**Rise**

**Transcript of Dance North Conversations…**

**Karl Jay Lewin**

**Jacob Boehme**

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:00:00**

Hello and welcome to Dance North Conversations brought to you by Dance North Scotland. We're coming to you from slightly cloudy but still beautiful Findhorn here on the northeast coast of Scotland, where Dance North have been celebrating and presenting contemporary dance for over 20 years. Rise Festival, which takes place at the end of May each year, brings together artists from across the globe to this small, vibrant corner of the world, creating space for bold ideas, moving stories, and unforgettable performances.

I'm Karl Jay Lewin, Dance North Creative Director, and joining me today on a walk through the Findhorn woods is Jacob Boehme, a Melbourne-born and raised artist of Narangga and Kaurna Nations in South Australia. He's a multi-disciplinary theatre maker, choreographer, curator.

Welcome, Jacob.

**Jacob Boehme 00:01:01**

Thank you.
Thanks, Karl.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:01:05**

So, so, Jacob, welcome to Findhorn.

**Jacob Boehme 00:01:09**

Thank you.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:01:10**

We were out walking in the Findhorn woods, called this the Hinterland. We've just passed the Hinterland Hub workstation, where they're working to manage and regenerate the land and the local environment.

So we were talking earlier on today about how the premise, the initial impulse for you coming here to Scotland was to do a bit of research, development, a bit of a recce with view to bringing and adapting a piece of work that you made for stage, Guuranda, working with creation stories from your own land and country to look at and to examine, question, explore, investigate how you might adapt the work to this land and this part of Scotland and we were also talking about how while the premise of this trip is about working towards the making and presenting of a new piece of work that we've both been on rather extraordinary journeys already. We only met physically in person. Two days?

**Jacob Boehme 00:02:44**

Three days ago.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:02:45**

Three days ago. it feels like a lot longer.

**Jacob Boehme 00:02:51**

I know.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:02:51**

And we've both been on some kind of extraordinary journeys.
And I was just wondering whether that's, is that something that's been the same for you?

**Jacob Boehme 00:02:59**

Oh God, yeah. I mean, as soon as, when we hopped in the car in Edinburgh and you made the decision, like, we're going to make the diversion off to Pittenweem instead of coming straight to Findhorn, that in itself, started a whole, well, it kind of went from being a recce to going on an extraordinary journey, the start of an extraordinary journey because that in itself was, you know, like the fact that we turned up to this fishing village on the coast and where my great-great-great-grandfather was born, and then we find out that there's a blue plaque on a house to commemorate that he lived there once and to, you know, you instinctively went down, let's just go down to the library. And the library was, you know, the two women that were there, Hazel and the other woman that, I can't remember her name. But they were there, oh, you're lucky that we're open today. We're only open four hours a day, you know, two days of the week or whatever it was. But that they knew who my great-great-great-grandfather was.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:04:17**

I've heard the story of Pittenweem and your great, great, great grandfather, Sir Walter Hughes. I've heard it two or three times, but I never tire of hearing it.
And it's always got another, it's got a sort of new aspects or sort of nuances.
Would you like to just tell us a little bit more about, well I think what, who he was, and also the significance, because you talked to me in the car when we were driving after we'd had our extraordinary time in Pittenweem, about the significance of why he has such an important role in your family story, family history.

**Jacob Boehme 00:05:06**

Sir Walter Hughes was a Scotsman who was born in Pittenweem. He left Scotland, I think, in his 20s. He sold opium on the open seas before he landed in South Australia. And in South Australia, he managed to get his way over to the Yorke Peninsula, which is Narungga country. And he noticed somehow that the Narungga people were using copper because it was making the, there was copper, either in flint or in something that they were using, that the ancestors were using because he noticed there was green flame in the fire, which was a signifier to him that there was copper. So he managed to get the Narungga mob, our mob, to show him where they were getting it. And out of that he created Moonta Mines, he made a mint, and he's often referred to as the father of the University of Adelaide. So he was the one that founded the University of Adelaide. So he wasn't just the father of the University of Adelaide.
While he was on Narungga Country, he also fathered a child, an Aboriginal child.
to my great-great-great-grandmother who they called Mary Jane, her English name was Mary Jane. So she was one of the wives of our Narungga tribal chief, King Tommy. So when they all came over, they gave all the chiefs of all the tribes titles like King, Earl, Duke.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:06:46**

So they took like a social hierarchy from Yeah, and gave it to our... Back in Scotland, England.

