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. Together, Victor Vân Tran and Deanna Peters are co-directors of the Vancouver International Dance Festival. Victor is a Vietnamese Canadian choreographer whose work bridges street and social dance traditions with experimental stage practices. A breaker, rocker and hustler, his choreography transposes the freestyle ethos of these forms, drawing from ciphers, clubs, and dialogue with community. Through Now or Never crew, Victor has upheld a legacy of local street dance shaped by intergenerational mentorship and over 20 years of collaboration, competition, and community building. His practice is informed by deep ties to grassroots spaces where dance thrives as both resistance and joy. Deanna Peters/ Mutable Subject is a dance artist and designer who creates, performs and DIY- produces for the stage, club, gallery, web, and print. Deanna uses the name Mutable Subject because they're always moving and evolving in their decades-spanning career. As a creator of eye popping and deeply moving dance works, Deanna is known for pushing the boundaries of the form. Diverse training projects keeps Deanna nimble in body and mind, and currently they are being mentored in house dance by Sekou Heru in New York City. Hi, Victor. Hi, Deanna. Welcome to Thrust Podcast.

DEANNA PETERS: Ooh, I feel that!

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: Hello!

ARIA EVANS: Yeah. Our new name we're launching. So, so exciting, you

have just completed your first season of VIDF. Is that how locals say it?

DEANNA PETERS: Uh, no, definitely not. [Laughs].

ARIA EVANS: The first season of Vancouver International Dance Festival. And I'm sure that you're still trying to understand the rhythm of what the festival is and the work that you're doing. How is that sort of calibration going for you today? Currently?

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: Yeah. Thanks for having us. So cool to be here. The rhythm of running a festival, it's hard to say. Because this last festival was our first, and we were kind of just thrown into it. And I don't think we're gonna really know the rhythm until we've actually had a full year to do a festival and then a second iteration. So I feel like we were given a garden and it was in the middle of spring, and now we're finally feeling like we have an understanding of what was in that garden.

DEANNA PETERS: It's like our first April as festival directors. So it's hard to get a sense of cycle or rhythm until we get to do another April, or May, or whatever. And it was a bit surprising 'cause it was a big push just to mount the festival in six months. Including programming artists from South Africa, and Visas and everything like that. And I think we both anticipated that there would be a rest after the festival, but here we are in early May and we have written 10 grants since the festival. So, you know, we're wondering when that push is over. [Laughs].

ARIA EVANS: Yeah. And it takes a huge amount of stamina. Because I know you're both practicing artists yourselves. So then to both be writing grants for the festival and also for yourselves, that's wild. It's so beautiful when the two of you talk about your shared values and ethos and the way that you advocate, both being complimentary but also different. And I'm curious, 'cause you've talked about intentionally not making the Vancouver International Dance Festival an institution. Why?

**This transcript has been edited for clarity.*

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: This is what I know, is that, we're just doing what is natural to us and we haven't really worked in the institutional context. And I also know that we were appointed these positions because we weren't bringing in an institutional framework. We were bringing this fluidity. We were bringing eyes and ears on a street level. And we're bringing something that's very responsive, and I think that's what the festival was needing. And I think that one of the criticisms of structures or institutions in artistic settings is that there's some harmful emergent properties. You know, properties that are rigid or it can be exclusionary. And you start to lose the essence of what you're doing when you rely too much on an efficiency model, let's say.

DEANNA PETERS: I guess I could share through an anecdote. You know, 'cause we are coming with a lot of experiences so we're not necessarily looking to learn about how to produce events. We're bringing our style of producing to VIDF. But I was attending another festival just weeks before VIDF 2025 and I showed up and there's all these banners and all this infrastructure, it felt like. There's even tables with staff and computers and a box office, that kind of thing. And I started to feel imposter syndrome about like, is VIDF even gonna work? Like, is it gonna be a disaster? Even just around something like box office, because we are just going to check people's names off when they come into the space, you know. And we don't have staff, like, 'oh, do we actually have the experience to do this?' And so I came back, I came home and I called Victor and we chatted about it and he was just like, 'yeah, no, we just need to try it and we need to stick to our guns and we need to do what we know and we don't need to try to adopt what everyone else is doing. So I think it's not so much about not wanting to be an institution, 'cause it's semantic. I think it's just about being a different type of institution. And I think that you don't have to do things status quo. Isn't that the point of being an artist in a way?

ARIA EVANS: Absolutely.

DEANNA PETERS: You know? And I think also the fact that we are practicing

**This transcript has been edited for clarity.*

artists ourselves, and that is our main driving ethos, we are able to relate to the artists who we are supporting and who our organization is designed to support. And we can do that through extremely empathetic, non-hierarchical means. We also acknowledge what we don't know. And that some of these artists that we're working with, Helen Simard for example, they're coming in with so much experience. Like they're big, we're following their lead. And we're learning from them. We're learning what our points of view are going to be. And you know what a privilege it is to be in relationship with literally hundreds of our peers.

