



Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education

Episode 2: Pathways into Industry Transcript

[Intro music]

Yusef Sacoor: Welcome! You are listening to 'Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education', Music Mark's brand new podcast, where we spotlight wide-ranging experiences and perspectives from across the music education sector. We'll look at the big challenges to those working in music with young people and celebrate and share inspiring projects and stories from across the nation and beyond. So turn off your amp, put down the bow, pull down your mixers, and grab a cup of tea, as we bring our guests together to tackle music education's biggest questions, most inspiring projects and musical journeys of those involved. Thank you.

And thanks to Able Orchestra, who provided the intro, outro, and transition music for this episode.

Aimee Christodoulou: Welcome to episode two of Make Your Mark, Notes on Music Education. My name is Aimee, I am one of your podcast hosts, and in this episode, I caught up with Tom from the Musicians Union, Turner from Rap Club and the Spit Game, and Grifton, a professional trumpet player, to chat all things industry pathways. We discussed portfolio careers, the different hats you need to wear to sustain a music career, navigating the music industry, and more. We hope you enjoy listening.

Thanks everyone for joining us today! Could you please introduce yourself for our listeners?

Tom Eagle: Hi everyone, so my name is Tom Eagle. I'm the regional officer for the East and South East of England for the Musicians' Union. The Musicians' Union is the only trade union in the UK that represents professional musicians. We were founded in 1893 in Manchester, and we support professional musicians with workplace issues such as pay, legal advice, general career advice. We currently have about 35,000 members across all sections of the UK music industry and we also run campaigns to improve the lives of working musicians.

Aimee Christodoulou: Brilliant, thank you so much. It's amazing that we can get a spokesperson from the MU here today. Ben, would you like to introduce yourself?

Benjamin Turner: Yes, so my name is Benjamin Turner. Most people just call me Turner. And I used to be a classroom teacher. But while I was in the classroom, I started something called Rap Club, which now is running across schools across London. And then we've also got the collective called the Spit Game, which has young people who are now signed to some major labels, as well as making films which are getting into some exciting BAFTA qualifying festivals, so it's a whole mix of different creative stuff and it's very youth-led.

Aimee Christodoulou: We actually had some of the Spit Game performers at our Music Mark annual conference last year, it was amazing so thank you for that. And Grifton...

Grifton Forbes-Amos: Hello, my name is Grifton Forbes-Amos. I am a jazz trumpet player that studied at the Conservatoire in Leeds. My background of getting into the industry, I went through certain organisations like Tomorrow's Warriors, an organisation led by Gary Crosby to help youths leading into their time in college or into university to help them understand and prepare for the industry in jazz and just the genre as a whole.

Following upon that, had some background in NYJO, learning about the organisation of big bands and more traditional styles of jazz and then through the Leeds Conservatoire, allowing that to help me get into the industry a bit more through the professors teaching there and giving me guidance and understanding to how the industry works and stuff. So yeah.

Aimee Christodoulou: Thanks, Grifton. It's really great to have the perspective of a performer as well in the room. Of course, you all have quite different backgrounds. You've all probably taken quite different routes into the careers that you've ended up in now. I'm really interested to hear what has been your personal path into a career in the music industry?

Tom Eagle: Yeah, so before I worked full time at the MU, which has been about six years, I was a full-time professional player. Drums is my instrument, So I started playing when I was about 10 or 11, I think. Then it was, had some drum lessons, started jamming with other people. I started gigging probably in sort of cover bands in pubs and clubs at probably age 13 or 14 or something like that. I didn't go to college to study music, and this is something I sort of feel quite passionate about, is because I'm from a non-musical family so for us the idea of going to music college was just, it wasn't really talked about, there was no real guidance about potential careers in music or anything like that really. It was just kind of a little bit out of reach if you know what mean. So, I studied a trade at college and then carried on gigging and playing and everything. Then I got offered more gigs, got offered some teaching work, this was when I was about 19 I suppose. And before I knew it, it's late 19, early 20, something like that, I was able to go full time, which was great. And then I was full time ever since, had a portfolio career so drummer for hire, for functions, corporate stuff, you know, sessions, that type of thing. Also had quite a busy teaching practice, did some lecturing in music business and music performance. And also in original bands as well, so I did a lot of playing abroad, played in over 25 countries with different original bands, which has been great.

I was always involved with the MU, so I've been a member for 20 odd years. I'm still a member, even though I don't play that much anymore. And I was on one of their committees, so the MU is run by different committees. It's not like an organisation like a business with a CEO or anything like that. It's run by members for members. So I was on the regional committee for a long time, for 8 years or so and then a full-time job came up and here I am six years later! Which is great, so that's my background.

Aimee Christodoulou: You must have been so busy, that's a lot to fit into six years! But I'm sure lots of our members and listeners will feel the same when it comes to wearing lots of different hats and exploring lots of different roles within the industry.

Tom Eagle: Yeah, that's quite a lot. So I've done quite a lot of different things. Now, apart from my day job at the MU just I play, I think I've done about 12 shows this year. So I'm still keeping my hand in, but not playing very often.

Aimee Christodoulou: Well, someone who does play very often, Griffon do want to tell us a little bit about your path into the industry?

