ARIA EVANS: Welcome to Thrust, the dance: made in canada podcast. We're here to provide intimate insights into the perspectives of Canadian dance artists. We'll talk about why physical expression matters, what it does in our bodies when we experience it, and how it impacts our daily lives. This season we're looking at legacy, succession planning, and knowledge sharing. Change is inevitable, but how does one prepare for it when artistic organizations are built on an individual's vision? How do we pass along embodied knowledge and our artistic vision? Or do we? Let's ask some of Canada's prominent creators now.Crazy Smooth is one of Canada's top street dance ambassadors, a choreographer, dancer, instructor, judge, and community leader. He is the founder and artistic director of Bboyizm, an award-winning dance company that has been instrumental in the preservation and proliferation of street dance in Canada and abroad. Founded in 2004, Bboyizm has successfully brought authentic street dance choreography into the professional theater setting. Crazy Smooth was most recently named Dancer of the Year at the 2023 Dynasty Awards. In 2025 Crazy Smooth was announced as the artistic director of 10 Gates Dancing, founded by the late Tedd Robinson. Crazy Smooth is coming in with consideration of the legacy of a mentor, peer and dear friend through this transitional time. Well, hello! Welcome to the podcast.

CRAZY SMOOTH: Hello, hello, hello. How are you doing?

ARIA EVANS: I am feeling good today. Yeah. There's rain in the air and I'm thinking about what rain does. Sort of washes away and brings us in new. How are you?

CRAZY SMOOTH: I'm good as well. There is definitely rain, which means I will be doing work inside, not outside.

ARIA EVANS: Yeah, no patio view for this podcast.

CRAZY SMOOTH: No, unfortunately.

ARIA EVANS: So in the last conversation that you and I had together, you

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mentioned that you really like studying things that you don't necessarily like. Except for maybe admin. That's like everyone's, 'we have to do it, but it's fine'. Can you explain where this curiosity comes from for you? What is it about the things that you don't necessarily align with that makes you curious?

CRAZY SMOOTH: So I think being goal-driven is the base of it. So for instance, if I set a goal, an example is I want to be a professional dancer. Okay? So, from the inception of the idea is to dance, it is to make dance my living. Is to do everything with dance. So, instinctually you already know what you like to do is dance. But you quickly realize that there's other aspects that you may not like. For instance, I didn't realize that these were all things that had to do with being a professional dancer in the career of dance: writing grants, doing budgets, having meetings, having to convince people of your idea. 'It's a good one, and you should fund this and blah, blah, blah, blah.' So those are all things that's not what I think about necessarily when I think of being a professional dancer. But they are necessary and some things you may not like, but you're okay at them. Some things you really don't like, you know? And so the 'keep your eyes on the prize' saying, that's why I say goal oriented for me. When I'm goal oriented, I will do everything that is necessary to achieve the goal. So I will dive into things that I don't like. And then sometimes I actually become good at them. But initially I didn't like them. Like the whole idea of having to talk to people, like schmoozing, I've become good at it. But it's something that I despised when I first started and I used to see my dancers, we would perform. Okay. Standing ovation. Cool. And then everybody's going out to kind of party and then I had to stay, schmooze and talk to people about the work. I didn't like that at first, but now I think I'm okay at it.

ARIA EVANS: There's a really beautiful outlook on life that is underneath that perspective that you've just shared, where, yeah, there are things that we have to do, but if we get curious about them, if we see them as a necessity for the things that we love, they become more interesting or tolerable. [Laughs]. Is

there somebody that you feel like instilled that sort of ethos within you in your life?

CRAZY SMOOTH: Everything for me is from my parents. Right? Both my dad and my mom bestowed upon me a pretty intense work ethic. And whatever you set out to do, you do it to the fullest and you always do your best. So I'm from that generation and so that has helped me a lot when thinking, 'okay, I'm gonna do a career in the arts. I'm gonna make my living with dance and with my body in certain ways.'

ARIA EVANS: Do you remember any early conversations with them when you wanted to shift into this as a career?

