way to segue into a question of the difference between, let's say, a creative in your work in the creative work that you're doing, versus the role that you step into as a creative. So, Marlana, could you talk about, I guess, your experience in regards to your role as an educator versus an administrator versus the actual dancer?

Marlana:

Right. So, yeah. I mean, the thing is I'm not dancing anymore,

but when I was dancing and trying to do these things, I know how taxing and hard that is. When I was younger and with my old employer and old organization, I was pregnant. I got pregnant twice and I was able to physically step back. And then I realized how much stuff needs to be done on the arts administrative side and how maybe I could thrive in that while being a new mother. And then I went back to performing and then I got pregnant again and then tried to perform again. And then I just realized this is just not... I'm kinda done. All the people I danced with, all the passion, I was more nervous. It was just like, okay, we're good. So now, we're gonna step into this role. And then, with the transition of moving into my own organization and starting my own business, I had the confidence of just the years and time I've put in and the education that I learned, mostly from Dance/USA, which is a national service organization. I've been with them. Served on the board for three years, was the council chair for artistic directors. I've been with them for 15 years. And just all that I've learned, the networking, the conversations they have, the resources they have, have really shaped me to feel confident to leave my employer and start my own organization, and start my own nonprofit. And having the dancers come with me, all of them left with me and they just wanna dance. They just wanna be here. They wanna be creating. They're young, and I get that, because that's where I was when I moved here from Boston, 18 years ago. So just providing that for them and letting them not have to worry about the taxes with the IRS or any of these things. They don't need to be doing that. They need to come into the studio, they need

to create with the choreographer, they need to perform. And just having that communication. So, yes, educator/mentor, I would say, for those artists. Even the choreographers, some of them are very established, some of them are, I don't wanna say emerging, but are younger and maybe not as experienced, maybe never been to Houston, don't realize there's such a big thriving art scene here. And giving them an opportunity to have their voice here and giving Houston a chance to view what's happening outside of Houston. So kinda creating that partnership in Houston. So educating, mentoring, and directing. Once a piece is set, I go in, I look at it. I don't choreograph anymore. I did in the first season, but I think that there's enough choreographers that need the work. I think that if I can provide the space and the dancers and pay them for their time and bring them down and let them have an artistic voice, then I wanna try to keep providing that. So kind of a presenter, in a way. Bean and I are talking about a collaboration in the future. I mean, there's just so many opportunities that I wanna take advantage of while I'm here. So, I guess, yeah, mentor, educator, director. I mean, I'm not dancing anymore, so just making sure that's clear. I teach, but my heart is really in making these things happen for other people and making the stability and the transparency really important for both aspects of my business, if that makes sense.

Reyes:

No, and that's actually, it's really beautiful. I think kind of like... I mean, 'cause it takes... Yeah, just kinda like, that's

kinda blowing my mind in terms of where you realize your role and your strength. Again, you don't dance anymore, but I'm, yeah, again, you stepped into kind of a creative life because that's what it means so much to you. And then now, you're facilitating that for others. I think that's a really big, and I think that's really beautiful, I think, wanting to kind of allow for other people to do that. And then, Bean, you yourself are, again, are an educator. You play a role in different communities. Could you kinda go into that, that aspect of what you consider your role as an admin? You've been on the side of where you've contracted people to do performances, and you've been contracted to do performances. Can you talk about stepping in and out of those roles? Kinda segueing into different roles of being contractor, contractee.

Bean:

Sure.

Reyes:

And what that means for your-

Bean:

Yeah. I wanna be really deep, but it's really, it's just like, okay, that's what you need me for? Great. And I see it as really linear. I'm in a negotiation with someone right now, and I'm kind of like, 'cause they're contacting me, my mindset is like, what do you need from me? What do you need from me? Yes or no, you know what I mean? Excuse me. And that's how I kinda view it.

