

Thu 26 Nov - Thu 3 Dec 2020  
Sadler's Wells Digital Stage

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# Let's Talk About Dis

## Sadler's Wells and Candoco Dance Company

Engaging and endearing, questioning and reflective, Hetain Patel's Let's Talk About Dis brings out the individual dancers in a way our audiences have not seen before.

In Let's Talk About Dis, visual artist Hetain Patel has created a humorous and intimate piece for Candoco that builds on an exploration of the dancers' personalities and distinctive physicalities. The work is a playful interrogation of identity that probes the audience to think beyond surface appearances.

One of the UK's most exciting visual artists, Hetain's solo-show American Boy, a personal and humorous take on identity shape-shifting, received popular and critical acclaim, playing to sold-out audiences at Sadler's Wells. In 2013 he was invited to do a TED talk entitled Who Am I? Think Again which has been viewed online over two million times.

Hetain approaches dance from a cross-arts background, he works with performance, installation, video, photography and sculpture, blurring the lines between theatre, gallery and film. His work is often humorous and deeply personal, allowing the audience to form an intimate connection with the performers.



Photography © Amanda Thomas

## About Candoco Dance Company

Candoco is a world-leading professional dance company. Bridging the mainstream and the experimental, our bold approach and powerful collaborations create distinctive performances and far-reaching learning experiences. We celebrate different ways of seeing, of being and of making art, putting us at the forefront of conversation around dance and disability.

We are excited to introduce a new, online audience to our work as part of Digital Stage In Focus. Let's Talk About Dis is a piece that provokes, asks questions of ourselves and of each other and addresses the complexities around political correctness. The work builds on an exploration of the dancers' personalities and bodies and explores themes around inclusion and intersectionality. The version you are watching today was recorded in 2015 and over the last five years, the piece has evolved in form, language and content to reflect our new company dancers, their experiences as well as the social and political context which we are now performing in.

As we approach our 30th Anniversary in 2021, Candoco continues to address the themes and questions raised in Let's Talk About Dis. We are continually expanding perceptions of what dance can be and who can do it.

We hope you enjoy Let's Talk About Dis and will delve further into our work during Digital Stage in Focus; by experiencing one of our workshops through Get Into Dance or by watching our new short film Cuckoo. You can also find out more about Candoco and our programmes by visiting us at [www.candoco.co.uk](http://www.candoco.co.uk).

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## Creative Team

### Concept, Choreography & Direction

Heta Patel

### Dramaturgy

Eva Martinez

### Associate Choreographer

Lorena Randi

### Choir Consultant

Dom Stichbury

### Writing

Heta Patel with the company

### BSL Interpretation fingersmiths

Jean St Clair & Jeni Draper

### Lighting Design

Jackie Shemesh

### Access Consultant

Deepa Shastri

### Costume Design

Valentina Golfieri

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## Performers

Megan Armishaw, Joel Brown, Tanja Erhart, Adam Gain, Andrew Graham, Laura Patay, Toke Broni Strandby

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Photography © Amanda Thomas

## Hetaï Patel

*Concept, Choreography & Direction*

Hetaï Patel is a visual artist. Since 2004, his video, photography and live works have been shown internationally to critical and popular acclaim within institutions from Tate Britain, London to the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, Beijing. Hetaï's practice, exploring the subtle and often humorous complexities of identity formation, takes multiple forms, from work in galleries and theatre to the screen, the web and the page. Hetaï is a Sadler's Wells New Wave Associate.

**Exhibition credits include** Plastic Dreams (Shakespeare Memorial Room); Don't Look at the Finger (John Hansard Gallery); Don't Look at the Finger (Chatterjee & Lal); Don't Look at the Finger (Tanzhaus Dusseldorf); Don't Look at the Finger (Manchester Art Gallery); Don't Look at the Finger (QUAD); The Jump (Wood Street Galleries); The Other Suit (The Agency Gallery); The Other Suit (Chatterjee & Lal); Fiesta Transformer (C-Mine); At Home (Pump House Gallery); At Home (mac); At Home (Chatterjee & Lal); At Home (New Art Exchange); Love and Marriage (John Hansard Gallery); To Dance Like Your Dad (Watermans Arts Centre); Sacred Bodies (National Office, Arts Council England); To Dance Like Your Dad (New Art Exchange).

