

LIAM FRANCIS

***Was.Once.Now.Next.***

*My journey through contemporary dance*

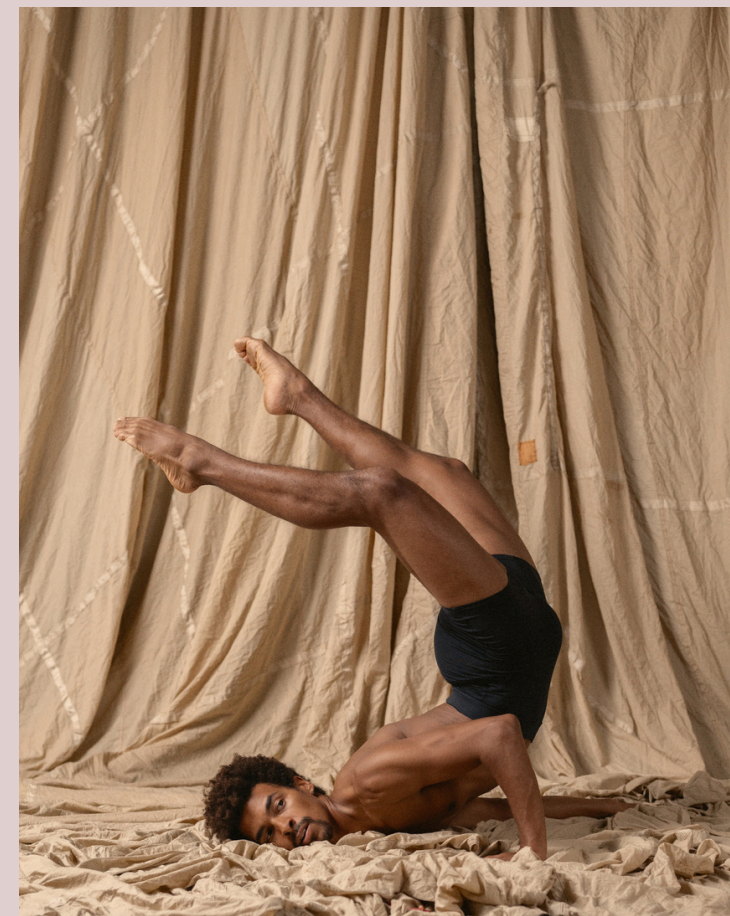


# ABOUT

*Was.Once.Now.Next* is an innovative solo work by Liam Francis, featuring a hybrid approach that merges elements of a mixed bill and a lecture demonstration. This unique production offers the audience an intimate experience of embodied dance history.

In this performance, Liam showcases three-minute excerpts from pivotal works that have significantly shaped his career: *Into The Hoods* by Kate Prince, *RainForest* by Merce Cunningham, and *Faun* by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Interspersed with these excerpts are insightful narratives and texts developed in collaboration with Ben Duke. These narratives provide context and anecdotes about the works and their creators; assisting audiences to draw connections between seemingly unrelated dances and better understand their influence on Liam's career. The production culminates with a new 20 minute solo by Liam. This concluding piece not only draws upon his inspirations but also serves as a visual manifestation of how these experiences have collectively inspired his artistry.

Liam's eclectic embodied knowledge, informed by hip-hop, ballet and contemporary dance all play into his choreographic voice. Whilst these vastly different styles rarely share a stage together, inside Liam they collide, coexist and collaborate. This solo is an opportunity to share this dance medley with audiences. With the added medium of text and speech, Liam assists audiences to see choreography as they might not have seen it before and draws connections between seminal works from the dance canon.



# AIMS

After years of collaborating and performing works from some of the world most renowned choreographers, Francis' aims is to build on the attraction he has gained over the years and further establish his voice as a UK choreographer working across borders. With his newly founded dance company FranDanCo, Francis aspires to contribute to the representation of black and brown choreographers and dancers within contemporary dance, in both performance and educational settings.

So far "*Was.Once.Now.Next*" is a self-funded project which has received generous space support from **Oxford University, Rambert, Dance East, Impact Dance** and the **Kammerspiele Theatre** in Munich. **ZooNation**, the **Merce Cunningham Trust** and **Eastman** have all granted the licensing and music rights to Francis enabling him to revisit the works alongside rehearsal directors Shanelle 'Tali' Fergus (ZooNation), Jeannie Steele (Merce Cunningham) and Mavin Khoo.