CRAZY SMOOTH: Not conversations about it, because, you know, as a son of immigrant parents, dance was not necessarily an option. 'What do you mean you're gonna be a dancer? We sacrificed everything, not for you to become a dancer, but for you to become, I don't know, a doctor, engineer,' whatever. But they quickly, I think, realized and saw my work ethic and the will to succeed and give it my best. They quickly saw that's the approach that I had. And it helps when you win awards or they come see your show and people clap and are like, 'oh my god!' You know?

ARIA EVANS: [Laughs].

CRAZY SMOOTH: So, okay. Yeah, my son is serious. You know, it's not just the idea of like, 'oh, I'm gonna dance.' They start understanding what the career path is.

ARIA EVANS: With that intergenerational expectation, you said like engineer, doctor, and when you had Bboyizm and you made the choice that you wanted to bring this street form onto more professional stages, what made you say, 'I need to do this, I have to do this, I want to do this?'

CRAZY SMOOTH: Yeah, that's an interesting question because I was already operating within the street dance world, right? It's not like I was winning battles, I was gaining a reputation in my world,

the street dance world- which is the most important thing for me, to be respected by my peers. By our OGs, the creators of the dance, et cetera. So that was being achieved, or I was immersed in that world. So then the transition or the desire to take everything that I learned, and a lot of this is because it's not just something that- being part of this community- you do on weekends or whatever. It's your life and you identify through this culture. Like a lot of people, and especially in my generation, a lot of immigrants that are in this country have that duality in culture. You know, I'm from Benin. When I'm with people from Benin it's like, 'oh, I know that's where I'm from, but I'm not a hundred percent like that.' When I'm with my Canadian friends, I know I have my citizenship, but I'm not a hundred percent Canadian. So the world of street dance and of hip hop is probably the world where I identified. And so transitioning to the stage, part of it is like wanting to pay homage and justice to our causes or our culture and having them being represented well, versus how a lot of people kind of saw it in the beginning when I was starting. Like, 'oh, this is cool kids spinning on their head' or whatever. It wasn't viewed as a legitimate art form. If I go to the root of it, that's definitely one of the reasons why I wanted to transition. Or bring what I did, or what we do in that culture, bring it to the stage and represent it well and not in a watered down form.

ARIA EVANS: Yeah, I can imagine also that seeing representations around you that maybe felt extractive and being able to really come to it from what you described as cultural, as embedded in who you are, as your identity, into that different setting. Which, you know, I said 'professional', but that word means so many different things to so many different people.

CRAZY SMOOTH: Yeah. Loosely used. Because well, maybe it's different now, but for my generation, it sounds funny to say 'I'm a professional b-boy.' No.It's like, I'm a b-boy. You know? But today I think maybe people have more extensive careers. There's the whole Olympic thing.

ARIA EVANS: Mm-hmm.

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CRAZY SMOOTH: And so I think maybe today people would say that a little bit more. 'I'm a professional'. [Laughs].

ARIA EVANS: To come back around to legacy, how did the transition with 10 Gates come to be?

CRAZY SMOOTH: Okay, so the discussion had started before Tedd passed away. He was already talking about retirement and people from his generation were retiring and those were the things that he was thinking about. So it wasn't a sudden thing. The discussion was already underway. But then, when he passed away, it accelerated things. The original plan was for me to be with 10 Gates, but to have one year where Tedd would kind of teach me how. 'Cause yes, I have Bboyizm, but I'd never been artistic director, I've never been in the non-for-profit structure. Right? So, board of directors and all that. It was gonna take a year to learn, but then when he passed, things accelerated and so, we continued with the plan. Luckily, you know, I already had a good relationship with Tina, his general manager, and I knew Tedd, and I knew 10 Gates. So I want to say it went as smoothly as it could have gone, given the link that I had with Tedd. So I'm now artistic director of 10 Gates and carrying on legacy and bringing my twist to it.

ARIA EVANS: Mm. Can you tell me more about your twist?

CRAZY SMOOTH: Well, you know, already if you look at a picture of Tedd Robinson and then me, you'd be like, 'huh?'

ARIA EVANS: [Laughs].

