

W&L After Class: The Lifelong Learning Podcast

With Guest Caleb Dance

Episode Transcript

Ruth Candler

Welcome to W&L After Class the Lifelong Learning podcast. I'm your host Ruth Candler, our guest today is Caleb Dance, associate professor of Classics who came to W&L in 2014. After earning his bachelor's from Tulane University, which included a stint at Princeton, Caleb received both his master's in Philosophy and Doctorate in Classics from Colombia. He teaches courses in Latin, Ancient Greek, Sex, Gender, and Power and Ancient Literature: can information improvisation and performance culture and a survey of Latin literature and translation. Good to see you, Caleb, thanks for joining us today.

Caleb Dance

Thanks for having me.

Ruth Candler

Let's begin by talking about your interest in the study of classics. What lit that spark for you?

Caleb Dance

It definitely started with Latin. I went to high school with a really good Latin program that I was not part of at the beginning, I enrolled in Spanish because I was curious about it. I took three years of Spanish and got to the end of that and said, "I don't really know any Spanish", I didn't feel like I was really using that time particularly well. So I transferred into freshman in high school Latin class, as a senior, I decided I would start Latin there. And I got really excited. One wonderful instructor, Jim Broderick King, but also, I think I just was thrilled at noting correspondences between Latin and English, especially with derivatives. And suddenly I realized that words that I just always used, had their roots in this other language, then I got excited about, you know, what else was coming from that other language, what other forms of literature and so on. And so when I went to Tulane, you know, you don't learn enough Latin, in one year of high school, Latin, to test out of anything. So I start all over again, with you know, a couple weeks Head Start, I guess. But just got really excited about the fact that since we aren't spending much time in the way that I learned Latin, in learning how to speak in the language. We spend way more time learning to read really foundational literature in that language. And so I would get sample sentences and they are from Cicero. They are from Horace. And this is in my first semester of reading Latin. And so from there on, I was hooked. Jumped into Greek the next year, ancient Greek was a real delight, and then studied abroad, and it kept on snowballing.

Ruth Candler

This is one of your research interests is humor in ancient Roman writing, and I don't think that I've really thought about the fact that ancient Romans told jokes. But how did you become interested in that topic?

Caleb Dance

Yeah, it was it sort of surprised me as well. I was reading Horace and Horace wrote satires, and it was in grad school that I was reading this one satire, his first satire, and the speaker says, "Read as you're laughing." I read the next sentence. And then I stopped and I said, "Wait, I wasn't laughing. Was I supposed to be laughing?" So then I go back and look at the previous sentence. I'm like, oh, there is a joke there. Right. And so he was I propose, sort of creating a textual laugh track, right? So he doesn't have another piped in, you know, voice actually laughing. But the speaker says, "You're laughing as a way of saying, I just told a joke, sort of, you know, when, when you pause for laughter", he was offering that pause, and it's in the text. And I found that really interesting and started looking at laughter every time and also complicating laughter for myself, because I always thought of laughter as something associated with humor. And it is, but it's also associated with awkwardness. It's also associated with, you know, denigrating people, you laugh at them. And so, I started sort of pulling on all of these threads and seeing where they took me and they took me to my research project for the last many years.

Ruth Candler

It sounds like an interpretation of laughter

Caleb Dance

Yes, it is right and every time and I think laughter does that, right? If you walk into a room and you hear someone laugh, it's almost like they've asked you a question. You're like, what are they laughing at? Is that are they if I laugh with them, or whatever be laughing at them? What is this laughter doing in this case? So I do treat every laugh in a text as a question that sort of needs some teasing out. I try not to explain the joke necessarily, but I try and find where the laughter what the source of the laughter is maybe what the target is, if there is one. And tie that back always to sort of my own experiences, whether I'm reading ancient literature in modern literature, or just the news.

Ruth Candler

So I was gonna go back, I was going to ask you to go back and tell us that joke that you first discovered. So was it a situational thing that you discovered with the laughter, what was it actually somebody laughing at something that was said that was funny?