Griffon Forbes-Amos: The way that I kind of viewed my way of getting into the industry was all through for lack of better words, like luck and fortune, and also hard work, but more just because I would do stuff that would benefit the longevity of my career, but then didn't realise the long lasting effects of it. Like, for example, going through Tomorrow's Warriors and then building up connections through there and then moving up to Leeds after spending a year in Tomorrow's Warriors and then starting to study there. I was mainly practicing and honing my skills while also trying to understand jazz.

So the course in Leeds is like three years, and before wanting to actually start the course, I did a foundation year to kind of get my bearings of the actual genre itself. So with that, I managed to start the year by just trying to understand everything I could before getting involved in the course and while doing that was starting to head down to London a lot more to just be a part of that scene and integrate myself unknowingly, by just being a familiar face within the crowd and playing in certain situations where people could see me and hear me and develop my sound.

And then after that year and doing the same thing for the other three years while I was studying, I think everything leading up to that point had let me put my foot in the door within the industry and then being recognised by some names within the industry now have known me from being in different jams, different gigs and that's allowed me to then get work through them. And being a part of now bigger projects through that just have been just gigging like most of my time, through living at home as well and having a supportive family as well. That's allowed me to take up music full time and do whatever gigs I feel like I would want to do that can be food for the soul and be very, very enjoyable for me to be on stage with. But just more just to say that I still feel like I'm finding my bearings with it. I still don't feel like I understand everything about it, but I'm still there and just trying to make something happen through hard work, basically.

Aimee Christodoulou: Thanks for sharing that. I mean, with so many different routes into the industry and with things changing all the time, I think it's understandable that it can be hard to find your bearings. But it sounds like community and sort of saying yes to as many opportunities as possible has really helped get you going.

So Turner, could you please let us know a little bit about your path into the industry?

Benjamin Turner: Yeah, so I started originally as a jazz musician. So I play saxophone and keys. And I grew up in Yorkshire in the Midlands, and it was a quite exciting time at that point of just performing a lot and we were, there was a jazz group which I had, where we were performing at a few jazz festivals like Cheltenham Jazz Festival, et cetera. But then my mom got annoyed with, my lack of security, let's put it that way, which I think is, you know, something which is very common amongst musicians. And so, she then encouraged me to try going into teaching. So, I then became a teacher and I had a very traditional education where I'd done A-Level music, I'd done AMusTCL, which is essentially a grade in theory, etc. And so I kind of approached the classroom expecting to do that. And then within the first month I set a detention, which I'm sure any teachers is, we're all familiar with doing. And in this detention, it was with a student who was really not engaging with my lessons. Specifically, this was a lesson around, I think it was a piece of music by Mozart. And they just for some reason, weren't engaging with it. And so I asked them what kind of music they like, and then they started playing some rap music, some drill music to be specific, which I at that point had not heard any of, so I was a bit like, okay,

right, this is a bit interesting. And from there, I then, within the detention got them to start writing some music with different rap beats. It was a very unusual detention. And then they wanted to do more essentially of the detention, so then we turned it into a little rap club. And from there, the club kind of just got more and more popular within the school. And then when I was moving to a different school, the young people were very keen that that project continued.

So, I then was doubling running that project in Croydon and being head of music in a school in Camden. And then that project continued to grow more and more young people getting involved, more schools wanting to set up their own rap clubs. I then became director of music at a school called East London Arts and Music, which is funded by Universal and the industry college for music and film and games. And then it got to the point where I couldn't really balance doing the Rap Club project and the educating side of my career. And so I then decided to focus just on Rap Club and also on the Spit Game. And it's always just been led by the young people, so, we were then in terms of my engagement with industry, just by profiling their music and giving it a platform, we were then getting approached by industry. I then had to learn how to engage with industry, essentially as a artist manager and social media manager and all of these different types of roles that I had to learn and then also support the young people to develop in. And it's just kind of grown from there to the extent where now most of my career is artist management, actor management, because a lot of them are now actors, as well as creating our own films, as well as putting on our own events. So, it's become a very diversified role, which is quite reflective, I think, of a teacher in many ways, because teachers have to put so many different hats on, but just with a very industry focus.

Aimee Christodoulou: What an amazing project. I wonder how many more young people would engage with music if they had those options, if it wasn't just all about Western classical music. I guess that's something for another episode, to be honest, because we could probably spend an hour just talking about that!

But just to bring it back to what you just saying about wearing lots of different hats. I mean, you've all kind of touched on portfolio careers and other things you have to do to keep your career going as a performer. I'd be really keen to hear from all of you about what hats you have to wear to succeed in the industry.

