



## **Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education**

### **Episode 11: Christmas Special**

[Intro music]

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Welcome to Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education. We have made it to the final episode of season 1, which also happens to be our Christmas special. In this episode, you'll get to learn a bit more about the Music Mark team, including everyone's musical highlights from 2025, what we are all looking forward to in 2026, and controversial opinions on favourite artists, biscuits, and more. Emma, myself, and Yusef, split the team into three groups to tackle all of this important stuff, so let's get started with Emma's group.

**Emma Cragg:** Hello everyone and welcome to our Christmas special of the Music Mark podcast. And today we're here with all of the Music Mark team, which is really nice, and we're to hear a bit more about what everyone's getting up to behind the scenes and their highlights from the year. So, to start things off, I think it would be nice to just get a little introduction from everyone we've got here today and find out more about what they do at Music Mark and why they wanted to work in the music education sector in the first place.

**Gary Griffiths:** Yes, Hi Emma. I'm Gary and I am covering Rosie Lowe's maternity leave, have been since January, as Programme and Engagements Director. Why did I want to work in music education in the first place? I mean, I've been in music education since 1999. It was just always a passion, always a musician and always enjoyed being with other musicians, making music and seeing people grow. So, I worked for 13 years for Essex Music Services and then as Head of Havering Music School.

**Emma Cragg:** Amazing, thanks Gary. Abi, could I come to you next?

**Abi Marrison:** Sure thing. So, I'm the Schools Manager at Music Mark, for those of you who don't know me. And the reason that I wanted to join Music Mark and to do this role comes from my time as a Primary School Teacher. So, I was a primary school teacher for 10 years. And then from that worked for one of the Arts Council's Bridge organisations, which is trying to support the intersection between cultural education in schools and there's still such a role which is needed to support schools. There just still seems to be such a huge squeeze on English and Maths being such a focus in primary and actually, you know, that really does still filter through to Secondary because young people aren't getting what they need. And often, you know, the answer is more English and Maths, more English and Maths. And actually, there are other ways to approach it. So that's why I do the job that I do. I just think that education should be so rich and full of everything. And music is just such a beautiful thing for young people to get involved with. So that's why I'm here.

**Emma Cragg:** Perfect, thanks Abi and Jamie.

**Jamie Munn:** I'm the development manager at Music Mark. I've been doing that for a couple of years. And why I got into music education, I suppose, because I never really left in that I went to music college, came out, worked quite a lot in community music as a facilitator, workshop leader, that sort of thing, doing lots of peripatetic teaching in schools. Leading projects and then kind of falling into Music Mark a couple of years ago, which is a bit of a different sphere, but very much enjoying it.

**Emma Cragg:** Great. Thanks, Jamie. And actually, I might just do a little quick introduction to myself as well, because I think some of the podcast listeners will probably have heard my voice if they've listened to previous episodes. But other than me being on the podcast team with Aimee and Yusef might not actually know what I do. So, I'm Emma and I'm the Marketing and Communications Officer at Music Mark. So looking after all of our newsletters, articles for the website, putting together content and things like that. And I really wanted to work music education because I guess similarly to Jamie, I don't really feel like I ever left it much after studying music at uni. I was very involved with outreach work in the music society while I was there and thought that that was really important, making sure that as many young people as possible can get involved with music and music education. And so, the role at Music Mark really seemed like a great way to be involved with that and the advocacy work that Music Mark does I think is really important.

So now I think it would be really nice to talk about some of our highlights from Music Mark this year. For me, I think again, this podcast has to be, it would be silly if I didn't say that that was one of the highlights of the year. I think starting, we launched in January. And I don't think a day has gone by where I haven't thought about what else needs doing for the podcast because it has been an absolute mammoth. I think something that's been really rewarding work, getting together people to talk about all of these different topics for music education. And actually, it's been really nice seeing how it's helped the guests that we have on to connect as well. Quite a

few times the guests that we've had might not have ever really met each other before, even though they're often or almost always doing very similar work just in different spaces. And that's been a really nice bonus, I think. So that's definitely been my highlight of this year. Abi, what would you say your highlight has been?

**Abi Marrison:** My highlight is from the start of the academic year, so September, which really isn't that long ago, but I'm really pleased that this year we decided that we would stop Music Mark schools. We stopped that in the summer and we launched the Music Mark of Recognition in September. And the reason it's such a highlight for me is because there are many people who think that all Music Mark is and all they do is a quality marker stamp to say, okay, we have the Music Mark. We did something in music and that's it. And it's great to be able to refresh, to start again so that schools get recognition for what they do. But also, they realise that Music Mark is the organisation name. We're a subject association. We have a huge membership, and we do so much. And from the relaunch, it's just meant lots of new conversations, people understanding that they can buy membership, what they can get from that, the training and events. And it just feels like such a positive step because not only can schools who've received a Music Mark of Recognition be really proud of that, we've got over 1,500 schools, I think, that have received one so far, and we're still quite early in the process. And it's just lovely to see schools say, yeah, we're really proud of the music education we provide, the relationship we have with our music service, and just for other people to go, okay, Music Mark aren't just a mark. It's not just a logo or a badge. Let's find out about the podcast. Let's find out about the other things that we can get from a connection with Music Mark. So that's a great highlight for me.

**Emma Cragg:** Absolutely. I think Music Mark of Recognition has been a really exciting thing to launch this year. And yeah, really key with the myth busting, I think about what Music Mark is and does and the other ways that we can support schools.

**Abi Marrison:** And I love what Katie's done with the certificates and logos. They look great.

**Emma Cragg:** Yeah, they do, they look fab. Jamie, what's been your highlight of the year?

**Jamie Munn:** I suppose like many other people in the team, the highlight is something that hasn't quite happened yet, in that we have our Annual Conference in a couple of weeks. And apart from probably being the only chance in the year that you can meet as many people face to face, given the reach of Music Mark and how, well, spread across the country we are as a nationwide organisation. But for the past few years, we've been running our awards. And for the past few months, we've been receiving in nominations from members and staff of member organisations. And it's quite a bit of a highlight to read through all of the great work that's going around across the country, especially this year, we had more nominations than I think the previous two years combined. And what's really heartening, I suppose, is that in areas, especially where we've had a campaign focus over the past few years, so Talk in to Action, and This Is Not A Rehearsal, which focus on inclusion and sustainability respectively. We've had a huge increase in nominations in both of those categories. So, whilst we can't necessarily take

credit for making those projects happen, I think at least we're getting people to think about how these areas can play a part in the day-to-day life of music educators and also recognising it as such and kind of making it bit more public.

Another highlight of the conference is given the time of year that we're listening to this last year's conference I think was for me definitely the first snowfall of the year, so if we can replicate that, that would be great. I know Laura our Events Manager would definitely not like that to happen, but you know it looked nice, it looked nice.

**Emma Cragg:** Yeah, I don't think Laura would be happy to hear that you're secretly wishing that we have the snow back because I logistically it's a nightmare, but I agree. It was really pretty when that happened last year. But yeah, I think the awards are a really, really nice element of the conference and kind of similarly to the Music Mark of Recognition. It's just a really nice way to, like you said, recognise the work that's going on and showcase it and make it more public so people can see why music education is important and where people are doing it really well.

Gary, finally, what has been your highlight of the year?