Caleb Dance

Yeah. So it's one voice. You know, the satirist is just this one voice who's speaking at length. And he's sort of run it almost feels like a big long rant, in certain ways. The speaker, and at some point, he talks about, in fact, this is, oh, I'm hesitating. But I'm pretty sure that this is just a little bit after we have the lines in Horace that give their that provide the source of our school motto. So in resource satires, he refers to an ant. And the Latin for ant is for Mica. Where we get our word for mica like it's like, I guess it's as if it looks like a bunch of ants. But an ant is known in Calcutta Futura, futuri. Right, not unaware, not unmindful of the future. And in that case, he's talking about how an ant will store materials for the winter, right? So resources so that it is planning, but he draws a distinction with the hoarder who never draws from that pile, right? Someone who never deals with it again, and, and just is miserly and holding on to all of their resources. So he draws a distinction between these and makes a joke about a mythological figure named Tantalus. And that was the joke that I only learned about when I got to the line where he says, Oh, you're laughing. And his whole point is, if you're laughing, realize that it could

really be about you, right? The thing that you're laughing at, you might actually be committing the same fault that Tantalus did. But now I'm really wanting to double check the Non incautus future. We got a computer. So Monet's no encounter, yep, Non incautus futuri. And then about 20 lines later? He says, yeah. Yeah, that's it. So I didn't lie yet.

Ruth Candler

Yet. That's encouraging. Wow. I mean, I've never really thought about the, you know, the source of our motto. And that's what we're always saying is not unmindful of the future.

Caleb Dance

Well, and I think what's, you know, it's a gendered language, Latin is, there's feminine nouns, there's masculine nouns, and there's neuter nouns. But when I tell students that the original because the word for ants is feminine, it's not that they thought all ants were feminine. It's just the grammatical gender. When I tell them, Well, you know, the original is known in Kouta. All of the Latin nerds are like, Oh, my God, feminine. Wow, how progressive and it's like, well, maybe, maybe not.

Ruth Candler

But understand that study abroad was a critical part of your introduction to classics, you now have had the opportunity to create and lead those experiences for W&L students, would you tell us about the study abroad courses that you have taught? And in what ways was it important for students to visit the sites that they're actually learning about in class?

Caleb Dance

So glad you asked me that. Because I was just thinking, when speaking with a student about how they were hesitating, should I study abroad, shouldn't I? And the one thing that I tell every student, when I first meet them, whether they're an advisee, or a student in my class, I say, plan on getting your passport if you don't have it yet, because we are going to figure out how to get you abroad at some point. And it's because I feel like it reminds us that the walls of a classroom are or within the walls of a classroom is not the only place where you can actually learn. And when I studied abroad, I studied first for a semester in Rome, at the intercollegiate center for classical studies, where w and L students actually go almost every semester, and then in Athens at the college here in Athens program. And my undergraduate advisor had told me "Caleb, when you go abroad, you know, you're going to look at all of these ruins. But be sure to look beyond the knee high sights." That's what he called them the knee high sights, because a lot of walls are sort of, they've fallen down, they've tumbled down, or it's just the base of a column. And it's his way of saying, this is an amazing place to see the ancient material, but to see it in a real living context, because once you look beyond the knee high sights, once you look a little higher, suddenly you realize, "oh, I'm in front of this beautiful church that I can walk into and see something that's not ancient", but the people who inhabit this community, have valued this material to such an extent that they want to integrate it into their cityscape, they want to walk past it, they want to preserve it for other people, tourist students, etc. who is going to come and study it for years to come.

Ruth Candler

When you first studied abroad, was there an aha moment? Like you knew what that professor was saying to you and why he encouraged you?

Caleb Dance

Yeah, there is. Okay, so this was when I traveled to Rome, this was my first time, you know, traveling on my own. And I rode the train to the neighborhood in Rome where the school was, and I get to the train, stop there. And I have these directions that say, you can get on a bus or you can get on or you can call a cab. And I'm like, Oh, wait for a bus. It's a great way to sort of learn about the city. And I'm waiting there. And I'm wearing a Tulane shirt. And this man approaches me and he says, Oh, do you go to Tulane in English? When I say yes, I do. And we start chatting for a little bit. And he says, I'm waiting for someone to pick me up. And we're just talking for a little bit. He said he had gone or he had friends who had gone to Tulane. And then his ride comes and he says, "Where are you going?" I'm like, Well, what did my parents say about cars with strangers, right? But I've sort of sussed the guy out. And I'm like, and the woman who picked them up, you know, she seems very nice. She's speaking Italian, but she spoke a little English to me. And I tell him, you know, it's only about a five minute drive. And he says, "All right, I'll, I'll drop you off." So he then takes me there, drops me off. And then I was like, Oh, that was an interesting experience. But then, a couple of weeks later, he emailed me or messaged me in some way and said, You had mentioned that you're studying classics, I want you to see other parts of Rome. So he takes me to this church called San Luigi de franchisee, and which is very close to the Pantheon. And this church has this beautiful cycle of paintings by Caravaggio. And I was suddenly that's when Tom Brazil, my undergrad advisor, words popped into my head, and I said, "Oh, my gosh, yes, this is what Rome has. It's the Eternal City." So it's not just what's ancient, but it's what's still present and what's still valued. And so, the study abroad program that Professor Matthew Loar, who's the director of fellowships here, and I led was really about making the students fall in love with the idea of studying in a different city, living there for several weeks, and appreciating it not just for its connections to the ancient world, but for the fact that it is a very modern, exciting place. You know, several of them talked about how cool it was that this was the first place where they became familiar with riding public transportation, because we were going all over the place. And so we would say, alright, we're meeting at this place, they take the bus, they take the train, and they'd be there. And so it wasn't just about seeing Rome as some fossilized entity, that's 2000 years old, but Rome as a living city still. And the W&L students, they were so good and so excited, and gave wonderful presentations and really threw themselves into it.

