

## **PNB Hispanic Heritage Month Panel English Transcript**

[background conversation]

**Monica Rojas-Stewart:** Oh. Okay. I think I am in charge. Good afternoon.

[foreign language]

**Monica:** Thank you so much for being here. I want to specially thank the inclusion, diversity equity, and acquisition [sic] committee of the Pacific Northwest Ballet for organizing this event and inviting us to be here and share our experience. It feels so far away in these times when we need connection. I wish you guys were close and we were all kinda... Since there's not a lot of us, maybe we can engage in conversation at the end. But yeah. So, my name is Monica Rojas-Stewart. I am an immigrant like many of us present here. I came all the way from Peru several years ago to study. I came as an international student and I met my husband and got married, children, and ended up staying here. And maybe in the process of the panel, I'll share a little bit more, but let's see.

**Monica:** I'm supposed to formally introduce myself. So, I'm gonna start with saying that I'm a mother. I'm a mother and I'm a wife and I'm a community artist. I've been involved in community arts, in arts education, arts and activism for several years. I think that's the reason why I was invited. Thank you again for inviting me. And several years ago... When I came to the Pacific Northwest, I realized that many people had no idea that there were African-descent Peruvians. And I had been involved in the Afro Peruvian community for several years before I came to the Pacific Northwest. So I decided to launch a project called DE CAJÓN Project back in 2009. And since then I've been doing a lot of arts education around African-descent Peruvians, and then expanded and created a nonprofit organization called Movimiento Afrolatino Seattle.

**Monica:** Bringing together and activating several migrant communities that do practice and educate about African-descent Latinos in other parts of Latin America. I'm a cultural anthropologist. That's what I came to study. I'm a cultural anthropologist, graduated from UW in 2007, and currently I hold several positions at the University of Washington. I'm assistant director of the African Studies Program and also the Latin American and Caribbean Studies program at the Jackson School of International Studies and part-time lecture in the Department of Dance. [applause] I am busy, busy, busy, so that's me. And now I would like to invite our wonderful, amazing, panelists today to also take a couple minutes to introduce themselves and then we can start with our conversation. So...

**Jonathan Batista:** Am I next? Okay. Hello, my name is Jonathan Batista. I'm a principal dancer with the... Oh my goodness, with the Pacific Northwest Ballet. And I'm from Brazil. I'm from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. And I would say that I'm a community man. I'm the guy that likes to connect people and build bridges and I believe that one of the most important things for me is to tell stories and highlight them 'cause it's what bridges together and bring people together. I'm a little bit nervous, I don't know why today. Like, I just

danced. So I grew up in Rio and I got a scholarship to Trinity College where I got my dance majors in Trinity College, London in the UK. And then upon graduation, I moved to Miami to dance with the Miami City Ballet. I also danced in Toronto, Canada, Boston, Miami, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Oklahoma City. And I'm here with Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle. And this is home for me and I'm really grateful for this opportunity, also the opportunity to serve in the I.D.E.A. committee, which has been great to serve with Sarah, who is another dancer with the company. And yeah, I think that's... I'll leave you here for now and I'll say more later. I'm a little bit nervous. I don't know why.

[foreign language]

**Albina Cabrera:** My name is Albina Cabrera. I work at KEXP. I'm a radio host and radio... Like a music journalist. I'm nervous too. I don't know why. It is my work to talk on the microphone, and now I am very nervous. But I am from Mendoza, Argentina. Mendoza is the border between Chile and Argentina. And I've been doing radio since I'm 15 years old. Always covering independent music. Specifically the music from... Bueno, at the beginning from Mendoza. Then I expanded when I started my work at the National News Agency in Argentina. When I moved to Buenos Aires, I spent 12 years there working in specifically the underground music scene, the Latin American underground music scene, and trying always to push that idea about the Latin music or the Latin artists... Must play in a specific music just to expand the idea, what Latino American can play, and can build in our own songbook.

