



Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education

Episode 10: Access to Instrumental Music Making Transcript

[Intro music]

Emma Cragg: Hello and welcome back for episode 10 of Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education. One of the key challenges facing music education is low income acting as a barrier, particularly to instrumental teaching.

Yusef Sacoor: We're joined by three organisations working to dismantle barriers and ensure as many people as possible can access music education. Let's hear from our guests and find out more.

Yusef Sacoor: Welcome all. Lovely to have you all here. I was wondering if you guys would like to introduce yourselves and I would like to start with Katie if that's okay. Katie, would you like to explain a little bit about what you do and why you're here?

Katie Walker: I'm Katie Walker. My pronouns are she/her. I work for Young Sounds UK as Programme Producer North for the Connect programme. I've actually been at Young Sounds for, just into my second year now. Before that, I was a head of music at school in West Yorkshire for 17 years. I'm also a vocal teacher and a choral leader. So, yeah, I work at Young Sounds. Really important organisation that when I moved to it, I just, it just fed everything that I believed with my past in music education. And so at Young Sounds we believe that talent is everywhere, but opportunity isn't. So our work is about changing that. We aim to break down the barriers that can make it tough for young people from low-income families to get into music. So whether that's financial access related or opportunity based. And once the young people start their journey we're there to support them as they grow in confidence and develop their skills.

We also support with funding and a whole range of other sort of musical development. So we do this through training, advocacy and research. Young Sounds UK runs four programmes, Discover, Connect, Thrive and Innovate. So because I work on Connect, the Connect programme is helping young people from low-income families who need to continue making music after their state-funded lessons are finished. So it's all about keeping them learning, progressing and enjoying music through their teens and beyond.

Chris Guenault: My name's Chris Guenault, my pronouns are he/him, and I'm a senior relationship manager at Future Talent. Future Talent is a national charity that supports young musicians from low-income families across the UK and we do that in a few different ways. We have our financial awards which help with the practical costs that can otherwise hold people

back, things like lessons, instrument hire and travel, which range from about £500 to £2000 depending on a young person's age and level of music making. And then we have our three programmes, our junior programme, development programme and senior programme, which are all about giving extra opportunities, inspiration through creative workshops, performances, masterclasses, mentoring and just giving the young people those experiences to help build both their music and their confidence. And we're also running this year career focus sessions with professionals working in different corners of the music industry, so not just performers but people in education, production, management and more, just to show how many different routes there are into a life in music.

I personally came to Future Talent from a background of teaching, instrumental teaching and working in SEND settings. I'd been playing brass most of my life before in my late teens, settling on the trombone and having come through my local music service in Lancashire, I then went on to Junior RNCM and finally on to do my studies at RNCM and it was there I kind of really got involved in education and... It just became, really showed me through all my later work with the music service, with Live Music Now, In Harmony Opera North later on, just how powerful music can be in giving young people confidence and a voice. So, when Future Talent did advertise, four and a half years ago, for a Northern Relationship manager, it just helping to grow the number of young people we supported and developed those local and tele-operatives just felt like a natural next step. And in the last year I then moved full-time to still continue looking after the young people and families we support in the North of England and Scotland but also then to work on, take the lead on the partnerships and programmes nationally and it's been brilliant.

Dr Jo Yee Cheung: Hello everyone, lovely to be here. My name is Jo Yee Cheung, or Jo. My pronouns are she/her, and I am the founder and chief executive of Olympias Music Foundation. We are a charity based in Manchester, which like Future Talent and Young Sounds supports young people experiencing barriers, like low income to access musical opportunities. Specifically, for us, that is free one-to-one sustained music lessons over many years. So in that respect, we're the other side of the coin. We are very much on the ground and in the community delivering those lessons day in day out. So we work currently with between 180 and 200 children every single week and since 2015 when we were first started, we've delivered over 41,000 free music lessons for those young people.

We have a range of different programmes that we deliver our work from. So, Learn to Play is our flagship programme and that's all about offering, as I say, free one-to-one lessons over many years with an instrument and access to books, exams, opportunities to do auditions or join orchestras. We also run choirs and orchestras too, a music residential course in the summer, lots of things like that. And I suppose the thing which makes us really unique is the model of work, our mode of delivery. So we are delivering not out of schools, but after school, out of a local library called Longsight Library in Manchester. And we're really keen on delivering from within the community, working with families, really listening to the voices of the people that we're working with to shape the kinds of things that we do. So for instance, during Ramadan, we always have a community iftar which has music and food prepared by the families that we work with. We have a community board of parents who work with our trustee board to influence decisions and shape the kind of work we do, and a youth board who are helping to shape our offer for teenagers, this kind of thing. So that's what we're doing in Manchester.

My background is as a music educator and as a pianist. So I trained as a pianist at the Royal Northern College of Music, like Chris, and found myself teaching in and around Manchester. I later went on to do a PhD looking at the role of parents in children's musical development and

that's been a really key part, I think, of the work we've been doing at Olympias, trying to understand how the entire family environment and the community has a role to play in individual children's opportunities and interest in music and where that might take them. So lovely to be here and lovely to meet everyone.

Emma Cragg: Amazing, thank you so much. It's really great to have you all here with us today. So, in Youth Music's 2024 report, Sounds of the Next Generation, there was a quote from a young person in there saying, "There's a strong sort of like middle-class presence, especially in being classically trained. Even in piano, guitar, drums, it takes a lot of resources. It takes a lot of investment and time that a lot of young working-class people don't have." So Jo, I might come straight back to you if you don't mind. Do you think that this kind of summarises some of the challenges that face families from low-income backgrounds in accessing music education? And would you say there are any other barriers or challenges out there that you think are particularly important to talk about?

