

Dr. Maria Helena Pinto, I am so excited to have you as my first guest on the podcast, Beyond Beauty. Thank you so much for being here. Thank you so much for inviting me and also to be the first guest for you. It's an honor for me. Thank you so much to think about me. It's an honor for me. You are incredible and you and I met in 2012. So it's been 10 years since we met. Do you want to tell everyone how we met? Yes...(laughs) We were doing a tour, and I was dancing a piece, a choreography piece that called Sombra. It was a solo with four other women from Africa and we had this big tour for different states there in the United States. And it was amazing to see you there and hosting us and managing everything we need to this very important moment for us. And it was a very huge and important moment for my career, also as a dancer and choreographer. and also to represent my country Mozambique. And it was really, really amazing to be there with you. And it was so useful and every time present for everything we need in that time. Thank you so much. Oh, that was that was an amazing experience we had with you. Yeah, it was an absolute honor for me. The name of the tour was Voices of Strength. And I recall our tour traveled, it was put on by MAPS International Productions and the tour traveled to New York City, Washington, DC, where you guys performed in the Kennedy Center. And we went to Seattle and Milwaukee and Chicago. So it was really, really great to travel across the country. And you were one of the featured artists in the show. And you guys did, was it two shows a night for three nights or something like that in each city? Oh, I don't really remember, but I think it was like six different states there. Seattle, New York City, Chicago, California, and many of them. It was like six, six different states. So and ...sometimes we had one or two performances. I remember in Washington, we did the performance in Kennedy Center. That was amazing for me. One unique experience because I was putting the bucket inside my head. And after the performance, I did reverence and then I go out and the audience was just in stand up and make this ovation for me...and the staff was telling me that I have to take out the bucket because people wanted to know my face. And they said, "No, I can't show my face." But they were there like 15 minutes clouded the hands and it was very, very, very important. Some of them, the audience was Muslim beacons also and they they stay and wait for me just to say that they have this moment to testimony how huge work I was doing for people, not only for Muslim, weekend people, but like this audience, they don't know about us, about my country, about my people here, culture, but they was identified about what I was talking about, the women, the liberty, the expression to be free and uh it was really, now I can say it was strange, no? Very, very big, emotionally, psychologically and yeah, it was important for me that that moment in Washington when I did this performance. That performance was incredible. It was so memorable. It's almost like I can see it in my mind's eye right now when I remember it. I remember you putting the buckets on your head. Do you want to talk a little bit about that show, your artistic strategy or your artistic intentions in producing that choreography Yeah, it was also... it was about my own life and how I was passing from one step of my life to another step of my life and to understand

that I can be a voice for other people, for other women like myself that have uh..no this, have no this courage. I don't know how you say in English, courage is to have this courage, not to not have here, to go and talk about who they are to come from the shadow to the light and trying to do this it's like uh walking, you have to walk from one state where you are and get to another state of your life to be free and have your face your voice, your name, and you can affirm this for everyone you would like and not, don't have this fear. So the bucket it was the woman in the shadow to take this and it was about this. And I was I made the concept that I was also working with words. And I remember that for the United States we make some translations and then people would understand what was saying and about this process that I was going through to go from the shadow to the light. And also the conception of the the scenario it was about black and white and also the clothes It was uh black and the buckets also was white and black and the lights was also white and dark and light and just like two colors, every time two colors. And that built all the...this universe that it was important to give to people to understand. At the end of the piece, she's going from the darkness, from the shadow, she's going to the light. And that was purpose...the main purpose of the piece of Sombra.