**Albina:** And since early 2000, I became a fan of KEXP. I don't know if you know, it's a radio station based in Seattle, this 50 years old organization. And I became a fan of KEXP because it's very famous in Argentina and in Latin America. So that's why I applied to be an intern. And I came here five years ago to work in the expansion of bilingual content and as a radio host for El Sonido, which is my show every Monday night. And then they hire me and I finally moved here three years ago. Zero English. I'm still learning. So thank you so much for your patience, and that's me. I was your DJ early today and is the way that I have to connect with people through music. So I hope you like it. Gracias, yes.

**Luna Garcia:** Hi everyone. My name is Luna Garcia. I was born here in Seattle [chuckle], my parents are from Chicago, by way of Mexico. And my parents decided to raise us here in Seattle. And back in the '80s and '90s Seattle was a lot less diverse. And when I was seven years old we went to a festival, a community festival, and I saw Joyas Mestizas dance and I begged my mother to take me, so she did. And so me and my family grew up in Joyas Mestizas dancing. My mother sewed a bunch of the costumes. And when I was older, I joined Bailadores de Bronce who is kind of our, I don't know, like the mother of our group. One of the Joyas Mestizas was started because parents from that group, from Bailadores de Bronce wanted their kids and their youth to learn and be rooted in the culture.

**Luna:** And they asked Alberto Ortiz, which is my first teacher. And because he was so kind and generous with his time and talents, I was able to join a group for free. It didn't cost anything. It was just by the power of community and mothers and dads. To be fair, that's how our group is run right now [chuckle] And so I got to grow up in this very

beautiful community, which is really important because [0:09:04.3] my family was in either Mexico or in Chicago. And so Joyas Mestizas became like a cultural anchor for me. It became how I was rooted and who I was and who I am. And I was really lucky to be able to continue dancing with Bailadores de Bronce, a little note about Bronce, they were started in the '70s. They're one of the oldest groups like around ever. They started in the '70s outta the Chicano movement outta the UW. And I'm still dancing with them. On a very personal note, I will say, it's given me almost everything that I love: My family, I met my husband there, my brother-in-law is the Director, my sister-in-law's the Artistic Director, I have my niece dancing in there. It's where my family is.

**Luna:** Sorry [applause], I'm also very nervous [laughter] Yeah. And so when I was about 23 years old, 22 years old, my siblings were still dancing and my mother was involved and there was a transition and they didn't have a teacher. Some of the teachers needed to leave. So my mother volunteered me, she was like, "Well, Luna's gonna teach." And I go, "Okay." And I thought, "Okay, I'm gonna just help for a little bit." And it ended up being three of us. Laura Contreras, DeLeana Guerrero, and me, we all grew up dancing together. Their moms are my godmothers. That's how close we are. Yeah. And so now, for about 30 years we practiced out of the South Park Community Center. And through COVID we got shut down a little bit, and then we found a bigger space in Burien.

**Luna:** We're very very lucky to have that space. Rent has went up a little bit and it's always a worry, but, we're gonna make it happen. And now we're able, because we have that space, we're able to expand. I have my older teenagers teaching our four to six year-olds, which has always been a dream for me. And it's also able to be a community space for other groups. 'cause finding a space to accommodate our shoes is always a struggle. Yeah. And so that's, so right now that's, I'm a dancer with Bronce, I'm a teacher with Joyas, and I have a husband somewhere and sisters, and that's me.

**Monica:** Amazing.

[applause]

**Sarah-Gabrielle Ryan:** Hi, my name's Sarah-Gabrielle Ryan. I'm also so nervous that I wrote my name down as my first note just in case I forgot. I'm a dancer here with Pacific Northwest Ballet. I've been here for about eight seasons now. Originally from Philadelphia. My mom is from Puebla, Mexico, and my dad lived his first few years in Merida, Mexico before his family moved to Succotz, Belize. So grew up in a very strong Latin American household. And I just love being able to find ways to connect our culture to this art form. Ballet is a very Eurocentric art form, so I try to find all the ways that we can. This is a great example with our I.D.E.A. committee, bringing this together and just advocating for Latin American dancers, Latin American stories to be told in our art form. And sharing my own experiences has been really important to me, not just as a dancer either. I also... A few years ago I got to present a paper at Seattle University about my parents' immigration story just as a daughter of immigrants. And, yeah, just finding any way to shine light on our community is really important to me. Yeah, and I'm really excited to be a part of this.