And I carry that when I am booking someone else. I carry that kinda mentality of, all right, here's what I want answered when people approach me. Real quick, what is it? Well, what do you have a budget for? What do I have a budget for? And I work with people all the time, but it's also like, I like to get to that question. I like to get to that question very directly, rather quickly. I would rather hear that before I hear the vision. I wanna hear like, "Oh, this is what it is." So when I talk to people, I'm like, "Hey, I have this festival. I found out about you through this person or through this. I'm a fan," whatever it may be. "I have this festival. Here's what I got. How much do you charge?" "How much do you charge? Are you interested? If you wanna hear more about it, I'll tell you more. I would love to tell you more." I don't wanna waste people's time, even at that moment. And that's not always said to me, but when I talk to people, I try to be as upfront about... If I talk to people and I have the purse, if I'm the one with the grant and the purse and I'm putting something on, that's one of the first things. I bring money up in meeting the person. 'Cause I'm serious about paying them and I'm serious about... And I wanna pay them as much as they're worth as much as possible, as close to that as possible. Sometimes, I pay. Sometimes, I hit it right on the nose, and it's not a problem. But sometimes, it's no. Sometimes not.

Reyes:

Yeah. And I think a thing that, I guess, that people have an appreciation for, or maybe they don't, is really the art of

organizing, the art of educating, the art of being an administrator. Those are their own crafts, right? Those are their own practices. For example, me, I used to be like, "Curators, ha," or, "Editors, bah. I'm here for the work, I'm here to do my own stuff, and if you don't like it, oh well." But it's kind of like, well, actually, being an editor or being a curator, those are their own practices, those are their own art. And the art of getting resources, the art of getting space, the art of knowing what will do well to what audience or with what audience. I think that's a really interesting role that you've both played in and out of. Could you talk about, what does that mean to be an administrator? What does that mean to be the one behind the scenes, where you're not in the spotlight, you're not the talent? Your name isn't necessarily on the marquee. There's someone else's name. You've made it so that their name is on the marquee, so to speak. Kind of that experience. Yeah, Marlana, please.

Marlana:

Well, I think there's a sense of pride I have when I see something be performed or come together. In the past, I've had things that haven't really worked out the way that I thought they would, and maybe didn't want my name on it. But art is art, and sometimes the vision doesn't quite come through. So where maybe could I have helped more? Where maybe could I have had those hard discussions with the choreographer or a dancer about what's not working? But I also feel that you see things, you hear things, but it's really about what the experience is for

the audience and what people like. This city is wont to say sometimes, "Why don't you try this, why don't you try that?" So trying those things, but knowing ultimately, or keeping the vision and the mission at the forefront of what you're doing. We currently are, I mean, with COVID right now, we're in the process of creating a socially distanced work in our space. The dancers are masked, they're not touching. Which is hard for contemporary dance 'cause everybody likes to touch each other. And we're gonna present it. We're gonna present it in our space with a very limited audience at a distance. And safely. So what does that look like? And how am I facilitating that to make it so I'm not really involved with the art part of it. I mean, I'm facilitating the dancers and the choreographer but I'm trying to do the back end, the tickets, the logistics, the fundraising, the press release, I mean, all those things that kinda come into an administrative role, and making sure it's the best product to represent what we're doing. Like, when Bean and I spoke with, my first year as the organization, we did a film, but we were like, "It would be cool if we had spoken word." And I met Bean prior to... I don't even know. It was a fundraiser I think we were at for the children in the border. We did a fundraiser with a bunch of arts organizations and we met there. I said, "It'd be really cool if you wrote something that kind of echoed what I'm trying to do here." It's just funny that you were talking about that, Bean, because he literally went in and was like, "Well, what's the story?" And I'm like, "Okay. Well, here we go." So I told him my story and he wrote a prologue pretty much for my book, for this book of my new organization. It was our promotional