CRAZY SMOOTH: Because we're very different people. But, when you know us, I think you can see where we converge on certain things. The desire to be unique, the desire to be ourselves, the idea of authenticity and the idea of things coming from the heart, like pure things. But again, the twist is I'm a street dancer. And I'm not, quote unquote, a contemporary dancer. And the cool thing is that Tedd Often told me that if he were to be

younger or to do it again, he would be a street dancer. It may be one of the reasons why we got along, because of that mindset that he had. Yeah, again, my twist, I'm a street dancer, so that's where I'm coming from. So that in itself brings a fresh, new kind of vibe and definitely aesthetic. But my twist also being that I'm not a beginner anymore. I would say I'm mid-career now. So that means that I have a voice. I've done a lot of things and I'm past the 'hey, this is me. This is what I do. This is who I am.' So now I'm in a place of really expressing myself and wanting to say something. So part of the twist is also the opportunity that 10 Gates gives me to explore Crazy, Smooth, the artist. So the collaborations that are gonna be happening are going to give birth to a whole other aesthetic.

ARIA EVANS: Exciting.

CRAZY SMOOTH: Yeah. Yeah, really exciting.

ARIA EVANS: How would you define, 'I am a street dancer.' What does that mean to you?

CRAZY SMOOTH: The term street dancer essentially talks about this vernacular dance. These dances from a specific time and that are sporadic in nature. There's a social gathering, music plays, and people react. Again, in 2025 things are a bit different, but originally they are not institutionalized at all. So you couldn't say ' Thursday I'm gonna go take my locking class' or 'Friday I have a breaking class.' No. You go somewhere, music plays, and you train. You practice. This is where it's from. And the very nature of the dance requires individuality. Requires the foundation everybody learns, but then, you have to be ' Crazy Smooth'. 'Oh, that's my name. Okay.' You have to be Ken Swift. You have to be Vengeance. So everybody has to be themselves and through the foundation, find their originality. And you know, people have trademark moves. Okay, well someone did invent the chair freeze, the windmill, or whatever, but this is how I do it. Well, that's one thing that I love about the culture, but I think that's one of the things that Tedd really liked because even though he had

training, he never wanted to look like someone else. There's a club downtown here, Mercury Lounge. And he would go after rehearsals, or even when he would travel, he would go to clubs and just dance and do his thing because he didn't want to look like some of his peers, like the trained dancers. That's what he liked a lot. And so what is to be a street dancer is being within that culture and that understanding of originality through foundation. And foundation is movement, whatever, but it's also culture and it's also a historical understanding.

ARIA EVANS: The authenticity that what comes from within to come out, how do you approach that choreographically? Do you allow unison moments to happen? Are you thinking about the individuality of all of the performers?

CRAZY SMOOTH: As a choreographer and being a street dancer, that's the balance that one definitely needs to have. Because part of the magic of the dance is that sporadic improv. Yeah, structured improvisation. That's part of what makes it exciting. So by taking that away, you're taking the soul of the dance away. So you can't do that. But at the same time, if you have a theme and you have a message or whatever it is that you're creating, you need to have that structure. So it's the balance. I've experienced this a lot with Bboyizm, it's to allow that individuality, even in choreography that is made to be synchronized. And at the same time, give that timing because again, you don't want to lose what makes it nice aesthetically. So you have to be in the lab and test little formulas out to see what comes out and what helps the theme or the goal the most, you know. And the truth is, sometimes you do something really good, but you really just can't redo it, you know?

ARIA EVANS: Mm-hmm.

CRAZY SMOOTH: Because it was in that moment. But every time you set up the parameters for that to hopefully be able to happen.

ARIA EVANS: Yeah.

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CRAZY SMOOTH: But yeah. It's definitely something that you have to balance as a street dancer.

ARIA EVANS: I like the metaphor of the lab. I'm just imagining your proud parents being like 'a scientist!'

CRAZY SMOOTH: Yes.There you go. They'll understand that! [Laughs].

ARIA EVANS: It's just one of those things where dance really does integrate into every single thing that every single person does. There's parallels. So in this new work where you are going to be on the outside for the first time, are you thinking about approaching that relationship to choreography differently than you have in the past?