For 2025, Francis' plan is to further develop this solo project and present it to UK audiences from Summer 2025. Alongside the **45-50 minute performance**, Francis would like to deliver a program of outreach activities. Together with the performance, these outreach activities' aims is to celebrate the legacy of 20th and 21st century choreographic pioneers, bridge the gap between art and education as well as offering spaces for creative expression and professional development.

**Liam Francis and team are currently looking for co-producers, partners and presenting venues to further support the making and touring of this work alongside the delivery of the project's outreach activities throughout 2025 and 2026.**



# INSPIRATION

“There have been moments when I’ve experienced choreography and known immediately that everything would change from that point on. These pivotal moments challenged my idea of what was possible, fuelled my creative desires and altered the trajectory of my career. As I look back, I am amazed to realise that many of these moments lasted approximately three minutes. How could three minutes of dance have such a profound impact on me? I want to share this diverse experience of work, including my own choreography, with as many people of possible ”

Liam Francis

Click here to see - [Studio trailer for Was.Once.Now.Next](#)



# THE SOLOS

## *Into The Hoods (Teardrop) by Kate Prince (2005)*

“I remember watching *Into The Hoods* and being completely mesmerised by two exceptional dancers, Rowan Hawkins and Teneisha Bonner. Rowan dominated the stage with an effortless charm, flipping off walls and spinning on his head as if gravity had no claim on him. Teneisha exuded grace, humility, and conviction like I had never seen before. Their synchronisation and energy were so inspiring that I left the theatre adamant that I would one day emulate these dance superheroes. A few years later, I took my first step towards that dream by joining the ZooNation Youth Company.

My first professional job came full circle as I found myself performing in *Into The Hoods* (2009) - the very show that ignited my passion for dance.”

*Into The Woods* was the first ever Hip Hop dance show and the longest running dance show in the West End’s history at its time. It re-tells classic fairy tales in ZooNation’s trademark innovative style – combining comedy with Hip Hop dance, physical theatre and a strong narrative. It opened in 2008 at London’s Novello Theatre and has since toured nationally. In 2015, *Into The Hoods: Remixed* returned to The Peacock, followed by a UK Tour.



Click here to see - [\*\*In the studio with 'TearDrop' #1\*\*](#)

Click here to see - [\*\*In the studio with 'TearDrop' #2\*\*](#)

## **RainForest by Merce Cunningham (1970)**

“The curtain opened at the Theatre Royal Brighton and Andy Warhols helium balloons hung freely in the space. I remember a dancer who looked like me, mixed race with cornrows, making his way out of the shadows and towards centre stage. He crab walked to the front of the stage with his hips and plaits swaying left to right. His name was Dane Hurst. He performed the Gus Solomons Jr solo. Gus was the first black dancer in the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, a choreographer and queer activist, and this solo was created on him in 1968.

In 2014 I joined Rambert Dance Company and in 2017 I got the chance to dance the Gus Solomons Jr solo in Paris, Bassano Del Grappa, Reggio Emilia and Rome.”

*The title for RainForest came from Cunningham’s childhood memories of the Northwest, and the rainforest in the Olympic Peninsula. The dance piece that saw David Tudor responsible for the electronic score and Andy Warhol create the set design was choreographed by Cunningham back in 1968; a momentous year remembered for its student revolts and public social rebellion. Warhol created large silver pillows filled with helium that floated freely over the performance, uncontrollable and anarchic. The work was premiered by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company on March 9, 1968 in Buffalo, New York (USA)*



Click here to see [- In the studio with 'Rainforest' #1](#)

Click here to see [- In the studio with 'Rainforest' #2](#)