Tom Eagle: Yeah, I mean, you have to have a lot more, a lot of different hats now, which is not necessarily a bad thing. The industry has kind of changed a lot over the past, say, 20 years or so. So it's much easier, or more accessible, should I say, not easier necessarily, for artists to be independent, which is a good thing, because it means you haven't got to deal with the record companies that we're usually arguing with. So it means that you have to do a lot of different things. Obviously, the main thing you have to do is be really good at what you do, whether that's your instrument or writing or whatever. You know, I think it should be 80% of your time should be practicing. I mean, when I was a kid, I was practicing four or five hours a day. And I think that's something that a lot of, musicians are young bands and I'm going to talk from a band point of view because that's my background, they spend too much time on the social media side and things like that and not enough time actually writing, you know, that's got to be the main focus. But along with that you've also got to be you know, you've got to be your own social media manager now is obviously a massive thing, accountant, tour manager, all these kind of things because the more skills you can do yourself and be self-sufficient with the less people you have to take out on the road with you and then the more viable it becomes to be a self-contained band and actually make money. So it's learning a little bit of all those skills. We offer people a lot of support on legal things and general sort of industry advice because I think too many people

expect to know everything about the business. And I think it's important, I'm constantly reminding members that you don't need to be a lawyer, you don't need to be an accountant. There's lawyers and accountants out there to help you. So don't be too panicky that you've got to take everything on, know every in and out of the business, that's kind what we're here to help on.

Aimee Christodoulou: Brilliant, and we'll make sure there's some information in the show notes for anyone who wants to find out more about the MU and maybe get some support from them.

Benjamin Turner: I totally agree with what Tom is saying. I think it's, there are so many different roles that are required for a creative in any industry, whether it's music, film, etc. And yes, there is the thing where, you know, for me, particularly as an educator, and just the position I'm in, I have to have some familiarity with a whole range of those roles. But finding a community, which could meet be as simple as a friend, or someone who has access to a venue, or someone who's got some kind of experience with social media, finding those communities around you to support you so that you are not overwhelmed by all of the different roles that you kind of need fulfilled.

Yes, there is that big point again, which Tom said around how the industry now does give you much more capacity to develop independently. Which then in a way also kind of requires you to have some proficiency in a range of different roles and being able to put on different hats. But there is so much information online, that as long as you're open to support, open to finding out things which you don't know, then I think you can navigate it. But at the end of the day, you do need to find a community to support you, whether that be going through the Musicians Union for support, whether that be finding people that you know. Because you can't be a lawyer and a social media manager and et cetera, cetera, et cetera, et cetera, every single day. You're going to need some support, particularly as your career grows.

Aimee Christodoulou: Yeah, definitely. You've got to find your people. And Grifton what about you?

Grifton Forbes-Amos: I agree with what they have both said. I think the one thing that I've realised, which I've started doing now growing as an independent artist is that help is definitely something that people need to ask for. And I feel like I've struggled with that a lot more, with the thing of like, as you said, Ben, with becoming a social media manager and a lawyer but not having the skills to do any of those jobs, not as proficiently as others would do to a higher degree. You have to obviously ask for that help and allow yourself to just know that you're not, not fit for it, but there's always going to be somebody better that's something that I kind of have to come to terms with and I feel like a lot of people need to as well.

Even though it's good to have a level of understanding so then if you're going with somebody that I guess has been suggested or that you found online, you're not just going to get screwed over by them giving you something in a contract that has a fine print that says, "100 % of your earnings go to me", like that kind of stuff, you need to have your wits' end about whatever you're doing. But yeah, it's a difficult one.

I also feel like coming from the perspective of a session musician as well, one thing that I've had to do is, in regards to just being as approachable as possible is just, if I'm playing for somebody and I have ideas about something that revolves around their music, unless I've been asked for it, I feel like you should kind of hold your tongue and listen to what their ideas are about their own

music and then add in suggestions or developments when the time is right. Because I feel like that's the way that you'll get more work is being somebody that's easy to work with essentially. That's one thing that a lot of people that I've talked to recently, they have asked me about how to get recognised more. And I feel like this also goes into the scene of jams, you have to be a musician that listens a lot and somebody that is willing to follow the designated role of what your instrument is supposed to do.

Aimee Christodoulou: Yeah, thank you, Grifton, so much to unpack there. But Tom, I think you wanted to jump in and add something.

Tom Eagle: Yeah, I just wanted to kind of reiterate what Grifton said about, you know, I was talking earlier about how as a musician your focus should be on getting better at your instrument and that should take up most of your day, and the different hats you're wearing. But Grifton also touched on a really good point about those skills that will get you re-booked. It's the things of being approachable, really little things like being on time, being rehearsed, those kind of things, and a lot of the time in this business you only get one shot, right? So if someone hires you for a show and you're half an hour late and you haven't looked at the charts or your gear's not in good condition, you just won't get called back. So, as well as all the practice and those other hats of managing your career and running stuff, you've got to really think about those basic interpersonal skills as well. You know, just replying to messages in a timely manner and like I say, being on time, getting the habit of being, you know, if someone says, "right, sound checks at 4", then you get there at 3.30. You know, it's all those little things that, as well as the talent, are gonna help you build a sustainable career, because people will say, that person's easy to work with, I'm gonna use them. If someone's a pain and they're difficult, their number will get deleted. That's kinda how it works, so yeah, those other things are really, really important and we try and encourage people with those things,

Aimee Christodoulou: Yeah, it's an awful lot to balance, isn't it? You know, I feel like I remembered being at uni doing music only a few years ago, really. And I feel like there's so much focus on honing your craft, but there isn't really so much focus on how to manage the social media, how to make sure you're being that people-person so you keep getting booked. There's so much to balance there. I wonder what challenges do you see for young people, you know, making that leap from education into the music industry?

