HAPPi TECTURE PODCAST

Episode 2: Movement Building

Michelle: Hi, I'm Michelle Fenton, and welcome to the Happitecture Podcast.

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Michelle: What would it take to develop resilient, sustainable communities? How do we design cities that support our collective happiness? Join me as my guests and I discuss how we can plan, implement, and foster places that allow us to flourish and grow.

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Michelle: Welcome Jocelyn. I'm really excited to have you on this podcast. We've known each other a long time. Your energy is amazing, tremendous, positive, vibrant. And so, this is a real treat for me to have you on the podcast. So, thank you for spending your time with us at Happitecture.

Jocelyn: So thrilled that you invited me, Michelle. I also – I mean, it's total mutual admiration society – but I have admired you incredibly for your focus and determination and commitment to your vision of what you want to create in your life. It's just – it's unlike anyone else I know, and I was over the moon when you asked me to be involved.

Michelle: Well, I think what you have to say is something I want the world to hear. And so, let's start with the basic question – the first question – tell us what you do.

Jocelyn: So, I am a convener and this – what does this mean – this means that I spend my time working with groups of people that want to have conversations about making the world better for everyone. I mean at the most simple level that's what I do. A lot of folks think of what I do as facilitation, which is certainly part of what I do, but I'm really attentive to the whole container of any kind of gathering. And that can be a half day strategic meeting with a team up to and including a week-long conference for 1200 people, and anything in between.

So, I am interested in building the kinds of containers that enable the people who are attending the gathering to get what they need out of it, and to be able to bring their best into it. Most of the organizations and people that I work with are self-identified as progressive for the most part. They are in some way or another working to make the world better, make the world healthier, make the world safer, more equitable, and they're having really important conversations about how to do what they do better. So, sharing skills, sharing knowledge, how to strengthen the relationships in and between the communities that they work with. So, you know, community building, relationship building.

And for the most part, people are engaged in building movements. So, whether it's the movement towards compassionate capitalism, or the movement towards keeping fossil fuels in the ground, or the movement towards ensuring that arts and culture are adequately funded in our cities – any of the above. And so, the work that I often do with groups in building these gatherings, these – whether it's – again – whether it's a small meeting, or a large conference, these are what I think of as concentrated opportunities for movement building.

And as I've learned from one of my great teachers in the world, Adrienne Maree Brown, who is a wonderful thinker, writer, facilitator, and many other things. She talks about how we live in the world of building movements. We see that everything can be reflected in the idea of fractals. So, if you think about a fractal is something where the pattern of that thing is the same at the most micro level of zoom as it is at the furthest out macro level of zoom.

And so, when I think about the gatherings that I'm part of as being concentrated opportunities for movement building. That means right down to the interpersonal relationships that take place, or the interpersonal interactions that take place in a conference or in a meeting those are the most micro level places where we can see the patterns that will be reflected in our teams, in our organizations, in our organizational relationships, networks, and in our movements.

Michelle: Well, I mean, you bring a bit of an interesting point in, and it makes me think, well, you know, you've got people who are willing to be in the room but oftentimes we are blind — innocently blind to our own baggage that we bring in terms of how we think and how we address other people. And even well-intentioned people have certain — I don't want to say use the word bias as much — but there is a learned behavior that, sometimes if it's not identified in a loving and caring way, can sometimes hinder that conversation from moving forward or even opening up and being richer. So, I mean, you're clearly passionate about this, and you've given your life to this. The first question like, where is this coming from, where did this all start for you? And this drives you, clearly.

Jocelyn: Yeah that's a — it's a really great question because —

Michelle: And then we'll get back to the question of, how do you start to break those boundaries down that we don't even know exist.

Jocelyn: Yeah, that's the whole name of the game. Because we all have those no matter who we are. We're coming in with different ways of being in the world, so how do we — how do we communicate across those things? How I began this work is — it's sort of a very indirect or organic story, I suppose. I — this is certainly not the kind of work that you go into university and say "I'm gonna — I'm gonna be a convener when I grow up"

Michelle: Yeah, you probably didn't even know what that meant when you started doing it.