video for the season, and it was beautiful. I just never would've thought that we could've worked together. I always wanted to, and having this new organization, it was like, yeah, let's do it. And he was so willing to help. So, being an administrator, trying to put those things together and make them work and be successful at that is always great. So I feel pride. I feel pride when I watch that video. I feel pride when I see things that he's doing. I mean, we have a great relationship, but where are these other people that I could be talking to in the city, and how can we connect? So, yeah, I kinda went on a little tangent there, but, yeah, I mean, being an administrator, it's being proud of what happens. My name, you're right, isn't... It's the artistic director, but this is the choreographer, this is the artist. But being okay with that. I'm okay. I had my time. Some people like to hang on for a long time. I'm good. I just, I want to give back what I had when I was in my 20s and 30s. Kind of where I'm at now.

Reyes:

Bean, do you wanna respond to that or talk about, again, that role as someone who facilitates something rather than being the thing itself?

Bean:

Yeah, but I do both.

Reyes:

Oh, for sure. Yeah, for sure, for sure.

Bean:

I do both. And Plus Fest was just a way, was a vision I had, and it was also a way to make money for myself. And it fulfilled that for those times. But to also like, y'all, I want this to grow and get bigger. I didn't do it this year. Not because of the pandemic. I didn't do it this year 'cause I was gonna do my rollout for my book instead. And then the pandemic happened. It had nothing to do with the pandemic, actually. But, yeah, man, I'm on both. And starting to do things that can lead to more things on marquees and stuff like that. And I still wanna create opportunities for people. I like doing both. Just recently, doing my show at Stages, I realized, yo, I really miss this world of when I would do my one-man shows and stuff like that. I miss that world a lot. So, yeah, it's doing both for me, brother.

Reyes:

'Cause I think, at the heart of when people ask, "Should I start a nonprofit?" or, "Should I start this business model?" I think ultimately what it gets at the heart of is self-determination with one's creative vision. I think artists at times can grow frustrated of being like, "Oh, a gallery didn't choose my work. If I had my own gallery, I would do this." Or as a writer, if no one's taking my book, or if I had my own press, I would take these kinds of books. I would definitely publish these things. I think at the heart of it, really, is a mode of self-determination. But I think there's also that thing of, again,

being an administrator, being in a different role, you might actually have to sacrifice that vision the most, your own creative vision, because you're gonna be facilitating other people. And, Bean, I mean, you've had both. Marlana, you've had both in those experiences. And I think the next question then is, what are some things artists should consider before venturing into any endeavor that requires the extra step? There is a difference between... Again, as a writer, I'll speak to being a writer. There's a difference between me sitting down, writing a story or a poem, and then looking to go get it published, versus being the publisher, right? Being someone who is not maybe the forefront of that creative output, but you're facilitating that. So what are some things that you think people should consider before they venture into any endeavor that requires that organizing, that requires that leadership role? Marlana, please.

Marlana:

Yeah. I was thinking about this question, and I really think the knowledge of your craft, so really being confident that you know that you're could excel, are excelling, are very knowledgeable about dance or music or art or spoken word, that you have confidence in that. Because you are gonna get beaten down. People are gonna say no, and it's not gonna be what you expect it to be, and you are gonna have to be okay accepting that, and sometimes those knockdowns make you stronger. There's been many times where I've thought of, "We should do X, Y, and Z, but we can't because of X, Y, and Z." Or, "Let's apply, but we're not

quite there financially." I mean, there's just so many things that go into it. And then the other thing is, for me, I mean, just because I'm a Virgo, a multitasking personality, I'm also a mother of two children, so if you have children or if you have other things that you're doing, Bean's also very good at this, you have to be able to do all the things but then also have time for yourself, which is becoming very important during this pandemic. A lot of people are like, "What about self-care?" Because we all feel like we're running around trying to connect and trying to make things happen out of nothing or just trying to connect with people, which can get overwhelming. So having time to find time for yourself. So being okay with defeat, being okay with having a lot of things on your plate. I have to-do lists that go on, and sometimes I just don't get to it. It's just dance. We're not curing cancer here. It's gonna be okay. We're gonna get to it. I've had that analogy thrown at me a couple years ago, and I was like, "Oh, you're right." Because I was getting so intense with it. And then finding some time for yourself, to give yourself that time to step away from your craft so that you can thrive in what it is. I've noticed that mostly during the pandemic for most artists, most dancers, especially 'cause it's so physical, we can't be in the studio, or we couldn't at first and now we can but with limitations. So what that means, too. That's kind of my input on that.