**Gary Griffiths:** As Jamie said, the conference is an opportunity for people to get together face to face and meet right the way across the breadth and depth of the organisation and the membership. And that's something that I look forward to every single year. Just on the weather at the conference, I was told not to promise snow this year, but I can guarantee a hailstone, just a single one. That was Laura's joke, not mine. My highlight, yes, I mean, really, it is about the depths and the breadth. And my real highlight of the year has been working with such fabulous team as we have at Music Mark. We've had a change already. We've got another one coming. Sarah, our Research and Data Manager, moved on to a bigger role at the Royal College. And we were very lucky, I think, to recruit Kerry into the role. Who's already having an impact and being great. The amount of expertise and the depth of thinking that goes on within the team is huge. And I really would love to see the membership connecting with the whole team and benefiting from that expertise because that really is there. I think it's very easy for perhaps as a member for you to see Music Mark as the individual that you have had most contact with, and for a lot of them that might well be Bridget. But actually, there's so much expertise right the way across the team and you've all been an absolute joy to work with this year. So, thank you all very much for that.

**Emma Cragg:** Thanks, Gary. That's very wholesome. And it took me a minute to get the Hailstone joke, but for any of our listeners who aren't sure, Laura Hailstone, our Events Manager, will be at the conference this year.

**Abi Marrison:** I'm glad it wasn't just me.

**Emma Cragg:** I thought Gary for a second, had just become a very specific weatherman. And I was wondering how you knew that that was going to happen. But then I got it.

**Jamie Munn:** I actually only got that joke right now as you said that.

**Emma Cragg:** Well, there we go, I'm glad I explained it.

**Jamie Munn:** So, I was even slower than Abi.

**Emma Cragg:** Okay. And so now looking forward into 2026, it'll be really nice to hear what everyone's looking forward to working on next year. And I'm going to come straight back to Gary because I'm really interested to hear what he has got to say on this. So obviously Rosie is going to be back full-time as the Programme and Engagements Director. But I am absolutely sure as it was before Gary joined as Programme and Engagements Director that you're still going to be very much involved in everything Music Mark's doing.

**Gary Griffiths:** I really, really hope so. I think we're working with Rosie again is obviously something to look forward to, although it does mean that I have to give her her job back, which is part I'm not so keen about. Yes, I mean, we've got some big things coming up in music education over the next year or two. So again, as always, I'm looking forward to that opportunity to support the network. I would say that my role is to make it easier to run your music service. Just because I happen to have worked with the music services, I'm equally happy to work with any part of the membership. And so, I'm looking forward to that again and looking forward to seeing how the sector remains buoyant and positive and creative in the face of some really quite tough challenges. And I know they will remain buoyant and creative and positive, and I know they'll come through, despite everything that gets thrown at them. But I'm very much looking forward to being part of that.

**Emma Cragg:** Great, thanks, Gary. Jamie, what are you looking forward to next year?

**Jamie Munn:** Well, one thing that we'll be doing over the next year is our next application to Arts Council England, which in itself is not an exciting thing. No offence to anyone who loves applications. But as part of that process, we'll be kind of looking at the whole organisation and what we do and what we want to do over the next few years. You know, whilst that's part of the course, and we're always looking at what we do to kind of sit down and actually be part of a group that's thinking open-mindedly about what we can do is always quite exciting. So, I think for sure that will be something to look forward to over the next few months.

**Emma Cragg:** Perfect, thanks Jamie. And Abi, what about you?

**Abi Marrison:** So the year ahead looks, it feels huge. At the moment that we're recording this, we are imminently waiting for the Curriculum and Assessment Review. It's so soon. And by the time this podcast comes out, that will be out. The new revised inspection framework for Ofsted for schools in England is also out and inspections will be starting again in November. We've also got the announcement of the tender for the National Centre for Arts and Music coming at some point and on top of that we also know that there'll be curriculum drafters who will be asked to start doing work on the new curriculum so you know there's so much going on but they're not necessarily things I'm looking forward to they're the things I've got to get my teeth into they're gonna be lots lots going on for schools and just waiting for everything to settle. And then the things I'm really looking forward to is just like Gary said, how we then support our members. So, what I know we've got coming up to support classroom teachers in our training and events is brilliant. We've got a session happening in February on assessment where we've got ABRSM, OCR, a multi-academy trust called DRET and Pearson all coming to talk about what they think assessment in music should look like, which would be a great session for our members to come and join and bring their points of view because that's what our T-Time is all about. So, I'm looking forward to T-Time. I'm looking forward to the Secondary Mini-Series that Janetta Hurst is still running for us. We've had one of them, we've got two more to come. We've got the BBC 10 pieces coming in the summer. We have got Albion Music and Beat Goes On coming to do some CPD for primary teachers about how to just use what you've got already in your school to teach music if you aren't going to go out and buy instruments, you're not going to do anything else, how can you make it happen? So, it's an exciting programme for teachers and we want teachers to know that it's all out there. But that's what I'm looking forward to on top of lots that's going to be going on around the edges.

**Emma Cragg:** Yeah, so much going on there. So many exciting things to look forward to. And I think what all three of you have pointed towards is just there is a lot going on. And so I'm sure it's going to be a busy year. And I suppose that feeds into what I'm looking forward to for next year. Well, sadly, I'm not going to be working with Music Mark anymore next year. This is my like last full week as we're actually recording this episode. But I am absolutely looking forward to watching from the sidelines, I am absolutely going to be signing up to all of the newsletters and seeing what Music Mark is working on and so I'll definitely be keeping tuned in to everything that's going on.

**Emma Cragg:** Now we're going to do our quick fire round of asking some more light hearted questions just to get to know you all behind the Music Mark staff persona. First up, I want to hear what everyone's favourite song is. And I think mine would have to be Cloud Busting by Kate Bush. Jamie?

**Jamie Munn:** Without sounding highbrow, it would be not one song, four songs, Four Last Songs by Richard Strauss.

**Abi Marrison:** I'm really surprised Emma didn't go with Sabrina Carpenter's song. I'm going to go with The Dying Light by Sam Fender.

**Gary Griffiths:** I really struggle with this sort of question. Yes, I've not really got one, but I would say that *L'heure exquise* by Reynaldo Hahn is exquisite. I thought maybe we were going to say favourite Christmas song, which case it would be *Stop the Cavalry*.

**Emma Cragg:** Very nice. Thanks, Gary. I'm not even going to try and re-pronounce whatever you just said, but hopefully someone can try and spell that out for the show notes if anyone wants to go and listen to anyone's favourite songs after this. I'll leave that to someone else to work out. Okay, great. Okay, now favourite artist for everyone. My gut wants to also say Kate Bush, but I feel like that's a cop out because I used her for my favourite song. So, I'm going to go Elton John for favourite artist. Jamie?

**Jamie Munn:** I'll stick with theme and it will be Jesse Norman, specifically singing *Four Last Songs* by Richard Strauss.

**Abi Marrison:** Yeah, and I'm not going to be well behaved and I'm going to repeat the same artist from the same song. I'm going to go with Sam Fender. There is a theme coming here. Yes, have seen him live four times.

**Gary Griffiths:** For me, there's something about the way Americans train sopranos. I've always liked Barbara Bonney and I do like Renée Fleming as well.