Ruth Candler

So it's more than just learning about the coursework. It's, it's learning about life, right?

Caleb Dance

Yeah. And realizing that, you know, coursework is ideally preparing you for something, but that something might not be a career, it might just be, as you said, living in a place and appreciating and being there and enjoying yourself if at all possible.

Ruth Candler

Alright, so if your parents are listening, do you want us to delete that part about you?

Caleb Dance

No, no, no. In fact, I sent them an email, like, you know, I was sending regular emails and I definitely told them and yeah, that was his name was Ian Malcolm and he passed away a couple of years ago, but he and I stayed in touch for a long time. He had a fascinating job. He had studied abroad and just never left.

Ruth Candler

What a wonderful story. Thank you for sharing that with us. The spring term is a favorite W&L experience for many students. And I understand that one of your favorite spring term classes is improvisation and performance culture in ancient literature. What makes this class so enjoyable for you, as a teacher?

Caleb Dance

Well, as, as is often the case, it has a lot to do with the students in the course. And if there are W&L students in the course, you know, they generally chose to be there, right, especially a spring term course. So this isn't to fulfill some necessary FDR, some necessary requirements, they're in there, because they're curious about the material, which means they're going to do the reading, which means they're going to be engaged in conversations, and selfishly, and I think this is true of a lot of my colleagues, you, you teach the things that you're interested in, right? Because you're gonna, if you have that passion for the material, the students are more likely to become passionate for it or recognize some value in it, even if it's just the stuff that makes Professor Dance happy. But in this case, I was really excited about thinking through improvisation as a creative process that we continue to, sort of detect in ancient literature. So the sort of foundational story of improvisation in, in ancient literature, for classics, revolves around Homer and the Homeric bards. And, this wonderful research that was done in the early 20th century by a man named Milman Parry, and his student, our Lord, and then I think our lord's son is the one who published most of this because Milman Parry died very young. But that's all beside the point. What Millie Parry, sort of fleshed out, because it had been percolating for a little while was this idea that the Bards the Homeric bards, were making stuff up on the spot. Now, if you think of improvisation as just making stuff on this, making stuff up on the spot, it doesn't do justice to the amount of preparation they had to do. So they're making it up following certain structures dealing with certain standard storylines, characters, plot devices, et cetera. And for me, I started thinking that okay, the performance culture of reciting one of these is one of improvisation. But you have to be following some of these rules, you can't just totally take it in a different direction. And in fact, the goal for many of them was complete fidelity, you would hear someone recited. And then you'd say, I can do that to word for word. Now, Millman Perry had the technology to sort of record. Some people weren't, he found a modern comp Aranda. And he would record them, it'd be like, it's not word for word, but it is really, really close because they're following the same conventions. So I got to thinking, Well, that's one form of exciting improvisation. And I love sharing that with students in the classical Canaan course that I'm teaching right? Now, when I told the students, what did you notice about Homer? And they're like, well, there are these moments of repetition. And I was like, What do you think that's about? Well, these are stock phrases that the bard could sort of summon, you know, if, if the bard is thinking of the next thing to come, you know, come on and do a stock phrase. Yeah. So the students did notice that, you know, when Dawn has introduced, she's rosy fingered Dawn. And for me the interest, the personal interest that sort of led me to start exploring improvisation and performance culture was I realized, "Oh, this is

