

FINAL: Shannon Stowe

VC: Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: And I'm Kathleen Kaan

Shannon Stowe has done it all – dance, theater, film, fitness and everything in between, along with some teaching and coaching. Now all of this ground to a halt during the pandemic. Yet, Shannon created a number of dance and fitness classes to help keep us in shape during the lockdown. And full disclosure, both Kathleen and I are participants in Shannon's classes! So Shannon, welcome to the podcast. Thank you for joining us.

SS: Thank you.

VC: So for those who do not know you, why don't you just tell us a little bit about your background?

SS: I started taking dance when I was about five years old. I started taking ballet and fell in love and have just sort of lived in the 8-count, as they say, since then and that is actually what led me into the other worlds. Led me to the theater, I got my undergrad in theater and a Masters in drama and MFA in acting and it was a choreographer friend of mine who got me into group fitness. She said, "You need to come take my class so you can sub for me." We were doing Cabaret at the time. And so I got bitten by that bug and I got my group fitness certifications and from there fell in love with burpees, and barre, and spinning and all that other stuff and so that's both of those things, the performing arts and fitness have been a huge part of my life. As an Air Force brat, we kind of moved everywhere so I didn't study with like a ballet school or anything like that. I would just do the youth center classes whenever we moved. My mom would put me in youth center classes so that I could make friends and that kind of thing. But what brought me to New York was I had been a theater professional and teaching fitness in the San Francisco Bay area and decided I was going to go after my MFA in acting which is something I always wanted and that's what brought me to New York. So yeah, that's me in a nutshell.

KK: It's an interesting background Shannon. For years I also took classes as well as dance and then didn't do dance anymore but definitely continued with the classes. And when the pandemic hit that was like, it stopped you in your tracks. What made you have the courage to start doing classes remotely and getting students or clients? How did you do that?

SS: Well, I think I spent the first few days, because I was teaching so many classes and I had all of that relationship with people in my classes and several times a day, seven days a week and when it stopped I could feel that if I didn't do something to help myself that it was not going to be good. And I felt lost without all my classes and teaching and just also the physical movement. I bought myself a spin bike out of sort of panic buying, thinking I needed to do something. I don't know what to do, and I just had this thought, I took a free dance class that I saw posted on Instagram from Debbie Allen and from that,

saw that the dance community, right away, started posting free dance classes and disco parties and things like that as ways to heal, as ways to keep community and there was a group called Dancing Alone Together dot.org that I found, and I just thought I'm just going to put it out there. I'm just going to turn it on and I invited people that I did know on Facebook, because I did Facebook Live and Instagram Live at the same time when I started and I just thought, if I create a schedule for myself I'll be able to have some sense of grounding in my experience of this new pandemic world and I started off with just like 30 minute dance classes, I called it Jazz Barre, and people all over the world were taking it. I had women in China write to me and I had a woman in Poland, she sent a message out about my classes to her friends, and I just thought "how does this happen?"

VC: The magic of the internet.

SS: Right. And, we would have these, if you go back to my IGTV it's always me crying at the end because you know, I couldn't see them but they're sending these little notes and all these things on the screen, and I would always cry and then we always ended each class with Beyonce's Halo. And it was just communal experience even though I was in my living room by myself and when I saw the response and saw that we were all sort of in the same place, and it was something that I got really excited to get up very day and just, every week would put it up with the same schedule up, and then I started doing a monthly schedule with them because I could post on that site and sending it out through my Facebook and all of that stuff. And, that's how it started.

KK: Now from the dance, you also concentrated on the full body workout, which is what I take and thank you from the bottom of my heart. I got past not doing anything and I'm back, thanks to you. So how did you decide to go strictly from dance to this?