Dr Jo Yee Cheung: Thanks, Emma. Yeah, I think it's a really great quote and I think it really encapsulates how intersectional the different barriers that young people experience are. So yes, low income is a part of it. If you don't come from a family who can afford to pay for music lessons, it's very hard in the current climate to get that for free and to find the resources to have those lessons. But you may also have the challenge of, say, threshold anxiety. So you may come from a family where, certainly for myself, I'm from a family where I'm, no-one else plays music. I'm the first musician in my family ever, I think, at least in a formal sense. And so, you know, it wasn't a part of my background to be going to concerts. My parents wouldn't have known how to find a music teacher for me necessarily. And so, you know, in that kind of situation, it's very important that there are support systems and networks for signposting young people who perhaps don't have access to that at home.

At Olympias as well, so we're based in an area called Longsight where, it's a very diverse area basically in the inner city. 90% of the children that we work with are from global majority backgrounds and certainly 60% of the people who live in Longsight are from non-white backgrounds and so the kinds of music making that are taking place there are really, really varied. So it's not always going to be a violin lesson in a classroom with one teacher. A lot of the music making that happens is much more informal. So it could be in religious settings or during festivals or as part of celebrations. And trying to understand that, I think, is a really big part of understanding the barriers to young people feeling like other forms of music might not be for them or that they may not be able to or won't be welcome in particular spaces, concert halls or cultural venues. And I think the more that we can be having this dialogue to understand as I say the intersectionality of these issues, yes lower income, top of the list. If you don't have the money to pay for a ticket to a concert you won't be going unless someone's giving it to you for free. But even if you're offered the ticket for free what are the other things which are stopping people from coming through the door and really like owning the space and feeling like it's for them?

Emma Cragg: Thank you, and Katie, could I come to you next? What are your thoughts on this?

Katie Walker: Yeah, totally agree with everything that Jo was saying there. It is, it's that idea that we want to make sure that there is the bespoke support for young people who are learning music and although we can offer the free music lessons, like Jo said, it's the other things that go with that, the other opportunities that we need to make accessible. And I think that cultural and identity really plays a big role. And to break down those barriers, we need to make sure that we

are providing opportunities in these different areas. You were talking about the areas that you work, Jo. At Young Sounds, we have over 31 who we call Connectors. So these are people that are on the ground in all different areas across the country whose main job is to go out and work with local communities, local families, to signpost all the different musical opportunities there are available to them. To go and speak to families to understand what some of the issues are.

Sometimes it can come down to things like travel. In a lot of rural areas, it's just not possible for families to get to their music centres to go and appreciate all the things that are going on. And a lot of the time it can be that the concerts just don't happen in areas where they can get to. So I think we've got to really focus a lot on the grassroots and the idea that we're going out to communities and we are supporting making much more sort of direct contact with families there. Understanding what their needs are, understanding what is going to inspire and motivate, and I think it's understanding where the gaps in that cultural identity are in the music sector. Where do we need more representation? So yeah, it's not just about the financial support, it's funding those opportunities at grassroots level.

Emma Cragg: Yeah, thanks, Katie. Chris, could I come to you next, actually, because obviously you work sort of similarly on a national level at Future Talent, but do you similarly have things in place to get that more local community involvement as well?

Chris Guenault: Yeah, absolutely. And I think just all the points that have been mentioned so far are all brilliant points and super important. And one of the other things we also find that goes into it is the time as well that goes into that. And those, because sometimes it's not just about, you might be living in a different area, but you've got to then put the time into it, whether it be your practice to get good enough to be able to access some of these opportunities or just the time to actually attend the opportunities. So one of things we find that when we might have an opportunity that's out of area for someone is that it could be that we can support with all the travel costs and everything to get them there, but actually the time to get them there. It could be parents having to take time off work if they're working shifts, something like that if it's after school. It can all be a real challenge, so that kind of local work we do think is really important.

We'll try and make sure that our workshop opportunities that we will take around to local areas, we'll work with local partners and organisations to get more young people involved as well. So maybe not young musicians that Future Talent are directly just working with. And the great about that is that we can then share resources and ideas, music leaders, venues and really enhance that experience. So yeah, I think it's all of those hidden costs that really add up, all of that transport, the weekend rehearsals, maintaining everything. And Katie put it really nicely as well that we've got to be able to fund it. And I think that's where a lot of the challenges also come in that funding, even if it's one of the more obvious ones.

Yusef Saco: And we'll definitely get to the funding aspect later on and where money for organisations comes into it. It sounds like it's a big, big mix of both cultural and financial reasons for people on the ground and for young people who are struggling to access music or want to access music and can't. I was just, you've all kind of alluded to it, but I was just wondering if we could bring the conversations on to where you as organisations think you most effectively tear down those barriers and what are the most prevalent challenges in your work? So, maybe kicking straight back to you, Chris, on a national level.

Chris Guenault: Yeah, absolutely. So for us, it's about trying to remove the practical barriers and also those invisible ones. So we do have our financial awards for the young people from low

income backgrounds, which can cover things like lessons, travel, instrument hire, increasingly tech, especially since coming out of the pandemic, tech has become a really big thing so being able to support with that, which might enable them to access things outside of their area, as well as a lot of the way that young people are making music and consuming music these days.

But that financial support, although important, is just one part of it, as I think has already been mentioned. And so we'll also match young musicians with mentors, someone who can help them build their confidence, offer professional insight and often serve as a relatable role model. One example comes to mind of a young bassist who they were doing brilliant things, they had fantastic teachers and great opportunities around them. But they were still really questioning if the music industry was for them because they were struggling to identify with those people around them, however good they were and however good the opportunity was. It still didn't feel like for them they really fitted in and that maybe this wasn't something for them to pursue. And because we are a national organisation and our opportunities, we can cross some regional boundaries because they're a bit more interventionary, I suppose, so we were able to link them with a mentor who they could relate to and see themselves in. And it was amazing to see how inspired they were by meeting somebody who is being successful in the industry and that young person is now more fired up than ever to become a pro. They've requested if they can have more sessions with the mentor and keep that relationship going. And it just shows how having those relatable role models is so important in making a huge difference and helping them see the path forward.

