

**BRITTA B.:**

Hey, it's Britta B., yeah you know me, and this is *The 'D' Word*. Do you love poetry, music, books, photography or anything else that doesn't seem all that in jazz with dance? Every two weeks we listen, and interview someone amazing who works in any of these fields and is directly or indirectly inspired by dance, but they aren't dancers themselves. We want to know: how is the world affected by dance? This week we have Lucius Dechausay calling in. Lucius is an award-winning director, editor, producer and illustrator. Recently he was a producer at CBC Arts for the digital anthology *21 Black Futures* with Obsidian Theatre. This project empowered 63 Black creatives to ruminate on the future of Blackness through 21 filmed plays. He is also the creative behind the multiple Canadian Screen Award nominated dance series, *The Move*. Other notable works include the multi-award winning animated short, *The Mark*, and Hot Docs' *KETTLE*. Lucius, it's such a pleasure to have you on the show. Thank you so much for joining us. How are ya?

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Thank you so much for having me. I'm great.

**BRITTA B.:**

So much of what you do is behind the scenes, and you work on various projects. Lots of films, documentaries, music videos, and you also have produced and directed a lot of dance films and shows. Can you talk to me a bit about your trajectory? And how you got into all of this? Where did it begin?

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Yeah, absolutely. I, oddly enough, went to art school, for illustration. And it was through my second year, in which I took my illustrations and turned them into an animation that got me into this idea of filming, of storytelling, of editing and putting together all the pieces. And I did animation for quite a few years, and then moved into music videos. And coming up with many of my friends who are in the hip hop scene, I was able to combine my illustration, animation, direction, editing, into these really short, creative projects that could always be different. The challenge was always to make them different.

**BRITTA B.:**

Mmm. In fact, in my university days, I remember being a part of an explosive artists cycle of always keeping up to date with different tracks, he was dropping- Kid Famous. And you in fact directed *Big Man Tings*. And can we talk just for a moment about, is that one of the first music videos that you did? Or what was one of the first music videos that

you directed or produced? Like that guy is kind of a statement, or a landmark of an era of the time. So yeah, if you could talk to me a little bit about that [laughs].

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

I will! I love that reference. Yeah, the Kid Famous was, it was such a funny time because I had edited a ton of music videos at that time. And this was an opportunity to step, still behind the camera, [laughs] slightly more in front, in directing it. And I actually had major jaw surgery [laughs].

**BRITTA B.:**

Get out!

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Like, literally three days before we shot. And so I could barely speak, and I didn't want to admit that, I didn't want to, like, lose this opportunity. So I was on set with him just like, you know, ice grilling and like my mouth was closed shut. Mumbling directions [laughs].

**BRITTA B.:**

Wow! Literally through the wire.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Literally through the wire. But you know, he kind of represents such an interesting era of hip hop. Where he was being, sort of managed and produced by Rez Ota, who was like, you know, well I call him Rez Ota. OTA. Reza Dahya. Who is an incredible host and filmmaker and producer. And Reza had a real strong vision in terms of, you know, we were going to do music videos for every single track on the album. And, so when I talked about this idea of trying to create something that's different, some of them were going to be party tracks, some of them were going to be animations, some of them were going to be, just like artistic, abstract vignettes. And we did something like 13 music videos in a year [laughs].

**BRITTA B.:**

Wow.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

And they sort of got released over the course of maybe two or three years. But it was a really interesting time to work with an artist who absolutely represented Toronto, and that Toronto sound of that moment, and then trying to capture that visually.

**BRITTA B.:**

Mhmm. And someone who like, was really pushing, and pushing himself really hard. Like, it was a time of Myspace, and MSN, you know, none of these kids these days will know about that. But yeah, a time of a lot of self promotion, that was a matter of getting your name out there and getting your name as widely distributed as much as possible that you can do for yourself. And I think it's incredible, also, that you were able to go from illustration school, working in animation and illustration, and be able to look at how film and cinema and videography can tell a story in a different way that you hadn't seen before, a way to bridge those gaps. Kind of coming back to the focus of looking at filming dance, what are some considerations that you have to think about and use at the forefront of your techniques to tell the story? What do you have to do differently with dance projects than you would, say, maybe for a documentary, or something that's not dance related?

