

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Redefining Dance: An Interview With Naughty Girl Fitness Founder, Janelle Ginestra

Kristee: When did you first start dancing and what inspired you to pursue this as your career path?

Janelle: I was a pretty hyperactive kid and could *not* f*cking sit down, go figure. When I was one and a half, my mom took me to go watch a family member perform in a dance recital and I was hooked. I bothered her for six months straight, telling her, “Mom, I want to do that, I want to dance.” So, she took me to a local dance studio when I was two. They tried to turn me away and said I was too young, but I started to just do cartwheels and twirl around the space and they agreed to take me.

Eventually, she moved me to Los Angeles where we lived from the time I was seven until I was 12. I did minor dance training here, like tap, jazz, and ballet, and then I trained in hip hop with Dave Scott and Shane Sparks back in the day. Soon, acting became my priority, and I moved to Modesto and got into competitive cheerleading and pom dance. When I turned 18, I did not feel any inspiration or passion to continue school, so I said, “Mom, I’m not going to college, I’m going to move back to LA.” Even though I’ve done other things in my life, dance was always like, my church, my worship, who I truly am inside.

Thankfully, when I was a child actor, my mom set up a trust fund for me. So, all of the earnings that I had made as an actress in those five years helped me move to Los Angeles to pursue my dance career. I was lucky because I had this cushion, which allowed me to just train for a year and not stress about money. For some reason, when you’re a professional dancer, you don’t feel like you’re “doing the thing” until you’re touring with an artist. It took me about five years to get my first tour, but luckily I was able to work some lucrative movie and TV jobs in the meantime. I always tell dancers that it’s really good to know multiple things and, since I knew how to cheer and did karate, I got hired for jobs where I could use these talents.

Kristee: What has been one of your favorite dance or choreography jobs that you’ve been hired for and why?

Janelle: My favorite dance job was touring the world with Pink, not necessarily because of the dance, but because of the environment. Learning from a strong, badass, risk-taking woman was everything I needed to know how to become the version of myself that I saw in the future. Touring with her was everything because she cultivated the most empowering, validating, and beautiful energy.

I also love choreographing for the artist I frequently work with, iyla, because she is so bold, different, and cool. I’m really inspired each time I get to work and create for her. She’s the truth. She’s so dope.

Kristee: What is your creative process like and how do you go about choreographing a routine?

Janelle: It's funny, because I'm either a perfectionist, or sometimes I'm just like, "Good enough." Basically, I'll get into the studio, listen to the music, and I'll see everything in my head which I then have to translate through my body. I start seeing pictures and how it should piece together, and then I try to create it. When my perfectionism comes out, I'll change it probably, like, three to eight times (unless I really love it). I'll keep changing it until it gets better and then I move on. Because stuff that I created last week, I'll think, "Ehh, not the best." I'm constantly searching for the next thing that's going to be great. There's only a few things that are timeless to me. Besides that, though, I'm like, "Good enough." Good enough for the picture, good enough for the cause.

Kristee: Do you ever have problems where the images in your head don't translate to your physical self?

Janelle: Of course, because what I see in my head is so much better, so when you're trying to embody everything you're seeing, sometimes there's disconnect. I will keep pushing myself until I find a good enough ground, though. Luckily I rarely have choreography blocks and I think that's because I'm so open to whatever movements come to me. Even if it's something random and weird, I'm like, "Yeah, sure, put it in." It doesn't need to be the dopest flow—I have to keep pushing and get the thought out. I feel like my brain would get too congested if I didn't get to release these thoughts and move on.

Kristee: If you weren't working as a dancer and choreographer, what do you think you'd be doing career-wise?

Janelle: I'd want to be an interior designer. I love creating spaces that feel unique to me, so I would love to hear what other people want and do the same for them. I've redecorated my home like, every f*cking six months, it's crazy. I just love looking around and being like, "Oh, this feels good," and whatnot. I love creating space, so that's definitely something I would want to do. I could also see myself refurbishing furniture as a retired woman.

Kristee: What advice would you give to someone who is aspiring to be a dancer or choreographer?

Janelle: It seems a bit cliché, but you have to be unafraid to completely dive into your individuality and take up space. I feel like there are so many of us now, so if you want to make a legacy or name for yourself, you have to really understand who you are and what it will take to get there. Be completely unafraid to explore everything about yourself and show it, because in a creative space, you have to be like, "I don't give a f*ck! I'm here and I'm going to show everything that I've ever felt, trained for, or gone through." That's what people are attracted to.