Jocelyn: I certainly I did not. I didn't know it was a thing at all. But I think in many ways it's very — it's a very much a part of my personality. There's a real combination of aptitudes, if you will, around convening that has to do with being very intuitively connected to the energy of a group, which is a thing that I think I've always been. Even though I didn't even necessarily have that many words to describe — even like the word intuitively connected to an energy of a group probably couldn't have defined that for you. But the sense of really paying attention to — in a given scenario where there's many people in a room engaged in

conversation or just being together, being really attentive to what's going on, and who's being included, and who isn't being included, and who has space, and who doesn't have space, etc. And the other element — certainly the element that I bring to my own computing practice, is that it can be quite performative.

So when I — when we are in the moment, when we are in the middle of the conference, or when we are in the middle of the meeting, there is — there is certainly, in my experience, value in being able to keep people's attention, being able to use humor, being able to use energy, being able to invite a room full of people to bring their energy up, to bring it down, to point it inwards to bring it outwards etc. And these are all things that I think I did totally unconsciously until experiencing a series of conferences and actually working in more of a production role. But having a few opportunities to be at the front of the room, as it were, and had folks give me feedback that, oh I was very good at holding space — holding space — and I thought, what even is that? How do you hold that? Seems like a not a thing you can do.

Michelle: Yeah.

Jocelyn: But the more I thought about it —

Michelle: Well, you're talking to an architect, but —

Jocelyn: Right.

Michelle: So, you know, for me that makes a lot of sense.

Jocelyn: Right.

Michelle: But, yes, I hear what you're saying.

Jocelyn: Yeah. I definitely didn't know what they were talking about at all, but what I realized was that, number one, that's a thing that not everyone can do, which is not a thing I realized because I just thought it was part of my personality. And number two, it's a thing that people will pay you to do if you're good at it.

Michelle: Yeah.

Jocelyn: And so, then I started investigating what that might look like, and slowly but surely, I started to find my niche and find my own voice if you will, or my own practice. That's not — it's not to say that there aren't lots of places you can go to learn facilitation skills. There's many different styles and schools. A lot of the way that I practice has been built over time observing other practitioners that I really respect. It's been through my own personal research, and it's been through a handful of workshops, particularly around certain elements that are important to me.

So around, for example, creative facilitation. So, using creativity, creative practice, to invite people to express ideas in a different kind of way, and also facilitating for anti-racism or anti-oppression, and understanding how to bring some of those conversations into the room. Because I have experienced that — no matter what room you're in, no matter what conversation you're talking about, you are going to be facing the questions of the systems of power and privilege that organize our world. And so, it's important to me to have the skills necessary to be able to hold those conversations, to be able — to be able

to answer questions about those systems, even if those are not the core content of what it is we might be talking about together.

Michelle: Well it's interesting. We're talking about holding the space, and really what we're talking about is being an open-hearted, open-minded space. So, it's almost instead of that word upholding the space, giving the imagery of contraction,

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: It's almost an expansion of like, dissolving that separateness that we —

Jocelyn: Yes.

Michelle: As we get older in life, you know, we tend to become more rigid in our separateness, as opposed to appreciating that there is a vast realm of possibilities of how we interact and how we relate to each other.

Jocelyn: But people know what it feels like to feel open. They just might not have experienced it recently.

Michelle: Right.

Jocelyn: Because we all lived that way as children. That's how we're brought into this world.

Michelle: That's right, yeah.

Jocelyn: And if you can — I've found — which is why I particularly love using creative facilitation techniques, because people feel goofy if you ask them to use glitter and stickers and colored pencils to write their name tag, and you ask them to, you know, mime their favorite thing to do on the weekend, or you ask them to build a human statue out of their colleague to describe you know the topic that they're talking about, they feel so goofy and they always resist. Because as adults we are buttoned up, and we go into a boardroom, and that's not what we — that's not what we're used to doing in a boardroom. But as soon as you get over that first hump — like I have never had an experience where that doesn't work.