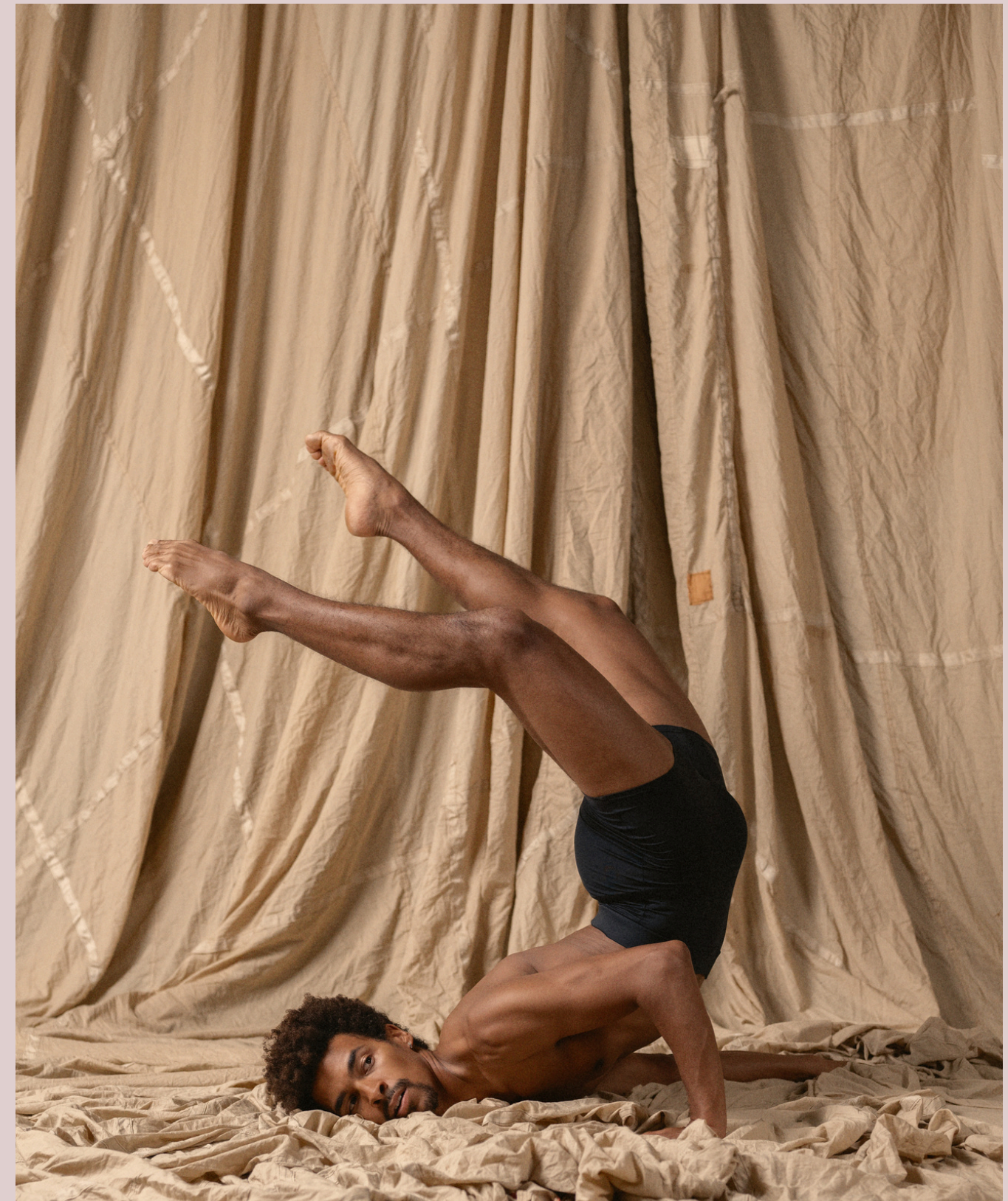
## **Faun by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (2009)**

“As a contemporary dance student, this solo was practically legendary amongst me and my peers . Even before I witnessed it, I had an intricate vision of the piece woven into my imagination. This vision was shaped by the vivid descriptions of those fortunate enough to have seen it live at Sadler’s Wells or performed it themselves.

When I finally saw the solo on Youtube, it surpassed all my expectations. The intricacy, emotion and physicality of Cherkaoui’s choreography left a profound impact on me. Cherkaoui, alongside James O’Hara, has crafted a piece that is not only a technical challenge but also a deeply expressive journey.

To perform this solo is an honour I hold in high regard. It represents a tribute to the masters of contemporary dance and allows me to connect with a rich tradition of dance excellence while pushing the boundaries of my own abilities.”