**Emma Cragg:** Great, I think that's a nice mix of people. Okay so now I want to come to album of the year, so this doesn't have to be a new album that's come out this year or anything like that, it could be just something that you've spent a lot of time listening to this year, or feels like it's been a big part of the year. I feel like there's been a lot of good albums that have come out this year actually that I've really enjoyed listening to. But if I had to pick one, I'm going to say *The Clearing* by Wolf Alice because for me it's like a no skip album. It's all really good. Jamie, what about you?

**Jamie Munn:** I'm going to stick with my choice and it's Jessie Norman and her *Four Last Songs*, especially this time of year, know, headphones on, wind blowing around, good vibes.

**Abi Marrison:** I'm going to stick with Sam Fender because he was the Mercury Award Prize winner for people watching this year. But I will add to that, I bought my husband a vinyl record player earlier on in the year and it's been really interesting what albums that we've then gone out to purchase that we're happy to listen to from end to end without skipping anything. As you get so used to selecting a song to listen to or being able to skip things. So, it's interesting the ones we've gone back to that we've been really nostalgic about and gone, oh no, I really need that on vinyl. So there have been some interesting ones, but actually a surprise one has been Noah Kahan.

**Gary Griffiths:** It's a late one in the year for me and it's for personal reasons because my father's been ill. We've been listening to some of his old favourites so best of Burt Bacharach and The Shadows.

**Emma Cragg:** Oh that's lovely. I think it's really nice when there's that sense of nostalgia there. And with the records as you were talking about, Abi, as well, I think that's a much more thoughtful way of listening to music rather than just putting something random on and skipping it all. Next up now, these last two are very Music Mark staff team specific, which is because we're talking about it all the time in the team's chats, which is what our favourite biscuit is. Now myself and Laura did kind of cause controversy in the chat one day when we both revealed we weren't massive biscuit lovers. But at the same time, if I do have a favourite biscuit and it is a Jammie Dodger, because I feel like it's quite a childish biscuit because it's full of strawberry jam, but I just can't help it. Or alternatively, the like BN biscuits that I could only ever get them in France filled with raspberry jam. Those are more elite than a Jammie Dodger, but they're quite hard to come across in the UK. Jamie?

**Jamie Munn:** I mean, I think I have a bit of a reputation on the team for eating too many baked goods. My top biscuit, let's say, would be the Humble Custard Cream. Whilst it is the cheapest out of the lot, it's an all-rounder. It doesn't crumble into your coffee. Perfect.

**Emma Cragg:** I just knew you were going to say that, I don't know how, but I could just tell that you were going to say custard cream.

**Jamie Munn:** I'll take that as a compliment.

**Emma Cragg:** Abi?

**Abi Marrison:** I was going to go with granola bar but I don't think you'd get away with that as a biscuit. I don't think granola bar would be allowed. I'm probably going to have to, I never buy them, but I know that a bourbon, if I was given a tray of biscuits, a bourbon would be the one I'd pick up. But yeah, never actually buy them in the house.

**Gary Griffiths:** I had a terrible experience with custard creams at a youth orchestra concert recently. In the interval they serve coffee and biscuits and there was this plate, I thought oh there's a custard cream that's nice, I picked it up and it had orange cream in the centre, it was revolting. I'm still traumatised, but my favourite, sorry, is I do like a dark chocolate ginger.

**Emma Cragg:** Oh, that sounds nice. I feel like that's quite a rogue, unusual choice there.



**Gary Griffiths:** Yeah, and if borders wouldn't do for every day, then Morrison's best range has a very nice one.

**Emma Cragg:** Thanks, Gary. Always good to have some biscuit recommendations for everyone. Okay, and then last but not least, I have to know if you're a cat or a dog person. Again, not to be controversial, I do think I'm both. I love cats and dogs. If I had to pick one, I think I do side with dogs a little bit more. But when I'm older, I'm absolutely gonna have cats and dogs. I could never just pick one. Jamie?

**Jamie Munn:** Well, I've never had either, so I would say probably objectively neither, but if I had to choose, it would be a cat just because they can look after themselves and they're a bit eternally judgmental. They're a bit smarter, they're smarter.

**Emma Cragg:** Do you feel like that reflects your personality too?

**Jamie Munn:** I think that's a question for Abi and Gary.

**Abi Marrison:** The independence.

**Jamie Munn:** I won't ask you Emma because you'll have an answer ready.

**Abi Marrison:** I'll move on swiftly. This is hard and it's a great question for the Music Mark team because there is often a cat walking across camera from most of the team and with Kerry joining us we have a dog to keep my dog company and Rosie's dog company so it's a hard one but Alba is within hearing distance, my 14 year old yellow Labrador. If I didn't say dogs I'd be in huge, huge trouble. But I have so much love for the Music Mark cats and yeah, my son comes to say hello to the rest of the Music Mark team just to see their cats. So it's got to be dog then cat, but it's close.

**Gary Griffiths:** I grew up with dogs, but we've had cats mainly because we both worked full time and it didn't seem fair to have a dog. I do miss a dog. I think you can have a deeper relationship and a more two-way relationship with a dog, but it has to be said that as Abi says, the Music Mark cats are much more entertaining on screen.

**Emma Cragg:** Yeah, I think that is probably true. I mean, if you had a dog walking across your laptop every day, I feel like that would be quite disruptive. OK, well, great. Thanks, everyone. Well, that brings us to the end of our Christmas questions. I hope everyone has had a great year. Hope everyone has a great Christmas. And we'll see you all in 2026.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Next, we're catching up with Chris, Laura, Matthew and Myself. So, I'm going to let each of you introduce yourselves. It'd be great to hear a little bit about your role and why you wanted to work in music education in the first place. So, Chris, can I start with you?

**Chris Buglass:** You know what? This is the one question I haven't thought about. I was too busy thinking about songs and things like that. OK, here we go. Yeah, I'm Chris Buglass, the Membership and Operations Director for Music Mark. So essentially what that means is kind of looking after the day to day running of the organisation and obviously including all of our engagement with the members and how we engage with the members. So being with Music Mark for three years and absolutely love it to bits. In terms of why did I want to get into music education, I think initially it was a really great, it just felt like a really great opportunity to do something different, but I mean that was a sort of a few years ago back in 2018. Like after I'd left music education and was working in the refugee and asylum seeker sector, I just found that I was missing music education a lot and working in the cultural sector. So, when the opportunity to join Music MarK came along, it just felt like a bit of a no brainer because it was just everything that I'd been kind of thinking about and missing from my previous job. So, I think that's why I'm here now.

**Laura Hailstone:**

Hello, yeah, so Laura Hailstone, I'm Training and Events Manager at Music Mark. I think I've been here about two and a half years maybe now. Actually, getting into music education wasn't necessarily an intentional thing, but I'd worked in arts and culture and did music as a sort of young person a long time ago. And then I moved out of cultural services and did something more corporate, which I just didn't really get on with that well. And so, then I decided I wanted to head back into something a bit more cultural and the Music Mark job appeared and sounded great. Liked the idea of working for an organisation like this and I like that, you know, feel like part of something that's giving back. And I think being in around music is such an important thing for young people generally that it's just a really great space to be working in.