Michelle: Yeah.

Jocelyn: Because we are hardwired to be open, and to be curious, and to be loving. And what a lot of the work that I do is about finding every opportunity to invite the people in the room to meet each other with that openness.

Michelle: Yes.

Jocelyn: That's it.

Michelle: Well yeah, it's funny that you mention children, because even when you think of the way — as simple as breathing —

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: Right, and you observe children, they — their breath is a full body breath. And one — and if you actually take that and bring that knowledge into a boardroom, I think most of us breathe from the chest.

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: And even that simple, very basic act of breathing which we all have to do — when you compare the depth and breath and fullness and openness of a child breathing versus an adult breathing, it's really telling.

Jocelyn: Absolutely.

Michelle: Closed in — and you know, one of the things that I do a lot in my practice is facilitation. Multi-stakeholder facilitations. And you know, you get the sense when you go into a room that everyone's protecting their stake.

Jocelyn: Absolutely.

Michelle: Right? And the stakeholder is kind of a funny word in that way, right? But then you just say, you know, just take one second and see where you're breathing from. Don't change it, but just recognize it. And also, the second is — recognize also that I am not the only creative person in the room. We're all human beings, and as a result, we're all inherently creative, and that's why we're here.

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: The facilitation process is a creative process, and creativity requires you to be open —

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: And unguarded.

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: And — but that only happens in that safe space, so we come back to the idea of holding the space. And so, there's this dichotomy of a closed — a closed protected space first, but that's facilitating this openness.

Jocelyn: Yes.

Michelle: Right?

Jocelyn: Well that's — it's interesting that you bring that up because I mean — I think a lot of folks talk about wanting to devise or develop a safe space, and I recently was made aware of a different way of thinking about it as a brave space as opposed to safe. Because when we're particularly — when we're talking about bringing people together who have very different lived experience —

Michelle: Mhmm.

Jocelyn: We're talking about people who have a stake, and for whom there is skin in the game.

Michelle: Yes.

Jocelyn: And particularly when — in a multi-stakeholder arrangement, you have certain folks in the room who perhaps are quite used to their stake being the most important stake.

Michelle: Correct.

Jocelyn: And other people in the room who are quite used to their stake being entirely unimportant to everyone other than them.

Michelle: Right.

Jocelyn: Especially for those folks, it's not going to be safe. They won't feel safe. There's nothing you can do to make it safe.

Michelle: They'll just show up.

Jocelyn: But what you can encourage is that everybody brings a sense of bravery to allowing themselves to go to a place of discomfort, because it's that place — as I was discussing with the boardroom and the, you know, colored glitter or the human statues, you know — the first instinct is to feel very uncomfortable with that, in the same way as having to share power when you are used to having power feels very uncomfortable. And so, we have to invite folks to feel that sense of bravery, to feel the sense that — if we are going to make our way through this process together, we need to be open so that we can be creative, so that we can have the very best ideas, so that we can solve this design challenge, or this movement building challenge, or whatever kind of challenge we're facing.

We need to have all of the best ideas in the room, and the only way we do that is by everyone committing to either bravely sharing the power that they have always held, or bravely sharing the voice, or sharing the ideas that they have not previously shared because of the fear of it being shot down, of it not being valued, or of it not being welcome in the space.

Michelle: Well, I mean that to me that's a really great segue into my next question, which really comes to the crux of the matter, is — tell us in your mind, why is this process so important for public policy? I mean not just the — currently we've seen, you know, it's almost hard to watch the news now. Everything is so polarized and stigmatized. Where does this fit in when we talk about public policy, when we talk about urban design, when we talk about designing buildings for people?