**Monica:** Muchas gracias, thank you so much. I'm not nervous. How beautiful.

There's first generation, second generation, third generation, immigrants here. Is amazing. It's beautiful. I'm gonna tell a little bit of an anecdote to frame what the conversation... This panel is about belonging and how music and dance is a way for us to remain connected. I, one day... I already shared a little bit about myself.

**Monica:** I came as an international student with my Peruvian passport to study, and then I got married along the way, had children, bought a house, became a citizen. And one morning, literally one morning I woke up and I realized that I was not going back to Peru. And it was like a bucket of cold water. I had been denying this throughout the process. And then one day I woke up and realized that I was not going back.

**Monica:** And I went into a crisis because I had been so involved artistically, but also in activism back in Peru with the black community, along the coast of Peru, involved with Ethnomusicologists there. And my goal was to come study and go back, and people were waiting for me there because of... I was, again, I was already involved and then not going back. So I had to come up with a way for me to survive emotionally, but also my soul, how to fit my soul.

**Monica:** And that's how I... I was inspired by a word that I ran into that... It was related to General Motors or something like that. Nothing to do, but it was glocal, like, global and local. And I grabbed that word and I somehow told myself that what I was doing was both local and glocal.

**Monica:** And then I also read this Vietnamese philosopher Thích Nhất Hạnh, maybe some of you have heard of him. And I read something about ultimate dimension where you can be in the present and also by being in the present, you're in the past, in the future. And I went through this trip, in somehow making it okay for me to be physically so far away and how I could create some activities or how can I act in a way that I could still be in Peru? So I told myself...

**Monica:** "I'm standing in Seattle, Seattle is connected to Washington, Washington to Oregon, Oregon to California." And if you keep going south, eventually I make it to Peru. So I'm in Peru, I'm like an arm extending out and I can continue doing the work I was doing there, but here, and I'm still there.

**Monica:** And through this pro... That's how I launched DE CAJN Project. DE CAJÓN is a very Peruvian expression that means rain or shine, is a, you know, if you say, "Oh, are you coming to PNB panel discussion?" And, "Oh, DE CAJÓN means rain or shine, I'll be there." So that was a way for me to reaffirm that I was committed to the work, right? So DE CAJÓN Project became my platform to be in Peru, to do Peru here. And through that project, I was able to bring many artists.

**Monica:** Some of you have been involved with artists that I've brought all the way from Peru. And that's been my way to remain connected to Peru. And later I expanded to help other communities also create a platform for them to remain connected, right?

**Monica:** And that's how we launched the Movimiento Afrolatino Seattle. And

that's been an organization that has brought to life so much and has expanded the presence of Afro-Latino activism here in Washington state of all places. So, that's my story, but the panel is not about me. I just wanted to give you my story to frame how important is art and how art is such a powerful tool. Music, dance, is such a powerful tool for us to survive so far away.

**Monica:** And many times we want to reconnect because we've been disconnected for whatever reason. Some of us have migrated willingly, some of us not necessarily willingly. So how do we remain connected? Right? So that's the question. So I'm gonna launch the question, eh, for the panelists, is what is meaningful for you to share today here about the work you do and have been doing through either music or dance, or both, to maintain a sense of belonging and remain connected to your roots here in the Pacific Northwest? That's the question. And each of you have five minutes or so to respond. So who would like to start?

[overlapping conversation]

**Jonathan:** You go ahead.

**Albina:** Okay [chuckle] I will start. Okay. It's... I think that is still the process for me, as Monica mentioned, well, no, I'm an immigrant and we are here with first, second, third generations with that is exactly an example of how complex each culture can be. And I think that the process of me moving here with no English, just because I had the opportunity to work in my passion, I didn't have a chance to think about how to become an immigrant was gonna be. And the only way that I found to connect with people here was through music, my superpower, in español but not English. So my superpower that it was my voice on the microphone and the way to express my ideas one day just disappeared. And it was very hard for me to connect in English...