Wonderful. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to dance? What was your first exposure to dance? And also, how did you come to choreography? So can you tell me about how you came to dance and to choreography? Yeah, okay. I just began to dance when I was little and I have like uh seven years old or something like that. I was in the primary school and the Mozambican government was trying to find children that can go to the national schools of art and one of the schools was the national dance school And there was one of the children that was chosen in an exam they did for us. And then so, but after after this exam, I didn't go to see the results. So my mother, after six months, she asked me about this school. And I said, oh, yes, but I didn't go to see the results. And she said, you have to go and see the results because maybe they you have the results. positive results and you can dance. I said yes but I'm afraid and she said okay you are afraid and then you go with your fear and then you go to see if (laughs) you pass this and then I go to national dance school and I knew that I had I passed this to go to the school and then the director of the school, she said it was late because six months passed and classes was begun and they was in advance like I was late. I couldn't do the classes. They go with the group, the first group. But I find uh one teacher, Arminda, and she said, okay, let me just ask teacher Vladimir if he can uh try Maria in the class and then we will see. So this teacher, he said, "Yes, we can try her." And after the class, he said, "Yes, she can join the group and she will be the best of the group." That was my first steps, but also it was a little bit in the same time that I saw the one piece of the National song and dance company. Dance in 1983, I saw a choreography called "Age Mouff" and uh I saw Maria Jose Saccur is a dancer, Mozambican dancer and I was like in love with her, with the dance and they said I want to be a dancer like her. She was my, she inspires me to be a dancer and for me it's the beginning of this light to be a dancer. But to be a choreographer, it was just

like a process, like to be a teacher. It was a process, the continuity of my work as a dancer. And then you begin to understand that you can also teach, you can also create, and also you can make research. And then it's like different fields in the same area that we were studying. And because my passion of dance is so big (laughs), so I begin to learn different fields inside the this area. And it was interesting to know the different sides like in practice way and also in theory fields. Yeah, so I began a choreographer in the National Dance Company. I created some of my first pieces there. And also I create my own center of uh research in choreography called "Centro de Pesquisa Coriografica." And it was the moment that I used the main choreographies, pieces of myself with different choreo, with different dancers, Mozambican dancers or dancers of out of Mozambique. And I begin to travel with choreographers to some countries in Africa and in Europe and my work begin to be known as a choreographer. But at the beginning, at the beginning was really difficult because nobody believed that one woman can be choreographer in Mozambique. You just cannot do it because you are a woman. Only men can do this. And uh I was trying to make them understand like the company, the national dance company, that it's possible that a woman can be a choreographer. And they begin to do little demonstrations. And then I said, okay, you have to create your own space and then you're going to show your work. And I begin to grow and grow and grow and grow. After years of work and taking my works to Finland, Norway, France, Mali, uhm South Africa, many countries. So here in Mozambique they understood that there is a figure of a dancer, yes, there is a profession of dance, yes, but there is also women, choreographers, women. And that was uh very important for us, for the class to know that we can have men and women in the same profession, and we can be uh good (laughs) doing what we do because we can study, we can just have talent to do it and then we do it and then our work have a success and it's like another, another profession. Absolutely, and you've had intensive training around the world. Can you talk about your training as a dancer? Yeah, so I begin here in Mozambique like eight years in the national dance school and then I got a a scholarship to go to Cuba. And I did their professional training to be a dancer and teacher and choreographer uh for four years. After that, I came back to Mozambique, but I had this desire to continue my studies and research more about dance, about the theory of dance. I wanted to know more about the concept of how we can work with the body. When we talk about body, we're talking about what? And when we make a concept of a piece, what is the conception of one choreography, one piece of choreography? And many other questions come over and over in my head and I said, "Oh, I have to go to university because these questions I hope and I believe that I can get some answers about that, some of them." So I tried to find the scholarship and I found one to go to France and I went there. It was about 18 years making studies at the university. First I had...I was in the university, the Bachiwit. I did Bachelor and then after I did Master 1, Master 2 and then I did my Doctorate there and I finished all these 18 years because some of the years I was in Maputo, I met some here like two,