Jocelyn: Mhmm. You know, I work in a in a world — even though I'm working in these sorts of small, as I was saying, concentrated opportunities for movement building, I think and talk a lot about quite high level or meta-level ideas about, you know, moving us towards a place of collective liberation, moving us towards a place where our planet is healthy, where our communities are healthy, where, you know, families are not forced to migrate from their homes because of either political or environmental catastrophe that forces them out of their homes etc. But at the end of the day all of that — all of those

huge intractable terrifying challenges that our world so clearly is grappling with right now, all of them — the rubber hits the road when it comes to public policy, and often at a municipal kind of scale. So —

Michelle: I agree with that. I mean, even architecture —

Jocelyn: Yes, absolutely. So, you know, as far as the question of why is an engagement process so crucial for making public policy, designing urban space, designing buildings etc. These are the places where our communities live, and our communities need to be able to thrive in order to be able to — in order for our next generation, our children to be healthy, in order for families to feel safe and connected, in order for parents to feel like their children have places to be that are safe and inspiring and encouraging when they themselves have to be at work, or have to be caring for elderly parents etc.

So, when we are designing our space, we need to have all of the best ideas in the room. We need to have representation from the lives of people who will be living in that space. We need to invite into the conversations all of the voices that, historically, have not been invited into the conversation. And, you know, I think when we look at — when we look at these challenges that we're facing on any level, I think it's fair to say that what we've been doing for the last three 400 years has gotten us somewhere, but in some cases has gotten us into trouble.

Michelle: Yeah. I think a lot of people, even though they might be polarized on their political ideas, would agree with that.

Jocelyn: I think they would too. And I would suggest that the more we are able to invite more diverse voices into these conversations, the more likely it is that we're going to hear solutions and ideas that we haven't heard before that might actually turn the tide, that might actually help us turn the corner back to a more connected community, back to a place where we know, and feel safe with, and feel connected to our neighbors, where we can take care of one another, where we can feel safe with one another, where we can be in relationship with one another. And that doesn't necessarily mean that we're sitting around a fire circle singing Kumbaya every day, but it means that we know the people in the neighborhoods that we are living in. It means that we feel represented and we feel like our voice has value and belonging, and we feel ownership over the higher-level decisions that are being made, and the regulatory regime in which the decisions are being made about how we live. Because ultimately that's our policy.

Michelle: I mean — you know we — I think this is one of the things that we — we've gone so far down the road when we design communities to have this idea that, well we want to live in a safe community, and that does sometimes mean getting an opinion from one group, but then what ends up happening is that community becomes undesirable because it's homogeneous.

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: And intuitively we feel uncomfortable in a homogeneous community because it is not the human experience — modern human experience — to live that way. And so, I think we intuitively feel it, but we don't quite know how to express it.

Jocelyn: I think you're right. I think we do feel it. But at the same time, I think that, given the state of incredible polarization that we live in now, I think we are encouraged to seek out homogeneous communities —

Michelle: Through fear.

Jocelyn: Through fear!

Michelle: Yeah.

Jocelyn: And so, there's a lot of effort and work to be done around reminding each other, always, in every instance, that all any of us ever want is to feel safe, and to feel like we belong, and to feel loved, and to feel like we can feed our families, and to feel like we have a place to live, you know? Like, our human needs are very similar across the board, across religion, across — you know — geographic boundaries, across where we've been born, across colonial boundaries — you know. Whether we are the children of people indigenous to this land, or we are the children of long-time immigrants or recent immigrants, or whether we are the children of stolen people who were brought to build the wealth of this part of the world for the last 400 years. Today, we all share a common sense of what it means to feel safe and happy in the world.

And because of the kind of history that we've lived through and how we occupy our different positionalities in the world, that is to say, for example, someone like myself whose family came to North America from Scotland in the late 1700s; we are white — you know — we're English speaking, and I, as a result, have a huge amount of privilege in this part of the world because of where I come from, because I grew up middle class, because I am educated with two secondary degrees — post-secondary degrees. I have a different kind of positionality than, for example, someone whose family has just immigrated here recently, under perhaps — you know — a refugee kind of situation where they had to leave their homeland because of political persecution etc. There are going to be very different ways that we navigate the world. So even though we want the same things from the world — we want safety, we want our children to be safe, we want to, you know, put food on the table and keep a roof over our heads — our experience about how to get those things in the world is very different.