I just taught class recently and I told them, "Y'all have chosen a sport that is so flaunty, confident, and 'in your face'." I believe there's a human to serve every aspect of our world—we need people who are going to work at Target and make our day better while we're checking out.

I feel like people *do* enjoy showing up to normalcy. But if you're picking something that is just not "normal", f*cking do it. Don't come in here and be scared of it, no! You picked it, do it!

Kristee: What inspired you to create Naughty Girl Fitness and what is your ultimate goal for the company?

Janelle: I created Naughty Girl Fitness in the middle of what was essentially an identity death. I had just gotten out of my marriage and dance almost seemed too emotional for me at that time, but fitness allowed me to feel beautiful again. I would go in the garage and kind of combine the two to entertain myself and cheer myself up. I've always been a gym person where strength training is everything, but it's almost like I wanted to have this little moment with myself. When combining dance and fitness, I felt beautiful and strong at the same time.

We were in a pandemic, I had lost almost everything, so I thought to myself, "I wonder if people would like to do this, too." I hit up my friend Brazil [Helton Siquiera] and asked him to film a few of my classes for me to share on his platform. My sister-in-law suggested I share some of those videos on TikTok and the next morning I woke up to 800,000 views. I was like, "Holy sh*t, people do like it! They understand it!" So that's kind of how it started. I never saw something like this happening. I've always loved fitness and been a student of it, but I did not know I wanted to be a fitness instructor until I saw this response.

I know when I teach dance, I teach it selflessly. It's all about someone else's experience in that environment. I'm not there to show up, f*cking be a star, and then leave. I'm there to make *you* feel like a star. I feel like that translated within Naughty Girl Fitness because I was like, "B*tch, get up and let's get down!" And these "normal people" in their homes who aren't dancers are like, "Oh my gosh, this makes me feel so good!" When I saw that, I knew this was bigger than myself and could help others and I feel like God wants us to do things that help people in our lifetime.

It was a bit hard for me because I felt like I was cheating on my career with dance, in a way. It was a huge "let go" moment and I had to really understand that I can love and experience both, and that's okay.

As for my goals for Naughty Girl Fitness, I would like to build a certification program so that people can teach these classes all over the world in both gyms and dance studios so it's not just online, it can be in person everywhere, too. I also want to add strength training to it. I would love to start using weights, bands, and sell a little step up that people can buy for their houses. Even though my classes are intense, they're more of a "fun" version, and I have a whole different side of me where I love strength training and want to help others sculpt and change their bodies. Finally, I'd love to create an entire clothing line with the brand's mission of loving your shape, your body, and being able to wear it. That way people can "wear the mission", too.

Kristee: What's your favorite Naughty Girl Fitness class that you've filmed/taught so far?

Janelle: Two of my favorite classes are “Fly High Sky” and “Beyond Us”. I really like the Spiritual & Deep classes the most.

Kristee: Why would you say the Spiritual & Deep ones are your favorite over other categories?

Janelle: Because I *am* Spiritual & Deep! It’s funny, I am *all* those moods. I think we *all* are all those moods, right? We might favor some, of course, but as humans, we experience that. But Spiritual & Deep is where I love feeling emotion. I love speaking to my higher power and my higher being and really tapping in and going there. I don’t like ‘riding the surface’ in life—even the music I listen to has completely changed. I want to stimulate my mind and become the optimal version of myself in any f*cking way I can get. Tapping in is the way that I can feel that and then I’ll vibrate with that energy for the rest of my day. So those are all my personalities—including ‘Bloody B*tch’.

Kristee: With so many eyes on you and viewers of your content, you’re bound to get some backlash. How do you handle the mean comments?

Janelle: I don’t give a f*ck! I’d be lying if I said it never affects me because of course I would love everybody to love me, but that’s unrealistic. I have so much fun and believe so much in who I am and what I do, that someone else’s opinion of me cannot change that. I’m working to become the most optimal version of myself—if you encounter someone who knows and feels themselves and knows they’re doing that they’re meant to be doing, you can’t tell them sh*t about themselves. I’ll just tell you not to watch then.

I’m not the kind of human that would ever leave a negative comment on anybody’s post or page because I would never want to bring somebody down. I just think it’s distasteful and ill-mannered. So, something like negative comments is just not going to affect me.

Kristee: I know a lot of people really love the cussing and funny phrases you come up with for Naughty Girl Fitness—where does that come from? Do you just spit out whatever comes to mind in the moment? What inspires those? [“Chop zucchini and his weenie!”]