*Faun was originally commissioned by Sadler’s Wells for its production In the Spirit of Diaghilev celebrating the centenary of the founding of Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui proposes a personal reading of the mythical choreography L'après-midi d'un faune by Vàtслав Nijinsky, premiered with great scandal on May 29, 1912, at the Théâtre du Châtelet. In Faun, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui examines the animalistic nature of human movement and the power of mythology.*



Click here to see [\*\*- In the studio with 'Faun' #1\*\*](#)  
Click here to see [\*\*- In the studio with 'Faun' #2.\*\*](#)

## ***KNOT* by Liam Francis (2025)**

My ongoing choreographic focus is to find authentic expression of my embodied knowledge. This new work is one of many attempts to untangle the knot of influences that exists within me. This solo represents a checkpoint in my choreographic journey and allows me to share my choreographic expression alongside some of my biggest inspirations.

I often wrestle with how I can pay homage to those who have inspired me, whilst simultaneously pursuing my own authentic voice. In *Was.Once.Now.Next*, I lay my inspiration out clearly in front me and the audience before performing my own work. Through this, I pay homage and relieve myself of the need to hold any of them too tightly. I can escape the sense of reverence and simply get to enjoy exhibiting my own choreographic voice in the same space as my predecessors. I get to momentarily visit all of these inspirations and then let their influence wash over me. For my solo, I get to play in the residue left by the works of trailblazing choreographers.



**[Click here to see - In the studio with Knot #1](#)**

**[Click here to see - In the studio with 'Knot' #2](#)**



# LIAM FRANCIS

Liam Francis is an international dance artist and choreographer. Whether leading creations, or as a collaborator in other artists' work, he tries to let his passion for 'play' inform his contributions, decisions and performance. His practice currently seeks to authentically express the hybridity of information he contains; something he's acquired through working in both hip-hop theatre and contemporary dance. His practice is also informed by his interest in the relationship between Flow state and dance, which has been the focus of his recently completed research Master Degree at Rambert School.

His professional performance career began at Zonation Dance Company in 2009. Between 2014 and 2021 he was a leading dancer with Rambert Dance Company; performing and creating roles in works by internationally renowned choreographers such as Mark Baldwin, Christopher Bruce, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Merce Cunningham, Ben Duke, Sharon Eyal, Wayne McGregor, Marion Motin, Patricia Okenwa, Hofesh Shechter, Wim Vandekeybus, Didy Veldman and Alexander Whitley. In 2021 Liam was nominated by Dance Europe as 'Dancer of the Year' and Tanz magazine as 'Best Male Dancer'.

Liam's own choreographic work has been performed in London, Massachusetts, New York, Oxford, Paris, Rotterdam and Rome. In 2022 Liam's duet, *Dual Till the Death*, received 4 partnership awards at the Rotterdam International Duet Choreography Competition and another award at the Choreography Competition Hannover. He has made works for graduating students at The Place, London Studio Centre and Rambert School, as well as dance companies Ballet Theater Trier, Rambert, SALLY, Shechter2 and Skånesdansteater. Liam is the founder and director of dance company FranDanCo.



# COLLABORATORS

## Shannelle 'Tali' Fergus

*For ZooNation*



Shannelle 'Tali' Fergus is a London based creative, with over 20 years' industry experience as a performer, teacher and choreographer. Her movement style is a blend of her training in street styles and contemporary, with leanings towards gesture and pedestrian movement.

Tali is ZooNation's Agency Manager and has worked with the company over a decade. She's the founder and lead facilitator of identity. ideas. industry., a programme and method designed to encourage dance artists' curiosity about their creativity and the industry at large through movement, conversation and literature.

Jeannie spent 16 years working with Merce Cunningham as an apprentice, company dancer and rehearsal assistant. She is a senior stager of Cunningham's work and has mounted his choreography since 1998 on a number of companies including Pacific Northwest Ballet, Royal Swedish Ballet, New York City Ballet and Rambert.