Benjamin Turner: Yeah, I think there's a lot around music education where for the most part, what people, young people, are going to experience at all levels of education and music is more of a history, a reflective history on music rather than a practical 'how to have a sustainable career within the music industry'. Something I hear a lot of people say when I bring up the fact of, why does your course or your programme not teach about social media? One thing that people say is the young people know about it already, which is just such a myth of their actual understanding of how to manage social media, it's a thing where that's more the insecurity of the leader around their own lack of knowledge and projection that the young person might know more when actually, these young people don't know maybe how to do it safely if they know how to get strong engagement. So there's that aspect, which is really, really crucial that is missing, as well as a whole range of areas within education.

I think there's also a culture that a lot of young people subscribe to of this image of the self-made artist, which often gets in the way of them being able to accept or ask for help, not wanting to take part in certain programmes that are going to really elevate their career because

they want to be able to say, I did this myself when they don't understand that, that's an image that is portrayed as part of marketing.

But I think there is that factor around with education, the pathways that are available are often not made clear, as well as the learning that they're given isn't actually reflective of what the current industry requires. For example, a session musician might be told or taught by a teacher how important it is to be able to do notation and that's the focus because that is, as an educator, one of the easier things to teach. But the practical use of notation as a session musician, there is some, but it is limited into specific areas. And it's often the lack of understanding or assumptions that a teacher makes which limit what a education programme could provide for a young person who actually wants a career in the creative industry.

Aimee Christodoulou: Yeah, and we're getting some strong nods from Grifton. Grifton would you like to add?

Grifton Forbes-Amos: Yeah, I agree wholeheartedly with what Ben has said. One thing that did strike a memory was, how you're getting taught about notation and it doesn't have as much relevance. I guess for transcribing and for understanding music, for that kind of thing, it's helpful for that, but practically when in a gig or something that's relative to the industry, it's not really that helpful. And one thing that I was always thinking about when you were saying that was when we were in secondary school and then we were having to think about like taxes and all that stuff and we weren't told about any of this until we actually had to do it. And it's like if stuff like this was implemented into our lives from earlier, then it would have been way easier.

But I think in regards to the question, I feel like the same thing that I was talking about before, I feel like teaching kids how to properly listen. I had a teacher in Leeds called Mark Chandler. So, I had two different teachers over the course of four years, one called Steve Fishwick who is an amazing tutor and prolific trumpet player and one thing he did was give me resources about stuff to practice so I would hone my skills. But then I had another teacher called Mark Chandler and what he had done with me was he told me to practice different things such as listening to different albums, transcribing stuff. I think he told me to transcribe one album within a week, transcribe all seven songs so I could play them by memory, the solos and everything. And that was just to hone my ears to listen. So then when in a jam I was properly engaging with what's happening. You would have to hone your ears to like really pay attention and I feel like, yes, we're taught about structures and stuff like that, but you're not actually told how to listen for it until you're put into a practical sense and having to actually actively listen to it, you know? That's one thing that I feel like I get very frustrated about.

Benjamin Turner: I think it's also worth recognising that the majority of teachers have gone through the music, as music teachers, have gone through the music education system. It's worked for them to get to the point where they're at and a lot of them are not professional musicians. They don't necessarily have professional experience. And they won't have had the same experience as someone who's actually got the professional experience in the past, but that's something where they often don't either recognise that or they see that as an insurmountable barrier that means that they're never going to be able to do a curriculum which is industry reflective. And there are more and more provisions in place to be able to support teachers who need that kind of support. But the key thing is that the teacher recognises that that is something that's lacking in their practice and then they can actually access that for their students.

[Transition music]

Aimee Christodoulou: It seems like a lot of this roots in education, right? And how young people can see a reflection of what a realistic music industry setting looks like from a starting point of the classroom. I wonder then, what do educators need to do to facilitate careers in the music industry? We've touched on it a little bit there, but do we have any, sort of, tangible tips that any educators listening can take away and implement?

Benjamin Turner: The first thing is educators being humble. Something that I reflected on myself is that I was, and I can see it a lot of the time, trying to justify my existence as an educator. Where the best way to do that is, well, as an educator, I'm supposed to impart knowledge. So I have to bring something that I know, which the student doesn't know. I have to be seen to be giving information. And that's exacerbated by the way that teachers are often assessed. It's reflective of, you know, when English, maths, science, it's about, that might be an appropriate approach for that. But for a creative subject, if a teacher is pressured into, 'I have to make sure that when someone comes into my classroom, the students are clearly learning some information and can say something new' which then means that actually a lot of the time, especially in any creative subject, the best thing to do is to step back and give space. Because any assumption that an educator makes that a young person is just going to have space to go and do the creative, actual creative stuff outside of the classroom, that is not going to be the case in many instances. Or at least it's not going to be as well-resourced for them to be able to do it properly.