We also then try and make sure that with our programmes and with the creative workshops that we're really trying to build that community as well. So it might be that they're feeling a little bit isolated in their local area. So being able to link them up with other young musicians from outside their area, who they can see people who look like them, who don't look like them and who have got different, but also quite similar experiences and really changed the way how those young people then see themselves and open up ideas to new ways of collaborating, whether it be a classical violinist with a South Asian musician or some jazz and some rock and pop musicians. So it's just really broadening their musical horizons and helping them understand that there is more than one valid route to achieving great things.

Yusef Sacoor: That lived experience sounds really key in finding music educators and people who work with young people who have that. Is that the same for you, Katie? And Jo, we'll get onto the grassroots local level as well when we get to you as well. But Katie, first, on the national level, does that resonate with you? Is that a main challenge?

Katie Walker: Yeah, it does. Chris referred to relatable role models, and that is a really big key part of what we're trying to develop at Young Sounds at the moment. So we have as part of the Thrive programme, we have, we support around 400 young people a year. And so not only do they get a small grant to help with costs of their musical education, but they do have access to a wide range of opportunities, and one of those is our Exchange project. And it's a mentoring project in partnership with all five BBC orchestras. And great things where the young people get to side by side playing with the orchestras, they get to meet people like them who are in the career, in the industry, and give them that inspiration to move forward. Because there's always that difficult period, isn't there, for young musicians? The lessons, they sort of start to tick along. And when they start to think about future prospects, where do I want to take this? That's when it's, and I think that's what you were alluding to, Chris, that's when it starts a little bit a grey area for them. "I don't know, is there a future? Is there a pathway to industry for me here?" And it is about those relatable role models.

And so with Thrive, as I said, we have our Exchange project, but on the Connect programme, we have mentors in all 18 of our ambassador hubs. So these are, mentors are trained by us each year, they go out into the schools to meet with the young people on the programme and they offer that pastoral support as well as that kind of musical relatable role model for them. And I suppose it's also giving opportunities that perhaps they didn't realise they could do. So for somebody that is playing violin, we offer get togethers. So in each regional hub, they have three get togethers a year where we bring all our young people on the programme together and they're offered lots of different experiences. It could be to go to a live concert, it could be to do composing workshops, it could also be to do a studio day. And for some of our young people who have never experienced that before, they're then inspired to maybe think more about the different possibilities that they've got with their instrument and their learning rather than the traditional route.

And I suppose I just wanted to talk a little bit about, I think Chris you mentioned about attitude sometimes that families can have around the benefits of music and supporting the young people. I think Joe you referred to it a little bit earlier, the idea that music is great, but does it lead to a career? Is it more of a hobby? Is it something that's sustainable? Do I want my children to be following a career in music? I'm not sure. These are lots of questions that sometimes come up and, actually, are there clear practical pathways that young people can see that show them the possible routes into industry and a career in music? And sometimes I don't think they're always clear. Progression, we have exams, but that's not sometimes the best thing for all our young people. So how do we support young musicians in following a career into music? How do we show them what those opportunities are? How do we support them in that journey? And like I said, relatable role models with mentors, getting young people out there working with industry professionals, seeing the music on the ground in action. And it's, those are the investments that we really should be supporting for the young people, funding lessons, but it's the opportunities that we need to bring to them.

Yusef Sacoor: That is definitely a common theme across both our pathways into industry and higher education discussions on this podcast as well, and the difficulty of explaining the value of music and what you can do with it and what you can go on to do, and that it can be viable as well.

[Transition music]

Yusef Sacoor: It's interesting, earlier you touched on, well we have touched on lived experience and finding people who have relevant experiences to the young people that they're working with, and Jo, I was going to come to you on this. Is that always a barrier to working with young people and also, do you struggle finding people who can, particularly in instrumental music, who are from backgrounds that have relevant experience to teach young people? How much of a barrier is it for people who aren't from those backgrounds to engage people from those backgrounds? And if you are successful in employing people from those backgrounds in your projects, then how do you do it? Because we know that music education is at the moment full of people from a certain background, and it's normally quite middle class. That's quite a loaded question, but I'm going to hand it over to you, Jo, and see what you can do with it.

Dr Jo Yee Cheung: Thanks, Yusef, that's great. You know, this is a really interesting themes and points. So interesting to hear on some of things you're talking about, Katie and Chris, and just how sort of joined up that, whole the industry is, you know, we're talking about, you know, kind of grassroots and children in education, but we're also looking at the whole journey, you know,

how does that impact, you know, in 10 years time, the representation in the music industry. I suppose, on both levels, the thing which is similar across both working with children and then also trying to diversify the workforce is trust building. It's been a huge part of our work at Olympias. I suppose I say this from the perspective of firstly a grassroots organisation rather than sort of a national umbrella organization and also as a founder. But certainly when we first arrived in Longsight and said, you know, why don't we set up a music lesson project? Why don't we start offering free music lessons in the community? It's not like everybody was banging on our door going, yes, yes, music lessons! I think there was a lot of interest, but there was also a lot of suspicion and a lot of anxiety and a lot of experience, I think, from communities of organisations helicoptering in and then within a year leaving and being like, well, what was the point of that? You know, getting your hopes up and then feeling really quite let down that there's sort of no kind of sustainability in those efforts.

So maybe speaking to the question about young people first and then, and then going on to sort of teachers and stuff. As I mentioned, the Olympias model focuses very much on delivering from within the community and working directly with families. And we found that when you are working with communities who are very mixed, what I mean by that is that we have lots and lots of different communities sitting side by side, so say a very large South Asian community who also neighbours with our Afro-Caribbean neighbours as well, and then a large Eastern European community all mixing together, all living in the inner city. And trying to sort of encourage community integration amongst those groups that we found that the best way of doing that is to really look at kind of what the family environment is like and trying to engage parents. So as an example, so yes, the children are coming for their music lessons every week, they're having half an hour with us, but what's going on at home? What's going on in the rest of the week? How are parents supporting? Are they encouraging? Do they have positive views about music or do they see it as something that's not for them? Because if that's the case, then you're absolutely fighting a losing battle in your half hour with that child. So, as I say, as I mentioned before, we have a community board of parents. It's one of the ways that we try and infiltrate the family environment.