Reyes:

For sure. Bean, yeah, what are some things artists should consider before going into any endeavor that requires that

organizing, that leadership role?

Bean:

Yeah. I mean, knowing what you're doing, being good at it. That's the first thing Marlana said, and I agree with that. You have to be knowledgeable of it. And people will see it. People will see if you're good at what you're doing. I work in an admin role for a nonprofit, and working in an admin role has forced me to do things that has benefited me in my business. Even as a performer. Being organized, getting organized, using these different things. Using print. There's a lot of things that come from my job that is able to benefit me in other ways. But, yeah, I'm not an organized person. Get organized. It kinda doesn't matter if you are or not. You just have to do it. There's things that don't come naturally to me that I just have to do, because it falls on me if I don't. It falls on me. But I definitely, I definitely, definitely, like, "Yo, you gotta be good at what you say you're doing." And not feel like, well, they don't know. Well, they know what they like. People know what they like, right? And then also, on top of that, be a good egg. Be someone that people like to work with, that people will sing your praises after you're done, where people don't, "Mm, I don't really like them too much." You know what I mean? Like those things like that. 'Cause people talk and people communicate and people converse, and you need your... You need to be an advocate for yourself when you're not in the room. And the only way you do that is to treat people well. Treat people well when you work with them. Be efficient. Be good at what you do, but also

especially... I see myself on a come up and things, right? Whatever makes it look like for me, right? I still don't want people to be like, "He's a dick to work with." You know what I mean? I don't want that. I want it to be where people enjoy my company, enjoy me being there and working with them. Even if I'm a little late, they still like, "Yo, he came in and he bats 1,000 anytime he shows up." So that's how I want it to be.

Reyes:

Absolutely. And kind of going into this next question, I think there are different ways that one's surroundings can certainly be more supportive of one's endeavors. So one thing in Houston that, being a writer in Houston, the writing community is very diverse, it's huge, but one issue that I found is that the availability of presses, of publishers. And Houston is really not huge. There are some, absolutely, but they're not really as big as, let's say, in other cities. But, again, that doesn't mean I don't love my city. That doesn't mean I don't love writing in my city. But that is just the reality of who owns what resources, where I can find them, and their availability to me. So my next question is, Marlana what is something you'd love to see in Houston's art community or infrastructure to make it more hospitable to, say, people like you who want to start their own nonprofit or their own organization?

Marlana:

Yeah, I would say definitely networking and capitalizing on those investors or people that really do believe in art that

heals or art that can thrive or artists like myself that have experience but are starting something new. I just feel like there's sometimes limitations to reach those people. So starting a nonprofit is just finding those people that really do believe in art and the people that love art. I don't wanna be preaching to my students and their parents. I wanna find the people in this city that really do love art. So how do I, as a new organization, which I have some thoughts on, but how do I reach those people? Especially now during a pandemic, where are those people and how can I connect? And there's lots of things like Fresh Arts and different organizations that can help with that, but kind of... I don't know, just kind of finding a space or finding resources to help connect and help bridge gaps, I guess, between some of the big seven, the opera, the ballet, the SPA, the symphony. Where are those donors for small midsize groups or people that are just starting? How can we connect with them? Or creating partnerships. How can those big organizations collaborate with us? I know I have worked with the symphony before, I have worked with TUTS, but how does my organization, they've hired me as a choreographer, but how can my organization work with those? I think that's all I have for that on now, but I don't know, I don't know. Bean, what do you think? Just kinda meeting those people and...