So often I think one of the key things for teachers is to be able to step back, but also to inform themselves and learn, and be led as much as possible by industry, or by young people's passion. Because when they're led by a syllabus which reflects the people who made the syllabus, or which reflects a kind of need to protect music, which isn't done in the industry anymore, it kind of raises the question, why are we focusing on this music just to protect its existence instead of actually supporting young people to do more? Now, to be clear, I'm not saying reject Western classical music at all. It's often about bring it in an appropriate ways, as well as using fusion because that's where that music is so important in the industry now. It's not a case of you're just going to go and create some Western classical piece, you're going to incorporate that into a piece of music with a gospel choir, or you're going to have a brass band performing with a rapper, or you're going to, there's so many ways to do it, but those are often missed by a teacher.

And I'm not blaming teachers. It's not their fault at all. It's a very pressured job, I completely, I was there. But it's about how can we support those teachers or how can other people support them to be able to change their practice or their curriculum.

Aimee Christodoulou: Yeah, absolutely. It must be incredibly difficult to try and keep up with the changes in industry when, you know, you've got a curriculum to stick to and you've got an inspection happening soon. And there's so much to keep on top of already. I wonder if then, any of you have any recommendations for resources or organisations that educators can go and look to, to find that inspiration perhaps?

Grifon Forbes-Amos: Going to different institutions or organisations like Tomorrow's Warriors or like Julian Joseph's, or JJA, which is another organisation that has helped youths to understand jazz and can also help for any person of any age range.

Benjamin Turner: Some schools will be able to leverage industry voice. Others, though, absolutely should be maximising on youth community projects which are around their school and not just necessarily bring them in, no just necessarily just saying, OK, go away to this thing, but actually embedding that within the course or within the programmes.

I know in the school in Camden, we were right next to the Roundhouse, and we started developing a partnership with them where we were able to have programmes where Roundhouse were coming in or we were taking kids there for projects. And that kind of support, that a lot of young people are going to need just to get them through the door, it doesn't mean you have to go every single time, but there are lots of ways to kind of build those connections. But beyond that, I think that, you know, first and foremost, the internet, and there's just so much out there to learn from. There's frankly not really much excuse to find out you don't know something and then the next day know that thing, and when you can just look it up and find that out. And that's also evidence and good practice for the young creatives because kind of back to the point I was saying before about Western classical, et cetera, like genres, which are somewhat foreign to the young people that you're teaching. Teaching them about those things, yeah, that's nice, that's good. But the actual practical use of it, for example, for a producer, isn't going to be, 'Yeah, I'm an expert on Western classical' as well as, 'Yeah, I'm an expert on this African drumming', but what a producer would actually be doing is then being able to research and find out about that genre of music, rather than just being stuck in a position where they have to use what they've been taught. So actually a teacher showing those skills is gonna be really useful for the young people that they're teaching.

I know we're trying to develop more resources because we're very aware and me as a teacher in particular, I'm aware that there are some resources out there, but they often aren't directly applicable to a classroom context. You have to still develop a whole lesson plan, a whole scheme of learning. And so we are trying to develop some which we're trying to support teachers with. But ultimately just going online and finding things, there's plenty out there as well as using people with experience to complement your own learning for yourself as well as getting them to work directly with the young people.

Aimee Christodoulou: Yeah, absolutely. There's so much out there and just start looking and see what you find.

Tom Eagle: I think the most important thing for educators to do when there's that route between education and the industry is to give advice about realistic career goals and about, you know, about how it actually is in the real world. Like I said for me when I spoke earlier about my move into the industry, the main reason I didn't study music at college was because I came from a non-musical family and my mum and dad were extremely supportive with private lessons and driving me to gigs and all kinds of stuff and things like that. They were absolutely brilliant and they're still really, supportive. But it was just kind of knowing, what, how you could actually make a living at it, and that wasn't very clear and I know, it's about being realistic about it.

So, I go into a lot of colleges and schools that our members work at and I give talks specifically to the students about careers and about how they can achieve a career. A lot of people I think, and again it's getting that info as well about sustainable careers and realistic careers to the parents as well. You know, a lot of parents it's the age old thing of 'when you're going to get a proper job' and it's being able to go to them and saying, 'It is a proper job, this is what people do and this is how much money they're making.' So, I think there's a lot of work to do on that.

It's just saying, look, if you are good at couple of things, two or three things, and you have a portfolio career... you might do a bit of teaching, a bit of performing, do some writing for TV or film, before you know it you're earning a full-time salary for music. But it's just that realistic thing that a lot of young people and parents think that you're either kind of in the top 10 or there's nothing, whereas the reality is that most of our members are working away in various sectors of the industry, they're not household names. They are working away in theatres and studios, and on stage backing featured artists, earning a great living, travelling the world, and will have long sustainable careers. So yeah, it's just being realistic and getting that information out to students and parents alike, I think.

Aimee Christodoulou: Yeah, absolutely. It sounds like there's some myths to debunk, and it perhaps could start with educators in sharing the breadth of roles available to people looking to make that leap.