We also have a parent orchestra, which takes place at the same time as our children's orchestra. So yes, the kids are going and having their orchestra rehearsal and the parents, you know, obviously very free to sit in the car or sit in the waiting room, have a little break, have a nap, scroll through the news. But they are also very welcome if they'd like to, to pick up a guitar or pick up a viola or a trumpet and have a go in parent orchestra, you know, no judgment, free space, any ability, welcome. Again, you know, trying to pull in parents and communities and families, aunties, uncles, grandmas to help with baking cakes or making samosas or putting the chairs out or making lovely decorations for the concerts and, you know, it's taken a long time. It doesn't happen overnight. It's certainly not a one-week project where it's like, okay, great, everyone's, everyone's friends now. But over many years, as you start to sort of chip away at that, and as you keep showing up for the community, what we found is that there's more and more interest basically from children, from their friends at school going, ooh, you know, what's that funny case that you keep bringing in school? Whoa, I didn't know you were playing in assembly! You know, the word soon spreads. And it's a very powerful thing because ultimately, when you're trying to inspire, particularly for us working predominantly with primary school aged children, going up to secondary, but still for us, the majority being on the younger side, social media isn't the way that they get their news. It's not the way that they get inspired to do things. I mean, maybe I'm being a bit old fashioned here. Sure, they're watching TikTok. Sure, they're on Instagram. Let's not kid ourselves. But what's really inspiring is like going into school and, and

knowing what your classmates are doing. And if they're doing it, they often want to get involved too.

I think Katie and Chris, you've both talked about relatable role models. And we know that that's a very big part as well of getting kids interested and involved in music. So, one of the big pieces of work that we've been developing over the last five years is called Global Music Teacher Training. And that project is really about doing two things. The first thing is trying to work towards a 50-50 global majority teaching team at Olympias, which we're very pleased to have achieved, but also looking at diversifying the kinds of music that we're teaching because although Western classical music is certainly large in the UK, you know, very much mainstream, even if that's not what you listen to, there are of course many other - millions - of different kinds of musical cultures all over the world with their own distinct styles. And there is a disconnect, you know, I think when we talk about working with children from a range of different backgrounds, but we're not teaching them a range of different music. So over the last five years, we have been putting together a network of musicians from around Manchester, all with expertise in music from other cultures. So that network is called Migrant Voices and there's 70 musicians there, all with different expertise, all professional musicians, teachers, performers from 36 different countries. And over the last half decade, we have been training those performers to work with young people and to teach on our teaching team. And each year we aim to take on one or two of those teachers who we've trained ourselves to enter our workforce and then to work in the long term with those children. So we're really pleased that this year, for instance, that we have three new teachers teaching Iranian Santoor, Senegalese drumming and dance, and Indian Harmonium and singing. And that's been really interesting and exciting for us because it's we've had, for instance, a huge number of Iranian children and families get in touch and be like, I had no idea that I could learn Santoor. We really remember that from home. It's like, you know, how in the UK everyone has a piano in their back room, I think I can even see one in Katie's back room [laughing]. You know, the Santoor is the equivalent in Iran. So I think just finding, really trying to kind of use our empathy and our imaginations to think, you know, okay, so this is our norm. This is what we're used to. But what is the norm for other people? What makes people feel at home and listen to? So there are a couple of thoughts on breaking down barriers, certainly around lived experience and working both with children and teachers to do that.

Emma Cragg: Wow, amazing. I think it sounds incredibly impressive to have achieved that goal of having your teachers 50-50 from global majority backgrounds, and such a diverse range of opportunities out there that you're offering. Katie and Chris, I think you both have thoughts that you'd like to add on there, I'll come to you first, Chris.

Chris Guenault: Yeah, thank you. I mean, it's just incredible to hear everything that Jo's talking about and all that work going into it and the variety of work and the different ways you're approaching it. And all of that, I think, stems from that first point that you mentioned, which was about trust and building that trust from those communities and the work that you're doing and how important it is. And as a national organisation, I think it's... it's working with local organisations like Olympias is what makes it all work. It's that joined up ecosystem. We couldn't do what we do if there aren't these groups who are offering these opportunities and getting to know the young people and building that trust, because I think that's one of our biggest challenges for reaching young people is that we're just a big national thing and they're thinking, well, you know, how often are we going to actually work for you? We've got this and this going on in our area and these people that we know and that we see regularly. And so I always feel that the best thing we can be doing is speaking to local partners, supporting them, because they're

the ones who know the young musicians best. The way that Jo's talked about it, it is amazing the knowledge that you have built for those young people and those families in your area and what's needed to really help inspire them. So it's our job really to tap into that and support that. And I think just for all those local organisations like Olympias, it's just brilliant that they're doing what they're doing and we'll just keep doing what we can to support that.

Emma Cragg: Absolutely and Katie, did you have something you'd like to add there as well?

Katie Walker: Yes, I did. I just wanted to pick up what Jo was talking about, the fact that the music curriculum currently doesn't reflect all the different musical identities that we currently have across all the different areas in the country. And I think that certainly is something that needs to be addressed. And at the moment, with Young Sounds, our Discover programme tackles the way that musical talent is spotted. So we look at training educators to recognise musical potential, not on whether they're already learning an instrument or whether they've had that opportunity, but on, we call them the eight key facets of potential, such as enjoyment, curiosity, leadership. And that helps to ensure that educators are looking for talent regardless of their background and their opportunities that they've had so far. So part of our Discover programme is Equalize. So we were further address culture and identity barriers. So this cross-sector collaboration is with the Black Music Research Unit, Punch Birmingham and Bradford Music and Arts Service, and it aligns music education with young people's musical identities, especially in electronic and black British music. So helping them to develop their potential. So we deliver training, summer schools, workshops that are helping educators diversify their practice so that young people can see themselves reflected in what they're learning. And we're hoping that this is a programme that's going to snowball and it's going to roll out so young people see themselves reflected in what they learn and in the teachers guiding them.