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

That's a great question. I mean, I think that there are always similarities, because for me, I'm a deeply empathetic person. And I try to meet each artist where they are, whether it's a documentary, whether it's a poetry piece, whether it's dance. But dance is really interesting, because I can be quite introverted, dancers are quite introverted. And they are people who express through their bodies, but don't necessarily have to ever talk about it. [laughs]

**BRITTA B.:**

Mmm.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

You know, it's like, if you want to see my art, you want to see my dance, like, that's how I'm expressing myself. But they're not typically given a platform to actually talk about and disseminate their own art. And so, when I approach dance films, I mean, it's a little bit of finding that connection, of empathy and humanity within the dance that translates what, to some, could be an abstract art form, into something that connects on an emotional level. And that can be different for different styles of dance. So when working with Esie Mensah on *A Revolution of Love*, this is a dancer choreographer who is very much rooted within African traditions, but then bringing in fusion from all different dance styles that she has studied over the years. And so that's a project that could go in many

different directions. And the goal was to shape it to tell the particular story that we want to tell for this moment. Versus working with dancers from *The Move* where I'm working with ballet dancers. I have not taken the ballet. And so for me, I am approaching it from that childhood student perspective of 'I'm going to learn from you. I'm going to learn from you what the most important aspect of this routine is going to be.' And we are going to try and expand that for everyone else who also didn't have those opportunities growing up and didn't have access to that space growing up.

**BRITTA B.:**

Mmm. That's really beautiful. I think there's a lot of humility there. Like you're talking about this childlike nature, to be able to put yourself in a position or in a perspective where you are learning and from an audience's point of view. You're thinking about how an audience can also learn the shape and expression and texture of perhaps an art form that they might not have an opportunity to experience for themselves. Or maybe even enlighten that inspiration to learn a little bit more, whether it's through actually moving themselves, or just studying it from other perspectives. Now, when you're directing the camera, there's a lot of movement I feel in choreography, I feel with camera angles, and even the lighting and how it hits or lands on the subject of the camera as well. What are some of the notes you carry through your process and how you want things to show up on film and on camera?

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Yeah, I, especially when it comes to dance, because dance is so much of about this expression through the body, I want to capture expression and I want to capture movement. Movement can translate the emotional range of the piece that you're trying to show. The funny thing is, if you see me behind the camera, because I shoot all these pieces, and I dance with them [laughs]. So, you know.

**BRITTA B.:**

Like stage mom.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Stage mom. You're seeing me, you know, hunched over and rolling on the ground and doing my plié, [laughs] and trying to, like, move the camera.

**BRITTA B.:**

[Laughs].

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

You know, with these dancers, because that's me embodying them. You know, and that's what I'm trying to communicate through the camera. And personally, like everyone has their own style, their own aesthetic, I want to empower these dancers especially in a project like *A Revolution of Love*. It's really about filming in angles and lighting that empowers. And that helps drive the story, light is a very important component. Light and colour are very important components of illuminating what the dance is trying to communicate to you. It's adding in additional layers that are cluing you in to the details of the dance. And I think that in learning the details, you're learning something about life, you're learning something about that story.

**BRITTA B.:**

Absolutely. In fact, let's dig into Esie Mensah's *A Revolution of Love*. Can we talk a little bit about that project and what it's about for our listeners?

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Yeah, absolutely. *A Revolution of Love* is part of a larger project with the City of Toronto, Toronto History Museums, to animate these historic spaces through a project called *Awakenings*. And so, *A Revolution of Love* was a project that I co-directed with Weyni Mengesha.

**BRITTA B.:**

Woo!

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Who is the queen [laughs]. Every time you say her name an angel gets their wings somewhere.

**BRITTA B.:**

[Laughs].