Tom Eagle: Yeah, absolutely. I went to a college the other day and did a talk and they had a great display on the wall of different careers and it kind of stemmed from a performer and then it stemmed off into all the other things that you could do as well around it. So, you know, you can be a performer but then also in your spare time you could do, even if not music-related, you could be a graphic designer for bands and artists if you're good at art, you know. You could go to law school. If you already feel like you're proficient on your instrument and you're going to be in a rock band, go and study law, go and get a law degree. Do something else that can be brought into music that you can use. So that was a really good sort of idea saying that these are all the other things you can do kind of on the side. While, as long as you're flexible, so you can kind of drop something and go when you need to, use your other skills you have to make money.

But, yeah, it's completely realistic I think is also the other thing to say to young people. A lot of people think that it's kind of a dream. It's really not. It's a really realistic career for people to have to be a professional musician.

[Transition music]

Aimee Christodoulou: Welcome back everyone. We've just been speaking about what challenges there are for young people in making that leap from education into the music industry, and we've spoken a bit about what educators can do to support them. But I wonder what advice would you give to someone, perhaps a young person, trying to pursue a career in music?

Tom Eagle: The first thing that I would always say to young people who want a career in music is that it's completely achievable. They've just got to work really hard at what they do, and be realistic about what a life in music is like and be realistic about their career goals and like we said about portfolio careers, about thinking about how they can sustain themselves from music. But I always like to say to young people that you can make a good living being a musician and it's realistic.

The second thing I would always say to everyone is if you ever get offered a contract, get a lawyer to check it out. Because we deal with a lot of contracts where young members or people who are new to the business come to us and they've signed a really bad contract and they want to get out of it. And they can't a lot of the time. So, it's something that when I'm talking about this, a lot of people just switch off because they're just not that interested. But in recent years, more and more of the contracts we've been seeing can be really, really life-altering. So, if we've

got time, I'm just going to tell you a couple of stories about contracts we're dealing with at the moment.

We've got one member who, these are all members, I'll say they're all under 20, okay, so they're of new artists, young artists. One member signed a management deal with a manager, and the industry standard for a manager is like 15, 20%, usually 20% now. This was for 50% of all earnings, so the manager took 50%. Even worse than that about it was, there's a sunset clause in there. So, the sunset clause is when the manager gets paid in diminishing amounts for five years after they stop working with the artist. The idea being that a manager has built an artist's career to a certain point. So when they end up retiring or moving on to a new artist or whatever, the manager gets paid in increments. So over five years, it might go 10%, 5%, 3, 2, 1, something like that, okay? This management contract had that even when she finished working with the manager, and she wanted to finish working with him because they weren't the right fit, the sunset clause was still for 50% in perpetuity. So, it was still 50% for forever that this artist had to pay the manager.

So, they then had to pay out of their earnings, 100% earnings, 50 to their ex-manager, 20 to a new manager, so it left them 30%. So they've had to come to the realisation that their career in music is no longer financially viable.

Benjamin Turner: Just to jump in on that, sorry to interrupt, I would say I've seen the exact same contract, but the truth is there's so much predatory behaviour around that, that it absolutely could be someone else where it was also a young female singer who was offered a 50% sunset clause, et cetera. And the only thing that stopped her from signing it was that she had someone, in this case me, to be able to just be like, 'Oh, what do you think? She said to me, 'I'm going to sign it anyway, but I just wanted to get you to look at it', and the point that you made about lawyers, lawyers are for the most part, they're free to the creatives. It's more that when you sign a contract, it's the other party or, not always the case, but a lot of the time it's the other party who would be paying the lawyers' fees. The lawyer looks over it and manages to convince her to move away from it. But there's just so much predatory behaviour and that kind of thing, just like you're saying, it just ruins a career so early on.

Tom Eagle: Yeah, I think that's a really good point there, Turner, you're saying that unfortunately, there is a lot of predatory behaviour from labels and managers at the moment. It's just the contracts tie people into so much that, you know, the other one I was going to talk about was another member who wants to get out of contracts. They've basically signed a 10-song contract. And the terms of it are that basically, the young female artist has to submit 10 songs to the label and they only have to accept those 10 songs when they approve them. Basically, what they're doing is they're waiting for that next big hit, right? So, they're saying 'Anything you write has to come to us, and if we don't want it, you still can't use it anywhere else. But, we don't have to release everything you give us. We can refuse anything.'

So she's now submitted two that they've released, so she's got eight more songs to go until the contracts are over. I mean, that could be the rest of her career. So, they could just reject and reject and reject songs till she comes up with that one big hit that they want. So she's tied in. You know, it's really difficult. And this is all because they didn't get it checked out. Like I say, doesn't even, it doesn't have to be a lawyer. If you're an MU member, we can look over your contracts for free. Our lawyers look over them and advise members on them and tell them usually not to sign them or what to ask for. But yeah, that's one of the biggest bits of advice, because I see that the contracts are having a much more profound effect on careers earlier on

than they ever used to. So yeah, word of warning. But it can be a great career as well, I don't want to put anyone off, just get someone to look at it.