**Albina:** And I think that it's something very similar with the diaspora in terms of English... Spanish, sorry. So, I started to build that idea to connect through music. Of course, I work in a radio, and I came here to work with KEXP, which is super famous in my culture, in Latin America. But I realized that what I was trying to connect with the Latino community here, not all the people know about El Sonido or KEXP or about this fact that I'm sharing with all of you. So, I had two thoughts. One, the people are still migrating. The people are still moving. I'm 35 years old. I'm a single woman and I just moved to try to find better options. On the other way, I think that we are still have a lot to work to do to try to close this gap that we have in our communities, specifically in here that it's very hard to see people like us in places like this.

**Albina:** So, that is a very big effort and it's a daily work that we have to do. So I'm so grateful to be in this type of panel with people like all of you, to be open to different perspectives. So, at KEXP, we started the first podcast in español that basically is the story, like how I, not me specifically, but with other artists, we became immigrants. That is called El Sonido. It's the first podcast in español and also in English that you can find in the KEXP's YouTube channels. It's called Cancioneros, which means songbooks, and basically is the story like what happened when your personal songbooks disappear. When the music that was with you just literally changed. It's a little bit about my personal story,

but it was the way that I found to connect with others, with other's perspectives, with other's stories of migration that are always so complex and specifically to try to build a different idea of what Latinidad means. So many times I was in conversations here and it's like, "Oh, you don't look like an Argentinian." "Oh, but is Argentina part of Brazil or part of Europe or... Oh, really? So do you have like punk rock there?"

**Albina:** "Wow." And so many reduccionismos [it] around our culture, but at the same time, I had a lack of information about other different cultures in centro de América Latina. So, I'm using my show, my podcast, to make this big conversation with other Latinas here but specifically in the diaspora to try to build a new narrative about us. And I found a way to do it with the artists from today and tomorrow. So I think that they are building the songbooks and they are writing the stories. So I'm very focused to connect with the international feminist movement through music as well. It was part of my activism in South America and in my time in Mexico.

**Albina:** And I find that movement like super inspiring to do the work that I do, that basically is guide you through music and playing songs that maybe brings you a memory or maybe you are building a memory with that song and that's the magic of radio to me. So my work is specifically in KEXP right now, but I'm on the airwaves. So if you wanna listen to part of my story, it's like every Monday 7:00 to 10:00 PM Pacific time on KEXP, and, yeah, I just wanna say that... I'm gonna finish with this, again, that I'm super grateful. Thank you so much Sarah for thinking about me, because those actions, we can build different conversations in this type of spaces. So I'm very grateful and thank you so much. So that's...

[applause]

**Monica:** Now it's your turn.

[laughter]

**Jonathan:** All right. Yeah. I feel like I'm not nervous anymore. So I left Brazil at 15 years old and I was one of many kids who was a part of dance outreach programs and I carry that with me, which was so important wherever I went to. And so starting dance in England was very important because I truly understood the importance of community. It was so multicultural. I was able to really connect with different Latinx groups such as Colombians, Mexicans, Cubans and actually that's how I learned to speak Spanish. And it's so important for me to continue to share stories. I find a lot of value in people's stories because that's how you become interested. Whether if it is through dance, music, food, culture in general and then unfortunately I had a mishap. I got injured and that's when I moved to the United States. And I was welcomed by a great Latinx community in Miami. But then I kept on moving and I moved to Toronto, as I said before, Boston and et cetera and somehow I felt myself quite disconnected from my culture.

**Jonathan:** Not only the Brazilian culture, which it was hard to find Brazilians in certain communities and places. I didn't see many of them so it was hard for me to connect. It was hard even for me to be myself. And so for the next, I'd say, three years of my life I became so quiet, which is not the case these days [chuckle] But I was so quiet

and I was unable to speak, unable to express myself, and somehow, I didn't feel safe. And it wasn't until I moved to Oklahoma City where I found a group of Latinx group, and they were so fierce, fearless, to speak up. And that's when I developed the passion to, once again, connect with people, talk to people, and understand their stories, and understand the value of diversity, which really informs, how an individual speak, or behaves, its culture and also what's harmful for that one culture. And so that way I was able to free myself and continue to connect with people, which is my passion. I love connecting with people, building bridges and building communities. And that's what I do during my off-time when I'm not a dancer.