**Matthew Crisp:**

I'm Matthew Crisp and I am the Membership and Operations Officer at Music Mark. And that role involves a lot of communication with our audience, whether they're getting in touch with an inquiry or phoning us up. And I also make sure that all our systems are running smoothly day to day and generally help out with lots of other different bits and pieces. I took part in a lot of music when I was growing up and so it's really great to be able to contribute back to ensure that young people today are getting the best music education that can be provided.

**Aimee Christodoulou:**

Perfect, thank you. I'm actually gonna introduce myself as well because it's been nearly a year of the podcast, but I don't think any of us on the podcast team have actually told anyone who we are. So I'm Amy Christodoulou. I'm the Social Media and Content Officer for Music Mark. So I

work with the Marketing team on our digital campaigns. I create content for our social media channels and I work on the podcast team. And why did I want to work in music education, well I've been lucky enough to access great music education throughout my life, and I feel that every young person should have access to that, and that's really what Music Mark is all about. So after studying music at uni, when I saw the opportunity with Music Mark pop up, I jumped at the chance to combine my love of music with a role that could really make a difference.

So next question is what is your highlight from the year? So, Chris, I'm gonna come to you first.

**Chris Buglass:** Oh I'm going to give the professional answer, which was the release of the DEMOS report, which might not be the sort of the sexiest thing that Music Mark have done this year but, for me like one, having been quite involved in the project and had pushed for it and also to because of that it was something new and it was like a new space that Music Mark had moved into, it just felt like quite an important piece of work that we did. And it sort of felt like we were doing something different for our members and for the sector. I think what came out of that is a really sort of valuable piece of work in terms of advocacy and in terms of discussing the importance of music education in England. So I am going to go with the DEMOS report.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I think we can call the DEMOS report sexy. I think that's fair enough.

**Chris Buglass:** Your words not mine.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Don't let Bridget hear that one. Go on Laura you're next.

**Laura Hailstone:** So my highlight, I guess, is actually after months and months of emailing lots of people, I finally get to see them all in person at the conference. And that's one of my favourite bits of the year, just because I genuinely don't know what half of these people look like until I get to the conference and then I get to say hello to them. And it's like I feel like I know them and it's such a really, really lovely thing. And obviously the conference is very music based and we had some amazing performances that year, which I really love actually that we get to bring the product of the work of the people we're here for into the conference in that way as well. So that's my highlight of the year.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I think I'd have been worried if you didn't say the conference, to be honest. Matthew, you're up next.

**Matthew Crisp:** I have another Music Mark highlight, which is the release of our advocacy timeline. It was a big piece of work to work on delving into Music Mark's archive of history of the organisation and trying to present that in an organised and approachable way. And yeah, I really enjoy working on sort of web development projects. So that was really enjoyable.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Lovely. My highlight has to be this podcast. We launched it this year. It's been such a fun project to work on. I've got to meet loads of people across the sector and find out about all the cool things they're doing. So, it's just been a really nice opportunity to branch out. Obviously, I love working with the team as well, but it's nice to chat to everyone else in the sector as well. So, last of the more formal questions, if you like, before our quick-fire round. What is everyone looking forward to working on next year? So Chris, do want to start us off?

**Chris Buglass:** I'm not sure I can really say what I'm looking forward to working on next year, only because it's not really been announced yet in terms of the details and stuff. But I think that our next kind of big campaign, so obviously our most recent one was This Is Not A Rehearsal. I think our next campaign, I'm really excited about what we can do with it. And I'm really excited about hopefully some of the changes, some of the positive changes that we might be able to see in the sector because of it. So yes, I guess watch this space, but that's what I'm looking forward to.

**Laura Hailstone:** I mean, it was great going back to the East Midlands Conference Centre for the Music Mark Conference this year, but I'm looking forward to a different venue next year because I just enjoy the challenge of figuring all the different bits and pieces out, but no spoilers yet because we haven't confirmed. But generally, the programme is really fun working across the team and working with lots of people from within the sector to deliver the programme, to you know, build that piece of work all the training and activity that we hopefully using really good to support music educators across our membership.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I like that you're both going for things where you're not giving away spoilers. Like really leave the audience wanting some more there.

**Chris Buglass:** That's not premeditated or anything.

**Matthew Crisp:** I'm trying to think of something mysterious I can say now. Sadly, I don't think I have anything mysterious. And that's partly because I don't actually know what I'll be working on next year. So, I would say my I'm looking forward to getting the conference website going again for the next conference because it's going to be a lot easier this year, because we did a lot of development on it in the last 12 months. So, it'll be really exciting to see how that develops and how and also how much less work there is to do on it this year.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** So, you're looking forward to less work.

**Matthew Crisp:** Yes, this is quite mysterious, because what am going to do with that time? So yes, I'm looking forward to an absence of work in the next year.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Wow, we're making the music mark team sound really good. I might have to cut that last bit out.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I think mine is maybe a little bit of a cop out because I've already said my highlight from this year, but we'll be launching season two of the podcast in January. And I feel like we've learned a lot over the past year. And I'm going to be doing some more training on podcast related things tomorrow. So, I'm looking forward to seeing where we can take the podcast next with the next season.

**Chris Buglass:** Yeah, I think we all are. I think we all are, really.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Aw nice.

**Chris Buglass:** It's been good to see. It's been good to see where it started from, where it's at. So yeah, roll on 2026.

**Aimee Christodoulou:**

Exactly, looking forward to it. So next up, I've got a quick fire round of questions. I feel like this is a really good opportunity for people to just learn a bit more about the Music Mark team and who we are as people outside of our work. I'm going to start with what is your favourite song? So, Chris.

**Chris Buglass:** It's just such a difficult question as I don't have one favourite song. I have like a favourite song for every possible scenario that I might encounter in life, you know. But, you know, if I'm being pinned down, if I'm thinking about quality of the lyrics, just how great the music is, how it sort of just takes you to a particular place. I'm going to go with Thunder Road by Bruce Springsteen, little bit obvious maybe but it's just phenomenal.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Very nice. Go on, Laura.

**Laura Hailstone:** Outstanding choice Chris. I'm glad I didn't write that one down because it was on the the list because I had the same issue but I'm gonna go with Piano Man by Billy Joel.

**Chris Buglass:** Nice.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Is there a story behind it?

**Laura Hailstone:** It's just, you know, it's a great song. At no point am I ever gonna hear that and be like, I really didn't wanna hear that song today. yeah, it's just a brilliant classic.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** That is a fair choice, Matthew?

**Matthew Crisp:** My favourite song of all time is I Wish I Knew How it Would Feel to be Free by, well as covered by Nina Simone, I just think there is really nothing better than that song sung by her and it's a song for freedom, it's a song of passion and she's just completely in the moment when she's singing that song and I just absolutely love watching there's a live recording of her that you can watch and I absolutely love it.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Beautiful choice. If you send me the link for that live recording, we'll pop it in the show notes and anyone listening can go and watch it after as well. My choice is more of a nostalgia based one, I think. Mine is Dreams by Fleetwood Mac. And that's because my very first job as a teenager was in a guitar shop and we played Fleetwood Mac, the Rumours album, all the time. So, I feel like that was the anthem of me being a teenager. And it's a good tune, isn't it?

**Chris Buglass:** It's a bit of a banger. Yeah.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** It is a banger. So next up is who is your favourite artist?