CRAZY SMOOTH: Yeah. I will. I have to. I'm gonna be co-choreographing with Saxon Fraser, and she does dance in some of her work as well, but she's more used to setting stuff on others and not having herself necessarily generate the movement. That's the issue that I'm going to wrestle with, is that the movement doesn't need to be generated by me. And in fact, within the creation exercises that we do, identify ' can we do a little bit more of this? This was the exercise, but now we've found something here. Let's try it like that, you know? And get excited, you know?' And find it through the others. Luckily the five dancers that we have, they're really good movers. I already admire their movement and how they do it, so I think that's half the battle. And then generating movement through the creation exercises that we're gonna be taking them on and pushing them, Saxon is really good for that. Where, 'okay, that's good, but let's push more. What if I take this away?' You know. 'What can you do?' And so, it's gonna be fun.

ARIA EVANS: How do you decide who to work with?

CRAZY SMOOTH: Oh, how do I decide who to work with? There's probably a few things it could come from. Just a general respect. Mutual respect. I respect you as an artist, therefore, let's work

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together. It could be from conflict. We butt heads on something, but because I respect you, you've made me reconsider. You've challenged me, and I like that.It's signs, for me anyway, that 'oh this could be cool because we both respect each other. We don't see certain things exactly the same, but I can see where this can work.' How do I decide who to work with? Sometimes it's also through pure admiration. Like Tedd for instance. I admired him because of his reputation. Because of his words. Because of his kindness. He came to the studio and that's how our relationship started. And through that little experience, I knew that someday I wanna work with him. It's not like I saw one of his performances, no. It was through a relationship and I admired him.

ARIA EVANS: Were there people in your life when you were growing up dancing that did that for you? That challenged you? That pushed your expectations? That allowed you to rebel?

CRAZY SMOOTH: Being in breaking, that's the nature of it as well. It's an endless challenge. You know, 'oh yeah, that's good, but can you do this?' So there's always pushing. Pushing is part of the dance. And it's also like what I was saying earlier, that you want to be original and you don't want to look like the next person. So you always like pushing. So throughout my career as a b-boy, that's the mentality that I grew up with. Always challenging, always pushing. So my peers, or whoever was around me, that's also what was around them, you know? And so we always pushed each other to reach new heights. Now, within concert dance and the theater and the stage world, that's also there, but not in the same way. It's not as in your face, I would say. But sometimes that challenge, if I think of some of the people that I've crossed paths with, sometimes it's not through a challenge, it's through just a conversation. And through that conversation there was a question like, 'oh, I didn't think about it like that.' Or a question where I struggled to answer and it stayed with me after, you know?

ARIA EVANS: Yeah.

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CRAZY SMOOTH: Or a discussion about a topic, about dance that pushed my thinking or my reflection about that topic. It pushed it further. I hadn't explored that. I hadn't seen it from that angle or that perspective.

ARIA EVANS: It's interesting to pull out those values from the way that you experienced dance culture growing up and now thinking about it in your role as an artistic director or a choreographer for Bboyizm. Have you thought about how those values intersect with the infrastructure of 10 Gates? That sort of charitable status, operating funding, into that world in any way?

CRAZY SMOOTH: You know, those are the aspects that you just named, like the structure and everything behind. For me it's important that even though they seem really technical, really structural, it's important for me that every aspect of 10 Gates, of Bboyizm, of everything that I do, they have to have those values. It has to be embedded in it because, again, authenticity is important and I believe that's where my strength is. That I'm not just saying things, I'm not just writing things. If I said certain things, but then my discussions with the board were completely different. You know, money is important to be able to operate and do these beautiful ideas. But, it would be weird if all the values and all the stuff that I put out there for 10 Gates, and then I'm sponsored somehow, or there's an affiliation with something that's completely got nothing to do, and it's purely 'cause they got money. You know, it'd be weird 'cause it wouldn't align. Yes, there are other aspects, but the values and all the things that are important, they need to be embedded in every other thing as well.

ARIA EVANS: Yeah. It sounds like you lead with a lot of integrity.

CRAZY SMOOTH: Yes. That's the word, integrity.

ARIA EVANS: I'm gonna switch gears for a moment and I wanted to shout

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out one of your crew mates who wrote a book, Don't Stop the Rock. And I bring it into this conversation because one of the main themes is about carrying on tradition, but with a touch of modernity, and I'm curious what about that is integral or important to you?