three for one month or sometimes even one year and then go back to study. And the important part of the research, like to my thesis was in Mozambique. So I was dividing the work in France and in in Macbeth to France in Macbeth to and I finished in 2014. And then I did the book. Yeah, tell me about your dissertation research. That was about how in Mozambique born a new movement of a choreographic artist, contemporary choreographic artists. And I design, I make a design or I make a, how you say, chapters of the piece, the field, my thesis that in the first part, I was studying about what is to be a dancer. The second part was what is to be a contemporary. And the third part is what to be an artist. And in the first part about what is to be a dancer. I make a research to understand how in Mozambique generally, this new generation have the training, what is the main trainings, what is the choreographers that this artist was exchanging with the main techniques that they had in their training and how they build our thoughts and the conceptions of the creations they did after their training when they began to be choreographers. Also, the second part was about what to be a contemporary in Mozambique and I analyzed uhm the main pieces that was known by the "Rencontre dans l'Afrique" dance. It was one of the main uhm meetings of contemporary dance of Africa and one of the pieces that had our there it was a solo paracinco and it was of Augusto Corvillas and he was treating about the expression of woman and the body and the nudity and how the body can be ...have this influence of the material of this white sand and water when they put because I was a dancer also in that piece And we were putting this in our body and this material changed the weight of the body. And because the weight was changed, that also changed the way we was moving. And also the effect change and the technique also changed. also the expression of what is this desire to be, that woman to be free and express herself. Wonderful one. Uhm But this was the main one because it was like creation. It was my first thinking. It was this process of the creation was a laboratory where a burn, burn, this concept of contemporary for uh dance in that new movement of artist, choreography, artist in Mozambique. But also I found this in different pieces of Pana Ybra Gabriele, Macario, Tome, Pac Jamena and other artists. And the third part, it's about what is to be artists. And this is about how choreographers, Mozambican choreographers was uh challenging by putting their work not only in the local market, but also in the international market and how this desire to put their pieces, photographic pieces inside of Mozambique and outside of Mozambique was uh designing something different. How was the influences come abroad to this process of creations and how this artist was also building something very original of Mozambique, bringing traditional materials and changing the traditional movements and trying to find a new gesture, a new expression of movement and trying to also uhm put their artistic identity in that global desire to unify one aesthetic and one conception of movement and one conception of the choreographies. And in that the Mozambican artists really put something different and strong in this Afrid... dance de Afrid dance, they bring something new. And it was about make this, how you say, reflection, uh think

thoughts about how this new generation that born from 1995 bring something new because before that from the independence of the nation Mozambican nation that was in 1975, uh we was essentially working with traditional dancers and the national dance company was the representation of the dance in Mozambique and they also represented how you say, a perspective of what the dance was. And it was one national dance, the notion of nation in dance, like there is one dance that is a national dance. And in that time in 1995, this young artist was had this, we found like a saturation or they was tired about this same conception of the choreographies and also to have to defend one national art, one national dance. And it was like, okay, we know about that. Okay, we know you build the choreography with this structure, but we have another desires to express the dance through other spaces, other bodies, other thoughts, other materials. And they bring this new dynamic energy thoughts and change the history of dancing Mozambique. And they bring something new, and they bring different expressions in dance to local and meaning Mozambique and also bring this new expression for the other countries to understand that there is a new identities and also between Mozambican artists there was many different artistic identities. I found different because they didn't build the same thoughts also. So it was interesting to make this research. It took long years, but I thought it was, or it's important to put the first steps of researching dancing in Mozambique. And it was like, I am a (laughs) pioneer, I don't know how you say modesty, modesty. I am a pioneer in that field of researching in my country. And I hope that my thesis will be the beginning for the other artists to make other research. We are very few in Mozambique in researching, And we need that more artists think about what they are building or what is building in Mozambique, not only in Mozambique, but it's very important to have this approach, theory, theory, the theory of dance, it's very important to understand what we are building, what we are doing. Yes, absolutely. I agree. And you are definitely a pioneer in the role of research, the research play in not only Mozambique, but across the continent. And would you now talk about dance artists and particularly thinking about what you've just said about how Mozambican had dance...contemporary dance. Could you talk a little bit now about dance artists? Yeah, so you know Mozambique and many countries, not only in Africa and also another continents have a huge problem of spaces to dance manifestations. And I just made this, I saw this observation and I said okay it means we need to have spaces, more spaces for dance and for arts for performing arts and I also made the observation that in Maputo the capital of Mozambique we have many spaces for these manifestations of performing arts and I said okay maybe we need to find another region, another place out of the city and try to see what it's possible to do to like take arts from the city out of the city and the country. And I found one space beautiful space in Matola, Matola Riu district of Boane. And I bought this land and the dream of my life. I'm still on (laughs) the Intel Steel building. I think it will take all my life, but no problem. I'm ready to do it (laughs) as the first day. And I said, OK, now my dream was to build a theater. But