like a riff in a musical context, right?" Like, if you sit down with a piano player, you'll hear them oftentimes play the same riff. It's just like a comfortable sort of phrase. And so and you know, it sounds good, as long as you can integrate it into the rest of the structure. So the Homeric bards knew that if you're talking about Dawn, you can sense it's all in poetry, you can definitely say rosy fingered Dawn, and you've just filled up a little bit more of a line plus you've made it you've conjured this beautiful image of sort of the sky, you know, brightening gradually with these tendrils. And the students detected that repetition. And then when you tell them, Well, what if I told you that in its origin, these were improvised recitations? You see their eyes widen and they say wait No, because, you know, they're holding a 300-page book in front of them at the time. But the individual performances that individual episodes would have been delivered just in these little segments, and recited in such a way that everyone was entertained. Everyone was having a great time. And in all likelihood, the Bard was responding to everyone in the room, right, seeing what gets them excited, and maybe sort of pushing the story in a slightly different direction, even if there are certain conventions, right? That's the structure that they're dealing with. There's this element that they've prepared for improvisation. And one of the analogies when speaking with students about improvisation that I make is to the conversation, right? We have conversations every day. And we follow certain conventions, because if you start speaking to me, Ruth, and I start speaking to you in a different language, you might be like, Wait, that's not normal. Right? One of the rules is, we're going to speak in the same language unless we've somehow signaled to each other, that we're going to be jumping between languages. Likewise, if I'm speaking to you, and you just start like clapping and jumping up and down, I'm going to be like, Wait, that's not a normal conversation. All right. So I don't know what you're going to say next. But I do know that you're going to follow you're likely to follow certain conventions, certain rules. And I think that when we think of improvisation in ancient literature, they're doing the same thing. The other thing that gets me excited, you know, we started with Homer, but then the students really got into thinking about the illusion of spontaneity. And that's when you're reading a play, right? You're reading Sophocles or Aeschylus, or Euripides, you're reading the Medea, this figure, this magical figure comes on stage, and she is speaking. And it doesn't sound like a canned speech. It sounds, it might be elevated, but it sounds like something a human would say. And then you realize, Wait, this was all scripted, but it was scripted. to sound natural. That's the goal. You want it to sound natural. And so this illusion for me is another fascinating thing. And I think it's what lots of people who are good at improvisation do. They don't want you to see how hard it is. They want it to seem effortless.

Ruth Candler

Yeah. Well, the word that you use illusion reminds me of the word that I've heard you use sprezzatura. And you've been a teacher, when teaching structured improvisation. Would you explain that term for us?

Caleb Dance

Yeah. Um, so this is a term that I've encountered. It's, I've encountered most often in the context of fashion, right? And it's when thinking of specifically, most of the time I noticed it in like Italian men, when I'm in Rome, and they look just so sort of effortlessly put together, right? It's like, "Wait, did they? Did they put that wrinkle in there? Like, did they deliberately make themselves look like a little bit? Oh, I did." You know, I'm not wearing a tuxedo. But I'm not dressed down. And so it's this idea of sort of hiding the effort in some way. And that if you're aware of it, you're sort of seeing the effort at the same

time. So there's this tension, where there's a famous line in off it, have it in his Metamorphoses, he describes this story of a sculptor, Pygmalion, who is sculpting this beautiful statue. And the line is that art escapes notice through its art, right? The skill escapes notice through the skill itself. So you're watching and you're like, oh, wow, that looks effortless. It is, it looks like something that you just did off the cuff. But you, you did have to put a lot of time into it. Right? And that's what spreads. Tura is for me, it's just like, it has this illusion of spontaneity. But, and sometimes you want to preserve that. But other times, you want to draw attention to it and be like, Oh, no, no, no, I put some I put some time and effort into it.

Ruth Candler

It sounds like it takes a lot of effort and experience just to be natural. Right? Yeah.

Caleb Dance

And I think that, you know, sometimes it feels that way, right? As we're moving in the world. You're like, oh, I want to feel I want to, I want to look like I'm comfortable. And it's like, well, what do I do? I cross my legs this way, like change, right? But you try and present yourself as being comfortable in that situation, and disguise the amount of effort that you put into it for any number of reasons, but I think in art, oftentimes, it's because it's not fun, always think sometimes there's an appeal. But it's not fun to see how much work someone you want to appreciate maybe the story you want to appreciate, I think of it also, you know, it's talking about conversation. But dialogue and films are another things where you, it's really hard to write dialogue. I've been told I've never written any, scripts, but like to write dialogue in a film. Because when we're speaking, we often have, you know, sentences that break off in the middle. And there's so much that's communicated through just context. Whereas in drama, or in film, everyone's speaking in complete sentences, it seems a lot of the time, but it feels natural. You know, when you're watching it, you aren't like, oh, that's unnatural. It's sort of how we all think we speak. And then we, if you record yourself, and listen back, which you and I are going to be doing, I'm sure at some point, when we listen to this, when we listen back to this, we're gonna be like, Oh, is that what I said?