SS: Well, I guess I started that in July, in the middle of the summer. I remember thinking, who knows what's going to happen with gyms and fitness and again, I missed doing it but also I wanted to try and find a way to experience the fullness of my classes – not just dance, and I love the dance, but I wanted to branch out and see what would happen and so that was how that started. I thought I'll start a class and if it sticks, and it stuck! So since July, it's been Monday, Wednesday, Friday except for a few random holidays, and I love that modality and I didn't want to lose touch with what I was learning myself and then trying to teach. I wanted to keep up my abilities and again, community and seeing what I could do to maybe start to turn what I was doing with Triple Sweat Fit at the beginning, if there was a way to turn it into something even more business.

VC: So you've been teaching all these classes, so how has it been for you teaching remotely as opposed to teaching in-person classes?

SS: Well, I miss my people a lot. The thing I feel like I miss most in some ways is, I mean it's the tangible energy of people in the room, but at the same time the community of people that I am teaching, there's something so present about them and I act like a ham no matter what, so even when it was like Instagram, there's nobody there, I perform for

the camera, even when it's a workout class. I just feel the energy of that experience, so I know a lot of people are afraid of it or scared of the Zoom, and I'm like "no, you just turn the camera on." I'm the same me as I am in a room, except maybe in a room I would have my movements be bigger. But I definitely have found a comfort zone with it

VC: Yes, you've adapted well. So you had mentioned that you were doing training for some new area, in particular some holistic training. So talk about that a little bit and tell us how it kind of fits into everything else that you do, and did this actually come out of the Covid situation?

SS: I think it did actually come out of the Covid situation. I started thinking around the same time, how do I take what I love to do and keep going with it? Which was creating these classes and then you're looking around at job boards and trying to find jobs when really there aren't very many and I started thinking, well, how – people kept telling me, "You have to pivot – You have to do something else." Well, no, I have spent way too much invested time and energy and people still need wellness. I wanted to take the skills that I had and build it out and be able to offer more. But I knew it was in that wellness realm and I found this program called "the Holistic Health and Wellness Coaching Certificate." Because my experience and my approach with fitness has always been, it should be a full body experience, mind, body, spirit. It's about a lifestyle because I believe fitness and wellness, mobility, flexibility, all that stuff sets you up for better daily living.

KK: You know, I can't help but keep thinking that you are so creative, but I think the pandemic, and tell me if I'm wrong or right, it has turned you into some pretty good business woman. You're thinking out of the box and you're constantly figuring it out, and I'm sure with the gyms, that was one thing but now you're your own business for sure.

SS: Thank you. Yeah, I think it has pushed me a little bit, you know, they say life begins at the end of your comfort zone and I was certainly in my comfort zone going, bebopping along, my schedule was like tattooed on the inside of my forehead, it was very comfortable doing it and I you know yeah, I was thinking, I want to do more of this, I want to do more of that, but I really hadn't put it into any sort of concrete action until now. Yeah, so it has pushed me into this new realm and I'm thinking about things differently and looking at okay, what is a sustainable way for me to exist in this industry and where can I fit in that new level?

VC: So you're really exploring this new realm and seeing how that's going to work out for you. So I know you were working with the New School for a while. Is that still happening?

SS: Yes, yes, I'm part time faculty at The New School, just teach a couple of hours a week but I've been there since 2015 as part time faculty.

VC: And what do you teach there?

SS: I was teaching dance for actors, a program I created for them, wrote that curriculum, and with the pandemic with Zoom this semester. That fell off the class offering so now I'm teaching a class called "Whole Human Artist" to Freshman College of Performing Arts students from actors, to directors, playwrights, jazz singers, jazz musicians, opera and it's basically about tools to create a sustainable life in the arts.

VC: I think that's a great idea because people who make that choice to have a career in the arts whether as a performer or behind the scenes you really need those living skills.

SS: Yes, yes. It's like the physical, psychological, mental, emotional, business, artistic – there you have to have it all really.

KK: Are you just teaching that at the New School or are you offering that as part of your classes to people that are actors, singers, writers?

SS: Just at the New School but you just gave me an idea.