**Chris Buglass:** I think, again, super difficult one. But in terms of like, if I go purely on who's the artist that I've seen the most, which is probably as good a metric as any to, you know, objectively measure who my favourite artist is, I'm going to go with a guy called Frank Turner, who I think I've probably seen about 20 times at the last count. I just think his live shows are great. And, you know, I have like such strong emotional connections with lot of his early albums so yeah going with Frank

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Have you actually seen him like 20 times?

**Chris Buglass:** Oh yeah, definitely.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Impressive.

**Chris Buglass:** Yeah, think, well, I think it's 19 actually. I think it's 19 at last count, but let's not quibble. And I've got tickets for next year, so it will be 20.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Nice. Go on, Laura.

**Laura Hailstone:** Well, I went down a rabbit hole of the Beatles yesterday, so that would probably be up there. But if I have to pick one individual artist, I'd probably say David Bowie, just because I think the breadth of music across what he's done is amazing. Plus, there's a little nod towards Hull with Mick Ronson from The Spiders from Mars, which I'm always keen to give Hull a little shout out.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I thought Chris might have something to say there, because I briefly remember a Music Mark team dinner where Chris wasn't that keen on David Bowie, I think. Sorry to out you on the podcast.

**Chris Buglass:** All I was saying all I was saying, if you remember, there were some quite contentious opinions expressed at that dinner. Jamie. But all I've said about David Bowie is that. And I think similar to Queen, I think some absolutely phenomenal pieces of work, but I think there's a lot of less quality stuff in the back catalogue. I reckon Queen's about 20, 25 % great songs and the rest of it not great. I kind of think the same about Bowie, but that is absolutely an opinion. I don't put that out there as fact.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I'm looking forward to the backlash we'll get after this episode airs.

**Chris Buglass:** Exactly.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** And Matthew, what about you?

**Matthew Crisp:** My favorite artist, I'm going slightly left field here for Sandra Kerr. Now, Sandra Kerr was the voice of Madeleine the Ragdoll in Bagpuss. And I'm not quite old enough to be of the Bagpuss generation. But it just so happened that when I was growing up, Bagpuss was the one of the videotapes we had on the shelf. And that would be my go-to thing to watch when the television was offered. So, Sandra Kerr singing those songs in Bagpuss has stayed with me. And she also does fantastic work bringing, keeping the folk song tradition alive and taking it into schools and educating. And I just think her voice is magnificent and the songs are magnificent that she sings.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Lovely. I'm gonna have to go and have a listen after this, I think. But that's a really sweet choice. I like that it's from an early memory and it's stuck with you. Mine has to be Raye. I just think she's a legend. I think she's amazing. I feel like she's our next Amy Winehouse. I've seen her live a few times and she rocks my world every time, so easy choice for me. Next question is, what is your album of the year? Now this doesn't have to be something that was released this year, but maybe something you've listened to a lot this year or kind of defines the year for you. Hard question, I know. Go on, Chris.

**Chris Buglass:** No, this one's super easy actually for me. Like I could have told you what would have been on my sort of like 2025 end of year playlist by about March. So, this year not particularly what I've listened to previously, but I've become absolutely obsessed with a band called Ghost. No idea why, but I have, and I'm just kind of riding that particular wave at the minute. But yeah, they released an album this year, *Skeletá*, which is, I just can't stop listening to it. Well, actually any of their stuff. But yeah, because it came out this year and that was my kind of my introduction to them. I'm going with *Skeletá* by Ghost.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** And Laura?

**Laura Hailstone:** It's maybe not necessarily the most listened to album that I've had this year, but I'm gonna go a bit festive because I have listened to it multiple times in the last few days and that is Vince Guaraldi's *Charlie Brown Christmas* album. I flipping love it, it's amazing and it's so sweet and aww, it's just so cool. So yeah, that's what I'm going for.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I love that you've chosen a Christmas album. Matthew, what's your album of the year?

**Matthew Crisp:** Well, we went to see Flight this year in York, and I had never heard of them before and just thought they were absolutely fantastic. So, they're a new discovery for me this year and I've really enjoyed listening to their new album of 2025.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Even though I asked this question, I found this question really, really difficult. But I think it's gonna be another slightly cop-out answer because my previous answer was Raye, but her album, *My 21st Century Blues*, it's a masterpiece. And it came out a couple of years ago, but it's one of those that I haven't got bored of no matter how many times I listen to it. So I feel like that's a good sign of an album of the year. So the last two are a bit more controversial, the final two questions. For anyone listening who doesn't know, Music Mark is a fully remote team. So, a lot of our, you know, office chat happens over Microsoft Teams. And one of the most important things that comes up regularly is what everyone's biscuit choice. And so I have to ask everyone, what is your favourite biscuit? Go on, Chris.



**Chris Buglass:** So, I happen to think that a Twix is classed as a biscuit. And so, if it's allowed, I'm going to go with Twix. If it's not allowed and I don't know who's setting the rules, but if it's not allowed, there's a it's like a kind of like a farmhouse type thing called an oat flip. Which some people know about them, some people don't, but I think they are the greatest things ever. So if you can get like a chocolate dipped oat flip, I mean, that's about as good as life gets.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I think we'll let the Twix pass, but it's nice to have two options in there. I'm not a Twix fan. Controversial, but I actually can't stand a Twix.

**Chris Buglass:** That is very controversial.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** I don't think I've ever seen your face react like that Chris. Laura, what's your favourite biscuit?

**Laura Hailstone:** I'm sorry, still reeling from the Twix thing. So, controversially, I'm not actually a big biscuit fan and I rarely have them in the house and yeah. However, again, I'm being a little bit festive because when you get the big boxes of biscuits at Christmas, the one that I always like is the one that's got not a lot of biscuit but is just covered in thick chocolate. That's the one that I will always go to and there's only ever two of those in the pack which is really annoying. But yeah I'd say let's go for the really thickly coated chocolate shortbread thing or a nice homemade biscotti is the other one because yeah that's you can't ever go too far wrong with that either.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Matthew?

**Matthew Crisp:** My biscuit of choice is a strongly spiced but soft gingerbread.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** That is a very solid choice. I feel like your biscuit choice does say a lot about you as a person. No offense, because I did say I don't like Twix, but I do like you, Chris. Mine is, well, like Laura, I don't often have biscuits in the house, but not because I don't like them, because I will just eat the whole pack in one go. They can't stay very long. So I'm going to say a Biscoff because I just feel like they're nice and simple, they dunk in tea very well, but I don't have them in the house that often, to be honest. So, the final question. This one's also controversial because I think we're quite split as a team between cat owners and dog owners, but are you a cat or a dog person? I think I know the answer for yours, Chris and Laura at least, but Chris, go on.

**Chris Buglass:** I love cats and dogs, like genuinely always wanted a dog like ever since I was a kid and never had one. And now, yeah, like life is sort of a little bit too busy. Like me and my wife

tend to be away lot, just with work and stuff. So, it's just not fair to have a dog. But we do have a cat Iggy who we just love to bits. So, on that basis, I am a cat person.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** And Laura?

**Laura Hailstone:** Very similar to Chris here. I love dogs it doesn't work for me for having one. Although my friend's dog, Hugo, I'm his dog mother because I went with them when they went to go and choose him. So, I have many dogs in my life that I care about. But as anyone who's been on a sort of Teams or Zoom call with me probably knows, I do have cats. I actually have two, but one of them you hardly ever see, but Morris makes a regular appearance on my screen, usually about three o'clock in the afternoon when he's starting to think about food. So, I guess, I guess we'll have to say that I'm a cat person, there's a very slight edge, but only on current basis, and because they can hear me in the other room.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** And Matthew, I think Matthew you're the one I'm not sure on.