Bean:

Yeah. But a lot of that is just you gotta get out and go and build relationships as you grow yourself. I think Houston does... I don't know how to make it better. I don't know how to

make it better, per se, but I do think that Houston does an okay job with, okay, well, we have X, Y, and Z happening. Go. Go to it. 'Cause I go to them. I go to these different things. Fresh Arts, I know y'all do a lot of, like, y'all have the happy hours and so on and so forth, so on and so forth. And those things are great. Yeah, those things are great, and I think that they could happen more. Well, can't happen literally right now because of the pandemic, but I do think these are things that people should take advantage of as they know. I think Houston's biggest problem, full-stop, is its geography. So it's just not all the artists live inside of 610. Marlana doesn't. You know what I mean? But once you make that trek home, it's hard to ask people to come back out. So I think a lot of that is, maybe there is some virtual spacing of virtual networking that can happen, but that's even difficult to do. I don't know, but I do know that Houston's biggest issue, especially with the arts and all other kinds of things, Houston's biggest issue is geography and how spread-out everything is.

Reyes:

For sure. I guess I asked that question because I think it's totally okay to wanna know your city and know what it wants or know what it needs, or the way one interacts with their city. For me, again, like I said, as a writer, one thing that I would love to see in Houston would be to, again, have, let's say, more funds available to artists, more incentives to start, again, the things that y'all are doing. Or if I wanted to start a press, you're like, well, how will the city help me in doing that? I

think, and I know I'm gonna butcher this, but, for example, I know, at the end of a lot of TV shows, you'll see the logo for the State of Georgia, right? Like the-

Bean:

You're talking about, like, peach. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Reyes:

Yeah.

Bean:

Yeah, yeah.

Reyes:

And that's one of those things where people go to Georgia to film, because why? Because they get certain tax incentives or they get certain benefits. So, I guess, what about that? Just like a dream, just like dream out loud.

Bean:

Well, yeah, that's a big dream, but you have to kinda start something. Like, Tyler Perry went to Georgia, and Georgia had no film industry at all. He created an entire industry. They had TV. They had TV and news. But they didn't have a film industry. So he built something that wasn't there, and then they wanted more of it. So it's like, it is like a sense, but he built something. He built something that wasn't there initially. And maybe there is something along the lines of... I don't know,

man. I don't know. I think if Houston saw art as a business, 'cause there are small business loans and grants and stuff like that that cities do... I don't know if Houston does, actually. I need to look into that myself. But they want small businesses. So a lot of times artists themselves, 'cause I was one of them, I didn't see myself as an entrepreneur. And artists should definitely start seeing themselves as entrepreneurs, themselves as a business. You are the business, right? And why not have those same things? There can be definite of, like, all right, how long have you been doing this? You can show paths of success with your business to get some of these loans. Maybe something like that would be beneficial for artists, right? And it has to prove. And a lot of that, the market will show that if it's being worked on, if it's being proven. Thank you, Marlana. I just saw you bought a book. I didn't-

Marlana:

I did. Will you sign it for me?

Bean:

Yes, I'll sign it. Yeah.

Marlana:

After I got Reyes' email and I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I forgot to buy one." Of course.

Reyes:

Marlana, is there anything you wanna add to that?

Marlana:

No, I totally agree with that. I mean, I think that, yeah. I mean, the city does have some grants, Bean, but it's like you have to be, like I can't apply for my nonprofit. They don't really fund nonprofits. My LLC can, but then I'm in the middle of that. And being a woman and now a small business owner, I have some benefits, but I'm in the middle of that application, which is very lengthy. Just so many things.

Bean:

I bet it is. So I think, yeah, and Houston definitely does a lot for-

Marlana:

Businesses, but not really nonprofits or-

Bean:

Or individual artists, right?