Yusef Sacoor: There's a few things touched on there and I think we've all kind of alluded to the intersectionality here. And I think there's an obvious answer if I talk about prejudices in music industry, education, society, around race, gender, etc. sexuality. Do you think that there is a problem not just in representation, but in prejudice towards people coming into music from a lower income background? And I'll open that up to anyone who would like to reply.

Dr Jo Yee Cheung: Yeah, I think that's a really interesting question. I think prejudice is maybe not the word that I would use, but what I would, maybe a better term would be sort of structural problems or structural challenges or barriers, which are kind of baked in because I think that no one's trying to be, no one's actually actively saying, you know, "You're from a low income background? Well, door shut to you, you know, don't come back!" It's not like that. I think it's more pernicious. It's more, it's actually more frightening, I think, what's happening. Which is that just over a very, very long time, it has become harder and harder for young people experiencing low income, from working class backgrounds, to access musical opportunities. As I said before, for a very wide intersectional number of reasons. And I think that the more we're kind of aware of the things which stop people from taking up those opportunities, the more we're able to help. I think the biggest problem is that many interventions are quite short term. And so when you're dealing with a big structural problem, like, you know, a very large number of young people not being able to access music, it's going to take more than a week, it's going to take more than a year, actually, or even four or five years to deal with that. What it takes is collaborative working between organisations like Young Sounds, Future Talent, grassroots organisations like ourselves, having an open dialogue about how we can pool our resources and really target them in an effective way without constantly changing our policy.

I think the thing which is often quite frustrating as a grassroots organisation is when you have the opportunity to work with a brilliant young person or a group of young people, but you're only able to do it for a short time. And I think that a lot of funding works that way. A lot of kind of interest in projects happens that way. Just the nature of kind of media and PR is that people are always looking for the new and shiny. And so that kind of maybe slightly less sexy work of just showing up every week and doing the music lessons with the same young people and, you know, getting them through, I mean, Katie will know all about this because she used to teach in schools. But you know, so much of that is the really nitty gritty of that kid is on the verge of giving up, but they're so unbelievably talented, you know, working out what's going on at home, working out, is there something I can be doing as a teacher offering more support? Does that young person have additional needs? Does that person maybe need a quiet space to practice that, you know, are they having some friendship issues? And really working out how over the long term, we can kind of create this sort positive narrative rather than, you know, just these little injections of money or opportunity that, you know, are lovely for a day, lovely for a week, but aren't really going to, you know, make the kind of shift that we need, if that makes sense.

I suppose, you know, to draw a comparison with like maths or English at school. Nobody would expect you to be fluent in English and to be writing with beautiful handwriting and passing your GCSEs, you know, with half an hour a week for say half a term, which actually is how much you're allotted, I think, you know, every child is allotted a certain amount of music lessons, aren't they, from the National Plan for Music Education. It's about half a term of lessons. But I don't know, is anyone really expecting a young person to come out as a fluent performer on that amount of time? We need to be thinking much more long-term and thinking much more collaboratively about how we can, as I say, focus our resources and be really dynamic in the way that we're addressing the issue.

Chris Guenault: Yeah, I think they're brilliant points and one of the things that it made me think of in everything that Jo was just saying then is, how we sort of define what that excellence and success looks like? And the way that we view excellence and define what it is in musical learning is going to naturally be more approachable to some people because I suppose there's a lot of our structures are based around some very classical pathways and that's just not approachable for some people. It's going to assume that you've got a kind of background in stability. And you know, that we talked earlier about the time that's involved in things and having a quiet space just to practice, but you know, being rewarded for if you sit down and you practice every single day for the X amount of time, then you will be successful. And that's just not practical or possible for some people.

I think sometimes as well it's like the familiarity with the systems. It could be having families around you who have that knowledge to know where to look and what kind of thing you need to do next to be successful. And if you don't have those things, the barriers can really stack up quite quickly. So that's where the idea that we can be working together because one organisation can't be something for everybody. It's just not gonna happen, it's not possible and we really shouldn't try because we'll just spread ourselves too thinly and fail to do that. So by working together that it could be that there is an organisation who is able to help fund those music lessons to keep it going but then that's then funding some of the teachers to be able to do their work, who were able to then provide some mentoring, who were able to offer a group experience for those young people. And if we can build that kind of big network and structure around each of the young people who want to keep on music, then hopefully there is a chance that they can then pursue it and keep going all the way through and keep growing that network,

which will then help them as they then go out into, past initial music education into professional industry and keep that support network going.

Emma Cragg: Yeah, thank you, and Katie?

Katie Walker: I just wanted to go back to what Jo was saying as well, because you were saying, Chris, talking about the idea that we need to all come together and all support how these young people can continue beyond the funding. But I just want to point out that the funding that we give never stretches. It never grows with the young person's talent. So for example, at primary school level, you've got the whole class teaching, but then they might go into small group teaching. So there's three of them in a lesson, having their clarinet lesson or a ukulele lesson. But then as they get more advanced, teaching three in one class just isn't going to work. And especially when they go to high school, perhaps they've gone to different high schools that then, the funding that is the same pot for three children, has now got to then be split across those three children for individual lessons. And it just doesn't work. And we're finding that with young people on Young Sounds, and it's the same across all the music services, that the pot of money just doesn't stretch as far as those young people develop and they advance. And that's why we all need to come together and make sure that there is, the funding keeps coming. It isn't for a short space of time. And that funding also needs to grow because everything that comes along with, as we know, musical education grows.