**Performance credits include** Jarman Award screening programme by Film London; Dance Umbrella, Don't Look at the Finger (Barbican); The Hidden Pulse, Don't Look at the Finger (Sydney Opera House); Transitions Dance Company (UK and international tour); London Short Film Festival, Don't Look at the Finger (ICA); Let's Talk About Dis (Candoco Dance Company / Sadler's Wells); American Man (Sadler's Wells); American Boy (CODA Festival); iMovie 2.0 (National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai); iMovie 2.0 (Extinction Marathon, Serpentine Gallery); Let's Talk About Dis (Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, UK and national tour); American Boy (Bush Theatre); American Boy (Sadler's Wells, London and UK national tour); TED Talk (TED Global, Edinburgh); I Wanna Be Like You (Sage Gateshead & Norwich Arts Centre); Be Like Water (UK national tour); TEN (Théâtre de Gennevilliers & Caen); Me and Me Dad and Me Wife (Tate Modern); Be Like Water (Royal Opera House); Elephant (Southbank Centre); TEN (British Dance Edition); TEN (Minto:Live, Sydney Festival).

[hetainpatel.com](http://hetainpatel.com)





Photography © Amanda Thomas

## Q&A with Hetain Patel

### *What inspired the creation of Let's Talk About Dis and how was the experience of bringing it to the stage?*

My commission for Candoco came as an invitation to make a short work for Candoco from former Artistic Co-Directors Stine Nilsen and Pedro Machado. When I was chatting to Stine about it, she talked about Candoco's identity as a disabled and non-disabled dance company. I was interested in why they approached me because I'm a visual artist and this was my first company commission. Stine said that they were interested in my work with identity and my use of humour, and the way that I use text and movement in my own live works. They were interested in me bringing these things to Candoco, so as part of this I asked a lot of questions.

I was interested in this idea that Candoco refers to themselves a company of disabled and non-disabled dancers, and I was interested to interrogate that in the work. I was interested to think about how Candoco is seen by audiences and the press, and how everyone experiences their work - both how they are seen as a company and also as individuals.

In terms of the actual content of the work, that was the starting point but it also came from discussion with the dancers themselves. A lot of the process was conversation between myself and the dancers, so I learnt a lot about them as individuals. Some of that was a group discussion, some of that was one-to-one conversations. Out of all that material I put together some sketches. However, when we were developing the work that way and talking about very personal things, there was the proviso that everyone can veto. It was their choice if we used that material so we created it quite collaboratively.

I was very much editing and structuring all this material that we were developing through text, movement and setting tasks. The experience of it was really intense. We really went there. We deep dived into lots of personal things, political things, and naturally we didn't always agree on things. It was a delicate space

and a place where a lot of care was needed. It had to be a safe space where everyone felt comfortable contributing and where we were careful with and for each other. That is intense. I think that is the main experience of it.

But we also had a lot of laughs. We got to know each other really well and it was a very new company at the time. There was quite a number of dancers for whom it was their first production, so it was a great way for everyone to get to know each other. I was also really well supported. I feel like Stine, who was my main contact at the time, was such a pivotal role in my care. It was so great to be able to have someone to talk to outside of the group. She looked after my needs as a choreographer and as a person directing all this intense stuff. That was the first time that I'd ever done that, and as someone who self-produces a lot of their own work, it was such a pleasure that everything else was sorted. I wasn't fundraising or hiring and booking space. That was a pleasure.