Benjamin Turner: Yeah, sorry to jump in again, but and I feel like you could do a whole podcast on contracts to be honest. But one of the biggest pitfalls I think a lot of young people face is that they see the advance and they first of all, they don't recognise that that's a loan and they have to pay that back. And secondly, they'll see an advance which says 30,000 or let's say £120,000. If you look at actually what that contract is tying them into, that's then spread over five, six years. And so when you then divide it by that, and then consider that that also has to pay for all the aspects of your career, and you have to pay it back, it actually isn't this big amount money that a lot of young people look at and they're like, this is great, I'm sorted 120,000 in my pocket, great. It's not actually that. And there's a lot of misunderstanding there.

I think a lot of the time for teachers, putting themselves in a position to safeguard young people, there's very limited safeguarding within the industry in these areas. There is a project called Music Guardians led by Kimberly Goddard, which are starting to do a lot of this kind of work. But for the most part, there isn't this safeguarding. A teacher is so well positioned to understand safeguarding, to understand risk and being able to position themselves there to just be a little bit of a stopgap to get a relationship with a lawyer, which would be free to cultivate, and then they can just support them. But yeah, contracts... podcast in the future maybe!

Tom Eagle: Yeah, and it's really, you know, it's difficult. Like you say, people get presented with a record contract and I go, 'I've got a record contract. I've made it!' and that's not the case anymore. You know, when you were getting the five-album deal and getting loads of money upfront and you were definitely going to recoup, it was a different matter. But it's not everything now. And that's why it's such a good time for independent artists because they don't have to deal with all this stuff.

That said, we also do look at some really good contracts that we get through that are really beneficial to artists. So, they are out there, not every contract you get offered is gonna be as bad as the ones I've described. There's great managers, there's great labels out there who really look after their artists. Just get someone to give it a once over.

Aimee Christodoulou: And as an active performer, Grifton, what's your advice and your take on all this?

Grifton Forbes-Amos: Just go to loads of performances, make yourself well-known, showcase your skills to the right people. And that will naturally get you the performances and gigs that you seek or that you visualise yourself doing. You have to just make yourself as well-known with the scene, make a name for yourself. I think the one thing as well that I feel like I've realised is that your name is a brand, and you have to make that name well known to an extent. So even if that means you're just going to the most obscure place to play a jam with some people, but then that person will know somebody that will then connect you with somebody that will connect you with somebody, then domino fall after another, you're then in the position that you want to be in, in next five years. But it's just time and effort, as you said Tom, just putting in the effort and making sure that you're doing as much as you can because the life as a musician is going to be difficult so you need to be willing to make that sacrifice essentially.

Benjamin Turner: And yeah, just if I can jump in with some more suggestions, I would say definitely diversifying beyond just one aspect of what you do creatively. I think there are so many things where there's a young person, for example, who, this is very relevant to the young people I

work with, who does acting. There are ways that that can support and elevate your career. Same way where if you have a passion for art, design, et cetera. Don't ignore those things. Don't feel like you have to channel yourself as just this, 'I only do this thing'. Actually being able to show that variety can directly support your music career.

But beyond that, I would say there's three kind of key areas for any young creative, regardless of what role it is within the creative industries, which are their portfolio, their network and their presence. With their portfolio, that's where it's their skill sets, but also you know, you might have these skills, but if you don't have a portfolio to showcase your skills, whether that's as simple as some recordings, videos, performances. Having that portfolio is going to be so vital for people to be able to actually want to go into your brand, as you said, Grifton,

Then also your network. That's anyone, that can be just people who you're friends with, but it can also be, as Grifton was saying, you go to an event, you build your network just by speaking to someone there who might connect you with someone else, someone else, et cetera.

And then with your presence, that's something which can take a range of different forms. Of course there is social media, but it can be so much more than that. And ultimately it comes down to building your profile and your professional credibility. So yes, for an artist, that's simple, but for a session musician, for example, that could mean something more along the lines of yes, having a great portfolio to showcase to people, but also building those connections and those performance opportunities for yourself.

And I think it all kind of comes down to not waiting for someone to come and just turn your career around. Or you're waiting for one thing to happen and it's just going to blow up. A big misconception a lot of young people have, which is essentially bad practice, is this kind of TikTok ideology and I'm not saying TikTok is bad, there's plenty of ways to utilise that and you need to understand it. But, where for artists they are like, 'I'm going to blow off this one song', but then you're to be known as a song, not as an artist, not as a creative. And so you need to think about what's more than this song, just the amount of artists who have a song does great, they disappear. There's a reason for that. They're not cultivating themselves beyond this one thing. And so the more that you can create your own industry yourself by creating those opportunities, the less reliant you are on people who might be coming with malicious contracts, but also the more ownership you'll have of your own career and then the more control so that when those contracts do come along, if they do for you, you're in a much more powerful position to negotiate and to actually make that something which makes sense for you rather than just what makes sense for the person coming with the contract.

[Transition music]

Aimee Christodoulou: Thank you for sharing those brilliant tips for young people. Next, we'd love to hear a bit more about your work. What's one thing that you're really enjoying working on at the moment?