Ruth Candler

Get not an easy task. You had mentioned earlier, that when you were an undergraduate, your professor encouraged you to take ancient Greek since you're enjoying Latin so much. Now that you're a professor, and you have you know, the hindsight, would you say that was good advice? And would you give that same advice to W&L students who have the same interest?

Caleb Dance

Oh, for sure. And even if they don't have the same interest, I might say, you know, I hope that they have an interest. And in general, I believe that you're going to do things better if you're interested in that, right? And so, in that case, I showed some interest in antiquity, and the professor said, Oh, well, and there is sort of a disciplinary, excuse for this. Latin, most of the Latin we read, all of most of the Latin that I read, was influenced by Greek literature before. So if you want to know where that Latin is, you know, the same experience that I had when I was first learning Latin and saying, Whoa, this is where certain English words come from. Latin conventions, some actual words, they have a similar parent to a Greek parent, there's this proto indo European language. And so I was like, I should learn what the Greek is. But in, in general, at W&L, it's wonderful because Virginia has a lot of Latin training

in the secondary schools, a lot of students have some Latin and decided to continue with it. Greek, not so much. But I think if you learn Greek, you are opening yourself up to these opportunities, like Homer in your third semester, right? So in your third semester, in my three years of high school, Spanish, I couldn't sit down and read Isabel Allende. But in your third semester of college, Greek, you're sitting down, you're reading Plato, you are engaging with the material. So it's not just the language for the language's sake, it's the language as a door to a different culture to a different time, for better or worse, right, you might be more alert to some of the problematic components of a given culture, but at least you've read it and you've started to conceive of a world other than the one that we're really familiar with. And I think that makes you better as a person just to be more self aware. And as a global citizen, as someone who can relate to people all around the world, you have this flexibility of thought so yes, I think learning Greek was amazing. I still have you know, the Odyssey is my favorite book. I was telling my students this, but I'm a Latinus. Right. Most of my work is in my research is on Latin. And So had I not taken that Greek. I don't think I would have the appreciation that I had for the Odyssey that I do have for the Odyssey

Ruth Candler

Did you read An Odyssey, by Daniel Mendelsohn? Yes. Did you enjoy that?

Caleb Dance

I did enjoy that. And he's just such a, I think he's another person who lets you know that you can. Like he is a classicist, but he's also an essayist. And so, you don't by studying Greek, you aren't saying I'm going to be a classics professor, right? That's not the goal. And that's not why we teach Greek. That's not why we teach Latin. We aren't just fixated on the next generation of scholars. We see value in this through the people in the present and in antiquity that you get to come into contact with,

Ruth Candler

Well, what other courses would you recommend to students who are interested in Classical Studies?

Caleb Dance

Oh, boy, well come join any of my classes. I have a great time. You know, the class that I'm currently teaching is on canon formation. We call it blasts from the classical past. But by canon formation, the questions we ask ourselves are, why do we read these books? Right? Is there something inherently valuable? Well, the only course there are two books that I have sine on the syllabus and that is the Odyssey and Plato's Symposium. Other than those two, the students collectively debate what we're going to read and why, and what our collective measure is for what is canon? What is what needs to be read? And there was a time when these discussions were referred to as the cannon wars, where people said, Look, we don't need to read anymore dead white men. And some people said, well, maybe we still should, for any number of reasons, some of the reasons that come up. I think the outdated ones, the outdated ones in particular is, you know, moral, you learn something, morally from reading, the Odyssey, about heroism, and these are all couched usually in, you know, some potentially toxic forms of masculinity. But the culture is still there, I was just talking about the culture in the context of the language. And so having that context, that's a good reason to read something. Another one is a little more transactional. It's just because other people, you know, it's something that's been read for a little while, and so you should be dialed into what is culturally what Carol carries some of that cultural value

or cultural relevance. But I'm ultimately very sympathetic to the one where it's just like, is it beautiful, right? And it's, it might not be a happy story. But if it's beautiful, that might be a reason in and of itself. Does it open up sort of your mind to new ways of recognizing yourself or the world around you?