I suppose one thing that we can tackle is enabling a young person to have that self-motivation, that self-drive, enabling the families to help to support looking for those musical opportunities. One of the things that we push a lot at Young Sounds is individualised learning plans. So this is learner-led learning so that they are deciding what they want to do for their lessons, for their learning, what they want to pursue in terms of their musical choices. Hopefully by enabling them to have that self motivation, there's going to be that driving force to help them find ways that they can continue with their music lessons and music learning outside of the lessons they get for free in schools. I know that with some of the young people we had, was that their learning plans, one of the calls was that they wanted to go and see a live performance. And when we spoke to the family, they said, "Ah well, such and such's dad is a great folk guitarist and he's playing at the pub at the weekend. We're going to go down and we're going to go watch." And that just turned out to be something that we didn't need to organise, we didn't need to fund. It was the families have gone out seeking and you talked about that, Jo, that families and communities coming together to support. So it's all about enabling young learners to be motivated, to families enabling them to take a responsibility in helping to support, as well as speaking to the people where they can deliver the funding, explaining that the funding needs to grow as the young people grow. And that's the hard part, isn't it?

Emma Cragg: Yeah, thanks, Katie. It sounds like from what you were just speaking on, and I think Jo touched on earlier as well, really listening to the young people and working with them is really, really key. And also then speaking to their families to really have that holistic picture of what's going on is really key to making sure all of these young people are supported.

[Transition music]

Emma Cragg: Welcome back everyone. Some really, really interesting topics that we've picked up on and themes that have come up throughout the conversation. And I think this is something that we've already started touching on a bit, but I think now it would be nice to discuss what the

music education sector as a whole needs to be doing to make music more accessible for young people?

Katie Walker: This, actually, I think has been a bit of a theme earlier on, but collaboration I think is the key, especially for organisations like Young Sounds. We are in the fortunate position that we have this national picture and we are aware of all the fantastic work that's already happening, but we just want it to happen everywhere. And we want to make sure that all the resources and all the networks are really sharing ideas and that's where we'll see real change. So we're proud that we're delivering the Music Opportunities Pilot from the DfE. That's really supercharged our Connect program. And we're really hoping that all the learning that's taking place over this four-year pilot will hopefully shape the future of inclusive practice and the idea of collaboration.

So I think music lessons are the highlight of a young person's week. The student teacher bond is really, really special, but we also need to keep creating inspiring experiences. So live performances that young people can attend that are in their community setting, not somewhere that they can't get to. Giving them the opportunity to play with others in groups. Meeting relatable role models, whether that is professional musicians that are playing music like them, or whether that is mentors, young mentors that have gone through the same journey they have and are sharing their advice. And we also want the young people to have a say in their own future as well. And I think, Chris, you were talking about that, and Jo, you talked about the fact that young... pupil voice, I call it pupil voice because I still have that education, that classroom setting, but a young person's voice. And we have the Amplify panel where we get young people from across regions that are meeting to discuss things that are going on. Giving young people a voice, also giving them a say in their learning. And that all comes down to all the community-based programmes that are happening that Jo, that you're leading, and the partnerships that we at Young Sounds and Future Talent have with those community-based programmes. And we've got to build all these different networks, we've got to share all these ideas because that's I think key and learning from what everybody is doing and coming together.

Emma Cragg: Yeah, thanks, Katie. I was wondering if really quickly before I perhaps come on to Jo, I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about what the Music Opportunities Pilot is, for those people who might not have heard of it before and how that is helping Young Sounds to develop all the work that you're doing.

Katie Walker: Okay, so this is funding that we got from the DfE and this has helped with the Connect programme. So we have increased the number of hubs that have come on board. We've also increased the number of young people that we have on the programme. We've now got over a thousand young people. We've now got 31 Connectors. So, we've now sort of taken the Connect programme model and we've been able to expand it and reach more areas across the UK. And so part of that is that we now have, as I say, Connectors. So these are people on the ground in these communities who work with the local music services and they are sort of helping with the free lessons, the funding of the lessons, but also they're organising what, as I said earlier, get togethers, so these musical opportunities for the people to come together. They also run teacher forums where we invite teachers and other music leaders to come together once a term to discuss issues surrounding the music education sector and how we can help on the ground in those areas. We have also got, developed the mentor program, the funding's been really great for developing that. So we've now got mentors in all of our ambassador hubs where we're supporting young people in music lessons. And then part of that, we have what we call the delivery group. So we're working with lots of the different partners. So we're working with

ABRSM, who are offering free lessons for young people on our programme, working with the BBC who are offering free ticket offers. We're working with Charanga, who are looking at individual learning plans that are hosted on their platform for our young people. So that's kind of helped, as I say, the word is supercharged, the Connect programme, so that we are working with lots of other partners to reach more young people on the Connect programme across the country.

Emma Cragg: Thank you, yeah, I think it's really interesting work and really great that you've been able to expand that. Jo, do you mind if I come to you next, going back to that initial question about what the music education sector can be doing?

Dr Jo Yee Cheung: Yeah, sure. I'm happy to speak to that and off the back of lots of the things that Katie's been saying, which are absolutely brilliant. I do feel that there are some, this is going to sound cheesy and bad, but there are, there is such a thing as a free lunch. And very often actually when we're working together creatively and dynamically, we can find really cost-efficient ways of making those opportunities go further. I'll give you a couple of examples. So at Olympias, our official partner is the Royal Northern College of Music. We're really, really fortunate to be working with the college, especially as so many of our teachers are alumni and we know the space really well. And the college often have a lot of free tickets that wouldn't get sold anyway, and so by working directly with us, we're able to offer those tickets free to grassroots communities. We already know that that's often not enough to encourage families to take up those tickets, but because of the trust that we have nurtured over the years and because you we may send a member of staff a familiar face to wait at box office, you know, for those families who are feeling a bit nervous. We might speak to box office staff in advance about names which have, you know, more difficult pronunciations, or the college might even you know have somebody there who that the children know, we're able to help, you know, kind of kill two birds with one stone, which is, you know, the first being let's have a full concert hall and make this really pleasant for the performers. But secondly, give children who wouldn't normally go to a concert the opportunity to do that for free.

