Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education

Episode 5: Disability Transcript

[Intro music]

Yusef Sacoor: Hello! You're listening to 'Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education', a Music Mark podcast where we discuss inspiring projects, hot topics, and key challenges circulating around music-based work with young people. And if you're enjoying the intro, outro and transition music for this episode, make a note that it's from Able Orchestra, a youth ensemble and musical project allowing music-making on equal terms, specifically supporting those who are neurodivergent and people with disabilities.

Hello and welcome to Episode 5 of Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education. I'm Yusef, one of your hosts for this episode.

Emma Cragg: And I'm Emma! Today we'll be exploring disability in music education, and we're thrilled to be joined by Ben Sellers, leader of the MEHEM Uprising! Project, Kris and Nicci Halpin, who co-lead the inclusive music project Dyskinetic, and Jess Fisher, a musician, educator, and member of the Able Orchestra.

Yusef Sacoor: We talked about the barriers facing disabled musicians, including restrictions that both pupils and teachers face, even within SEND settings. Our guests also highlighted some incredible work happening across the country to make music more accessible.

Emma Cragg: We hope you enjoy listening, and don't forget to check out the show notes for all of the resources mentioned throughout the episode.

Hello everyone and welcome! Thank you all so much for joining us today. It's great to have you all here with us. Before we kick things off and get into the meat of the podcast, I'd just like to start, if we could all do some introductions and just talk about who you are, where it is that you work or what you do. Ben, would it be okay if I came to you first?

Ben Sellers: Hi, thank you. My name's Ben. I'm the project lead for the MEHEM Uprising Project, which is a project that works across the East Midlands to improve the quality and consistency of inclusive provision in schools and out of schools, amongst other things, I do various bits of training.

Emma Cragg: Thank you so much. Jess, could I come to you next?

Jess Fisher: Hi, yeah, I'm Jess and I kind of do a bit of everything. My kind of main things are, I am a pioneer for the Able Orchestra, and I also do MEHEM alongside Ben, and I am also, I work

for Inspire Music as well, so I do a bit of everything. And I'm a musician and I play CMPSR (pronounced 'Composer')!

Emma Cragg: Fantastic, a bit of everything, that's what we like. It's great to have you here with us. And then Kris and Nicci?

Kris Halpin: Hello, my name's Kris Halpin. I am a musician of sorts. Most people know me for playing the MiMu gloves and I'm one half of Dyskinetic.

Nicci Halpin: I'm Nicci. I'm the other half of Dyskinetic and we are the lead artist and mentors for the Able Orchestra.

Emma Cragg: Great, thank you so much. It's really great to have you all with us today.

Yusef Sacoor: I suppose the first question to get into is, you've named some organisations there. So, it'd be nice to of learn a little bit more about them, your musical journey and how that intersects with disability. So Ben, you mentioned Uprising. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

Ben Sellers: So yeah, my background: clarinet player, saxophone player, started doing workshops alongside my playing. And then one day the fantastic legend that is Phil Mullen showed me an iPad at a training and he said, "I think this is the future, but I haven't got time to look at it". I thought, wow, this really is the future. So I started doing Garageband sessions, working in some primary schools. And then, I met Drake Music and they sent me as an assistant on a project in a school in South London. And then at the last minute, the leader of the project dropped out and I went to meet the school and the teacher was saying, PMLD this, P level that. I had no idea what she was talking about. And the guy I was with, I thought he must know. So, when we left, I said, "Ah Dave, you know, what are these acronyms?", and he said, "Ben, I don't know". So we went to a cafe and we did some Googling and the next week I found myself in front of a class of pupils with complex needs and we made it work. And I realised I get so much more from working with pupils with additional needs than mainstream settings. You know, they are well up for it. Often, they're completely honest and the group sizes are much smaller, so you can get a whole class making music together, which is really powerful. So I did workshops, started doing trainings, and then the MEHEM Uprising Project, it is a Youth Music funded project since 2020.

And the idea is that MEHEM, Music Education Hub East Midlands, huge region, over a million young people, they wanted to improve inclusive provision. So, at the moment, more than 50% of music in curriculum music is taught by non-specialist musicians, so generalist teachers, who've got their own story of their own music education. Often music can be quite a mystery to lots of teachers. So, how can we support them to teach music that is musical, get them playing instruments, supporting their young people? How can we get instrumental teachers who are brilliant musicians, brilliant pedagogues, have never walked into an inclusive setting before? So, you've got these two groups and they've both got contrasting skill sets. How can we get them to learn from each other? So that's the premise of the project at the moment is getting instrumental teachers in specialist settings, working together with generalist teachers and seeing where the points of learning are. So we do that.