**Jonathan:** And in Oklahoma City, a group of Latinx young people, we just put a group together called Latinx Landia, and we started building the community through dance programs. And we saw such a difference in our community. There was a such a huge impact on people's lives through dance, right? And that's when I moved to Seattle as well. And I don't have a group here, I still work with the group in Oklahoma City. However, I continued to develop my passion, and that's when I got involved with fundraising to build schools in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Like I said before, I came from a dance outreach program, which was installed in the City of God, it's a small slum in Rio de Janeiro. And I'd say that within 22 days, we put a fundraiser, a GoFundMe together, and we were able to achieve a goal and once again, give the opportunity for kids to build their own stories just like I did build mine once. And that's the importance of literally connecting with people, being Latinx, and being fearless. There's something about being Brazilian that I love, and I don't know if we have Brazilians in the house today, but there's this one quote that we have, is that "Brazilians never give up". And somehow we smile in the face of challenges and that's who I am today. Look, I'm smiling in the face of being nervous today. I don't know what's happening.

[laughter]

**Jonathan:** You know, I usually talk a lot. But yeah, that became so important to me to connect with people. And yesterday I had, I would say, my first opportunity to really connect with the Latinx community at the El Centro de la Raza. Yes. Gala. Yesterday and it was fantastic. I was able to connect with a lot of Latinx people, and once again, just hear their stories, which include their struggles, their successes, their steps, how they got to the United States. They immigrated, they build themselves and et cetera. And so connecting is just my passion, and that's what Brazil really taught me. And I'm a dancer today, however, I love music. I love food, and I talk about it all the time. I think Yuki [Takahashi] knows. I'm always like, "Yuki, would you like to have a caipirinha with me?" Which is one of our cocktails, that we make in Brazil. I often take my friends to Brazilian restaurants too. But yeah, that's it.

[applause]

**Monica:** They all have been within time, amazing. Nice.

**Sarah-Gabrielle:** That was amazing. I think for me, representation has just always been really important in ballet. And I was very lucky that when I joined this company, I had Karel Cruz and Lindsy Dec, principal dancers here, Karel's Cuban, and

Lindsy was also Mexican American, so that was so nice. But then when they were gone, they were kind of our sole representatives. And so I made it my mission, I wanted to be that here. And I think what you saw today is that there's so many of us now. It's not just two, there's... And it's across all ranks. And, yeah, I think that's really beautiful, just being that, having that responsibility within a ballet company.

**Jonathan:** Can I add to that?

**Sarah-Gabrielle:** Yeah.

**Jonathan:** Yeah. And I think going back to what I was saying, it just creates a safe environment for you to understand that you can be yourself. And not only that, when we get out in the community as well, and they are able to see some pictures of us. If you ever come to the performances at the McCaw Hall, you see our pictures throughout the glass of the McCaw Hall, and you can really feel the representation right there. And one of the things that I understood when I was younger was that I understood that my dream was going to be made possible because I saw the manifestation of my dreams in those pictures. I saw the manifestation of my dreams in England when I saw Carlos Acosta performing for the first time. So being that nowadays and understanding the influence that it took 10 years, 15 years ago, it's just so important because now we are that generation that is paying forward, right? And making, I dunno, setting up the ground or the foundation and just welcoming the newer generation to this building, occupying places like this that was Eurocentric, just like Ballet or certain spaces. So it's very important to have this group here. So I'm thankful to be here with you.