Ruth Candler

I'd like to step outside the classroom now for a few minutes. I know that you're also a talented musician. Yeah. Especially with a saxophone and flute. When did you discover your love of music?

Caleb Dance

Oh, boy. It was what my mom would probably say in utero.

Ruth Candler

But is she a musician? No,

Caleb Dance

She was she did. She played the flute. And that's the instrument I started with. Because we had a flute. Right. That's so if it's in the closet, that's what you'll play. But she took tap dancing classes when she was pregnant. And so, I was, you know, Riri tap dancer from the beginning. Yes, exactly. Dance into rhythm into all of this. And then my parents, you know, they had a rule. We all have three siblings, Zachary, Gabriel, and Kate, wonderful, wonderful people that I loved spending time with. We were all in like a big band together. We had a rule of asking you about Yeah, okay. Okay, well, we my parents had a rule. That was if you want to play soccer, you got to play music. Now, that wasn't a tough sell for most of us. And for me, not at all. I was like, No, I want to I want to do both. But we all, Gabe and Kate, were maybe a little more. They're very talented soccer players. And they're like, what if I put just more time into this. But before this became any sort of point of tension. And it wasn't a great tension. But we were all part of the Bonta Dance Dance band. Because this family friend named Bill Bonta had two kids. He loved big band music. He knew that the dance family had Zach on saxophone, Caleb on flute, Kate on, she was playing tuba, I think at that time, but maybe also drums and gave on trumpet. And so you could see the Bonta Dance Dance band at any number of local malls, on certain holiday weekends. And we would sit there and just play all together and have a grand old time. Like it was a great, it was a great experience to

Ruth Candler

Do you have any video recording?

Caleb Dance

Oh boy, I don't know. I'll ask my parents.

Ruth Candler

I'd love to share that with our listeners. We'll put it on our show notes.

Caleb Dance

And it might be some photos if nothing. Okay, photo photos would be great. Yeah, videos would be even better. It was so it was a lot of fun. You know, so the music of Glenn Miller, you know, we're we would rehearse and Bill bought his basement. And then we would look for some location to perform.

Ruth Candler

What fun, great childhood memories. I think the last time that we talked you were getting ready to perform at the Beer and Wine Festival at the Limekiln theater. Which is you know, I remember the last concert I went to, there are musicians saying that they playing at Limekiln has been on their bucket list for years and years and here it is in your backyard and you were able to do that. Do you enjoy performing for a crowd? Oh, yes.

Caleb Dance

I don't enjoy being the like, I don't want to be a lead singer. Right. You've all now heard my voice. This is not the voice of a lead singer. Sing something. Thank you. But, but I do love playing with a group and sort of like playing with an audience because that's how it feels, you know, in the way I was talking about the Homeric Bard being responsive to their audience. We're feeding off of anyone in the crowd as well. And so, Limekiln is wonderful because it's beautiful. It's just stunning. But I think it's a wonderful nonprofit. I really like all of the music that they bring in. And a really nice perk, although sometimes it makes me more nervous, is you see familiar faces out there. It's almost harder to play for familiar faces than when you're like, oh, I don't know that person. But if you're gonna see them, you know, a couple days later at work. You're like, oh, did you hear my Miss note?

Ruth Candler

Well, the good thing about playing at a beer and wine festival? I think people might be a little more forgiving.

Caleb Dance

Oh, yeah, great point.

Ruth Candler

So during your time at Princeton, you discovered MIMA, a nonprofit organization dedicated to music and you've now been working with them for a number of years. Would you tell us more about Mima, what it is, what it does and how you work with them?

Caleb Dance

For sure. I love MIMA. MIMA music is music education nonprofit that, yeah, I started working with in 2005, because I was at Princeton for one semester. And most Tulane students refer to that semester as their Katrina semester. And so, I was a senior, I was going to all of these freshmen events, right? I'm a senior, there was no question I'm going back to Tulane, but I want to know what the school is like that I'm going to be at for the next four months. And advertised was this nonprofit named MIMA and what they were doing at the time, Christophe Geisler was then the executive director. And he spoke to all of us and said, we use music to bring people together. And I was like, Wow, that sounds like a great idea. And what they did in particular, were drum circles. And we would go to local communities and make