Michelle: And the expression of how we express ourselves, of what how we want to achieve those things.

Jocelyn: Absolutely.

Michelle: Yeah, well, I mean — let's go back to your facilitation, your meetings —

Jocelyn: Yes.

Michelle: When you're looking out to this diverse group — when you're looking to facilitate a very diverse group for a very contentious — let's put the highest case scenario on the table — very diverse group, very contentious issues, what are some of the core qualities that you've identified when you have a group like that, versus something that's less contentious, maybe less diverse? Are there qualities across the board, or are they are they specific qualities depending on the group you're talking to — or talking with, sorry.

Jocelyn: I bring — interestingly, I mean, certainly I'm flexible and I understand the nuance of the different kinds of groups that I work with, but fundamentally, I bring a similar approach to every group, and that is a real encouragement to — for people to, as I was talking about earlier — to understand that we are here together co-creating the space and the energy that we are going to be in to have this conversation,

whatever this conversation is. And that, you know depends — and this is very much dependent on the group and why it is that we're gathered, but perhaps we have a shared understanding of where we're trying to get to. Perhaps we don't have a shared understanding of where we're trying to get to. And at a certain point maybe we can get to a shared understanding, and maybe we can't. And all of those questions are functioning within a broader context of — I'm trying to imagine the kind of facilitation that you're doing also, Michelle, with the kind of stakeholder engagement that you're engaged in. You know, at a certain point if all of your stakeholders cannot come to a shared understanding of even where we're trying to get to as a group —

Michelle: Yes.

Jocelyn: I can imagine that at a certain point you're working within a context where you have to make a decision about where you're going.

Michelle: Right.

Jocelyn: Sometimes.

Michelle: Yeah.

Jocelyn: So sometimes that has to happen, but that can — what that ends up looking like can be wildly different if everyone in the room has had an opportunity to share their imagination of where you're trying to get to together.

Michelle: Yeah, I mean oftentimes for me, depending on the clients we have, I don't even start design until we have the facilitation process.

Jocelyn: Yes.

Michelle: Because for me the vision of that project comes out of the vision of the collective. And the vision of the collective is very nuanced and very sophisticated. And oftentimes it's not just a nice shaped building — often times that is the most simple way to get to a project that isolates and alienates large portions of our client.

Jocelyn: Yes, yeah.

Michelle: And so, to me, the idea of having that collective conversation —

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: Even so that each person's agenda is bared —

Jocelyn: Yes.

Michelle: And discussed together is highly important.

Jocelyn: And it's interesting — I wonder if you found this — and this is not in any way to disconnect the value of the process from the actual design, but in my experience, sometimes what comes out at the end of the process — so let's say in some cases I'm facilitating, for example let's say, an organization is trying to develop a strategic plan or they're trying to develop — they're trying to articulate their vision, mission, and values, or something like that, which can be quite contentious depending on who's at the table, right? Because ultimately whatever you come up with is going to govern your organization for x number of years in the future etc.

Sometimes what comes out at the end almost doesn't matter as long as the process has made everyone feel that their voice has been heard. So, when you talk about like, you can skip right to building a pretty building, but if you've had the process, the form the building ultimately takes ideally has been informed by what has come out of that process, but just having had the process at all and enabling people to feel heard and that their voice is valuable can help them to get onside with whatever the final design ends up being.

Michelle: Well, you know, what I found is that — and you mentioned this in the beginning, where you get this resistance when you bring up the glitter —

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Michelle: It's very similar in the process when we sit down and we do a process called "gaming", and that gaming is designed for the specific group. There's a lot of resistance particularly to the name gaming. People think, "well we're not here to play, we're very executive," and that sort of thing, but what you find is you start to — you start to get those creative juices going, you start to get the guards down, and there is a lot to unpack —

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: That a lot of people don't realize that there is a lot to unpack. And then you start — the process in of itself has its own moment and it really — I have never driven a facilitation process where the idea hasn't coalesced in the end, or at least the direction is — everyone's on board with it.