ARIA EVANS: It's beautiful to hear you articulate that. This August, witness bold new choreography in its rawest form. Video Cabaret presents Mighty Dances in a Small Space, an evening of powerful contemporary works by Jera Wolfe and Peggy Baker, two of the most dynamic voices in Canadian dance. In a space where every breath, every step, every shift matters, experience performances by Miyeko Ferguson, Katherine Semchuck, and Jera Wolfe himself. With sound design by Julian Anderson- Bowes, lighting by Gabriel Cropley, and an audience up close. This is dance stripped down to its essentials. Visceral, immediate, and unforgettable. Join us at 10 Busy Street Leslieville, Friday, August 15th at 8:00 PM, Saturday and Sunday, August 16th and 17th at 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM. Part of Video Cabaret's 50th anniversary season. Tickets and more at videocab.com. Small space, big ideas. You are responsive to your community, your peers, the artists that you're working with, and audiences. And I'm curious Victor, you said that your point of view was what the festival needed. And I wanna flip that for a moment and ask you, what have you inherited? In the way that you were a vision that the festival needed to move forward, what, in your mind, does the festival hold that you are now engaging with both positive or negative.

DEANNA PETERS: Operating funding.

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: Yeah. And along with that are these kind of huge sets of

responsibilities. If we were just talking about the operational funding, in a way I'm not precious about many things, but we are precious about where that money is going and making sure that most of that money is going directly to artists. And so I feel I've inherited this kind of scale that makes it challenging to be very efficient in our spending in a way that we would have in a smaller production. You know, like less insurance, let's say for example.

ARIA EVANS: Yeah.

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: So then I feel like I have to really find my way around, or we are finding our way around to cut all these additional costs where we can, so that we can still bring on an international caliber festival while also fulfilling our mandates to support primarily artists through the financial means. And then still making it accessible to everybody.

ARIA EVANS: Yeah, there's a huge amount of responsibility inside of leadership and infrastructure, especially the way that you two talk about being so value- centered. I can imagine that sometimes that is completely at odds with one another, and having to fit yourself inside of that is complicated. In what ways do you feel like you support each other through those hard moments?

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: I'll jump in and just say that Deanna helps me stay true to myself and true to my values. I believe , maybe through school or something, I have this tendency to try to be a, I don't know, like, a teacher's pet or something. Or to be a good student. When that actually does a disservice to myself and to my art and to my colleagues and so Deanna helps me, especially when we get into a bigger production like this, to resist the temptation to maybe follow a certain other code and just to actually be like, 'yo, what your experience is, is why you're here, and why it's needed and why it's valuable. You don't need to conform to anything else.' So yeah, Deanna helps me stay true.

DEANNA PETERS: Yeah, I mean, going back to the question of lineage, I'm from

Saskatchewan and I'd say it's like a protest sort of culture, you know?

ARIA EVANS: Mm-hmm.

DEANNA PETERS: Everyone will be sitting around a diner drinking coffee and complaining about the cost of this... I come from a grumble culture a little bit, it feels like. And I would say Jay and Barbara led VIDF with that energy, that protest energy. We thankfully have a culture that's looking towards diversity now, but what Jay was facing at Canada Council in what would it have been, 2000? Was very different. Sometimes he was the only racialized person that would be receiving funding. So there's a lineage there that I really respect. Work that is grounded in lived experience. And we're not doing it in the same way, but it is a value of ours too. To really be looking at people's connection to the forms and the cultures that they are working in to represent their expression. Is there an authentic connection there? And so I feel like VIDF already has developed a reputation for programming works that are on the cusp of pushing societal issues.

ARIA EVANS: It's interesting, Deanna, to hear you say the term ' grumble culture' because I often think about how our experiences of culture shape the way that we engage in the world as artists. And the two of you talk a lot about generative dismantling, and for me there's a similarity between grumble culture and generative dismantling. And I'm curious if you make those connections for yourself of your upbringing and your artistic ethos.

DEANNA PETERS: Hmm. This seems so idiosyncratic and personal maybe, but I often wondered, where does our agency come from? And you know, I don't know the answer to that question. But I see people trying to find their agency in multiple different ways and I think what Victor was describing about being given a bit of agency to be more himself in his work and I... hmm. Yeah, I'm not really sure exactly how to answer that question because I see it as a really complex shape, you know, to get to this point. So it's really hard to say one thing or two things

that sort of represent those intersections. And how are we shaped? Is it a conversation with a bus driver, you know, that really pushes you into a certain place? Is it these one-off little moments, and these experiences? But I would say that what I know about myself now is that I am reactive and I do process often through negativity. My first answer is actually to kind of say no, and then I kind of adjust around, right? So, Victor's kind of saying, 'oh, I'm a yes man.' So there's an interesting balance there. And I feel like we balance each other out. Like I go to Victor to soundboard things. Like, are my feelings justified? Is my rage justified? Is my frustration justified? How do we shape this? Because I don't always get the best responses from people, in the way that I approach things, so it also helps things be more inclusive to other people and their views.

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: And in turn, I have found this to be a challenge. Having that tendency to be a yes person and quote unquote be 'too nice' in all those situations. But there is a high level of criticism that's going on in my head, but I guess I'm just trying to be keeping the peace, let's say a diplomatic or whatnot. And I turn to Deanna to talk about her experiences because they offer a level of criticality that often is aligned with me and then helps me speak it. Whereas often I would be too afraid to speak that. And I think if I don't speak my truth, let's say, then my lived experiences, the experience that I think is valuable for relationships and for a community, is not being spoken or doesn't have any ground. So it's interesting. We have complimentary styles, right?