music with them and try and just create good feelings. Now, over the ensuing years, we decided we could be more deliberate, right, and we could try and write a curriculum, which we did, in fact, do. And that curriculum is built around group songwriting, and using the activity of group songwriting. And again, you'll hear a theme here improvisation to tell participants most of whom are kids, that they have everything they need to write music, right, they are musical beings just by existing in the world. And so these group songwriting experiences are about drawing upon what your experiences are. And as a group as a community and writing something and the goal is, of course, to make good music. Not all of the songs are going to feature on you know, top 40 radio stations, right. The most important thing for us is that the students come away feeling like they've learned some collaborative skills and feeling that they have some creative confidence. So that's what MIMA does. We do group songwriting, Charlottesville, Stanton, Harrisonburg soon, I'm sure we'll do something we've done some workshops in Lexington. But yeah, it's just about using music to sort of empower participants and to take it off of the stage and realize that we all can be music makers, right? appreciators, of course but makers, you know, just tapping your foot. You're giving it that pulse, right? You're doing something to and especially if you're tapping your foot with the person next to you, suddenly you're making a song.

Ruth Candler

Yeah. Love that will include will include links to MIMA on our show notes. So, it's been fun learning about your professional interests and your love of music. And I want to chat a little bit about what you like doing when you're not on campus. And so returning for a moment to your life as a musician, who are your primary influences and what are some of your favorite artists?

Caleb Dance

That's a fun one. So here, you know, primary influence probably begins with family, right. Zach, the oldest brother played saxophone. So, when he got a new saxophone, I got his old saxophone. So that's great hand me down. Exactly. And it's a beautiful saxophone. And so he still happens to. Oh, yeah. And he also and my brother Gabriel. They were both fans of Led Zeppelin and I remember listening to Led Zeppelin. And you know, I'm playing flute and saxophone, there's no way I'm going to play. Right. But I just suddenly started to recognize their musicality, their precision their, you know, their, I think, really all genius geniuses on their respective instruments, including the voice in Robert Plant's case. And so there it was about taking this classic rock and trying to figure out how I can use what musically I can learn from them. I listened to a lot of New Orleans music when I was in New Orleans. And so, I'm a big fan of The Meters. And a lot of jazz, too, right. That's a more comfortable area. Desert Island album is. Right. Your mind kind of blew by Miles Davis. Just, I can listen to that on repeat really, for forever and ever. But, you know, I like to listen as widely as possible. You know?

Ruth Candler

So, you're a talented musician? Do you dabble in any other forms of art?

Caleb Dance

Um, no, I don't. I don't think I do. Let me think. No, oh, yeah, I guess I do. The one that I would come back to, because having just talked about the liberal arts, I should touch on this. I aspire and sometimes do to write poetry. And so I teach poetry all the time. And really, due to the mentorship of several faculty members here, Leslie Wheeler, in particular, Seth Michelson, and Lea Green, these three people, you

know, they, they had a poetry cohort, I shared some of my work in progress. And they said, you should send this out. And so, a couple of my poems were published, and I was like, Oh, I guess I can sometimes be a poet too. So, it is a form of art and a form of art that I just love.

Ruth Candler

How wonderful that you collaborated with other faculty and that they were supportive and encouraging

Caleb Dance

Wonderful mentors and all tremendous poets, right? Yes, they are in their own right. And then, you know, I think that the other my primary audience is often my partner Lily, she'll often look at my poetry and say, this is, I think, I think it's ready or you might want to work on that again.

Ruth Candler

I'm so I'm a foodie. And I love hearing about different culinary experiences. And you've spent a lot of time in Italy. Do you have a favorite dish?

Caleb Dance

Yeah, you know, I think carbonara you know, they're the big four Roman pastas and carbonara is arguably my go to

Ruth Candler

do you make it at home? I do drink a good carbonara

Caleb Dance

I make a pretty good carbon Ara, and it's a collaborative effort. So, Lily discovered this jam stock and provisions which is in Charlottesville, and they are a butcher, and they cure their own guanciale and guanciale is this cured pork jowl that is the necessary component of good carbonara. Like sometimes you'll say, Oh, you could do pancetta, or something. But no, you need guanciale. And it is yeah, it's very fatty. They before they started carrying their own guanciale, they called it they didn't add any of the herbs and they called it face bacon, which is less appetizing, but still delicious, right? And so you get this, these slices and toss them in your pasta

Ruth Candler

they change that name, face bacon, and

Caleb Dance

Right, right

Ruth Candler

especially if you do like a little Italian sort of "guanciale." Yeah. Do you have a recipe that you can share with us? Or do you wing it?