***Let's Talk About Dis was created in 2014 and presents a playful interrogation of identity, exploring what's lost and found in the languages and labels that we use. How has the conversation around disability changed since this work was created? Why is this piece still relevant today?***

I'm not sure I know how the conversation around disability has changed since the work was created. It's always difficult to remember the exact political landscape at the time. I feel like things are easier to talk about now, or that maybe there's more of an open culture of talking about disability now. Perhaps it's more considered.

I'm also the wrong person to ask in a lot of ways as well. Although I'm seeing that it's talked about and considered more when I'm working with organisations and in the wider world, I'm also not disabled. I'm seeing it from a different perspective. However it feels like not just disability but race, gender, sexuality are discussed and considered more now than back then. That's my memory of it and I could be wrong there. And that's not to say there have been vast improvements, by any means. But if I had to think about the difference between now and then I think that might be that.

In terms of why the piece is still relevant? I suppose because we do still need to talk about it. I feel like what the piece aims to do is partly put a finger on what some of the audience members might be thinking or feeling, in a way that makes a connection and that plays on perceptions that the company felt at the time. Perceptions that they were getting from audience members. And the piece addressed that. I'm imagining some of those perceptions are still there, and so I feel like the piece is still relevant in that sense.

If I was making the piece now it would be different. It was a very different political landscape and now I feel like some of the content might be more direct and it might be less humorous in parts. I'm not sure. I just think it would be different. I think the piece is still something interesting to me, but it's definitely something that I created with the company in 2014. I feel like it would be different now. I'm not saying it would be radically different, but it would have a slightly different tone to it somehow.

***There's a moment in the piece where dancers Tanja Erhart and Andrew Graham start listing ways in which the company is inclusive and stop short when recognising that all the performers on stage are white. How do you think this translates to the present day?***

Back then we were pointing out that everybody was white because once we start talking about otherness, about marginalised identities, about inclusivity, then we have to look at it all together in a way.

As a group we talked about the strangeness of not addressing intersectionality in thinking about disability or marginality. And so, pointing out at the time that there were no non-white people was part of the work, and I think the ethos would still be the same today. If I were making that work now with the company, we'd still be looking at intersectionality, at what it means to be inclusive and at inclusivity in Candoco. Looking at the question, I feel that's sort of how it translates today that the approach would still be the same.



***As an artist you work across different disciplines, including film, sculpture and choreography. Let's Talk About Dis was your first commission for a dance company. Looking back, how did the creation of Let's Talk About Dis and collaborating with Candoco impact your future work?***

I think creating this work with Candoco massively influenced me in my practice. It was such a collaborative process. It was the first piece I ever created, definitely in terms of live performance, that I didn't perform myself. The work wasn't about me, or at least I wasn't using my autobiography as the central elements to the work. This was the first time of trying that and, because it went so well, it definitely gave me confidence and encouraged me to do that more in my work.

I've gone on to work with other artists who've commissioned me to explore their identity traits that I might not have lived experience of, such as ethnicity or sexuality or gender. I feel like it equipped me in the art of listening. That kind of collaborative work which is discussion based and then moves onto something movement based or physical or practical definitely impacted me in my work. Not just in live performance, but across the board in other mediums that I work in.

Since then I have definitely made film and video works that don't feature me or my autobiography as such. The collaborative, conversational element that was essential to Let's Talk About Dis has definitely acted as a kind of training ground to do some of these other works.



Photography © Amanda Thomas

### **Information for Deaf and hard of hearing audience members**

Let's Talk About Dis explores issues of identity through language and movement, using English, French and British Sign Language. Rather than translating English into French or BSL, all three languages are used in different parts of the piece. Unless an audience member speaks all three languages, they are unlikely to understand exactly everything that is said.

Each audience member will have a different experience as different parts become lost in translation. In this way language is used as a creative technique to underpin the themes of understanding and misunderstanding, representation and misrepresentation. As the piece is not fully translated into BSL, we have prepared a script of all the text spoken. This is to assist and guide deaf patrons and those with a hearing impairment if desired. This script is available from Candoco by emailing [info@candoco.co.uk](mailto:info@candoco.co.uk).