## Jeannie Steele

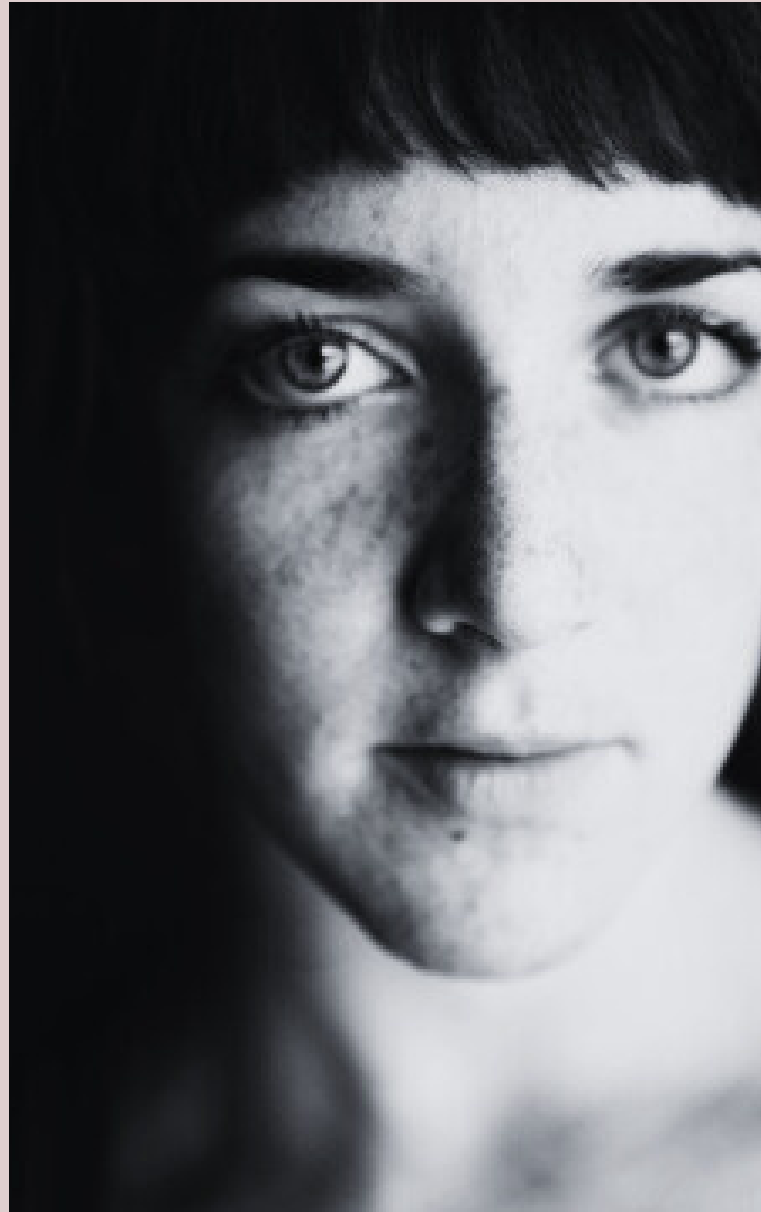
*For Merce Cunningham Trust*



# COLLABORATORS

## Daisy Phillips

*For Eastman*

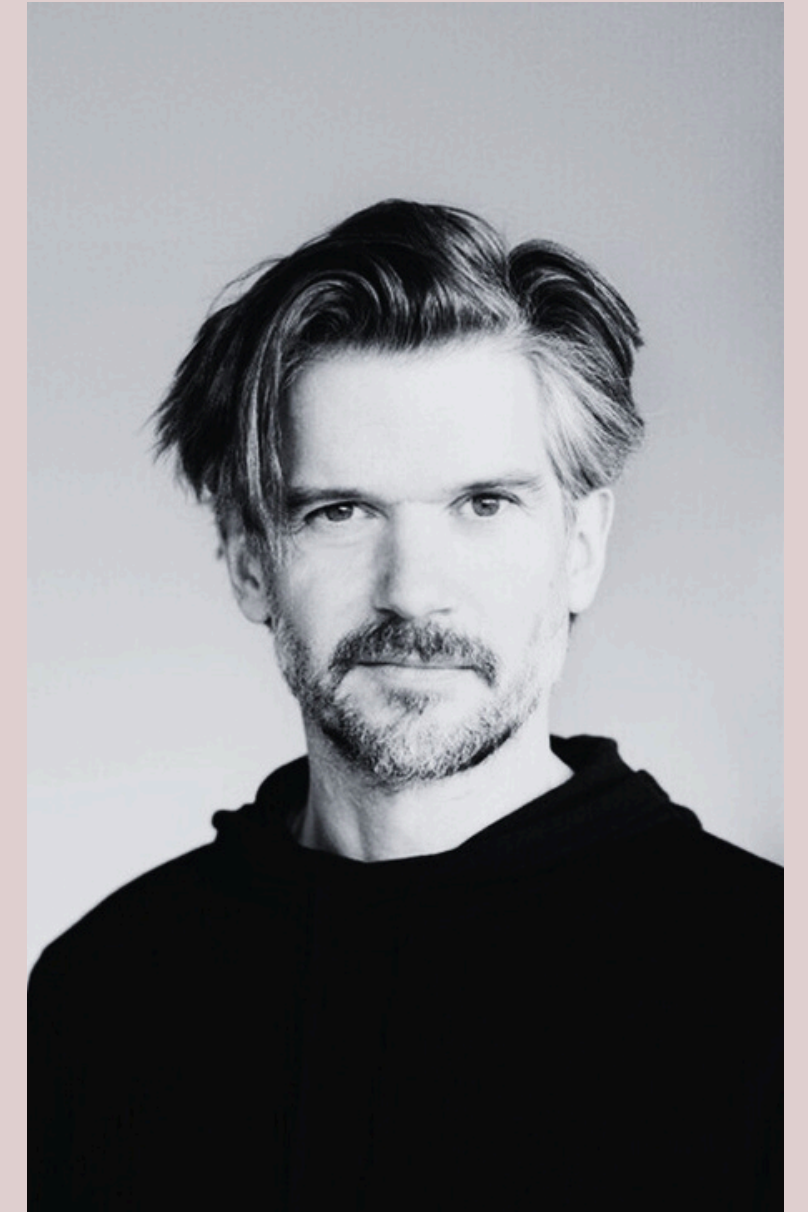


Daisy Phillips was born in Oakland, California, and studied dance in Berkeley, San Francisco, London, and Geneva, where she was a member of the Ballet Junior. She began her professional career with the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève, before returning for a year to San Francisco, where she worked primarily with Erika Tsimbrovsky. Since 2007 she has collaborated extensively with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, taking part in several of his creations. She now regularly represents him as a rehearsal director.

Ben Duke trained at Guildford School of Acting, the London Contemporary Dance School and has a first class degree in English Literature from Newcastle University. His work is an attempt to reconcile those three subjects. Liam and Ben first worked together at Rambert Dance Company in 2017 during the creation of the Olivier Award nominated production 'GOAT'. In 2023 Liam was invited to join Ben's company (Lost Dog) for the production of 'Ruinaton', which went on to win a Critics Circle award and an Olivier nomination. Liam has also worked as assistant choreographer to Ben for 'The White Hair' (Sadler's Wells) and 'WINNER' (Hamburger Bahnhof).

## Ben Duke

*Choreographer*



# FRANDANCO

FranDanCo is a project based dance company under the directorship of dancer and choreographer Liam Francis. The Brighton based company acts as a hub for the growth of Liam's choreographic voice, whilst also showcasing masterworks by renowned choreographers. The company aims to represent the eclecticism of the UK dance scene on local and international stages.


FranDanCo 5 core principles:

- **Investing in our neighbours:** Expand creative horizons by nurturing the spirit of neighbourhood. By engaging with diverse disciplines, individuals, and communities that enrich our own, we weave a vibrant tapestry of artistic collaboration.
- **Place Making:** Collectively creating experiential worlds that can be transported to an array of locations and audiences. This notion of Place Making extends beyond our performance based work and is also embedded in our outreach work.
- **Embracing Hybridity:** Utilising the full spectrum of our training, experiences and interests to create work. We see the borders of one genre, discipline or idea as the leap pad for further exploration. We approach these often fixed entities like water colours that can bleed into one another.
- **Advocating for Patient Art Making:** We seek to challenge the notion of 'fast art' and invest in the process of creation and the excavation of ideas. We endeavour to create art that honours present circumstances with a depth, width and breadth that will allow it to stand the tests of time and be a beacon for rich experiences in the future.
- **Historic Dance:** We want to honour the importance of the past and celebrate the legacy of those who have paved our journey. We want to find ways to make timeless wisdom accessible to fresh, receptive audiences.

# CONTACTS


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