**Jacob Boehme 00:06:54**

Yeah, and gave them to our tribal chiefs. So my great-great-great-grandmother had this child, or Walter's, Walter Hughes's child, whose name was John. Walter Hughes never claimed the child, but what he did, though, was he built schools and made sure that his son could be educated to read and write English because I, you know, he obviously knew what was coming.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:07:26**

You mean coming in terms of the wave of colonialism.

**Jacob Boehme 00:07:29**

In terms of the invasion of more colonialism that, you know, it wasn't going to go away, it was just going to get bigger. Yeah. But then he also gave a lifelong pension to King Tommy who raised John as his own child.  And so when...

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:07:47**

This is all in secret.

**Jacob Boehme 00:07:51**

This is all in secret. And then Sir Walter Hughes, I don't know when he becomes, when he's knighted, I don't know when he became Sir. But he moves back to England. He moves to England with his wife. They never had children.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:08:06**

Which is what, Hazel in Pittenweem library, who when you said you were an ancestor and talked about your Aboriginal heritage and she did a little eyebrow wiggle, which... But she sort of acknowledged that even within the Pittenweem history, there's an understanding that Walter Hughes did have children even though they were, even though him and his wife were childless, they didn't have children.
Or even suggest, because when she said that, I thought, oh, maybe there's more than one of these stories.

**Jacob Boehme 00:08:45**

Possibly. Possibly.

Where were we?

What we say well he's coming back to England oh yeah so he but he left all of his fortune because by the time he goes back to or goes to England goes to live the rest of his days in England he has he has mines he started wineries and he had whole lots of estate in South Australia. He left that to his nephews and so there are generations of that family that still own and manage all of that estate and yet there is our family who you know under….now that we don't go by clan and tribal group anymore, we go by English names, right? Yeah. So just as we were introducing ourselves yesterday at lunch when we had the circle.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:09:41**

We had a circle of people and everyone gave an introduction based around their ancestor.

**Jacob Boehme 00:09:45**

And who was it, Lindsay, the Gaelic speaker that says when somebody in Gaelic culture asks, where are you from? They don't mean where they mean who.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:09:53**

Who are you from?
Yeah.

**Jacob Boehme 00:09:54**

So it's the same thing with us. It's like when you say, where are you from?
You go, well, I'm a Sansbury Newchurch. And then you're able to go, oh, you're a Sandsbury, so you're from that side. And then da-da-da-da-da, you're related to da-da-da-da. So, okay, you're a cousin, we can't kiss. Done. All of that.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:10:10**

Because, yes, rather than where are you from?

**Jacob Boehme 00:10:12**

Yeah, because of the relationship. Yeah. So, yeah. Yeah, so there's our family who even now, to this day, are still not recognized by the descendants of Walter Hughes, the legitimate descendants of Walter Hughes.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:10:32**

So essentially the white colonial settlers.

**Jacob Boehme 00:10:38**

Exactly.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:10:38**

With our ex-generation.

**Jacob Boehme 00:10:41**

So for a lot of the family, they see that as like, well, you know, our ancestors, you know, this man made all of his money out of the knowledge of our ancestors.
If it weren't for the ancestors, like the Narungga old people that he cuddled up to and went, so where do I find this copper?

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:11:00**

Where do I find this copper? He would be... Backed by the huge wave of essentially military yeah. And might and state might, yeah.

**Jacob Boehme 00:11:10**

So for a lot of the Sansbury family, a lot of the Sansbury Newchurch family, us descendants of Walter Hughes, we're like, well, okay, where are the, where's the inheritance then? Yeah. However, I kind of look at it and go, as I was saying to you in the car, why he's such a prominent figure in my story is that I see a man who in that day and age could not claim a black child as his own, yet he has all these resources, so he sets up a whole lot of infrastructure for this child to be
able to win.