**Matthew Crisp:** Horse.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Okay, come on. That wasn't the question.

**Matthew Crisp:** I don't get enough opportunities to converse with horses and when I do it's quite clear that I'm a horse person and not a cat or a dog person.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** Okay, I'm gonna let that pass because I have nothing else I can say on the matter, I don't think. You were very sure about it.

**Chris Buglass:** Well, he had very good justification for his answer.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** He did, he did. I always say I'm a dog person. My husband says I'm a cat person in denial, actually. And we did have a cat until earlier this year. And I do like cats, but I think dogs will always win for me. I just love dogs and I think I had because I had a dog as a kid I feel like whatever you grew up with you kind of lean more in that direction don't you?

**Chris Buglass:** Probably, probably. But then I didn't, I mean, I one goldfish as a kid and I certainly wouldn't be saying the goldfish are my favourite.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** You can't cuddle a goldfish though, can you?

**Chris Buglass:** Well, not well, no.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** And on that note, thank you for letting me subject you to this and being part of the Christmas episode. It was really nice to chat to you all.

Finally, Yusef had a lovely chat with Kerry, Katie and Bridget.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Hello everyone. We're here for a Christmas episode and to introduce the entirety of the Music Mark team. So first off, Kerry, would you like to introduce yourself? You're a newer member of the Music Mark team. So maybe give a bit of background when you've joined, what got you into music education, where you've come from, who you are, what you do.

**Kerry Bunkhall:** Okay, happily. So, my name's Kerry Bunkhall, I am the Research and Data Manager for Music Mark and I started here in August, so I've only been here a few months and trying to figure out where things are but everyone's been really helpful so it's been wonderful. In terms of background, I've recently got my PhD in music in musicology, looking at French music in the 20th century and opera. But really the reason I wanted to work in music education is because I've had a lot of luck that has got me to some of the things that I've been doing. So, there's been a lot of things where I've just happened across really passionate and engaged people. And if I hadn't had those particular insights or those particular sort of interjections, then I don't know that I would have had the access to a lot of music that I have. So, for me, it's about making sure that anyone who wants music education whether it's because they want to do it for a living or just because it's fun, it's trying to make those avenues possible.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Amazing. Thank you, Kerry. Bridget would you like to answer the same question?

**Bridget Whyte:** Well, hello. So I'm Bridget White. I'm the CEO of Music Mark. I've been at Music Mark for eight and a half years now. And yeah, how did I get into music education? I sort of fell into it starting at the Arts Council as a secretary and an officer, then working for an orchestra and a conservatoire, and then going freelance. And my freelance career was very varied, but at one point I was asked if I would like to join Youth Music as one of their Regional Coordinators. And that sort of brought me into music education through some non-formal, informal music education sector, but made quite a lot of connections with music services through that. But also, my dad was a peripatetic music teacher. So, it sort of connected my world, my family world and my career world, and I haven't really looked back so I've been working I guess in music education in its broadest sense and music for music's sake and music for goodness sake since 2001-ish I guess. Yes, I'm that old.

**Yusef Sacoor:** And then finally, Katie, would you like to introduce yourself?

**Katie May:**

Hello, I am Katie May. I'm the Marketing and Communications Manager for Music Mark. I've been at Music Mark for about two years now and I wanted to work in the music education sector because music has always been an interest of mine since I started learning the clarinet at primary school. And I think it's something that everyone should have access to. And for me, it was also just important that I had a job that I really enjoyed doing as well.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Amazing. Thank you, Katie. And unprecedentedly for me, for people who regularly listen to this podcast, I now have to introduce myself. If you've suffered my voice before, you'll know that I'm Yusef and I am Events and Training Officer here at Music Mark. I got into music education from a slightly strange route when I was, I guess, a young person, a teenager, I did a community arts festival slightly crazily with some Arts Council money. And then I went on to work for an Arts Council NPO doing community music, extensively on their wider music offering on an outdoor festival, and then doing amazing work, but also by proxy doing a lot of youth work by nature of what the charity did, and really saw just how transformative music with young people can be, and gave me a real fire in my belly, for using music to improve young people's lives and then I came to Music Mark about three years ago I think, and, yeah, help with, the training and events.

So, it comes to your highlights of the year. So it comes to your highlights of the year. Let's go in straight away back to you, Katie. What was your highlight of the year? It could be personal. It could be Music Mark related, it could be music related, it could be music education related, it's your choice.

**Katie May:** My highlight is not work related, but it is music related. This year I decided to join a community wind band which has been really fun, it allowed me to get back into playing the clarinet after years of not picking it up so that's definitely my highlight of the year.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Could you jump straight back in or was it a bit of a challenge?

**Katie May:** It was actually fine. I was expecting to really struggle because I don't think I picked up the clarinet for about eight or nine years, but it was actually fine. Yeah, it was all good.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Like riding a bike. Bridget, would you like to go?

**Bridget Whyte**

Yeah, of course. You gave us the questions in advance for us to think about. And my goodness, it preoccupied quite a long time to try and think of any highlight. There are too many. Pretty much every single one-to-one or small group or larger group or conference that I've attended over the

last year has had a highlight, has had a moment where I've learned something new. Every day is a school day. But also I've connected with people and learned from people which has helped me in the job I do in terms of the influencing and connecting and supporting. So sometimes it's supporting somebody to say, you know, when they say something, I can say, well, you should talk to so and so because, or we've got this resource, connecting to organisations. So many stories that I hear and thinking about that one particular moment actually quite early in the year, in February I went up to Cumbria to the Cumbria Music Hub conference with teachers which took place in an amazing centre for special educational needs and music just outside Penrith. A glorious spring day looking out across the hills of the Lake District. It was just the beautiful setting, but it was also what was being said in the room and the conversations that we heard and I'm still quoting some of the things that the teachers said in those sessions. So it's memorable because of where it was, the weather, but particularly the people and what they said and how that really helps me do what I do because it's providing a real life example to hammer home a point with the government, with funders, with whoever it needs to be.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Yeah, the human stories are definitely the ones that seem to count the most. And even better listeners if you've got an invite to a national park that we can visit while also hearing those stories, that's an added bonus. Kerry, would you like to give us a highlight?

**Kerry Bunkhall:** Yeah, I similarly found this really hard because it's been quite a hectic year, you know, joining Music Mark has definitely been a highlight, especially because it's quite hard watching a lot of things you wish you could do something about or you wish you could be a part of and not being able to. So, it's been amazing to be able to actually be part of something that is really important. Otherwise, I spend a lot of time watching, you know, some of the different things happening with university music or and not really feeling like I've got a way of being able to contribute. So that's been a really big thing for me. But on a personal note, I put in my PhD on Francis Poulenc this year and got to go to his house in France and play on his piano and sort of I admittedly drank some of his wine from the vines that he used to grow there. So that connection with music, that sort of physical connection with music, I think was amazing and reminds you why things like museum trips and library trips and all of these other sort of hands-on experiences are huge and sort of making these composers real people so that you can have a different sort of relationship with music. That was wonderful.