[applause]

**Monica:** Thank you.

**Luna:** I will say having my dancers in this space has been... They were so nervous and having them here, I think, is also very important because I think sometimes you can get pigeonholed into certain spaces that they think they belong to. I would say Folklorico is a very community-based art form, inherently, and I think Joyas Mestizas [and] Bronce, especially for my family, was really used as a way of survival, because again, we didn't have our family here, and so that was one of the one places that we were able to connect with other families that look like us and to really live in our community... Like, live in community. And there's something to be said about being surrounded by women that I know that are gonna take care of me [chuckle], or they're gonna look after your kids, things like that. The other, I think the other part of it also, Joyas Mestizas, just Folklorico in general, as a woman that considers herself Mexican, but sometimes not as considered Mexican enough, or a woman that considers herself American, but when people look at me, they go, "I don't know."

**Luna:** Living in that in-between space can be really difficult, and Folklorico, for me, again, rooted me so strongly in my culture, and who I was, and where my family came from, that no matter what, no one could lie to me about where I came from, because I knew that it was beautiful. And Folklorico really cemented me in that, and helped me to survive, I think, in very white spaces, because again, I was taught really well, and I was

really really aware that I was able to get all of that because community members gave up their time and talent freely, and I think Folklorico teachers, just in general, tend to be very giving teachers. They want the art form to survive, they want the art form to flourish. We've been very very lucky, Bronce has, to have teachers come from Mexico and teach so incredibly freely, and they're so happy that Mexicanos up here are doing the work. They're like, "We don't understand why you're doing it all the way up here." And again, there's an experience that we're like, "No, no, no, you don't understand. We need this. We need it. We like... We love it." The other part of it is Folklorico is also taught in Mexican schools as required education, in a way that it's not done here in the States.

**Luna:** So it's something that connects us, literally, to Mexicans, the group in Mexico. I have a lot of people that come up to us and like, "Oh my God, we used to do that when I was young." And it's something that they didn't have to pay for as part of their education, and which is why I feel very, very strongly about having this program here in the Northwest. I get so excited when I see other youth groups starting and flourishing, because then that means that we have a community to sustain that kind of work. So Folklorico, again, has been my, just the joy of my life. And I've made it my mission to make sure that as many youth get that, the same thing that I got, still get that. And I will say, my other thing is making sure that they have an adult group to go to. Bronce has been, again, a community that I've been able to lean on and flourish. And so for that, I'm also grateful.

**Luna:** Yeah. There's also a lot of food involved with our activity [laughter] I will say as well. The other thing that I really like to impart on my students is how diverse Mexico is. It is not a... It's so incredibly diverse. And our Folklorico and our dances are reflected in that. But the food is not the same everywhere. The music is not the same. The climate is not the same. The people are not the same. And so it is also, I think, one of the things that I really try to make sure that my students understand is, again, "Where you come from is beautiful and diverse, and no one can lie to you about that." Yeah.

[applause]

**Monica:** Yeah [laughter] Wow. Beautiful. Thank you so much to each one of you. I think something that really impacted me was Albina's statement, like, "My voice is my power." And I think we all experience that. Not only Jonathan said, "I lost my voice," or, "I didn't have a voice," or, "I got quiet," right? And only when he was able to feel safe and start connecting and communicating again he then opened spaces for kids also to speak. And I think we all find the value of having a voice, be it through dance, be it through music, being... Speaking. And somebody also mentioned being in spaces like these, where usually some audiences don't have access to learning from us, because community has so much knowledge. We have so much knowledge that we can also offer in spaces like these. And by the way, this is kind of like a commercial.

**Monica:** But MAS, Movimiento Afrolatino Seattle, talking about breaking spaces or being in spaces that are not usually created for us, we're gonna be having an amazing concert at Benaroya Hall. Yes. Please mark your calendars Friday, December 1st [2023]. Big concert with Cuban music and dance, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Panama, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

**Monica:** Anyway, we have time because you've been under time. That's good. That's wonderful.

**Luna:** Can I add something really quick? Is that okay?

**Monica:** Uh?

**Luna:** Can I add something?

**Monica:** Sure.

**Luna:** Really quick. If you guys are free October 25th [2023], Bailadores de Bronce is having our 50th anniversary show at the Moore, and you guys are all invited. Okay, thank you. Bye.