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: I — maybe I have and perhaps I've wanted —

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: But I don't recall ever having a process — and I mean, we're talking about people who have very different ideas of what they want to achieve and in a protective fear from a fear-based platform.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Michelle: And so, the process that you described in the beginning of breaking those barriers down and helping them understand that we are — the separation is a perceived separation.

Jocelyn: And there are some ways — there are some very basic ways that I offer at the beginning of every single gathering, and I spend more or less time doing this depending on how long we're ultimately all going to be together, but there are some very basic invitations and offerings that I think help people get into a generous frame of mind and recognize that if they are being generous with others, others will be generous with them.

Michelle: That's a great word, because I think that that hits the note right on the head: generosity.

Jocelyn: Yeah, and some of it is also about — So, for example, we were talking earlier about the value of being aware of how you take up space, and sometimes that's around conversation. So, in — particularly in a multi-stakeholder engagement process, have you been the only one talking? Do you have a sense of how much other people have been talking, of how many other kinds of ideas have been brought into the space? etc. Bringing your own awareness to how you take up space also helps you have awareness around how others do. Similarly, sometimes we have to make agreements with one another out of the gate that we're going to — for example in many of the cases we're going to acknowledge that we may not — we may not solve all of the problems today —

Michelle: Mhmm.

Jocelyn: But that's okay, that we collectively agree that it's okay that we're not going to solve everything today. And if we say that right out of the gate at the beginning, all of a sudden it can really help bring the anxiety down a couple notches right out of the gate.

Michelle: The other part of it is, I think oftentimes people just don't have the opportunity to dialogue with people who have diverse opinions —

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Michelle: And diverse experience, not just opinion, and experience how they navigate the world. And just going through that process is such an enriching experience for that individual or that group. And it's no doubt in my mind you come away from a session like yours with a very different understanding of how you move through the world —

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: How you dialogue with people, the words you choose, your body language.

Jocelyn: And when you — when you make commitments like that and you — and the reason why I think about the kind of gatherings that I do as these little concentrated opportunities for movement building is that it's an opportunity to practice showing up in the world in a way that maybe you don't always do.

Michelle: Right.

Jocelyn: So, we talked earlier about how we have these built-in ways of showing up, and sometimes they're based on fear, and sometimes they're based on protection, and sometimes they're just based on learned behavior.

Michelle: Mhmm.

Jocelyn: But when we are invited to practice showing up in a different kind of way, then we start to use that muscle, and then we also get the benefit of seeing what comes out of other people, and experiencing the connectivity that can exist in a given community when everybody shows up with that level of generosity.

Michelle: Well I mean one of the things that I truly respect and love about my job is the — the importance of expressing or nurturing that collective responsibility for happiness. And I mean — I'm going to use the word happy because this is a Happitecture Podcast, but you know, there is a collective responsibility for the happiness of the whole, the well-being of the whole.

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: And I think oftentimes when we talk about well-being and happiness, we look at it as "what is my well-being" and "what is my happiness". And really what the purpose of this is, is to try to accentuate the fact that there is a collective responsibility that we should have, that we can have.

Jocelyn: Yes.

Michelle: And that collective responsibility is inherent in all of us, but we talk about this sort of fear, protectionism, it blocks us from fully inheriting that state of being that is inherent.

Jocelyn: And I think we generally — I think in in our world — lean away from the collective responsibility to one another of anything, other than our small units, our family units, for example, or perhaps even our community, our church community units, or you, know those types of things. But fundamentally, we live in quite an atomized society, I would say, and I think it's, you know, there are lots of reasons for that; we don't have to go down that path but —

Michelle: That's for another podcast.