Another example of that kind of collaborative working, again, sort of cost-efficient, not the main aim, but sort of as a nice bonus is that we work really closely with the college's pedagogy team and their pedagogy course. So at the Royal Northern, students have the opportunity to do some teacher training. And in order to train to be a teacher, they obviously need some guinea pig students. And so we bring in a number of children from Olympias to have free piano lessons with their piano pedagogy students. So again, it's a win-win because the college gets some students who are keen, eager, wouldn't have the opportunity to have piano lessons normally, and the children who wouldn't usually have the chance to learn piano get to have a teacher work with them for the whole year! And an opportunity to come in the college every week, play on great big Steinway pianos, come back to the library and say, "I'm not playing on that keyboard, I'm used to a grand piano!" No, they're very good. But, you know, and that's so great, though, you know, that sense of entitlement, they should absolutely be walking around and saying, I'm used to playing on a grand! I mean, it's so fantastic to have that, you know, in Longsight, especially. Those kids holding their heads up high and saying, "I just played a... I just played my first concert in the Royal Northern College of Music concert hall. What did you do with your Thursday afternoon?"

So I do think that the more that we're speaking to each other, grassroots organisations, concert halls, orchestras, big umbrella organisations like Young Sounds and Future Talent, the more that we're able to find really creative ways of making our resources go further. And really, at the end of the day, all of this sounds very bureaucratic, and management speak sometimes, but you

know all of this is for the benefit of the children and the more that we can, again to use Katie's term which I like very much, you know listen to pupil voice and listen to the family voice the more we're going to find creative ways of solving the problem.

Emma Cragg: Yeah, thank you. Sounds like really fantastic work and working in partnership seems really key. And Chris, last but not least, to come to you and see what your thoughts are here.

Chris Guenault: Yeah, I think I'd echo everything that's been said so far. They're all brilliant points. And there's so many things that go into it as well and partnership is always going to be something that I'm going to come back to as a key thing. It's also going to help with the fact that we keep alluding to the mention of funding and how tight things are getting and the more the you progress with music, how things are getting more and more expensive. And so yeah, by working together, it just means we can pull those resources and make that funding go further and be able to think more creatively. And when we're being creative, I think that then comes into as well as how we're getting more young people involved in music and getting those points of excellence. So, I think it's got to be about, I suppose, inclusion without diluting what's going on. And there are so many great things and it's not necessarily about lowering the standards to make it easy for getting to people, but just widening the door, I suppose, that it's easier for people to go through it. And sometimes that can be that we're just maybe thinking a bit more creative about what we value in music and that it is about those listening, it's about the creativity, the collaboration and all those different aspects of music making which is really going to allow a young person to not only be a great musician but be just a well-rounded person in general, which will see them succeed in whatever they choose to do later on. Because music is just one of the most transformative things a young person can engage with socially, emotionally, cognitively, and really change how they see themselves in the world around them. But the challenge is making sure that everyone has the chance to experience that. And I think everything that Jo and that Katie have been saying so far are all super important to doing that and just keeping the conversation going and sharing our ideas and what we can all do together.

As well as then listening to the young people, as you said, it's one of the things that we're working really hard to do at the moment is, when I mentioned earlier about our professional portfolio discussions that we're having, that's coming from feedback from the young people saying what they've been missing and what they wanna see. And so, we're planning it with them as well, we're having discussion groups about who they wanna see, what kind of industries they want to go into. And then following on for that, we're bringing in past musicians that we supported who are now either music college students or early career professionals, getting them involved in coming and not only getting the skills of being a mentor or a workshop leader or co-leading on events, but also telling us what we should be doing and what's right for young people today, coming and being in on interview panels and helping us make sure we're the right people in the roles who are going to be relatable. So yeah, it is just that communication, conversation, collaboration, it's just so important to everything that we do.

Yusef Sacoor: Thank you so much, Chris. I mean, we've heard a lot from you just then and from our other two guests on using your community, your contacts, the people around you to build and access and support certain communities, which leads us nicely onto our last question, which is what resources and/or organisations would you recommend for people who want to do more to address the problem of getting more children from low-income backgrounds into education. I mean, how do you even identify where the need is? How do you access those communities and what resources and organisations would you recommend?

Chris Guenault: We keep going back to partnerships and how absolutely vital they are because there's more need out there than any one organisation can meet. So by working together, it just means that we can hopefully reach all those points to put those network around those young people. Funding is tight, it's getting trickier every year. So, working in collaboration to make sure that you can stretch your limited resources so that young people don't fall through the gaps. I think looking for ways to connect through networks like Music Mark is a great place to start and being able to connect with other educators, share research, provide and get training, get opportunities, things like that. Getting in touch with your local music hub who will know what's happening in your area, help you connect to different ensembles and schools, community groups. The Young Sounds Connect network is another brilliant example because they've got people there who will understand what's going on locally and you can talk to and they will be able to signpost what you're doing to others so that you're not operating in isolation. And I think you mentioned it just then, Yusef, about taking a step back and asking, who am I trying to reach? What barrier am I trying to address? Because we've talked about so many different ones like the costs, the time, the cultural confidence, identity, geography, and that can be hugely overwhelming if you try and fix everything at once. So, sometimes the most effective thing might be to focus on one clear problem to start with and just try and do that really well. And then when you start forming those partnerships and thinking creatively, it doesn't have to be huge. Just could be sharing a venue, sharing instruments, co-running workshops. And that is also going to introduce the young people to multiple organisations at once and multiple opportunities and just helping to close those gaps so that even when we do have smaller budgets or tight funding, we can just kind of work smarter together to make that huge difference and making sure that every young person who wants to make music has a fair chance to do so.