Marlana:

Yeah.

Bean:

It does a lot of things for individual artists, I think. I think Houston does.

Marlana:

Yeah.

Bean:

And I'm saying, when I talk to my friends who are in other cities that have the same... San Francisco's not bigger than Houston, but as far as the amount of artists that are there, that's what I'm talking about. Who are comparable in that sense. Yeah, we actually, Houston does a lot. Houston does a lot of different things. But I do think, yeah, if... But, culturally, people would have to see artists as a business. And, culturally, that's just not the case.

Reyes:

Yeah, and I think, going into that earlier, of what we said of, yeah, the role, as an entrepreneur. I think people, or rather, artists see that as separate. Which, in a way, it is. The artist, the creative, versus the administrator, the person who does the forms. I think, again, the main reasons why we thought of you two is 'cause you you've both stepped, weaved in and out of those roles. Again, I think that's what's led to such an amazing conversation we've had thus far. Again, we've scratched the surface of really what it all means, but, again, I think this is indicative of how deep this topic goes and, again, the great work you're both doing in navigating those roles. So rounding up the discussion, could y'all talk about, just kinda briefly, the ability to want to work as part of a team versus the individual artist? I think, for me, as a writer, I think it's, I write alone, I do those things, and sometimes I'll share

it with other people, but that's not part of my process inherently. So, just kinda quickly, could you, Marlana, talk about the individual versus working part of a team?

Marlana:

Well, as far as being an administrator, I mean, a lot of that is just me and my computer. So it is pretty individual. I do have my board. And now that I am a nonprofit, I'm, even with Fresh Arts, I still had to have a board when we applied. With the nonprofit, I do have to get everything approved by them or just if it's a major decision or a financial thing or item. But as my LLC, I don't have to talk to anyone. I can just do it. I have staff and teachers, obviously, but as far as the institute goes, I can make the decision. And then, again, now, unlike Bean, not making the dances. Just facilitating for the dancers and the choreographer to do the work kinda helps. I feel part of the team. I need to be there more. But I'm also homeschooling two children right now virtually, so it's like I'm home for a lot more than I wanted to be at this time. But who knew that this pandemic was gonna hit the way it did? Well, we did know, but nothing was stopped or mandated for us to figure it out quickly. So I think, as far as the team goes, with both my organizations, or both my nonprofit and my LLC, that's the people that work for me, and they're part of my team, and the choreographers, the dancers, even the production staff, when we do do a performance, the costumers, I mean, there's just so many elements to putting on a show and making repertory dance for concerts, 'cause that's kinda the main focus besides education, which we can't really do

right now. And the other side, on the LLC side, it's me making most of those decisions and having the staff and teachers, I bounce ideas. But so a lot of individual work goes in with me and my computer, but I do bounce a lot of ideas off of my team and my board, if that helps.

Reyes:

Absolutely. Bean?

Bean:

I'm sorry. Hold on.

Reyes:

It happens. But, yeah. Oh, sorry. Go ahead, Bean.

Bean:

Oh, no, no. And re-ask the question. I'm sorry, man.

Reyes:

It's all good. Yeah, just speak really quickly on the dynamics of working as part of a team versus being an individual artist.

Bean:

Individual artist, I mean... Working in the admin space has helped my individual artist as far as being focused and things. Ideas I may bring to writers in the schools, I think about how I can do it for myself. So there's those kind of thoughts and comparisons that happen in my head. But, I mean, the grants I'm

applying for are different. When people, excuse me, talk to me individually about my craft or whatever I'm doing, it's a different kinda space and a different idea. So, yeah, it just depends, honestly, of what I'm doing. But the differences are pretty vast. One difference is... The ultimate difference is, one, I'm doing things to propagate myself; the other is to propagate and to help an organization. So the goals are vast, but what I'm doing in between them is pretty much, a lot of times, it's the same. A lot of times, I'm like, "You know what, I need to do this for myself." So I wind up just doing that as well.