**Monica:** So, another question that I'm just gonna open it, and whoever feels like you want to answer, just grab the microphone. Challenges, right? Oh my gosh. Challenges. What challenges have you experienced or overcome in your work? Anybody would like to start or share?

**Albina:** Took me around four years to find a community and I resonate a lot about what you said of losing your voice and feeling shy in a way to communicate and express. I remember being at my place, and not wanting to go out just because it's an effort that you and the person who is in front of you both together has to do, it is a community effort to communicate and to build community. It's not that you are going to say, "Okay, now I decided to build community, and the community is gonna be there." No [laughter] that is not how it happens, is como [it] you have to build it, but also the community needs to be open to welcome you. And that it was, the welcome part, it was something very hard to find. No, because it's not here just because takes maybe a little bit longer.

**Albina:** Of course I'm from, no, I'm not from... I'm from the desert, but I've been living, I was living, sorry, for 12 years in a big city. So the dynamics are completely different. It was very hard to me to understand, and to meet in the middle. So of course, some xenophobia of being new, being you are not from here. So you don't know how this community is. You don't know how you don't bueno [it]... So, and in some point that's true, [laughter] because I'm new and I have to learn that. But you also need people from the community to guide you in that process, is again, a community effort. And, based on that, with that challenge that many of people like me found here is that we started a collective, we are around 35 immigrants, like artists, DJs, creators, who are literally trying to hang out monthly and trying to start connecting with others organizations here in Seattle.

**Albina:** I think that the time also itself is a challenge to feel and to see that the time... You said something that one day you woke up and you decided that, "Oh no, I'm not gonna go back to Peru." And I think that I'm going through that moment right now. It's like, "Oh my God, I don't know if I'm gonna go back to Argentina." No because I don't want it, or I don't like my country. No, it's because you are starting to feel that this is your new home and that is common. It's so, again, complex. But I wanna close this idea, just that the

challenges becomes como the opportunity in some point. No, como, that challenge of losing my voice, of feeling like a little bit shy, with time, you know "planta las amisa" [it] and you can see the flowers, you know "la siembre, la cosecha" [it]. So yeah. Sorry. So long.

[laughter]

**Monica:** No, no, no.

**Luna:** Time. My challenge is time. And I also have a full-time job. This I do. So this is, I do one thing for money and this is the thing I do 'cause I love it. I think it's always time. And then everyone in Joyas and Bronce is completely... They're all volunteers. We all do this because we love it. And I think sometimes it really does take a lot of people, and dedication. And for that I'm incredibly grateful. But honestly that that for us and the work that we do is, just time. You're right. Time [laughter] Yeah.

**Jonathan:** Yeah. The challenges, I would say, well, I'll say, I'll talk about the solution. It really takes a village, for you to open up, for you to start building yourself first, filling up your cup, and then being able to serve. That's one thing that I learned early on. I love watching YouTube sometimes, [laughter] and I tell people, "You know, I learned this from, I think, Will Smith who said, your life will get better by living a life of service." And there were so many places where I arrived and I felt like I was a pioneer. And there were no Brazilians or no Latinx people. And so it's this moment where you feel completely lost. And I guess, one of the things that I had to start learning was to truly communicate, and just speaking up, even if it's a little bit, however, it does take a village.

**Jonathan:** It's a friend, it's a mentor, it's a teacher, it's a rehearsal director, it's your director. It's a lot of people. And it's also a work that we have to do within ourselves, to open up a little bit, and I'm not saying, "Hey, this is Jonathan Batista, woo." It took a lot of work for me to be here today and be able to speak on the mic. I guess you saw that, I was very nervous, barely breathing. I dunno how the words were coming out. But now I'm talking and, I, yeah, it takes a village, it takes the community, it takes people to who are willing to connect. There are so many people. I think that there are stories that we build to, within our head.