We also do a hive mind. So, often being an instrumental teacher is quite a, don't know about lonely, but certainly solitary experience. You know, you may be going to three different schools in a day, you're in, you're out, you don't really speak to anyone. You might have 27 pupils in a

whole class session that are spot on with their violins and three pupils that aren't accessing or engaging much or at all. So how can we support them to access those people? So we call it a hive mind every term online, anyone from anywhere in the country can come it's free. We talk about the challenges people are having and then we find solutions together. We look at a model called nonviolent communication, which is a way of addressing challenging behaviour and find new strategies to meet the needs.

We also have something called the Uprising Balloon, so UprisingBalloon.com, which is an amazing free resource. Jess is on there. There's an Able Orchestra ensemble video on there as well. Which is kind of best practice, how to work with specific groups, talking about lived experience of disability. So yeah, it's a great resource for anyone who's working with pupils with additional needs anywhere in the world, actually.

Yusef Sacoor: Thank you so much, Ben. It's a huge amount of strings to your bow and different projects that you're involved in, and I have a feeling that it's the same for Kris and Nicci. So I might hand over to you to describe a little bit more about what you do, and your personal journey with it as well, I suppose.

Kris Halpin: Where do we start? So this chapter of Dyskinetic is quite different. It started around my journey with the MiMu Gloves, which goes way back. It's almost exactly 10 years actually, since I started performing with the MiMu Gloves and MiMu Gloves are wearable technology, devised by Imogen Heap, Grammy award winning superstar producer of artists like Taylor Swift and Ariana Grande. She was trying to solve not an access problem, but she makes electronic music, but she's a songwriter. And as she famously said, “You're just watching a woman singing with a laptop”. Like for all you know, she's checking her emails. Like why is there a laptop on stage? And she wanted the audience to understand where the electronic music was coming from. And, I was working with a chap called Gawain Hewitt around this time through a programme at Drake Music to try and understand how I could access music and overcome my own disabling barriers to music. And we sort of went, oh, Imogen Heaps accidentally invented the first kind of social model musical instrument. Cause if a musical instrument learns you, then that inverts the barriers, doesn't it? Cause you know, as I always say, middle C is always where you left it on the piano. You can't change how traditional instruments work to a large extent, but if the instrument learned you, then that would be a social model approach to making music accessible.

That led me off on an artistic journey, and then we've been, Nicci and I have done more and more work together, as well as being a couple from literally two decades and having an entire family and all sorts of our own adventures. And it was about, two years ago that we were just doing more and more things together as we slowly evolved from Dyskinetic being... Like, I think of Dyskinetic as a band, right? Like we're a band, we have merch, we have records out and we do things and we play gigs and do the normal things that bands do. But we also found increasingly a demand which met us not really the other way round, we didn't chase this, but there was a demand for our expertise in massive air quotes because, how expertise that is I don't know? We certainly had a lot of experience, making high level things accessible and putting on disabled led performances. And we understood touring at a high level where disability is a kind of an influencing factor. And that was sort of how we started in this model of working both artistically, but also in terms of creating and supporting programs, which I think we joined Able Orchestra in 20...

Nicci Halpin: 23...?

Kris Halpin: Yeah...? Jess will fact check that for us, won't you Jess? Yeah! So, we signed on as lead artists and mentors and that's one of our main projects at the moment is supporting Able Orchestra.

Yusef Sacoor: That leads very nicely onto you, Jess. Is Able Orchestra where your musical journey started? Or is there more backstory there as well?

Jess Fisher: Yeah, funny enough, that's kind of like a nice segue because Able Orchestra is where my musical journey started. So I'll give a bit of background. So, I went to an SEND school and the music facilities there were, let's just say, not very musical. I always tell the story of I was given a tambourine, told to hit it, given a gold star and off I go, and at the age of 14, 15 that's not really how you want to be told to make music. Then luckily for me Inspire Youth Arts came into my school to work on the project Able Orchestra. It was actually named as iPad Orchestra at the time, fun little fact for you! But yeah, that's kind of where my musical journey began, and that's where I started to realise, oh not only can I make music but I'm quite good at it as well. And then through doing Able Orchestra I met Si Tew, who is the very clever person who went away and invented the musical instrument I now play called CMPSR. And that is how my musical journey really took off and yeah, that's kind of how I've got here today through the Able Orchestra and then meeting people like Ben and Kris and Nicci I've got to go off and do other amazing things as well.

Emma Cragg: Thank you. And I think actually, the story you were just saying, Jess, about being given a tambourine in school and being told to hit it and that was it, that was the extent of the music they had on offer, leads really nicely into the next question which is talking about what barriers are facing young people with disabilities in terms of music education?