with the architect, four years we were thinking about the concept of this space. And we found that it's not possible only to have a theater because of the economic approach of the project because we need to live this project, we need to have money and also live with what we are producing here. So we, we changed the my idea of the beginning and we said, okay, we will have this theater and also a studio of dance studio or for the school because I wanted to open a school of arts in dance artists and also we will build another building for with the commercial approaches so we can have money to continue also to build the other buildings because there is many many buildings (laughs). And when I bought the land in 2008, I didn't have more money to go on with the project. So in 2010, I decided to sell my own house to have one, uh how do you say, some million, some million dollar. It's how you say in English. \$100,000. Yes. Yes. So I had \$100,000. I took that and then I built the protection of the space because it's a huge uh space. And I put the protection. I made the first house. I began to build the theater and then money finished again. And I said, so now what I'm going to do. But the idea of the project is to bring a space out of the city for the training, for the exchanges, artistic exchanges, for the artistic and creation residences, for a meeting of eh how you say, actors of dance and other fields and like festivals, gastronomical and cultural and different kind of festivals. And we did this conception and then we have some buildings that are working in the how you say commercial side and then the buildings that are working in this artistic and cultural site inside the dance artist. So we built this house, the house, the first house, we built the building of the school is ready. We built also one coffee shop and we do bread and we sell it for the community and for the people that also use the dance artist. We create many different spaces here to make heavens, different kinds of heavens to also have found to continue to build the theater. So now from next year, we are going to go through the where we stopped the theater because it's not it's not finished. And then I'm going to go until the end of the theater. And then I'm going to another building then. Okay. So Maria, is there anything else that you wanted to add about dance artists that we might have gotten cut off last time? Yeah, so I was telling you that about the project because as you saw, it's a place that we are still building, the building here inside. And uh for this year, we are going to go on with the theater building and the next year we're going to open the huge one, the huge one of the Tansar, the theatre because it's very expensive and all these years I was working in trying to find which kind of business I can do to have money, to raise money and then to have funds to put, to build this expensive building. And this is the most important because of the artistic and cultural activities in the Sarthesh. So I decided this year and it was a big decision for me to sell another house. I will sell another house and finish this theater because it's very, very, very important for me. is uh my huge, like, old dream. Okay, I was dreaming when I had about 20 years or 25 years. I was dreaming about having a theater that I built with my hands and I told to myself, there is 30 years you have this dream. So it's time to finish this. So I decided to sell another house of mine and then I will finish this for next year and then we're going