ARIA EVANS: There's something that I'm piecing together from a couple of the last things that we've been talking about. And it's the way that you talk about bringing artists forward that are on the cusp, or who are on the fringes, and then you're also talking about your critical lens and the way that the two of you engage with the community. And then I also know that you don't necessarily like to refer to yourselves as curators, but I am interested in how you make programming choices, to use different language that maybe means something really

similar [laughs], for the way that you shape an experience for people attending your festival?

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: First, I think on the curation aspect, coming from my background in street dance, that's a fairly new word for me. So it doesn't make me feel comfortable. I don't feel comfortable to call myself a curator because as I'm learning, that is a highly specialized practice and skill and experience that I think is drawn from in academic spaces. And it is a legit practice. So I can't say something I'm not. But it is confusing because in our programming work, there is an aspect of curation. So to some degree you are curating, but I wouldn't say I am a curator. I definitely feel much more comfortable saying what I am, which is a presenter that has an aspect of curation in their work. And as I'm learning, that term can be controversial, or it's a loaded term. So I just wanna be respectful to all the curators.

DEANNA PETERS: And it's kind of ironic, right? Because now it's like you curate your living room, you curate your schedule, you know. It's just one of those buzzwords that gets pulled into the system and loses its meaning. And regarding the programming and the fringes, we've been doing everything on the fly up until this point, right? Like, I remember the first week we came on, like the very first day we came on, we had a production meeting with the roundhouse and nothing has been programmed at least, but you know, we're just thrown right into it. And, I remember we were keeping this document, 'cause we work remotely, we work online, and so we have a lot of shared documents where I'll see that we'll be in a meeting but Victor will be writing something in the document and I'll be going in there and we're writing our policies. Just right there. We did a call to artists and we were fortunate enough to be able to work with Michelle Olson of Raven Spirit Dance. We wanted things to be transparent. We wanted for the festival to feel accessible. Also, calls to artists were things that were a familiar way for us with producing past festivals and things like that. So Michelle helped us when we we're looking at works and were like, 'is this what we program? Is this what we program?' And we are asking,

the three of us, why isn't this something that we program? And we really came up with more solidified values. And I love working with documents. I really like having, whether it's a contract, or a community agreement, or a manifesto, or something that's not about us, it's about the work, the organization. It's about the festival. So it's not us saying no, it's the festival saying no, and these are the reasons why. And so it's really nice when we can just look at the document and be like, 'is this what we program?' And it's like, 'no, that's not what we program.' So we have three words that we use and they actually are words that have continued on from previous VIDFs, which are raw, kinetic, and experimental. And so we'll watch a video and we'll be like, 'oh, it's raw. Yeah, it's experimental. Okay. It's not kinetic.' It's not that everything has to fit all three. Sometimes it's okay to have one work that isn't as kinetic as others or whatever. So I like having those structures, and we allow those to evolve as well.

ARIA EVANS: As a sort of closing, as we come to a moment of ending that never ends, I wanted to come back to this theme of legacy and succession. And I'm curious if, having one cycle under your belt, if you have a question that you wanna ask each other?

VICTOR VÂN TRAN: It wasn't until learning more about choreography, and different dance practices, and performance, and just realizing that contemporary dance, if you actually just look at the word, which means 'now'. And that anything that is being created now is contemporary. So I guess my question to Deanna is, how do you define street dance?

DEANNA PETERS: Yeah, I would say that it's like all dance, right? Rooted in lineages, cultural lineages. Street dance wasn't the beginning of something. It's a continuation of cultural gatherings, social gatherings, and the knowledge that is created through human gatherings. Music. Movement. It's embedded into our life, our lifestyles. It's embedded in place. It's specific in place, and it's communicated via movement. You know, you're in a club, so now we're expanding, it's not

really street dance, but, let's say adjacent. You're in a club and just having that experience of somebody recognizing what you're saying, right? You never speak, but they recognize what you're saying. They come up to you, you communicate, you're like, 'yeah, I know this. Oh, I know this too. This is where I'm coming from'. We share a language and there's a familial kind of feel to that. You're welcomed into a community, you're welcomed into a family. It's like a secret handshake in a way, right? It's like, just to kind of signal where we're at. And it doesn't mean taking the stage and having to be the focus. I feel like street dance culture allows people to be radiating connections out. The whole is what creates that opportunity for that individual expression that might be in the center of the cipher. And how that then morphs and shifts. That fluidity.

ARIA EVANS: It's beautiful and meaningful to hear the two of you talk about how your lived experience is embedded into the leadership model that you are undertaking together. It is so unique and I feel so elated to get to be a part of our industry where this kind of change is happening. So I wanted to thank you both for your raw, kinetic and experimental energies in this space, for all that you've shared.

DEANNA PETERS: Yeah, we look forward to hosting you!

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

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.

**This transcript has been edited for clarity.*