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

You know, and with Esie. And I think that it was a really beautiful project because we all approach the subject matter of it differently. And so the general storyline is about a woman in modern day times, who, in the world is being affected by the noise. We call it the noise. The noise is trauma. The noise is everything that happened in the world that sort of led to this sort of cultural reckoning that we've seen in the past year. And it's resonating through this historical space that she passes every single day. And today's the day she's going to face that noise. You know, today's the day she's going to actually respond. And she responds through dance and it's, for me, it was the only way to tell

this story. And we talked about a lot of different things, because it could have been scripted, it could have had other elements. But at the core of it dance is how we process grief. It's how we process celebration, it's how we process so many significant moments and traditions within our lives. And this is a moment where looking at all of the protests that happened, before and after George Floyd. We always talk about George Floyd as if that was the beginning, but that's the 75% in [laughs]. These protests have been happening for a long time. But this is the one that caught the world's attention, and not just a community's attention. And I think that it was a hard moment, because I didn't have any words. I didn't. I really respect all of the writers, all the poets, all the people who were able to synthesize and condense their feelings in that moment, into a piece of art to share with the world. Because, at the time, for me, I was like, I just want to like punch people, I just want to yell, I just want to curse. Like, I don't know how to actually process this. And dance was the answer. Dance was able to sort of take the weight of the world, and then also shed it. And so in creating that piece, it's the dichotomy of this current world in which this dancer is feeling the waves, and moving through the space in a way trying to alleviate that, combined with this future vision of, this all black female militia that's walking through the space, and really owning that space. And so you're seeing the past, the present, and the future colliding in a way that I think is reminiscent of what's happening in the world at large.

**BRITTA B.:**

Yeah, and it comes through so, I don't even know if this is a word, but poignantly. It comes through with resounding sensation. It's intense, it's gentle, and tender, it is assertive. And I have so many thoughts on that project alone, because from the beginning of the film, we see one of the first shots and I'm wondering if you can even tell me how you directed this. But Esie is staring into the camera, and holding that eye contact with so much of that noise being translated and focused into a message that doesn't need words. Because you feel it, you experience it. Was there something, because I know behind the camera you're really good at getting dancers, artists, writers, and whoever you're filming, you're really good at setting people up, and I'm saying this from experience, to get to that realness. To get to that real feeling. And I don't like using the word raw, but if there's another word for raw, let's use it because I feel like you had something to do with getting Esie to look into the camera like that.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Yeah, I mean that was a big part of it. That was the first shot that I put on the shot list, actually [laughs].

**BRITTA B.:**

Mmm.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

And that sort of shaped the entire piece. It was built from that moment. Because we talked a lot about what is drawing this person to this space. And the distinction was that she has the agency. This is not a magical quest that she's on. This is not voices in the wind that are calling her. This is an internal journey that she is taking the time today to address. And I wanted her to really take this larger story and personalize it. So the same way that I was personalizing this to say, like, 'I don't have words, but we can speak through expression', I wanted her to be on that same journey. And so the opening sequence she comes on with the hoodie. The hoodie is a difficult symbol. You know what I mean? Like, it's been a galvanized symbol within the Black Lives Matter movement. And what it means. What it means in terms of threat, what it means in terms of power, what it means in terms of innocence. And so it was important to have her wearing that, situating that, shedding that. As she moves through the space, and staring back at us, you know, so that we, as the viewer, are taking in her pain in that moment, and starting to empathize with this character who's about to take us on this journey.

*Musical Break*

**BRITTA B.:**

So, one of the things that I noticed just from listening to you today is that you are a radical listener. You actively listen to folks, to artists, to whomever you're working with, in your projects, and you're able to really bring that to the forefront of what you're showing. And I also noticed that looking at your catalogue of projects, there's this golden thread that shows as a producer, as someone who is an artist, behind the scenes, you are really trying to raise and amplify voices that are not always the voices that are heard. What is, let's say, in a word or two, your artistic expression driven by?

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

I mean you, I think have absolutely nailed it. You know, because for me, I didn't grow up the way that we are growing up today. My parents taught me to be silent, to be afraid, to not have that voice, because it's an easier life. You know?

**BRITTA B.:**

Mmm.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

And I think it's interesting because I have, through my entire life, in elementary and high school and university, I've always had a very, like one incredibly big moment, where I had to decide whether I was going to speak back to an injustice that was personally happening to me, or be silent around it. And that has run the gamut, like some of it is race, it's gender, it's sexuality, it's all sorts of things in which I've been tested within those moments. And each time I've spoken out and lost something. And through my artistic practice, it's like, I understand the risk that's involved with being an artist, I understand the risk that's involved with, you know, having a point of view and speaking that point of view, even if it's not a popular point of view, even if it's politicized. And so those are the people I want to protect. Those are the voices that I want to amplify. And, you know, through my work, because I say no to a lot of things. I say yes to only the things that bring that there's an intersection with a part of me and my own ideology, and what I want to see in the world, with the art that's being created. And if there is not that intersection, then I don't need the paycheck, it's fine. [Laughs]. I have just said no to so many things, and I've been fortunate to also surround myself with artists who understand that risk, who understand the power within words and dance and in various art forms. And how we can bring this to light in a big way. And I think for me, it's funny because sometimes I do talk about the viewer, like, who's watching this.