**Yusef Sacoor:** If you heard any dogs barking in the background, we're coming to the pet question later. You may already have worked out that we're quite a pet friendly team here at Music Mark. Yeah, nice to hear everyone's highlights. I don't know what my highlight of the year is. I ask the questions, and I don't think of what my answers might be. I could really unsurprise everyone listening and say the conference, but I think every year I am really really impressed by the amount of incredible work that's being done by people. And people's differing but overwhelmingly young people centred approaches to music education. But by proxy of that, definitely the performances at the conference and having young people there I think is a great reminder, sometimes when people are going to a thing in a hall there's mostly adults, when you see young people performing, you're reminded exactly why you're there and why we all do the job that we do.

So, what is everyone looking forward to working on in the next year? Kerry, do you want to go first?

**Kerry Bunkhall:** Yeah, we've got some really exciting things sort of going on research and data wise and one of the most exciting things generally is just seeing all the research that is taking place and there is a lot. It's all just in its own little silos across the UK so we're in a really fortunate position to be able to see a really broad picture of what's going on and to try and get it out there and one of the best things for this year is going to be that we've got our first Higher Education Annual Conference. So that's going to be hosted at the School of Music at Cardiff University in May, on the 6th of May. And that would just be brilliant to bring together a lot of different levels of music education and music making. Because I think we're seeing this real need for connecting the levels and I know pipeline is the dreaded word, you know, like the Ofsted that everyone's terrified of, but those needs to sort of get universities talking to schools and cultural organisations and hubs and services. And for us, that's going to be really good to get a lot of people in one room and be sharing what we can be doing to all be supporting each other. And the hope is as well, we're going to be releasing a guide to outreach that I'm writing with the Schools Manager, Abi, which has been a joy in itself, just working with her, that is hopefully giving some actual practical tips so that we're sort of practicing what we preach and not just saying you should all be going and doing research, but actually going here's what you can do and how, and these are some ways that you can do that. So, I think for me, it's that idea of just bringing everyone into one space and going, okay, we should all just be working together as much as we can and how can we do that and what's working and what's not working because I think when you're all in one room together, it's a really good experience. And the annual conference was a really good experience for me to see what we could do. And so now being able to focus on it at a slightly different angle is going to be great. So yeah, really looking forward to that.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Katie, would you like to go next?

**Katie May:** Next year I am looking forward to working on the conference and I mean that quite generally so I'm really looking forward to coming up with the branding for the new conference but also then working on the comms plan for it, coming up with sort of different ideas of content to sell out the conference, encourage our members to book tickets and then being able to see those ticket sales rise as well is always really satisfying and it's always different every year for me as well even though I'm doing the same thing every year. It's always different things that pop up and it's a fun challenge to work on every year.

**Yusef Sacoor:** You're going to have a new team member as well.

**Katie May:** I am. Yes, we've got lovely Lucy joining us in January, which will be exciting.

**Yusef Sacoor:** So we may also have some future voices on the podcast from 2026. But finally, Bridget, maybe this is too much pressure to say, but you have full oversight of Music Mark. What are you most looking forward to over the next 12 months?

**Bridget Whyte:** Again, there's really too much to pick, but I'm excited by the HE work, Kerry, and the conferences coming up, particularly one in May. I'm excited that hopefully we'll be publishing, well, we will be publishing, a manifesto for the Welsh elections, which take place in May next year. We'll be publishing our vision for music education in Wales to support our membership across Wales. I'm looking forward to future planning with the team. We've started work on a business plan and I'm excited to be working with that. And we're delving into that quite deeply at our Team Away Day in January. But I think what I'm most excited about is the unknown stuff. Music Mark has a plan. Music Mark does its thing, and it supports, it connects its influences. But what I love about this job is the thing that happens and we go, right, okay, we need to do something about this. We need to support the music education ecology on this. And jumping in and finding a way to support colleagues, to shout about something great, to voice our concern about something that's not so great. So, there's a lot that's going to be developing across the country. Elections in Wales and Scotland, more development in Northern Ireland and of course in England we've got a new curriculum and a national centre to look forward to. So, it's all that unknown which I think is the most exciting thing to look forward to in 2026. We are going to be there, we're going to be supporting our networks, we are going to do what we do best which is support, connect and influence.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Great, Bridget. Well, I'm afraid that mine's much more base. Well, not really. The events team, we're supporting an event in the Northeast. It's the first time we're supporting one of those events, at least in my memory. So Laura and I are up to Newcastle in January, which I'm very excited for. One, because they've got a great team there and the program is shaping up to be really, really interesting. But also I love Newcastle as a city. It's a great city. I'm not going to pretend I'm excited for Gregg's. I live in Cornwall. Can't really beat a pasty. But yeah, I'm very excited about that on our end. And also heading up to Sound Connections Inclusive Practice Day. We're joining them in the springtime as well. And I'm really excited to see what that day offers, particularly as its youth led.

So, without further ado, we've got a load of quickfire questions. This is a really tricky one, what are your favourite songs? I'm hoping you can give some controversial opinions now. Perhaps not too controversial. But, Kerry, favourite song of all time, maybe? Or maybe just favourite song at the moment.

**Kerry Bunkhall:** I'm going to be honest, this has sent me into an existential crisis, Yusef, where I've spent the whole day trying to think about how to put anything down to one song. So I've sort of gone round and round in circles a little bit. I mean, it's Christmas, so I've been listening to a lot of Christmas music and I work with kids. We did a panto on the weekend, so I've had sort of certain music just blaring into my ears. But probably Oh Holy Night at the moment and it's an oldie and a classic and I've listened to a million different versions of it but it's that typical cheesy but makes me cry every Christmas so if I had to pick one for sort of this week I'd probably go with that.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Good to know. Well, Bridget, is it Wham?

**Bridget Whyte:** Well, no, I'm not gonna go for a Christmas song, although I'm enjoying some of them. But yeah, I was caught with Wham on the 4th of December, but apparently there's a reverse Whammageddon, so I'm now counting up rather than down. But no, again, I think it has to be a song that I'm loving now rather than an all-time favourite. I have an all-time favourite.

piece of music that's the Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis by Vaughan Williams, that would be my Desert Island disc. But my playlist of songs or a Desert Island disc of songs would obviously not include that because there isn't voices in it. Although if anyone's not heard the VOCES8 version of Lark Ascending they really should. My song, well, at the moment it's the Book of Love by Peter Gabriel. It's just a beautiful song, beautiful lyrics and version with orchestra, just glorious. And every time I hear it, I go, yeah, this is a song with a capital S and probably O-N-G too. So yeah, that's my song.

**Yusef Sacoor:** I'm very pro Peter Gabriel so happy to hear that. Weirdly never got on with Genesis but like Peter Gabriel. Katie, what about you?

**Katie May:** This is tricky for me as well because I don't know if I'd really say that I have a favourite song or a favourite artist to be honest. I tend to listen to the charts and the radio and my songs I listen to are always changing. A song that I've had stuck in my head a lot recently is a Taylor Swift song so maybe that is controversial.

**Yusef Sacoor:** It's definitely controversial, you're gonna get some opinions. Which one, sorry.

**Katie May:** It's the fate of Ophelia, her new from her new album. I wouldn't go as far as say it's my favourite song ever, but it's definitely very catchy. So that's my thought.