Caleb Dance

I pretty much. Yes, exactly. Oh, there's this great. And in fact, I don't think I got it from this recipe book. But the one that we use might be based on this cooking book by the New York Times, where all they do is they tell you all of the ingredients, but they don't actually tell you the quantities and the whole idea is like look be a chef, right? Figure it out. And that's a really fun way. If you have the time and the patience to improvise, right? Once again, you have the structure, you know what's going in there, but you don't know in what quantities, you might have some sense of the order. But know if there's a lot of winging it with that recipe in particular

Ruth Candler

A lot of improvising. Yes. Yeah. I think Caleb that's like the theme of your life.

Caleb Dance

It is. Yeah.

Ruth Candler

Have you ever thought about it that way before?

Caleb Dance

Oh, yeah. No. What like, not as the theme of my life, but now I am right. Thank you. I will think of it that way. But no, I think that it's that for me, I, I appreciate the joy that I've sort of been provided through the structures around me, right. I'm very fortunate in that respect. And so it makes me all the more excited to sort of play off of them and to try and appreciate them.

Ruth Candler

Well, you know, with improv is your jam. I thought we could end the podcast conversation with asking you to do something, but I'm looking around for like a flute or a saxophone and Oh,

Caleb Dance

Usually I did get told when I was traveling with MIMA, right. We used to do a bunch of international programs and Mateus, who's an amazing Tango guitarist from Argentina. At one point, we went out to some event, a gala, flute, and I said, Well, it's back at the hotel or the room and he said, you have the smallest, like, most portable instrument, you are not allowed to travel when you're here without it. But when I'm back on domestic territory, sometimes I forget to carry the flute around.

Ruth Candler

Can you tell us an ancient Roman joke?

Caleb Dance

Oh. boy. So, there is one really there is one but it's, this one's kind of tricky, because it's not well, I'll let you all decide if, if it's all right. So, this is actually in the Odyssey. And the story is, and a bard tells it to everyone else. So, a bard within the Odyssey. So like another storyteller within the main story, and he tells everyone about the adulterous relationship between Aries and Aphrodite, because Aphrodite was married to her Festus, the God of the forge. And Festus was known for not being a particularly

handsome guy. In the parlance of the times, in antiquity, he is sometimes referred to as lame. So he's disabled, he's not particularly attractive, and he works in the forest all the time. Right? So he's like dark and covered in soot you have to imagine, Ares is the god of war. And the God of War is, you know, young and pretty handsome and Aphrodite is just stunning, right? She's the goddess of love. And so she and Ares start having this relationship on the side and Festus hears about it from the Sun God who sees all and the professor says, Oh, well, I'm gonna catch him. So he's the God of the forge. He weaves these tiny like this metal nets, essentially, that he wraps all around the bed where they have their liaisons and walks away, and says, like, I'm going on vacation or something, and then all and then Ares and Aphrodite run there. And they have, their meetup, so to speak, and get caught, right, they get all tangled up, they cannot get out of this. So then have Festus comes back, and he says, "Hey, all of you, other gods come and see" these sort of funny he might say it's kind of this is very interested in whether he says funny, but we can, for another time, "come see these laughable things, or these unlikable things that Ares and Aphrodite have gotten up to." And all of the male gods come, none of the female gods come and they see them and they're like, "Oh, that's funny, because like, you know, slow have Festus caught fast war." That's very funny. Ha, ha ha ha ha. And everyone burst out into laughter. And you're like, oh, is that the joke here? But the story goes on. Because then what happens is two of the gods, Hermes and Apollo, sort of are standing next to each other, and one of them elbows together and says, "Well, honestly, if I were bedding down next to Aphrodite, I could deal with three times as many chains." And that's the actual joke, and everyone breaks into crazy laughter. Except I'm one guy, and then he arranges their release. But that's the, and I think my theory on this is it was an improvised joke. Because the Bard is telling this joke, because tensions have gotten high in with Odysseus. He's like, You know what I need, I need something to lighten the mood. So comes up with a fun joke about adultery, actually wouldn't land very well I imagine with Odysseus now that he's spent 20 years away from his wife, but so it goes. Thank you. Caitlin, thank

Ruth Candler

you so much for having us in your office today. Appreciate your time.

Caleb Dance

Oh, no, thank you. Thank you. I am looking forward to all of the future episodes. I think this is such a cool, thank you.

Ruth Candler

Thank you, thank you to our listening audience for tuning in today. We hope you'll visit our website w.edu/lifelong where you can find our show notes as well as a truly great selection of other WL lifelong learning opportunities. Take a look and until next time, let's remain together not unmindful of the future.