Emma Cragg: Perfect, thanks Chris. I think there's some really key places to start for people there. Katie, can I come to you next?

Katie Walker: Yeah, great, thank you. I totally agree with Chris and I think you talked about the music hubs. I think the local music services need a big shout out because they are on the ground working really hard and the financial climate for them guys has been, it's been a tricky 12 months and they're the font of information in all the different local areas. So for anybody who's wanting to find out what they can do, if it's an organisation that's starting up, maybe get in contact with your music service because they can help and support you and put you in contact with who you may need to work with on whatever project it is. And thank you, Chris, you mentioned Young Sounds, I appreciate that! Because yeah, one of the great things that Young Sounds want to do is we really, really want to help strengthen this network of all the fantastic organisations that are going on across the country. Yes, we have Connectors on the ground and one of the main roles of the Connector is to go out and find out what is happening. Jo, finding out Olympias and getting them involved and speaking to our Connectors so we can see how you guys could help some of the young people that we know about in our areas and things like that. So definitely, I would say love any organisations that go actually let's get in contact with Young Sounds because you can, we've got space on our website where we put all the information about the different organisations that helping in the different regional areas. So, we'd love to have more that we can promote there. As I say, our Connectors are out there working hard to signpost all these activities with young people. They've got connections in all the different schools, all the different music groups. So, yeah, that would be, self-promotion there! But that's one thing that we are really working hard to do is to help to bring together that network.

Yusef Sacoor: We fully endorse self-promotion, especially if it's relevant! So thank you, Katie. Finally, Jo, I imagine you're going to talk as well about not necessarily music contacts and connections in your area. But Jo, I'll let you talk for yourself.

Dr Jo Yee Cheung: Thank you, and so inspiring to hear everything that Chris and Katie have had to say. I feel like a really big part of unlocking some of this great work and working with limited resources that we have to have the biggest impact is about storytelling. Because I think that, you know, as I say, ultimately all of this is about young people and enabling them to reach their potential and the more that we can make their experiences and their stories tangible to the wider public, I think the more interest that we can get and more advocacy and representation we can raise for them.

And I think, just to give you an example from Olympias, one of the areas that we've been struggling with over the past couple of years is providing free instruments for the children. You know, instruments are expensive. And more than that, repairing instruments is nearly impossible because when you're looking at student instruments, most luthiers or music shops won't touch them because it's so expensive for them to fix a child's stent or violin. You know, and they, it's not worth their time a lot of the time, but that also has the knock-on effect of creating a lot of waste. So one of the pieces of storytelling we've been doing at Olympias is called The Recycled Orchestra. And with the help of a funder, actually as it happens, a recycling funder, so not even a music funder here, sort of thinking really laterally and dynamically about the problem. We went out to the public and said, we are looking for your broken instruments, your spare clarinets, your untouched trumpets and violins. It doesn't matter how knackered they are, we will fix them up with the help of our wonderful funder, the Oglesby Green Grants Trust, and we will give them to the young people of Manchester. And you know, obviously the most important part of this are those photographs of those children with those fixed instruments, going to orchestra, going to their lessons, playing a concert. And for those families who were generous enough to donate to think, "Gosh, Uncle Steve would be so pleased with this. He never imagined that his old school saxophone would have a new life." And what we found is that that project has really snowballed because the more people hear about these young people with these instruments that would have gone in the bin, the more people want to donate and not just donate instruments, but to help in other ways, to come and volunteer at a concert, to give their time as a facilitator or to, all kinds of wonderful, generous things. And so I think that thinking really creatively, not just within the music sector, you know, I'm certainly guilty of this. It's easy sometimes when you're facing a problem, just to sort of silo yourself and just sort of focus, focus, focus on how can I fix this one thing. But just thinking really, really laterally about, how can we engage all of the people in our networks?

You know, as I say, we deliver music lessons out of a library. Not the quietest library in Manchester, I will say! But, you know, that's another example of a problem where we were thinking, OK, we need a space, not a concert hall, not one big space where we can deliver music lessons, a place that has lots of small rooms and where we could deliver lots of music lessons at the same time. Where can we find, you know, what does that look like? And, you know, what we've ended up with is one-to-one music lessons every evening in a library and a weekly orchestra in a museum and instruments provided by all kinds of people from all across the UK, fixed by a recycling funder. And one of the problems that we've been trying to address, you know, looking at health and wellbeing amongst our young people. And it's not always about music. Music isn't all, music obviously is wonderful and is a big part of fixing the problem. But what about doing music lessons outside? What would happen if we took those young people from the

inner city who've never had a holiday and took them to Snowdonia and let them run wild for a wee while? That works. So let's do that. And so, you know, these are all examples from my organisation, but there are so many inspiring examples of local initiatives, ordinary people who are finding really creative ways to fix the problems in their communities that they know really, really well, with the help of national organisations like Young Sounds and Future Talent. Working collaboratively together to, you know, create opportunities for young people who deserve to do what they love and to really pursue with the full force and support of all these organisations, you know, a musical future.

Yusef Sacoor: Thank you so much, guys. You've all painted a wonderful image of not just our wonderful music services, music organisations nationally, community music organisations, but also of communities and spaces within your local area that can do so much, particularly for people from low-income backgrounds. Thank you so much to all of our guests and to all of you. We shall meet again at the next podcast. Cheers, everyone!

[Outro music]

Emma Cragg: Thanks again to Jo, Katie and Chris. We talked about the importance of relatable role models and intersectionality in supporting access for low-income families, as well as the successes of engaging full communities to encourage music making.

Yusef Sacoor: Head to musicmark.org.uk/podcast for show notes and more, and be sure to follow and rate this podcast wherever you're listening to it. Thanks to Able Orchestra for providing the intro, outro, and transition music for today's episode.