Jocelyn: That's for another podcast, exactly. But this idea of of redefining happiness as thing that is collective, that is collectively held, and that is held by a collective responsibility, I think is frankly revolutionary. And brings us to consider that if we are unhappy, it is also not solely of our own making.

Michelle: Right.

Jocelyn: And that's what I think can be very damaging and destructive, is when a person is unhappy that they are left to feel that it is their fault.

Michelle: Yes.

Jocelyn: And that the only way to become happy is their soul lonely responsibility by themselves.

Michelle: Right.

Jocelyn: But in fact, we know through research about happiness that so much of happiness is about our ability to be connected to other people, and our ability to feel belonging, and our ability to feel like we're part of a community. And so, if that's the fundamental definition of happiness, then it makes all the sense in the world that there will be a collective responsibility for it.

Michelle: Yeah, and I think, you know, when we look at modern research on happiness which I find really interesting — now, this word happiness and well-being — well-being has been around for a while — but happiness is starting to be measurable and a lot of organizations and communities and even municipalities are starting to measure qualitative aspects of a well-designed city as opposed to quantitative.

Jocelyn: Wild. It's wild.

Michelle: I know, right?

Jocelyn: Just to measure by something other than money.

Michelle: I feel this is an exciting launching pad for us to really re-examine this idea of the collective happiness as opposed to — like you say, this responsibility that we all feel, and it really contributes to that loneliness. That as a society — as a diverse society — in our little boxes in the sky — it just tends to — I think we've gone to the edge of that I think we — I think a lot of us are starting to realize that this cannot be what it's all about.

Jocelyn: Well, it isn't. We see the sort of worst-case scenario acts of violence that come from people who are profoundly alienated, and profoundly lonely, and profoundly disconnected. We see what the worst-case scenario of disconnection and loneliness looks like, and everything in between. And so, what I think is really amazing about this podcast and about the questions that you're asking, Michelle, is that you are connecting the idea of happiness — which I think despite coming into a place where it can be measured and it is beginning to become, you know, measurable for things like municipalities — it's still, I think, in the common understanding, common narrative, is understood as something kind of ephemeral.

Michelle: Yes.

Jocelyn: But you are connecting happiness to the built environment.

Michelle: Absolutely.

Jocelyn: And I think that's brilliant because I think ultimately happiness is fundamentally related to how we relate to one another, and the built environment only succeeds if it is also based on how we relate to one another, and supporting that relationship.

Michelle: Yes. Because it is the vessel — the container within which we play out or act in this life.

Jocelyn: Mhmm.

Michelle: And so, I think it's hugely important to start to consider happiness as part of measurable design efforts —

Jocelyn: Yes.

Michelle: That need to be played out as much as environmental responsibility as much as energy efficiency, you know, light, air, that sort of thing. I think it needs to be more important than this. And I'm not saying it's not. I think it's gradually becoming that way, but my hope is that this podcast can start to stir that conversation, can start to encourage people to demand more of their architects, their urban designers, their planners, their policy makers —

Jocelyn: And to make that connection at all.

Michelle: Right.

Jocelyn: To have folks who don't work in those fields, but who are impacted by those fields, and ideally can have a say in public engagement processes etc. To make a relationship, to demand a relationship between happiness and the environment.

Michelle: Yeah. Well I'm going to take a big leap here, because I don't know how many of our listeners know, but you are one of the star leading singers of the fantastic "Queer as Funk". I've had the opportunity to go to many of your shows, and hands down — the happiest show I've ever been to across the board. Talk about happy, diverse — incredibly diverse group of people all dancing, happy, engaged, powerful events.

Tell us about "Queer as Funk" and why is it important for you guys — I mean you're talking about — you do funk, which is 60s 70s maybe a little bit of 80s, but why is that music so relevant today? And what is that — what is that thing you bring? What is that power you bring to a group of people who are extremely diverse but can be happy in that moment — that container that you create?