Tom Eagle: Part of my job that I really, really love, aside from my sort day-to-day desk work, helping members with issues, is I really enjoy going and speaking to students at various colleges, conservatoires, universities, and explaining all this stuff to them, trying to give them a positive spin, and saying that if you want a career in music, you can have it. And this is sort of part of the way of how to go about it. I really enjoy doing that and getting feedback from students that, you know, they're more equipped to understand how to get into the business and how to maintain a long career in the business. So that's something I really like doing, so if there's any

educators listening in the East and South East of England who want me to come and visit their college or university, then just drop us an email at the MU and we'll arrange something. Or all over the country that in fact, because we've got offices all over the country. So, if anyone wants to come and do a talk about careers in music, then just let us know.

Aimee Christodoulou: Thanks for that. We'll pop some details in the show notes, as I said. But it's lovely to hear, you know, a more positive spin on things, because it can be overwhelming, I'm sure, when you're considering all these things that go into making that leap. So, thank you for keeping that positivity there.

Grifton Forbes-Amos: I've got too many to think of! I feel like I just enjoy everything that I do. so I don't know. One thing that feel like I should probably talk about, which I don't pay enough attention to because I'm just in love with music and it's just a beautiful thing. I feel, one thing that I've worked on recently, I enjoy doing is my own music. So composing music that I've envisioned and that has made the audience happy, has made me, like, feel a sense of joy at the fact that people love the ideas that I've created. I did a gig in March for my music and it was one of the best gigs I ever had because I remember I had a teacher from secondary school that appeared at that gig, and I feel like I had a few other people as well, friends of mine that appeared there that haven't usually come to my other gigs. And I remember one teacher came out of that performance and said something along the lines of 'The future is bright because we have people like you that are making really good music', and hearing that made me feel really, really happy because it meant that I was going in a good direction with what I was doing. So, I think one thing I feel like I've been in love with doing recently is, like, recording the music that I've played countless times, over the course of two years recently, developing more and more compositions and new ideas, and then releasing them as singles so then people have access to them when whatever they want. And just having music out there as well as a whole just because I feel like as you were saying before, Benjamin, the fact that you have music to add to your profile so then people can understand what you sound like and how you are and they can understand your personality a bit more through that, so hopefully over the next like coming months I'll have released two other singles. But essentially just an EP, that's what I'm trying to work towards and have out in the world so people can enjoy the music that I enjoy performing and creating.

Aimee Christodoulou: And what's your latest single called? How can our listeners find you and have a listen for themselves?

Grifton Forbes-Amos: It is called Ear Candy, and I think it's on all streaming platforms. I haven't got it on Bandcamp, which I need to do because that's a really good thing that would benefit me as a musician. But it should be on most streaming platforms for people to get a taste of what my brain creates, in a sense!

Aimee Christodoulou: And we'll make sure to put a link to that in the show notes, and we've actually got a clip that we can play! Have a listen to this, this is Ear Candy by Grifton Forbes-Amos.

[Audio clip from Ear Candy]

Aimee Christodoulou: It's a brilliant tune. Thank you for sharing it with us, Grifton. And if you're listening, make sure you head to your preferred streaming platform to check out the full track. Continuing with the conversation, Turner. What's something that you're loving working on right now?

Benjamin Turner: Yeah, I'm going to be cheeky and say two things, but I'm going to keep it as snappy as possible. In terms of Rap Club/the Spit Game, it's heavily youth-led, so we've got, 40% of the board of directors are young people who are alumni. And in terms of the actual team doing stuff, it's me and eight young people, so up to the age of 21, who are the leadership team.

And what's happened over the last year, we've been defining more clear roles. So we've got our associate director, who's 19, by the way, who's also head of Rap Clubs and he's currently running six rap clubs at the same time. And what we've now just recently done is that other alumni have now, well, alumni, other Spit Game members are now running their own rap clubs and we're expanding to Birmingham because we've been oversubscribed with our teacher training, our resources, but also with our rap clubs. And now we're in a position where we can expand that both geographically and also in terms of capacity, so that's something which, I would say, you know, great, please get into contact, but we do have a waiting list! But that's something which is really exciting for me. And I think it also showcases what we were talking about before about diversifying where we've got, I was saying in the break, we've got this young person, associate director of it, head of Rap Clubs, so he's running rap clubs right now. He's also performed at Royal Albert Hall last week, he's also acting and doing performances in films, including an upcoming Pinocchio horror film, which is going to be in cinemas. He plays this horrible bully. Doing all of those different things and that is a route of diversifying your career, which is I think really important.

And then the thing which I'm most excited about though, is our feature film project called Get Back Season, which we are working towards where we've just finished casting, and it is going to be brutal. There is going to be a lot of violence, but there's a social justice film and there's a lot of themes around bullying and a whole range of things which maybe not appropriate for me to discuss in this podcast. But yeah, those are the things I'm most excited about right now.

Aimee Christodoulou: Wow, sounds like you've got a lot going on, and it sounds like we need more people like you championing young people heading into industry. So really well done for all that you do, and we have loads of educators, I think, that will make up this audience, so get yourself on the waiting list for the Rap Club, if you're lucky!

Thank you so much for joining us today. It's been a really great chat. There's loads more that we could speak about, so maybe we'll have to do another episode at some point.

We hope you have plenty to take away and apply to your own work! Thanks again to Tom, Turner, and Grifton, for sharing their experience and knowledge with us. We hope you enjoyed listening, and we'll see you next time!

[Outro music]