Reyes:

All right. I guess the reason why I wanted to round out that question is, again, ultimately, what does that mean when we ask, I guess, when I ask, why start a nonprofit? I think one of the first things you really have to ask yourself is, well, what larger role do you wanna play in the community you're in? So I think you both answered that question. You've been answering that question. You continue to answer that question. So thank you for that amazing discussion on that topic. Again, we scratched the surface, but, again, you've also provided so much. So thank you for all that. I'm gonna ask just some quick-fire questions, and then we'll be done. So, Marlana, and Bean, favorite takeout in Houston.

Marlana:

Ooh.

Reyes:

Any places to recommend or-

Bean:

I love Les Givral, that Vietnamese spot off of Milam.

Reyes:

Oh, yeah, yeah. It's great.

Bean:

I love that place. Still like Turkey Leg Hut. Even though they expensive, they really good. They're really, really good. You know, I've been eating the pasta, Spaghetti Western. Spaghetti Western Italian Restaurant, I think it's named. Something like that. They're really good. They mix Southwest cuisines with Italian. Ooh, and it's so good. I just found out about them.

Marlana:

Sounds good. I'm a huge Barnaby's fan. 'cause usually I have to order food for my kids. They are very kid friendly and they have great desserts. And then I'm a huge chocolate fan, so The Chocolate Bar. I love to go there as well. It's hard because I live in Sugar Land. As Bean said, I drive out. But love to support the restaurants when I'm in town. I did a lot more eating out before I had kids and before the pandemic. But I would say Barnaby's. I would say The Chocolate Bar. I would say Aka Sushi as well. Love some good sushi. None of my family eats

that, so when I get to eat it, I can.

Reyes:

Nice. Another quick question. Who is a Houston artist that people should definitely check out? Bean.

Bean:

My boy, Tim Woods. Tim Woods, yeah. Definitely check him out. He's really dope. And me.

Reyes:

Of course, of course.

Marlana:

I was gonna say the Bean, too.

Bean:

Aw.

Reyes:

Right.

Marlana:

Yeah. And I don't know. There's so many out there.

Reyes:

Yeah. And then, finally, upcoming projects. This will air in October, so anything you wanna let people know about or direct

people to?

Bean:

I still have my book, "Color Outside the Lines." The one-man show of that, "Coloring Outside the Lines," will be premiering in San Antonio next month. That's awesome. And, yeah. But, yeah. My book. I should have more copies by then.

Marlana:

The Houston Contemporary Dance Company is doing our show at the Institute of Contemporary Dance. We're gonna try this, socially distanced. It's called "Coalesce." It's November 13th, 14th, and November 20th and 21st. We're gonna have eight performances at 20 people a show, at a distance from the dancers, at a distance from each other. We are gonna have tickets on sale on our website starting in October. houstoncontemporary.org. And we will have limited in-person seating. We will also be virtually streaming it as well one night. TBA on when that performance will be. And we have shows at 7:00 and 9:30, and masks are required. So that's our next project. It will be presenting works from Andrea Dawn Shelley, which is a work she created in February. It's a very female-driven work. It was supposed to premiere in April and then May, and we've just kinda held it until now. And then the new socially distanced work by Robbie Moore called "I remember..." that is being created as we speak, as well as a film by a good friend of his, which will be part of the intermission in one of the rooms. It'll be a great way for people to see the institute, to see the space. We're excited to

have it there. It seems like, while I have the space, I might as well do it and do it safely and kinda get people a little tour of the institute as well. So just go to our website, houstoncontemporary.org, and for more information on tickets.

Reyes:

Awesome. Again, thank you, you two. Thank you for your time. Beautiful discussion. I'll see you around.

Bean:

Bye-bye. Thank y'all.

Marlana:

Thanks, Reyes.

Spokesperson:

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