Jocelyn: Well, thanks for bringing up "Queer as Funk". It's definitely one of my favorite things to talk about. I'm so thrilled to be involved. I've been involved for five years; the band has been around for six. And as you say, we do lots of shows and they are just — you're right, they're just happy, they're jubilant —

Michelle: They're powerful.

Jocelyn: They're powerful, they're energetic, they're fun. I think there's a couple of things. I think at a very basic level, the music that we're choosing is music that has spoken to people, that has ignited people, that has made people have a great time for decades. So, we're talking Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, we're talking the great Sam and Dave, the giants. So, the music is great, and we certainly work really hard to bring our very best musicianship to showcase the music as well as we can.

I think another big part of it, honestly, is that we are a primarily queer band. We're an openly queer band. Our name is "Queer as Funk". And we, in the early days, primarily had very queer audiences that were, you know, 95% queer folks. But in the last two or three years I would say that that percentage is shifting significantly and when we get into our really diverse crowds that are, you know, straight and gay and white and black and brown and indigenous and old and young, and have different levels of ability —

Michelle: When I say diverse — I mean I hope our audience understands that I am talking across the board.

Jocelyn: Yeah, and I think part of it is that as a queer band, we bring a different kind of vibe to your typical, you know, live music dance party. We — you know, it's not all about getting lucky, it's not all about — not to say that you can't get lucky at our shows, but you know, we're not the same kind of vibe that you might find in your everyday club. We are there strictly and exclusively to be in a joyous relationship with the people in the room, and to encourage them to be in a joyous relationship together.

We talk about our music, we talk about how much it means to us to be able to play it, and also how aware we are of the fact that we're a mostly white presenting band playing a lot of music that was made famous and written by artists of color during the civil rights era, and that today we still live in an era where not everyone has those rights, and particularly folks who look like the people who wrote this music still don't have the same kinds of rights in the world as people who look like many of us who sing in the band and who perform the band. And we talk about that with our audiences, and we have — we are real with them. We love the music and we love each other, and that's obvious to the folks in the room.

Michelle: Sure.

Jocelyn: And it's just a real party. And so, it really does take a good old-fashioned dance party up a notch.

Michelle: Yes. I will say yes to that. Amen.

Jocelyn: Yeah, it's great.

Michelle: [laughs] I would encourage anyone who can get a ticket —that's the first challenge.

[Jocelyn laughs]

Michelle: Get a ticket to "Queer as Funk". Get a ticket to "Queer as Funk"!

Jocelyn: Get a ticket to "Queer as Funk"! Also, we play lots of fun free community shows. We're playing lots of small-town pride shows over the course of the summer and the fall. Lots of times to see us. Queerasfunk.com! And you can see all the times when we're playing.

Michelle: Excellent. And you gotta jump on those tickets because they sell out very quickly.

Jocelyn: They do tend to sell out; it's true.

Michelle: Well Jocelyn, it's been a real pleasure and a delight to have you. I so full-heartedly appreciate your time here with us on Happitecture, and we've had a lot to talk about. I'm sure we have a lot more to talk about. I can't imagine you not being on this podcast again to talk about something even more —

Jocelyn: Yay!

Michelle: Contentious, wonderful, delightful, important.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Michelle: And again, such a delight to have you here. Thank you so much. And just a quick note for anyone who's looking to have a serious conversation with a diverse group of people and don't know where to start they can find you at...

Jocelyn: Yeah. You're welcome to find me at jocelynmacdougall.com, that's j-o-c-e-l-y-n-m-a-c-d-o-u-g-a-l-l dot com, and I'd be more than happy to have a conversation with you.

Michelle: Great, thank you Jocelyn. We'll put a link on the end of this podcast so people can find you. Thank you again. So lovely to have you, genuinely, and have a great evening.

Jocelyn: Thank you. I'm so thrilled to have been here. Thanks for having me.

Michelle: Great.

[music]

Michelle: For more information on this or any other episodes of the Happitecture Podcast, you can find us at happitecture.com. h-a-p-p-i-t-e-c-t-u-r-e dot com.
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