**Yusef Sacoor:** For me, again, yeah, impossible. Impossible to name a favourite song. And I wouldn't even go to say the artists that I'm about to mention are my favourite artists, but I've been listening to a lot of what I'm going to say what I've been listening to today. So as of the 10th of December, I've been listening to a lot of old school hip hop and weirdly Jurassic Five keeps coming up as the thing that I want to listen to. Concrete Schoolyard is going around my head. Obviously Little Sims, within the last couple of years, sampled that track and that's really hitting at the moment. And yesterday I was listening to sort of some Charles Mingus, very jazz. So that seems to be my current thing. Not being very quick-fire, it's certainly not my one-word answer, but I don't think anyone could manage that. So Katie, if Taylor Swift is not your favourite artist, do you have anyone that's slightly closer to being called that?



**Katie May:**

No, I honestly don't. I'm just always listening to different stuff. I went to see One Republic earlier this year, but again, I definitely wouldn't say that they're my favourite artist. I really like Coldplay as well. I'm always trying to get tickets for them and failing. But yeah, Coldplay, I really enjoy them as well.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Coldplay is it like a lottery for tickets for Coldplay?

**Katie May:** It is a bit, yeah, I haven't succeeded.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Maybe for 2026. Something to look forward to. Kerry?

**Kerry Bunkhall:** Yeah, I found this really hard and I think that the one band that I've never fallen out of love with or got bored of is Queen. And I think any mood that I'm in, there's some Queen that I want to listen to. So, I think if I had to pick anything, probably Queen. But I did my PhD on Francis Poulenc and so Frankie P is always going to be up there.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Bridget, how about you?

**Bridget Whyte:** So we're doing artists here. I've already mentioned VOCES8, there are folk artists, there's a band called Iona which I really love, Katie Polwart. Yeah, I think it really depends on the day. Vaughan Williams is up there if we're going for classical artists, classical composers as well. It can be so varied. Ask me tomorrow and I'll probably say three different things. So yeah, it's really hard. Yusef, what about you?

**Yusef Sacoor:** Goodness. I mean, so many, I have the most generic into, picking up an instrument, which is falling in love with the Beatles at about 13 years old. But I don't know if it's my favourite artist now, but it seems to be my easy get out when people ask me.

The next question is album of the year. It doesn't have to be from this year. Not all of us are constantly on the pulse of what's happening this year. I know that sounds bad for music people, doesn't it? But, Katie, have you got an album of the year?

**Katie May:** This is gonna be controversial again because I only listened to one album this year which sounds terrible, but it was the Taylor Swift album again.

**Yusef Sacoor:** You're not beating the allegations, Katie.

**Katie May:** I'm not a Swiftie but it is the only album I've listened to this year, so I guess that's what I'd have to say.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Kerry, how about you? Album of the year?

**Kerry Bunkhall:** Yeah, I'm also I'm not good with new things. I think the album for me this year, I went to see Transatlantic Ensemble do the whole of Rumours and some other Fleetwood Mac bits in the summer and it was amazing and it sort of set me back. I've always been obsessed with Rumours anyway. If I had to say like an album I could just listen to without stopping, definitely this year has been a Rumours year. How about you then Yusuf because you ask us all these questions and we have a meltdown but I need to hear yours.

**Yusef Sacoor:** I hate being on the other side. It shouldn't be allowed. I think it was this year, the Laura Marling album that came out right at the start of the year was really, really good. All of her lyrics are incredible, but the lyrics are immense on that album. Album of the year is so tricky, isn't it? So tricky. I've also listened to a decent amount of the Yusuf days with Tom Minch as well. I've listened to that quite a lot this year, really, really good jazz album. So, Bridget, what was your album of the year?

**Bridget Whyte:** I think probably the album I come back to again and again, and it's an old album, but it is probably the one I listen to as an album most would be Orchestrated by Midge Ure. He orchestrated a lot of his songs, and songs from ultra vox, which was one of my first concerts I ever went to as a young teenager. The orchestration is just takes the songs to another level, and I absolutely love them, so it's an album I will come back to again and again.

**Yusef Sacoor:** So on to the really big questions that I would say are obsessed over in the office, or the virtual office at Music Mark, which is what is your favourite biscuit. Kerry?

**Kerry Bunkhall:** Again, this was hard, because it depends on the day, doesn't it? It's like, am I feeling like, generally I realised everyone I've chosen has some form of chocolate. So quite clearly I'm there for the chocolate, not the biscuit, I think is what I've come to the conclusion of. But I think if I go to buy something, it's your typical milk chocolate digestive. And it's boring, but I feel like the classics are the best. So I think that's, if I had to go for one for the rest of my life, probably a milk chocolate digestive.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Katie, have you got any controversial biscuit opinions?

**Katie May:**

Like Kerry, I'm also here for the chocolate rather than the biscuit. My favourite biscuit is those Fox's chocolate rounds just because the chocolate to biscuit ratio is excellent and they always come up around Christmas so I'm eating a lot of them at the minute.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Yeah, Christmas is the time for it. I mean, I'm really bougie. I love a Viennese Whirl. The closer it gets the cake, the better. But finally, Bridget, what is your favourite biscuit? To accompany an Earl Grey tea, I imagine?

**Bridget Whyte:** Of course, Earl Grey tea's black. So probably just a plain digestive, although I will have a dark chocolate digestive if offered and would probably choose that beyond a plain digestive. There's something so wonderful about the first digestive out of the packet when it's still really fresh and it's just, yeah, just lovely. I know it sounds very boring, but I love a plain digestive biscuit.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Right, so biscuits, controversial, not so controversial. Let's go on to potentially, actually, I'm not sure if this is going to divide opinion in the present group, but are you a cat or a dog person? Katie?

**Katie May:** I am a dog person. I don't currently have my own dog but I've always grown up with dogs and plan on getting a dog when our house is sorted so yeah, dogs for me.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Kerry, how about you?

**Kerry Bunkhall:** I was a die-hard cat person and have had cats my whole life and got a dog a few years ago. We were planning on getting a cat, but a dog needed a home and so we took him in. And I've realized that my level of emotional neediness matches a dog. So I think as an animal, love cats indifference, arrogance, all of that really appeals to me. But as a thing to have, I love that my dog thinks I am God and the best thing to walk the planet. And I think that walking in and it being like you've left for years is what I need in my life. So, although as an animal, probably a cat, I think I would be, I'm a better dog owner than a cat owner, but I would never turn down anything to be honest.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Yeah, I'm a real fence-sitter here. I have no strong feeling either way. I really like pets, although I don't own one, which makes me a minority in the Music Mark team. Bridget, I have a feeling what you're going to say to cats versus dogs.

**Bridget Whyte:** I love a dog, but we have two cats and they rule our life really and quite often join a Music Mark meeting. So, I mean, there's one asleep behind me just now, and they can cause chaos, and they can be lovely. But yeah, definitely cats.

**Yusef Sacoor:** Well, on that note, I'm going to say thank you very much guys and a happy Christmas to all of our listeners.

**Aimee Christodoulou:** That's a wrap on season one of Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education. Thank you so much for listening this year, and we hope you've felt as inspired as we have by the fantastic guest speakers and their projects across the year. We wish you all a lovely Christmas break and a happy New Year, and we look forward to returning for season 2 in January. See you then.