**BRITTA B.:**

Yeah.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

But everything that I make is for myself. And so if you absolutely hate it, that's fine. If it speaks to me in an authentic way, then potentially it can connect with someone else. And if it doesn't, that's fine, but that's just life, that's just how you know how we process conflict in various ways. But that's my biggest judgment, is this something that resonates and is authentic to me?

**BRITTA B.:**

That's really valuable to hear, especially for, I believe, anyone who's emerging into the industry, emerging into their art form, to be able to identify what is working for you. Because living in Toronto, for example, there's a lot of competition, who's going to get the opportunity? Who's going to get the spot? The shine? The recognition? So on and so forth. But I definitely connect with that notion of, I'm going to create for me, and have the intention, and all the hope in the world that it will reach out and meet someone elsewhere, it will connect, and perhaps, even in a future, I can collaborate with that person, and create something else that reaches another, and meets someone else. I think that when we are able to create what we most need, we are able to double the

possibility and the permission for other people to see themselves and essentially squash and subvert the status quo. Because we need each other, we need to see each other, and so much, if not all of your work, is an example of you meeting and reaching these elsewhere. So thank you, thank you, thank you, I can't stop thanking you today, [laughs], in this conversation. So much gratitude for you. I want to head into another project of yours, *The Move*. CBC's *The Move*. We just wrapped up before the pandemic, before COVID-19 began to spread, wrapped up a third season of *The Move*. And it was also nominated for the Golden Sheaf Award at the Yorkton Film Festival. Can you talk about the series and why you think *The Move* is moving so many people? [Laughs].

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

[Laughs]. Eh! Yeah, *The Move* is a series that I created three years ago. And it is telling the stories of dancers but also telling the stories of life through movement. And we've gone through three seasons. You know, the first season sort of focused on emerging dancers and the names that you needed to know. And the second season we focused on choreographers, and the third season is centered around kids, you know, all under 18 dancers. And the third season we wrapped up right before the pandemic started, as you mentioned. Right before, like, we shot a week, maybe two weeks before the entire world shut down [laughs]. And it's been a really incredible journey. I think that there were no expectations about it from the beginning. I had no resources, especially in the first season, and had to shoot, like, another show the same day I was shooting that piece. There was just no expectations. But once we put it out into the world, there was such a big response right from the beginning, which allowed us to have additional seasons. And I think that what it is, is that dance is so integral to us as human beings. It really, really truly is. You know, whether you are someone who grew up in organized dance or you're just like that person at the club, or that person at the birthday party or the wedding that like as soon as the first song hits [laughs], you're there. It tells something about who you are, as a human being. It tells something culturally. And I think that with the dancers that I've had the pleasure of featuring, there's so much about life, about, bullying, and being ostracized, but finding acceptance and community through dance. Your body is your art, your body is your form of expression. And in learning how to control your body, you can control your future in a certain way. And so I think that, that's the thing that kind of resonates with people that feels abstract, but then when you watch it in *The Move*, it feels very concrete. And it feels, you know, it feels like these are all little pockets of life lessons that can drive you through what you do.

**BRITTA B.:**

Life lessons and yeah, being able to apply so many fundamentals or foundations of dance, especially with different genres of dance, jazz, ballet, hip hop dance hall, to be able to apply that to life, as well. And especially with season three, being focused on

kids, those kids are little adults, also. Just the way they talk and are able to express themselves, and, like really be able to show what their mentors have shown them and pass that on to whoever's watching. And you can just tell they're going to be able to pass that on to another generation and pass the torch so to speak. And that's such a fulfilling thing to watch and witness. To see a young person really believe in themselves is really gratifying. I feel even though you're watching someone else see themselves, you feel that too, you feel that excitement for something, and it's definitely a way to bring audiences and people together. And speaking of kids, little youngins, you have kids! In fact, you have a new addition to your family. How has that shaped or influenced what you're currently working on the projects? How has having new life in your world given you fresh eyes?