Janelle: Literally, the “chop zucchini and his weenie” happened on the prep day, so that didn’t happen right when I filmed it. I wish I could tell you that these things were planned, but they’re not. Like the “whack-a-ho”? On the spot.

This is good and bad, but I let whatever I want come out of my mouth and sometimes they have to mute me because I’ll say some crazy sh*t. That’s why I have fun spending time with myself though, because I don’t mute anything I do. I let whatever the f*ck come out and sometimes it’s good and sometimes it’s bad. Yeah, most of this sh*t just happens in the creation area though.

Kristee: How do you gather the motivation to work out on days where you’re just not feeling up to it?

Janelle: I try to always remember that the days that I *do* work out and how it made me feel. I never regret a workout. There are some days where I recognize we just need to honor our tiredness and our bodies, but I know when I can push myself, I never regret it. I'm a better human being when I do some physical activity, because it's a gift of self-love to myself.

Kristee: So, some small movement is better than no movement at all?

Janelle: Exactly. You do Naughty Girl Fitness for only 20 minutes of your and you feel better for the rest of the day. If I can sit on the toilet on Instagram for 20 minutes, I can move my ass for 20 minutes.

Kristee: Along with physical health, Naughty Girl Fitness emphasizes caring for your mental health as well. How do you personally practice self-care?

Janelle: I functioned through life for so long without talking to my own mind. I was in a tornado of doing. So, I started to take time—even just 10 minutes of my day—to meditate with myself. Everything that I usually say at the end of Naughty Girl Fitness classes is something that I've written down during a meditation moment. Just being still, when I feel like it's my mind, my subconscious talking to my conscious, which can come from the Universe, God, maybe just myself. I just realized how beautiful and necessary that time is to reflect and to think and just be.

I didn't really want to just work out with everybody, I wanted to work out and say, "Let's take a second and just think about something." Whether that be positive, deep, emotional, random—just having that second to use your mind and reflect on something so you're not just going, going, going is extremely impactful, in my opinion. When you trigger thought, you trigger motion. So, people would be like, "You know what? I'm going to remember what she said that morning. Let me take a little bit more grace for today and treat myself more kind or whatever." But it was very important to me that Naughty Girl Fitness wasn't just about working out, but about stimulating the mind in a positive way.

Kristee: So along with meditation, what other things do you do to foster the self-care mentality?

Janelle: I told myself this morning that I *must* start doing more. I'm going to start doing it at least once a week. Also, I can't even describe how important eating healthy is. It's so nurturing for the brain and I know that the minute I put unhealthy food or alcohol in my body, I won't be running on the vibrations and frequency that I like for myself. Of course, I still do it because sh*t tastes good, but I make green juices every week—I'll prep cucumbers, celery, spinach, ginger—and am always fueling my body and mind with something nutritious and yummy.

I also make a point to journal a lot and review and process my thoughts. I allow myself to feel. So many times, I used to be like, "Oh my gosh, enough," and I'd just keep working. Now I'm like, "No, I don't feel okay today," and I'll cancel everything and honor that space. Sometimes I don't even know why, but if I need to feel this right now, I honor that.

Kristee: I know Naughty Girl Fitness isn't the only business that you've started. Can you tell us a little bit more about Let's Cheer Up! and any other business ventures you're involved in?

Janelle: I partnered with this incredible, beautiful human named Nina [Saifi Anowia] to create Let's Cheer Up! about a year ago. I loved the whole business structure of Naughty Girl Fitness so much and wanted to emulate it while paying homage to everything that made me better in my lifetime. So, I created Let's Cheer Up! because cheerleading really saved my life in high school. I could have gone down a really bad path, but cheerleading provided me with structure, discipline, and a really healthy, athletic, inspiring balance in my life. And then when I met Nina, who was on the 49ers Gold Rush dance team, and immediately knew, "Okay, this is the girl I want to do this with."

Developing Let's Cheer Up! has been much tougher than Naughty Girl Fitness because I've had to have more patience and really figure out who my customer is and what they need from us. It's been a different experience, but I like challenges! Besides that, I'm just working on creating my clothing line with my best friend Erica [Mer] and her best friend Lex [Cuttaia].

Kristee: Do you have any advice for anyone who is looking to start their own business?

Janelle: You need to have a really great team because you can't do everything on your own. You will burn out, it will get frustrating, and you need people to lean on. You need people who are better at things than you. You also need to thoroughly believe in your product, because there will be backlash or things that don't work and when the times get tough, you have to persevere. You have to engage, love, and understand your customers and what they want from you and what you're providing. Finally, make sure you're constantly innovating and giving them something to look forward to.