But not just for the benefit of John, actually it's the benefit of a whole bunch of children that are going to be overrun with a colonial system that's going to completely change everything. And so I look at that and I go, well, You know, you could look at that and go, well, bastard, didn't recognize or claim his child, you know, what a prick.
And yeah, fair enough. But then I also look at it and go, but there was obviously some love there because otherwise he wouldn't have set all that up.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:12:23**

Yeah.

**Jacob Boehme 00:12:24**

He wouldn't have set all that...

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:12:26**

It's a lot to do out of purely guilt, isn't it?
It's not bonging someone a few quid and saying, don't bother me again.

**Jacob Boehme 00:12:33**

No, no. It's actually... No, that's what we have in Australia called native title.
Native title. Native title. That's what they do. Here, we recognise that you were the original owners here, have a couple of mill, shut up. Oh, right. Don't bother us again.
Don't bother us again.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:12:49**

I think this thing of the contradictions or the change, the contradictory perspectives, it's been popping up a lot.

**Jacob Boehme 00:13:00**

Oh, completely.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:13:02**

So much of now, and from myself, and I was talking about, it's been an extraordinary journey for me. One of the things which has been beautifully challenging and at times uncomfortable in many of the conversations I've been having with indigenous artists from Australia but also from Turtle Island Canada and other places is this thing of how often, when meeting for the first time, the introductions that take place are honouring the lineage, honouring ancestry, honouring relationship to land, both the land that we happen to be walking on, and also land, the country of origin.
And that's very different than in my, very kind of North European, Western world.
Let's walk up here because that's quite a narrow path and it's hard to walk side by side.

**Jacob Boehme 00:14:05**

I just want this, the heather that's surrounding us, all this beautiful purple.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:14:12**

Yeah.

**Jacob Boehme 00:14:13**

Oh my God, it's just delicious.
It's very quiet.
It's very quiet and windless.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:14:22**

Yes, I was thinking about the journeys and the different perspectives. And one of the things that I've been thinking about is how I've made it my business to try and separate myself from my historical lineage of being aware of some of the painful experiences that I had, but also thinking wider society and culturally being aware of things like colonialism, imperialism, the impact that British culture.

I'm English, all my family come from the northwest of England as far as I know.
And yeah, I've made a conscious effort to separate from that as a way of thinking that that might in some way make some, I get some kind of amends or some kind of distorted reparations by saying I no longer associate with that. That's not the me.
I'm not that kind of white man. I don't believe in that. But actually, in having these conversations and of meeting yourself, where I've been encouraged to think about my lineage, think about the land I come from. It's challenging me to turn back and to embrace it again, and actually to recognize that everybody has a lineage, even if you don't know about it. And it is just what it is. Our relatives are just who they are, and hearing you celebrate and acknowledge Walter Hughes.

**Jacob Boehme 00:16:05**

But isn't that?

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:16:06**

It's a wonderful challenge.
It makes me think about it.

**Jacob Boehme 00:16:09**

But isn't that the thing, like when yesterday, when everybody came into the circle and we did that to introduce each other, it was like who are you, like Lindsay said, who are you from? …was the provocation. Tell me about you, what your lineage is, and everybody jumped into, and regardless of how far back into the lineage they could go, had stories about mothers, fathers, grandparents, great-grandparents.
And then as the circle kept going around, the further around the circle we got, then people started to recognize, well, isn't this interesting? You know, I've always lived by the sea. Or, you know, even from five generations back, there are still things that I'm being drawn to.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:16:56**

Yeah.

**Jacob Boehme 00:16:57**

And is that genetics, is that heredity, is that DNA? What is that? What is it?
That keeps reoccurring generation after generation or every third or fourth or fifth generation. It's interesting, like... We like to think that we're... that we're individual.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:17:13**

Our choice is individually. It comes down to free will only, but it's not.

**Jacob Boehme 00:17:17**

Not so.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:17:17**

I think some of the other areas where these kind of contradictions have popped up.
You had an extraordinary time this morning with Liz at the Highland Archive Centre with Lorna. And one of the stories that you came back with was, if I remember, you were talking about man who was writing back to...