to open and we are going to do a huge event at the end of the year so and maybe I can invite you to come back to Mozambique for this very important moment for the Sarthesh (I would love that) because the most important building inside the project. Yes, it will be about uh November or December next year. So this ehm is like actually what I was doing and what I'm going to do in this state of the project of Danzartes. But of course we have the school is working. We have been working in different fields of arts like music, plastic arts, uhm circle dance. dance and this year we are just going to concentrate in dance classes and we want to have just one performance on November because this is the performance of the school of course because there's another heavens inside that's happening and uh because I need to concentrate myself to build this theater that we have to finish until next year so I try to have less activities that we have to manage, but we are open, we open the space for other uh heavens. And so people come inside and they rent the space to do social events, cultural events, and then we find another, find us another money, more money for the buildings. So I'm still building this dream of the Sartish and uh now I have the light that I was trying to find. I took so many years but now I'm in the right direction. I have the the answers I needed to have and I'm in a good direction about the Sartish and I'm very happy that finally you know when you dream you don't know how you can make this real happen. But when you are focused and then you have this faith and then you work for that, the answers come. It's like the universe give you the answers. And that's what's happened with me. And I'm very grateful and happy that I stay with my faith. And even when sometimes people didn't have the, they didn't, how you say in English? It is like, (speaks in foreign language) I don't know how to say this in English. (they didn't believe) But people, they didn't believe. They didn't believe because it's too huge, you know? And when you see a woman, woman like me, and I'm very little, you know? I said (laughs), "Don't have one meter and a half and this woman, what she's thinking about?" (laughs) She thinks she can do this, but I believe in myself and my faith is very eh big and I'm happy to have this powerful spirit and mind to stay with my dream and go forward and make this happen. You know, yeah, this is the state of the side, but we also have this coffee shop and uh We rent the coffee shop for someone who is working in this coffee shop So now when I'm going to build some of the buildings inside some of them I we will rent and then we can raise money to build the other ones So it's so amazing to see all this journey for me and how I have been learned a lot about life and about how you can dream big and learn very important essential things in life. And this is like a gift for me. The fact is, it's like the most big gift for me to learn about uh how to be patient, how to be don't stop even when you are tired, you're still there. I'm going to sleep a little bit and then I'm going back and then go forward for it, you know. Your son has watched you through this whole journey. What does that mean to you that he's observing and learning from your journey? Yeah, I'm so happy to see my son. His name is Aiko. He's 19 years old now and he's living in Portugal now. He is a very humble boy, humble. And this is one value that when I'm looking to echo and I see that this

value is deep inside my son, I'm very proud of what he understood about what is to be humble, to be uh someone simple. You can still do big things and be simple and humble. You don't have to think that you are the best, you are... No, you don't need this. You don't need... You are here to serve people, to do the best for people, to do the best for you and for people, to make a difference in the life of you, your life and the life of people. And I see this in Aiko. And also something I think, because he's here, 19 years, it's a lot. He has been learning about his mother and he's a dreamer also like myself. He has a big dream to become a pilot. Wonderful. And he is going to begin his studies this year in September. I'm going there to make the registration and he's going to begin his big dream is to become a pilot. And he's also a basketball professional. Now he's in a team in Portugal. He's one of his big patients. And one thing he told me, the third thing he's dreaming to study is about business. He say, "Mommy, I like so much to make money. So if I like to make money, I have to study about business." Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's okay. It's okay. And then you're going to maybe have your company of your flights and of your (laughs) airplanes because your big dream is planes, airplanes, since you was a baby. So he got this to be humble and to have a dream and dreams and to go forward for that. Yeah. What advice would you give to your young self? We need to dream. We need to dream. If we don't have dream, we are lost in the world. We don't know where we go. We don't know. We have no direction. We need a direction. And the dream gives you one direction. Two, three, four, five. The dreams give you a direction. The spirit needs to have a purpose. You have to have something to fight for. To give a reason for what you are here in the earth. You know. So you need this dream, one dream. Even if it's one and you fight for all your life, you have a reason to be here. The dream gives you the sense of what we are here and what we can do for people in the world to make a difference in their life. So this is what I can advise for young you have to dream. First you have to dream and then everything comes. The knowledge, the people you need, the circumstances you need to get what you need, the money you need will come because you have this dream. Yeah and then you find the right people, the right place, everything you need for that. And the most important is the happiness. Deep happiness you have. Even if you are in the moment that you are struggling with the problems that because you don't have this, you know, but the meaning what this dream gives to you, bring something inside that is really deep and in relation with this happening. You are happy because you are in what you have to be in your life. Thank you. That's Sage Advice. Would you share what you would like to, would you share what you would like the world to know about Mozambique, about Mozambican artists, about African artists at large? Is there any message that you would like to uh...to impart? Yeah, okay (laughs) . So we have different fields, artists fields. We have a lot of artists in Mozambique, in dance, you know, I am a part of a movement, contemporary movement of dance in Mozambique since 1995. And there's eh many artists that are very important for us and have do a lot of work and create pieces, choreographies