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Oh, that's a great question. It's, you know, it's been an interesting year, because when I started working on the third season, in terms of editing, we were at home. We were in lockdown, and my oldest daughter was just turning three. And so she edited all of these projects with me. [Laughs]. Okay? She knows every line, every dance [laughs]. She understands it.

**BRITTA B.:**

Wow.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

And so it was perfect that we were doing a season around children, because it was very easy to share that experience with her. And she likes to mimic. And so she was seeing these moves, and seeing these aspirations. Cause it was really beautiful that, the kids are not jaded, the kids are processing all of these things, and all these emotions, and all of this knowledge, but they distill it in such a beautiful way and just express it through their bodies, and then it's gone. [Laughs].

**BRITTA B.:**

Mmm.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

You know? Like, they don't hold on to it the same ways that like, we hold on to things for 30 years now, [laughs] and counting. And, yeah, I just had a newborn, another daughter.

**BRITTA B.:**

Yes! Congrats.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Thank you. And I think that it really centres why this is important. It really does. I mean, I was always, when I went to art school, of the mind that like, 'why is anything that I'm creating important?' Why? Why do people care if I'm making this film? Why do people care if I'm creating this drawing, like why do people care? And this is why it's important. Because there is another generation that is learning to see themselves, that is learning about themselves, that is learning that their stories matter. And that level of visibility, and that level of empowerment through storytelling, and through making, and through art is so important for how the next generation is going to become. Like how they are going to grow as human beings. And so the experience that I had of never seeing myself, never knowing that this was a possibility. I have no family in the industry, I had to find my way to be able to produce to be able to direct to be able to work on these projects, it was never given to me. And I want them to see that they matter that their lives matter that their stories matter, and that they can access whatever they want, nothing is impossible or out of reach to them. And so that absolutely shapes the types of stories that I want to tell.

**BRITTA B.:**

Mmm! That is, [snaps], I have to snap. I probably shouldn't do that on the microphone, but lots of exclamation marks from my heart, my mind, my spirit going off right now. That is incredible. And a perfect way to wrap up our conversation. And I'm grateful for you being able to be somebody nobody in your family has ever been and to be able to watch how you've held the door open for people to pass through in better, more efficient, more gentle and prosperous ways, than possibly even you have. I love the idea of giving what you didn't get and you're someone who's truly an example of that. Lucius, thank you so much for this conversation. I feel inspired. And I'm inspired to write today and to carry your thoughts and your messages forward. Thank you so much for being on the show.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

Thank you so much for having me. And you know, honestly, like we need tacos after the pandemic is over, okay? [Laughs]. So, once things open okay?

**BRITTA B.:**

I gotchu.

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

You bring your beautiful partner and we will go for tacos, okay?

**BRITTA B.:**

I got a spot. [Laughs].

**LUCIUS DECHAUSAY:**

[Laughs].

**BRITTA B.:**

Alright, that wraps it up for today. Thank you so much for tuning into our show. You can find Lucius online on Instagram at Lucious D that's Lucius L, u, c, i, u, s D. Speaking of the letter D, *The 'D' Word* is produced by dance: made in canada, a contemporary dance festival featuring Canadian dance artists who possess unique artistic visions and come from all cultural backgrounds. This year dance: made in canada presents inTO Focus in partnership with Canadian Stage currently scheduled September 23rd through the 25th at High Park's Amphitheatre. Visit [dancemadeincanada.ca](http://dancemadeincanada.ca) to find out more about this year's festival and to donate. *The 'D' Word's* creative producer is Grace Wells-Smith, and the show is also produced by Sam Hale. Our editor and composer is Jamar Powell. dance: made in canada's co-festival directors are Janelle Rainville and Jeff Morris. Yvonne Ng is artistic director and also co-festival director. Thank you to Canadian Heritage, the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council for making *The 'D' Word* possible. I've been your girl and your host for today's session, Britta B. yeah, you know me. And the show is also hosted by Mingjia Chen, so check out the other episodes. Find *The 'D' Word* wherever you get your podcasts. Peace.