**Jacob Boehme 00:17:42**

I think he was writing to his cousin. It was dated 1858. And he was writing back to a relative, I think it was a cousin, to say come to Australia, mate. It is, it was like, come to Australia, do not bring the children. I've lost two on the ride over on the ships.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:17:17**

They died.

**Jacob Boehme 00:18:00**

Yeah, they both died on the ships. I think because the conditions, the length of time they were travelling, the overcrowdedness of the ship. The conditions on the ship.
They lost, he lost his child and a newborn. They had a newborn on the way over.
So it must have been a long trek because they're a trek enough to have a newborn child who died five days after was born. So come over, don't bring the children, but there is abundance here. You're a free man here. You don't have to answer to the master here.

And so this Scottish fellow who'd been oppressed by the British is saying, come over, there is, there is, you've got, you can turn into a free man here, it's brilliant, I can buy a sheep for a ha’penny. Like, and that really... So it's like the land of plenty, the promised land of freedom. And here it is written by a man who's been oppressed from the British, is now on the land where my ancestors are, talking about the freedom and what it is to be a free man, and me, really knowing that it's, you're saying this, as you're taking the land off my ancestors. It was wild. Wild just to think there's no mention of Aboriginal people in it. There's no mention of the Aboriginal people, nothing. It's just everything's up for the taking.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:19:19**

What really struck me is when you when you told us through and you came back, and we managed to get a word in with Liz's enthusiasm about having discovered Highland Archives.

**Jacob Boehme 00:19:31**

Yes. Which you've got to go to.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:19:33**

Which everyone has got to go to.

**Jacob Boehme 00:19:36**

Yes.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:19:38**

Liz is behind us with thumbs up.

Is this thing that you said it is the moment that the oppressed becomes the oppressor. And that made me think also of something that I think about within just within the world around me when I read horrific stories in the press or hear about thinking about an individual's journey when the abused becomes the perpetrator that there's a point in time in history And that's always fascinated me in a kind of uncomfortable way of like, when does that change at what point?

**Jacob Boehme 00:20:17**

See, I wonder then, because I just had a spontaneous running with, well, running, a meeting with one of the people that were in that circle.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:19:38**

This is the circle yesterday when we met. We had a kind of networking lunch.

**Jacob Boehme 00:20:29**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Who came to me saying, oh, you know, I'm still buzzing from that.
That was really lovely. The thing is, I can still feel them with me, like, I can still feel them in front of me beside me, you know, because they'd sung ancestral lineage.
So they brought up all the ancestors were saying, so I could still feel it. And, you know, we didn't close the circle off. We didn't close it off. And my response was, why would you want to? Why would you want them to go away? Why can't you remain conscious of your ancestors with you every single moment of the day?
Because that should guide your choices. Like, why would you want to close that off?
and that I think that whole thing, I don't know why I'm making that relationship between when the oppressed become the oppressor, it's what's that switch?

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:21:17**

Yeah, maybe it's about the contradictions. I mean I always thought, so the bigger context of you being here and Guuranda coming here and making an adaptation is because Rise 2026 is going to have a focus on the work of indigenous and First Nations artists and through the various conversations that I've been having with people building trust essentially and exploring ideas and checking out whether it's even a good idea for some white bloke English living in Scotland is appropriate to even be attempting to host a festival with this focus.
I was thinking, my mind just kind of span out there with about 100 different thoughts, different thoughts. But I was thinking, and I was reminded of the idea that while working in the arts we like to think it's about putting great work on stage or out in the environment in front of an audience about teaching great classes I think ultimately it's about relationship and making a performance is an opportunity to have a relationship with other collaborators putting an audience putting a piece out in front of an audience is about an opportunity for a relationship between artists and the audience and even this is like I like to think this is about Karl inviting Jacob to make a piece of work. Adapt a piece of work for the north of Scotland but it's really just an opportunity for us to have a relationship too and I think that's where the transformation happens that's where the real work happens and I think even we're talking in grand scales we talk about decolonizing our art form, decolonizing our sector. I think the real work happens in these individual conversations, more so perhaps than on the stage, although this work isn't going to be on the stage.

**Jacob Boehme 00:23:31**

No, and the opportunity to take, I mean, so it's a great opportunity to take Guuranda back to its original form.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:23:46**

Say a bit more about Guuranda.

