

Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

And I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: Joining us today is Joey Lorraine, creator of the Black Lives Rising Virtual Dance Film Festival. She's preparing for the festival's launch. Joey, welcome to the podcast. Thanks for joining us today.

JL: Hi, Vanessa and Kathleen. Thank you so much for having me.

VC: Let's start with your background. You have a very interesting background and body of experience so why don't you tell us about that and how all of this led to your creating this film festival.

JL: So I've been in New York City since college. In the late 90's I am a graduate of NYU's film and television program. I'm originally from Denver Colorado, Bear Valley to be exact, that's it. I am a valley girl, at heart, I make that very clear, but at the same time I am very much a New Yorker and definitely consider New York to be my home. So I've been an independent freelance dancer in the city for quite a while now. I've made my living as a movement specialist teaching gyrotonics and Pilates and a little bit of Feldenkrais. I am also in love with metaphysics and am a certified astrologer. So I do a lot of different things and when the pandemic hit I had extra time to just take in content that maybe I normally wouldn't take in. All sorts of content about politics, race relations, Black Lives Matter, on YouTube and that period I think kind of inspired me to create a vision, a racial dynamic, and a racial theme. I did receive a grant from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Center to take part in what they call their Creative Engagement Series. So I knew that I wanted to do something involving dance and film and like I said I think the extended time during the pandemic and watching all this different content really inspired me to kind of stretch myself and present a festival that even if I may not normally consider myself political I could at least kind of take in my experience and stretch myself to say, to give a message about what it means for me to be a woman of color and to open that up as a platform for other people to give them the freedom to express something that's authentic about how they feel about racial consciousness or their racial identity. That's kind of a long winded answer, but...

KK: One of the things that you mentioned in your biography. You say you're a valley girl and I know that had to be a big part of how you feel today because you were like the only Black family in this white neighborhood. Is that true?

JL: I think they were the first interracial couple to live on my block. It is a predominantly white community, it still is. My mother is African American and she's passed away, unfortunately, and my father is, yeah, very white, 100%.

KK: That's interesting because when you say you don't have to be Black to be a part of the Black experience, tell us more about that.

JL: It's what I believe. It's what I've experienced. My father stepped into the Black experience by marrying my mother. By default you become part of that person's experience so I think that's part of what I mean. I think someone could be ontologically Black, meaning that they could be Black in spirit. I think that's the idea. I know that there's a lot of controversy around that idea but I do think there's something to it that you don't have to have Black skin to empathize and to be open and to be connected to the Black experience.

VC: You also have a background as a filmmaker and have made some dance films in the past, is that right?

JL: Yes, yes. So after college I got the dance bug and I just started taking dance classes, you know, because I had extra time and I realized that I just couldn't stop. And so as time went on I wanted to use my education, I wanted to use my background and experience in filmmaking and the dance world and so yeah, I'd just been creating small works here and there, there's a small documentary that I made featuring the Uptown Dance Academy in Harlem. Robin Williams is the director of that dance academy and she's just a real go-getter. They have really special students there. They do a Black Nutcracker every year. Several years ago the famed ballerina Misty Copeland was able to get them a really substantial donation. And so yeah, Robin has just kind of been a staple in the Harlem community and at the time I was studying there and I thought that her, she was such an interesting character, a really dynamic character, and so I did make a short documentary.

KK: Tell us the name of it so we could all check it out.

JL: It's called The Black Nutcracker, Harlem's Dancing Queen, The Black Nutcracker.

VC: Yes, it was a wonderful film. So moving on to your festival now, tell us a little about the festival's mission and how it stands out from the many, many dance film festivals that are out there.

JL: Yeah, well you know dance film, dance on camera, is just exploding. It's just outrageous as to how much content there is out there now on YouTube specifically. It's mind-boggling, right? I'm interested in

creating something that I really feel comfortable with and is authentic to my experience because there's all this amazing stuff already out there. I don't want to try to recreate the wheel, so to speak, right? I'm not much of a group person, I'm kind of a do my own thing kind of person and I would have to take a leadership role as a festival director and I'd be stretching myself in that way, working with other people in a collaborative way. So I said to myself okay, I really want to make this something that is in my heart. So that's how it kind of like came about and as far as I know there are no other dance film festivals that have this vision of cultural identity and racial identity as their main theme. Although I do have to say more than ever, dance film festivals in particular are creating more and more diverse work from diverse artists and I think that is definitely the result of the Black Lives Matter movement. So it's exciting, it's an exciting time I think for artists of color or people who want to explore that landscape. But in particular, I think for me, I'm interested in kind of creating art that directly speaks to cultural identity and the Black experience.

KK: Is there some special criteria that you're looking for when people submit these films?

JL: I really would love to get films that do have an authentic, specific message about the Black experience in today's times. The more personal the message is, the more authentic the message is, the more from the heart the message is the better. We have to mix it up and really stretch the boundaries of how we look at race. So I would love for this festival to be a part of that and to encourage people to stretch their ideas around race. It would be great if I could get work that will stimulate people to talk about racial issues that they may normally not be comfortable with.

VC: Do you have specific guidelines for submission? That is, are you looking for short films, full length?

JL: Since the film festival will be a virtual festival on a virtual platform it will be, the films will be screened live virtually via a virtual gallery called I'm Not Art via Discord which is an emerging virtual space and Twitch so this is all like really new to me but I'm going for it and considering films that are short, anywhere between 30 seconds to ten minutes are ideal. We also want to involve the filmmakers as much as possible since it will be also a live stream event and so we'd love to give the filmmakers the opportunity to comment on their films in between screenings so that's how we're thinking of it so far.