**Jonathan:** It's just like, "Oh my God, can I talk to you? Can I say hi?" And maybe you'll get a no, "No," and it's okay, "Next. Thank you. Next." And you go from there. But it's such a beautiful thing once you find your community and then you're able to really rescue yourself from somewhere, find yourself and continue to build. And then... And that's a beautiful thing about culture as well, because there are so many similarities from being Brazilian, Mexican, Colombian. We share rhythms, we share values, "This is what we eat at a household. This is what we watch on tv." Like, El Chavo del Ocho.

**Jonathan:** Oh my God [laughter] I watched that in Portuguese growing up. Or Laos... Oh, wait. Oh, okay. Oh, sorry. I was just going to ask if that was a good word to say *La Usurpadora*, you know the telenovelas. Yeah. So we... Right? So we can connect from there. See, that's what I'm saying. So, we do share similarities and then we feel comfortable with each other, and then the walls start to break, and then that's how we go. So yeah, communicate and get out there in the community. I'm thankful that I was invited

to the gala yesterday. It was such a beautiful cultural celebration, music, dance, food, yes, food. Yeah. Well, and people, of course. Thank you.

**Monica:** Thank you. Would you like to share?

**Sarah-Gabrielle:** Sure. I think for so long, a challenge for me was just trying to fit a very specific mold in life, in ballet. This idea of what I thought I had to be to fit in. And I think as soon as I stopped doing that is really when I came out of my shell, I found my community and that was really life-changing for me. As soon as I connected that cultural stop trying to fit into this one box. Yeah.

**Monica:** Thank you everyone for that round. Wow. Yeah. It takes... It took for years to connect. It, for us, it's not that easy to find our people and it's sometimes a process where you have to figure out how to engage in where that thing, actually, Luna, you said something in the previous... Answering the previous question about that thing of being between places not Mexican enough, not, that thing, many of us experience that. When I go to Peru, people think I'm from Colombia because somehow I accept, yeah, I adopted some kind of accent from speaking English. And it's a very challenging place to be that thing of you don't fit anymore in nowhere. And all the things that Jonathan said, "It took a lot of things for me to get to this place, to get here many times."

**Monica:** It is important also to be aware that for many of us, our ancestors, all the work that our ancestors did for us to be here, is sometimes it's generations and generations of people who have fought for us to gain spaces and be where we are today. And, but I wanna close this round about challenges with what Albina said that how challenges become an opportunity. That's beautiful. That's a very beautiful way to think of these challenges. So thank you so much for that round. And we have time for questions from the audience. We would like to engage all of you in conversation. Obviously you are spending a Sunday afternoon here. You have an interest about this topic. Thank you for being here, for engaging in this conversation, for listening. We all need to learn to listen more. And I would like to ask if you would like to do one last round with any last message that you would like... I see some young audience members, and maybe they are really inspired now from hearing what you have to share. Maybe you want to share a last message for the audience in closing.

**Jonathan:** Ladies first [laughter] Would you like to go ahead?

**Sarah-Gabrielle:** Thank you for having me. This has been wonderful. So, thank you. My students from jazz, very, very excited to dance. Thank you.

**Albina:** Thank you so much. And please be always open and welcome and be nice with others. We never know the story and the background of the person that is in front of you. So, enjoy music, move your body. Both things are going to make you feel better. Thank you.

**Jonathan:** I would say go for your dreams and make sure to enjoy the journey.

**Sarah-Gabrielle:** I mean, I would also just say, you know who we are now. If

you need that community, you need that guidance, we're here. We're very approachable.

**Monica:** And my message is to stay connected. There's right now a post-pandemic. You know, we are suffering of isolation and loneliness.

**Monica:** And the arts is a really powerful platform that connects communities. So, there's a lot going on in this beautiful city. I feel fortunate to live in a place where the arts is everywhere around us.

**Monica:** So, there are plenty of opportunities to remain connected and remain in conversation as well. And I want to thank again the IDEA committee of the Pacific Northwest Ballet for having this event. And for inviting me and inviting us in conversation. And thank you all for being here today. And enjoy the rest of your afternoon. Thank you very much.

**Albina:** And shout out to Monica, please, for being a great moderator. Thank you so much.

**Monica:** Thank you. Thank you.

[background conversation]