CRAZY SMOOTH: The Warrior, who is my crew mate, and one of my best friends, we started a crew together called Kossassins. The famous saxophonist, musician and singer Manu Dibango from Cameroon, who passed away during the pandemic unfortunately- we both saw him in concert. So he has a famous song called Soul Makossa. Makossa means dance in Cameroonian language. And so that's how we got the name, or we created the name of a crew. Kossassins, dance assassins. Kossa means, like, I dance. Anyway, he's from Algeria. Raised in France. I'm born in Benin and we both met each other 'cause we're part of a crew. We were part of a crew in New York. When we got together, we ended up leaving the crew, but we were lucky to learn from a lot of the creators, or some of the first generation dancers of The Rock, the dance, The Rock. And that's something that they always told us. Like, okay, you learn the basics, but you have to do it with your own style and all of that. And we're not from New York, we're not from the seventies. So, when we say that, it's like we carry on tradition. So you need to learn, you need to like, sankofa. You need to know where things started and how they got to be. But then that's not where you're going. You're not going in the past. You're going in the future. So take the lessons, learn, understand them to a certain degree, master them, but then add a touch of modernity to go in the future, because you also want the next generation to do the same thing, you know? So the dance, the spirit of the dance stays the same, but all the other spices have to bring it to a modern time, you know. Or a contemporary time. So we came up with that through discussion as well. And also observation of the scene and other dancers. Like everybody is just trying to be like the old generation. It was like, 'no, well guys, you know that's not the message here.' It's like, they dance differently from their teacher, so you have to. That's one of the things that we always talk about

together. And so he put it in the book. I'm carrying on legacy in the sense. In our discussion I was telling you I just did my first core grant application, and in that process, I read the application that Tedd did and it's a lot, you know. It's scary. This is what was done before me, and so I'm carrying on legacy I want to take and move forward with. And hopefully, someday I pass it on to someone else. This is gonna be what Tedd did, then this is gonna be what I did. And then the next person is like, 'oh, okay, so there's all of this', but I'm not wanting him to do what I did or what Tedd did. I want that person to carry on the tradition, the legacy, and move forward.

ARIA EVANS: Has there been a piece of advice or a message that Tedd shared with you that is something that you are carrying forward with you?

CRAZY SMOOTH: I don't wanna say one-liners, but there's a lot of things. A lot of things that he shared with me and his presence was also just very calming. He had a very calming effect on me. And, you know, being in dance and living the busy life, it's like, you talk to Tedd, it's like, 'okay, alright.' He came in as an outside eye and it grew. And at one point he told me that I needed to relax a bit and stop being a bit of a control freak. And stop that in my creation process. Because of the work that I've done, the hard work and setting things up, there comes a point in that process where it's no longer up to me, and that the work tells me what it needs. At some point, the work tells you what it needs and what it wants. Yeah, I am still a control freak, but that's something that I carry with me a lot that Tedd told me.

ARIA EVANS: I really look forward to following how 10 Gates and Bboyizm tells you what it needs as you continue into this future that we're all propelling towards.

CRAZY SMOOTH: Thank you so much. This was a great conversation.

ARIA EVANS: Thanks for tuning into Thrust, the dance: made in canada

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podcast. Thrust is presented by dance: made in canada/ fait au canada festival, a biennial dance festival featuring dance artists from across Turtle Island with unique artistic visions from diverse backgrounds. We acknowledge that this land colonially known as Canada, has been the site of dance for many millennia. We are grateful for the ability to dance and celebrate on Turtle Island. Thrust is produced by Mayumi Lashbrook and Taylor Zalik-Young. Editor and composer, Jamar Powell, sound engineer Chris Dupuis, and 1990 Studios, and cover photography by Marlowe Porter. And I'm your host, Aria Evans. Thank you to our funders, Canadian Heritage, the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council, and our donors including the Azrieli Foundation, Lindy Green Family Foundation, and all our individual donors. We couldn't do this without their constant support. Find us wherever you get your podcasts and don't forget to rate and review. Let dance transform you.