KK: Will we have the opportunity to talk to the filmmakers and the dancers after the performances?

JL: That is an interesting question. We'll see, to be continued. We'll see what's all possible tech-wise but we definitely do want to maximize live engagement as much as possible and take advantage of that physical live

stream type of environment so I am really looking forward to exploring ways of engaging the audience directly with the artists, for sure.

VC: How does it feel now to see your festival, your idea, taking shape?

JL: It is amazing. And I say that from the bottom of my heart because it's not until you go out there and you start making steps and you start reaching out to people and people actually start responding to you and supporting you and you realize that it's real and that it's growing and it will happen.

KK: Do you have, I mean you're doing so much, do you have anybody helping you, and have you conjured up a staff?

JL: I got about 30% of my budget through the grant and it was kind of baked in that you raise the rest of your funds for your budget in other ways. And that's how I started to spend that grant money, on a crowd funding campaign and I hired a consultant and so part of that experience in doing the crowd funding campaign led me into creating a team. And so I do have a team that is helping me manage the campaign as well as the festival. They're all great. Giselle is my social media manager, she is in her early 20s, a recent graduate in fashion design, and Sara is the, my co-producer, Sara Fox, she's a recent graduate from the University of Michigan and has been studying all kinds of digital marketing and is also a dancer, she's worked for lots of nonprofits and has a real kind of flair for network building and she's just a real team player, a real go-getter, she's great. Italy Bianca is an associate producer who is going to be screening some of her work as part of the film festival and she's a Brooklyn based dancer, dance artist. I have my little team who is keeping me fresh with the social media because that's not my forte although it is becoming more and more my forte these days

VC: What do you think has been the most challenging part of organizing this festival?

JL: Raising money, absolutely. Once I decided that yeah, I want to do this all the way, my budget was \$10,000. I want to do it. I could have just said to myself, okay, I'm going to take the little 30% and do-I could have done something with that, right? Easily. But I had a vision and I'm also kind of midway through, I'm entering the middle of my I wanted to maximize the experience and so, I didn't know, though, how difficult it would really be, how much of a challenge it would really be.

KK: I was going to ask you, do you have any advice for other artists?

JL: Yeah. I mean the great thing about crowd funding, you've got to find out what works for you and get to know what your weak spots are and then admit to yourself like okay, these are my weak spots and find help, to help you with those weak areas, whatever they may be. And then that will hopefully leave you more space to focus on what really makes you shine. But particularly with crowd funding, that's like what I'm in right now, I have to say that it would work well for people who have large networks. A lot of people, artists, might not really know the value of their network, right. There really is value in these social networks. And, you can really tap into a network that grows over time and you don't need anybody to greenlight you but yourself. It's a really cool idea.

VC: What's your long-term goal for this festival? Like OK, for now it's virtual so down the road do you see it as being an in-person festival or a hybrid because I, in my view, the virtual platform is not going away any time soon so what are your thoughts on that?

JL: My thoughts are let's do it, let's do the festival. I'm working very intensely with my tech director who's also my graphic designer. He's very involved in the metaverse space which is this emerging virtual space. Now I'm just kind of like an open book, I'm just learning as much as I can about this new virtual space that's entering more the mainstream so I see myself going more actually in that direction. And then from there maybe live events, physical events would come out of that for sure.

KK: Do you have any dates in mind when your festival is going to begin?

JL: Initially I was actually thinking of making it a traditional virtual festival where films would be screened consecutively, one after the other, via a link and you would just watch the films as if you were actually in a theater but since I made the decision with my technical director that we are going to stream the films live I said OK, we need to make it shorter. Let's actually create a community and we really do want people to actually show up physically to be a part of this. And so now it's gone from ten days, it probably will be closer to three days, yeah, from the 13th to the 15th, that's breaking news, I guess. It's not on the website but we'll get that changed soon.

KK: Do you want to tell us and tell the people listening where they can find you, what your website is, and all the information about the upcoming festival.

JL: Absolutely! I am the director, Joey Lorraine, I have my own website, joeylorraine.com, j-o-e-y-l-o-r-r-a-i-n-e dot com, so that's me. The website for Black Lives Rising Virtual Dance Film Festival is

www.blrdancefilmfest.com, so that's the website and that's also where artists can submit their works, is via the website. The campaign the Seed Spark campaign, every contribution really does make a difference. I was so touched, there was somebody who donated \$5.00 and that got us over \$2,000. And it just, it made my soul smile when I saw that and yeah, whatever you can contribute is greatly appreciated. Also sharing the campaign via Twitter and Facebook. The campaign website is BlackLivesRisingCampaign, and that's where you have access to the promotional video, the website and Facebook and Twitter and Instagram, and everything is set up through that Seed and Spark landing page Black Lives Rising campaign. So contribute directly there, yeah, and again we are on all social media, Facebook, blrdancefilmfest is on Facebook, we're on Instagram, we're on Twitter, maybe it will even be on TikTok before this whole thing is over, who knows.

VC: I'm sure you will. And then if people want to purchase tickets to attend the festival, is that avenue open yet?

JL: Yeah, so Film Freeway will most likely be the platform for tickets. So stay tuned on the website I'd say for ticket information for sure.

VC: Excellent. Well Joey, this has been great. Thank you so much for joining us and for sharing your experiences in creating this festival and, look forward to attending. I can't wait to see the films.

JL: Thank you so much. I'm so excited about this. You have no idea.

KK: You're on a wonderful journey.

JL: Yeah, it's definitely a journey!