**Jacob Boehme 00:23:50**

Yeah, so Guuranda is, well it was commissioned as a main stage work for Adelaide Festival. But as we've been talking, and it's a, you know, contemporary performance. It's all sung in Narungga. It's about the creation stories from Narungga country. But the way in which what it doesn't represent in its stage adaptation of it is the way in which those creation stories and the journey to that point, how the content, you know, what the journey was to get to that point.
It doesn't show the walking of country, it doesn't show walking country and talking with elders, the process. What the stage adaptation doesn't show is the process of how that knowledge is acquired, how you earn that knowledge and I suppose the opportunity here and the

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:24:47**

When you say knowledge, you mean, like, the stories…

**Jacob Boehme 00:24:50**

The stories and all the kind of threads of knowledge that come with them, because the stories just aren't stories to sit by the fire and entertain the children.
The stories are songlines that actually teach you, like, for instance, the dingo creation story or the godly creation story that we tell in Guuranda is It has a lot of different lessons in it. One of the most important ones is because the dingo is a natural water diviner. It knows where to find water. And because we're a peninsula and we're surrounded in saltwater, we have fresh water wells all along the Yorke peninsula. And if you follow the storyline where the important parts of that dingo story, there is always fresh water there. So it also tells you generation after generation in saltwater country where to find fresh water so you can survive.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:25:45**

Yeah, so the real life stories.

Survival, that's about survival stories, but it's about how to live.

**Jacob Boehme 00:25:53**

Exactly, there are morals and there are values and there are all kinds of things embedded in these stories, and they're multi-layered. And so what Guuranda doesn't do, and you don't get an opportunity to do when you present a you know, a 75- minute festival work that's made for a main stage Western audience conventional theatre space. You don't get to imbue any of that knowledge in there. There's none of the walking, there's none of the lessons, there's none of the sitting and talking, there's none of the eating, there's none of the cups of tea around the fire.
There's none of that. But in taking it back to country, whether it's our country or this country, and having the opportunity to exchange knowledge with another culture here, what we do is we open up the opportunity to show what to be able to put in place some of the ways in which you do earn knowledge, in which you do
learn how to be in this world, what your responsibility is.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:26:51**

So I'm kind of carrying that in the same way I'm saying that putting on the performance is an excuse or the real work is to have a conversation. What you're also saying is the importance of the conversations or the walking or the asking questions or the patience has back to the performance. Because here we are, we're also on the Findhorn Peninsula, surrounded by saltwater.

**Jacob Boehme 00:27:17**

Yeah, and very loud guls.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:27:19**

And guls, yeah.

We're walking, we're talking, we're chatting with lots of people, we're looking, having conversations of people who have a sense of lineage, of relationship to language from around here, relationship to the land. There's many of us here in this, certainly in the Findhorn Ecovillage, are not from this land looking for kind of resonance looking for if not comparable stories where there's a there's yeah resonance where there's threads cross like and the journey is going to continue we've got more walking we've got more talking you have got a massive creative and cultural challenge ahead in making this work.

**Jacob Boehme 00:28:14**

But it's unfurling and it's unfolding. It is. It's like the walk I did with Michael the archaeologist yesterday and it's like by the erosion of the landscape, it's revealing the layers of the people that used to live here and it just keeps evolving and revealing itself and it's only day three or whatever it is.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:28:35**

It goes, I mean it, yeah, it's my mind sort of implodes or explodes because every little story, every little encounter, there's… There's an unfurling of metaphors, but there's also rooted in real life, factual.

**Jacob Boehme 00:28:51**

Yeah, it's all knowledge.

**Karl Jay Lewin 00:28:53**

And whether you're talking about using how erosion is revealing Iron Age beads, or is that Michael was talking about with you, or whether it's, which you can then use as a way of exemplifying or telling other stories. Seagulls interrupting.
Leave it there.
I think we'll leave it halfway through a sentence.
Because that might seems quite appropriate.
It does.
Don't complete the sentence.
And there.
On we go.
Thanks, Jacob.

**Jacob Boehme 00:29:27**

Ngayi Yunggu
Thank you.