and show in many countries in the world like eh Idio Shishava, Edna Jaim, Pak Jamena and many, many others. In music we also have many artists that are very important like Jimmy Juju, Moreira Xiongis, Stubbart Tsukuma. We have a large, how you say, Patrimoine, I don't know how to say, but the cultural sources, Mozambican sources of dance, rhythm, clothes, traditional, all these traditional culture we have in Mozambique is rich and amazing. We used to do some national festival of Marabenta. You know Marabenta is a music and also is a dance, is a popular dance, traditional dance. And I was amazed to see just last two, the last two weeks, a company of Italy came to participating this festival of Guazzamutini is a festival of Marabenta and there was one teacher Maria Giusema Camu went to Italy a few months ago and was teaching there and then the whole company came here to have a workshop and show the result of this workshop in this Guazzamutini. It was amazing to see they went to all televisions and was like wow and you see your culture your culture can be wide world can be universal you see if the Italian dancers people from Italy can dance Marabenta everyone can dance Marabenta in the world so there is this rich culture in Mozambique very important. Not all only culture, but we have also a beautiful beaches. The space is very beautiful spaces in Mozambique. There's a lot of things to know about these people also. Like the space like Villancoulou, it's so so amazing when you are there. Even myself when I see this, I see. But this is still Mozambique (laughs) You're bringing back memories. We can exchange. Yeah, we can exchange in different levels, you know, with people of around the world. So if people are interested to have this moment, yeah, it's a good opportunity with these people here to come and visit us and participate in some like this year we will have dance to the free dance in November is this international contemporary dance festival from all artists from Africa and other from the other part of Africa's another countries continents and it's a very important meeting and it's a a very important and good occasion to come and to see the country also meet very interesting people and artists in Mozambique. - Wonderful, when you were talking, you were bringing back so many memories. I remember you taking me to a lovely restaurant on the beach and we had shrimp. And also I remember going on national TV with you and somehow I do not know how I... how this happened, (laughs) but somehow you gave me a mini dance lesson on national TV (laughs) and I remember that that happened. There's even photos of it. Yes, you remember. Well, okay, great. So I have one question. So I have one more question. What advice do you have for women artist? Yeah. Oh, okay. Be powerful. Don't be afraid to be powerful. The power is very important. The power comes from inside. It's not outside. Don't compare yourself with the other one, with the other woman, with the other woman, with the other man, with the man, with another person. You don't need this. The power is inside us. So this is very important. We are in the world that in different countries we can find different ways to think and to like organize the role of the women, the women, no? So we have to be careful because even when we are in a culture that don't give the space or the freedom of expression for the woman, you have to know that the power is

inside us and then if you use it and if you know that you have it inside you, you just have to go inside and bring it out and then you can change something for another people and for the women like you, the women like you, you know, and you just don't have to be afraid to take this power and to have something to say and bring new ideas, new perceptions for the world, new inventions for the world, for people to give better life for people, don't be afraid, just go and be what you are. Don't be afraid to be what you are. This is very important. You are something different. People are different. We are all different, but we are human beings. But we can bring each of us something different, something to uh like making grow a little bit more something that someone else did before us. We can just take from that and go up with that. And we have to discover. We have to see, open our eyes and see what's happened. What can I do with that? And sleep at night and then think about that before sleeping. And in the morning you have answers coming to your mind and you know what you have to do after. So you just don't have to be afraid. This has been an absolute pleasure to discuss, learn, and laugh with you. Thank you so much Dr. Maria Helena Pinto. Thank you, Jacqueline. Thank you so much. I'm very grateful for this moment with you. I hope that you will also achieve all your goals. They are very important and big. I'm with you. I'm looking even far from here, Mozambique. I hope the best for you. I wish the best for you, Shakurim. Thank you so much. The charm. The charm of Sima, thank you. Abiento. Abiento. Thank you. Bye bye. Thank you. Bye bye. Thank you, Maria. Bye bye. Okay, that was great. So I think between the two.