KK: You better believe it, yeah!

SS: Because I have all these ideas that I've spun off of the class and I think "oh, I would like to do this," but I can't do it because it's not in the curriculum. I could create my own, and offer that.

VC: New York State now has authorized the gyms to re-institute the in-person classes. Have your gym employers been in touch with you about this, have you started doing in-person yet?

SS: I am starting now this week. Yes, actually I was pretty lucky to be called back. There are so many group fitness instructors and right now there are few jobs and I'll be teaching spin classes at New York Sports Club, a variety of classes at the YMCA, a stretch class, a Zumba class, and a body weight class and then I'm going to be doing teen and pre-teen fitness at Asphalt Green.

VC: Shannon, you are everywhere, you are all over New York City here. Now how do you feel about going back to the in-person classes from a safety point of view?

SS: I think I mean myself; I have had my first vaccination so I have my second one in the middle of April, so that makes me feel good. I think most of the gyms have really good protocols in place for wearing masks, using little to no equipment so there's no sharing of equipment, extra cleaning protocols, space limits, you know, classes are only allowed to be at a third capacity, so that's good. I feel okay, because the managers at the different locations have very strict protocols and signs and people monitoring so, and you get kicked out if you don't pay attention, if you don't follow the rules. I feel, so far so good.

KK: What do you see post-pandemic? What are your hopes for it? What do you think will be beneficial to you?

VC: Your goals.

KK: Yes, your goals.

SS: Priority one is to, well, to keep teaching to keep this foothold, find something sustainable while working while I'm finishing this certificate. I started already investigating what opportunities would be out there for when I have that certificate in hand and can look for jobs or find a way to make it work from my end as my own place. Truly re-establishing myself financially because finding a way to come off of unemployment and feel that securities coming from my work again and to, I feel like I've put those building blocks in place like with this certificate. And now that kind of the world is opening, turn that up a little bit. turn the heat up on that and look backwards from what that endpoint would be and start to create a plan because now it feels like, "oh, that possible!" So now it is creating some action plans, tangible things to do that aren't just study but okay, now how do I apply this and get out in the world with it? So that I guess would be my number one.

KK: I think when people look back like you're saying, the pandemic was the worst thing that could happen to us but in the end when we look back we see if it wasn't for that we wouldn't be thinking half of what you have just come up with for your career. It's pushed people in different directions. What do you, what kind of advice do you have for artists?

SS: Yeah, there are a lot of people, and I talk with my students about this feeling of like, creative drain and I myself went through, and still do, almost punishing myself for not doing more. Why haven't I created a piece? Why haven't I done this? Why do I find it so hard to come up with choreography? And you have to give yourself permission to be where you are because you can't muzzle that. If it's not there on any given day, or if it hasn't been there for a month, it's okay. We can't go back to normal. So your expectation of what you were before as an artist, you don't have to know what it is coming out of this, but I think it's important to know that it's changed and to be okay. We can't control the world but we can ask ourselves the right questions and seek to open different doors and see what happens when you open them. We can only put ourselves out there and ask the right question and then be open to the new experience.

VC: That's the key, I guess, just to be open to new experiences and see what comes in the door, as you said. So Shannon, thank you so much for being with us and for sharing your experiences and telling us about your new, upcoming ventures.

SS: Thank you for having me, it's making me, well, now I have a task, to create my new class, but it's helping me see that. Wow! I'm doing all right, I'm doing okay!

VC: So Shannon, if people want to learn more about you and your classes and stuff, how do they find you?

SS: They can find me on the Internet at TripleSweatFit.com and I'm also on Instagram, @ ShannonStowe and @TripleSweatFit, and Facebook, there's also TripleSweatFit so they can join a membership group there. They can see what's happening, I post everything on Instagram and then my website, again, TripleSweatFit.com. TripleSweatFit, play on the triple threat, mind, body spirit all that good stuff.