Kristee: Who are some of your biggest inspirations or idols in life? Who has helped you become the person that you are today?

Janelle: My mom for sure. I would also say Jim Carrey, Robin Williams, Viola Davis, Beyonce, Lil Wayne, and Britney Spears (when she was normal).

Kristee: What is it about those celebrities that made you pick them?

Janelle: Jim Carrey and Robin Williams? Jim Carrey just delivered comedy in such a weird, eccentric way that I loved as a kid. I loved how his face moved and how expressive he was. So unafraid. Robin Williams, too.

Viola Davis is one of the most powerful speakers I've ever heard in my life and her story is incredibly inspiring. I feel like she is anointed and gifted but doesn't use it in a way that puts herself above others, but does it in a relatable, humble, grounded way. I'm obsessed with her and I think she's phenomenal.

Beyonce because Beyonce is just Beyonce. There's really no one at her level. When she smiles during her concerts, it's like she's healing everybody's heart.

I love Lil Wayne because he makes me laugh. Lil Wayne is one of the greatest rappers—his metaphors are insane and he's f*cking funny. In my life, I think I always want to get sh*t done while laughing and have it still be f*cking epic. I even listened to him in the gym this morning and laughed out loud because I was like, "This motherf*cker is funny." He'll open a line with, "P*ssy ass b*tch, stop hatin'," and I love cussing. So, I just feel him. If you sit and really listen to his songs, his wordplay is literally insane, he's just amazing.

Britney Spears was the one I related to most—she was the one who I would dress up as when I was in middle school. I felt like I wanted to do her dances because they were so pop and girly and risky for that time. She wore a schoolgirl skirt and I was like, "Oh my god, I want to be hot like that." She made me want to be a hot girl.

Kristee: What is one tip that you would give to young women who are struggling with a low self-esteem or lack of confidence?

Janelle: You need to find things that make you feel beautiful. Start with listing five things that you like the most about yourself. It can even be like, "I like that I save money." It can be the most simple, mundane kinds of things, but you have to find *some* things that you like about yourself and make them habits. For instance, I love fitness and it makes me feel strong and beautiful, so I make sure I implement fitness into my daily life. Doing those things will help you with your inner beauty, which will then translate into confidence. I feel like if you feel beautiful on the inside, you will exude confidence on the outside. But I think you just have to find those things that make you feel beautiful.

Even with affirmations, if you're not saying the sh*t and believing it, it's not going to matter. So, if you're going to say it, you need to *really* believe it. Say things that you *do* believe and then work on the things you don't. Intention is everything.

I also want to remind people that we're not meant to look the same. We're not meant to all be supermodels. We don't need to be. Supermodels are abnormally gorgeous for a reason—let them be them. Embrace your uniqueness and who you are. Start to fall in love with who you look at in the mirror, because it's really all you got. You really have to know that you are you for a reason.

Kristee: What advice would you give to any young women who are about to graduate college and enter the real world?

Janelle: Be strong and don't buckle down in turmoil. Use your education, use your knowledge and intelligence, use your beliefs to get you where you see yourself going. The world, workspaces, and people can all feel intimidating, but you only have one opportunity every day to

make a difference. So, use it and believe in your gifts, for real, because the opportunity might surpass when you could've said or done something. Put yourself out there. Again, my favorite saying is, "Who gives a f*ck?" If people tell you "no", it's just a no. If people aren't feeling your idea, who cares? Save the idea for the next pitch meeting. There's going to be things that come and go and you just need to roll with the punches. You have to believe in your gifts though.

Kristee: If a student has just accepted an internship in Los Angeles, what advice would you have for them?

Janelle: To go to Salsa & Beer and get creamy chicken flautas and potato taquitos! *Laughs* But my advice is talk, talk, talk. Network, network, network. Use your f*cking mouth, because if you're just going to be a little mouse in the background that's not going to say, "Hey, I'm here, I would love to do that!" or "Hey, I'm here, will you put me in this video?" then you're not going to make it. Literally, you might feel annoying, but take risks. Take the chance to speak up. You have to use your mouth if you want something because people aren't mind readers. *Tell them* you want it. Simple as that. Put yourself out there and network.

Kristee: Is there anything you want to add?

Janelle: I just want to provide a loving, safe, and empowering space for all people to come and feel a sense of joy in their day!