Jess Fisher: I feel like now as a 26-year-old I feel more than ever, and funny enough I'm actually going in to a school next week to teach music, so as I'm going into the school I'm being mindful about one thing and I think that is, sometimes when you see people with disabilities, people fall into the trap of just assuming something about you based on what you can see, not what you know about the person. So for example, with my own journey, it was very quick for the school that I was at to assume that because I'm in a wheelchair and one of my arms doesn't work, therefore I can't make music. And I feel like there's a two hander here, one there's that unrealistic expectation there, people just assume, 'Oh, you can't so we're not going to bother', but also I think there's a bigger conversation around, there's not the training and facilities and expertise for people to learn that actually you can make music really easily and you don't have to be Taylor Swift to teach a class of music. I think people underestimate the power of music, like Ben was saying, because if you're a non-specialist, you're just assuming you can't do it. But actually, if you're given the right tools, it's a very easy thing to do and it can be a very rewarding thing to do. But yeah, I think the biggest thing I've had throughout my life is people assuming I can't do something based on my medical diagnosis rather than who I am as a person, and I think we see in the social model that is a crucial thing it's not about your medical disabilities. It's about, okay, what can we do to help this? What can we do to fix it?

Emma Cragg: Really interesting. Thank you. I want to leave the floor open here. Ben, Kris or Nicci, do either of you have anything you'd like to add to that?

Kris Halpin: I suppose, I think it's really interesting to think about the social model approach. Like, Jess, your relationship with the CMPSR, I guess we should probably explain what a CMPSR is. It's, originally, a sort of wheelchair remote control, because I understand, obviously you

mentioned our very good friend Simon, who devised this initially from a place of thinking about muscle memory and embracing the fact that you already had the muscle memory of a power wheelchair user. So why reinvent that interface? Why not harness the movement that you've perfected, but make that musical? And I thought, people talk a lot about how the gloves are a really neat way of encapsulating a musical understanding of the social model of disability. But I think the CMPSR is very much a really good example as well, because it met you where your movement was and it didn't say to you 'You're going to have to change your movement or your physicality'. Like I can't access lots of traditional instruments, or at least not in the way that I would aspire to, but working with an instrument like the gloves allows me to navigate that because it meets me where I am and I think that's the same thing for you and the CMPSR right?

Jess Fisher: Yeah, definitely and I think there was something so relatable about Si giving me an instrument that says 'This will empower you to be able to be the thing that you are able to be', and I think there's something as a wheelchair user, you know, you're not very seen often especially in media and in life, you're not always well represented. So I think being handed an instrument that said, not only does this meet your access needs, this also shows you that, here's an instrument that not only you can play but you can play with your sister, and it puts you on the same playing field and there's no like 'She's better than you' or 'You're better', it just helped me to feel seen and feel like, okay, now I can go off and do the same thing as my sisters.

Yusef Sacoor: Are those equalising sort of instruments and adaptive instruments important in the work that you're doing as well, Ben?

Ben Sellers: Absolutely, so we recently created the Lancashire Music Hub Accessible Technology Library, which has got 10 instruments, the CMPSR's in there. I think the really key thing to remember is like Jess's story, that instrument in a way was built for you, Jess, kind of. And that's why it's successful for Jess. I think the issue with the 25 million capital grant for the new instruments. It's brilliant, but hubs have got to work from the bottom up. They've got to start with, okay, schools, what are your young person's needs? What are your cognitive and physical barriers that, we need to overcome with our instrument design, and then find the instruments for them, rather than be like, okay, we want 10 of these and 20 of these. Cause the instruments will just end up in cupboards, which would be an absolute tragedy. But the right instrument in the right hands, can be incredibly powerful, and not just in a kind of participation school level, but right to the, you know, right in the professional level as well.

I think, answering the previous question about the barriers to high quality music education, I mean, it's got to be said that the government needs to give music education more money for sure. I think that in real terms, hubs are doing much more with much less money, when it comes down to it, which is a real testament to the hubs, but it's not that sustainable. You know, we've got these amazing tutors, they're brilliant musicians, they're so dedicated, they drive all over to nurture the next generation of musicians. We've to pay them properly, you know? It's the same with classroom teachers, brilliant teachers, nurturing the next generation. They should be paid according to that, as they are in other countries, who's education systems are much stronger. So, I know everyone knows it. Probably everyone listening to this podcast knows that, but I think it's got to be said as the main thing that would help.

I think given the current situation as much as anything else, it's self-belief, self-efficacy of teachers. So, I think music should be a subject that all teachers can teach, and all teachers do teach, and that all teachers enjoy teaching. It can be such a powerful thing, and we hear from schools again and again, we know how powerful music is for pupils with additional needs, but

we don't know how to deliver it. And I think in the initial teacher training for primary school generalist teachers, you get like half a day of music or a day of music in your year. And music education 30, 40 years ago, let's say was patchy, it could be brilliant, but it could also be pretty old school. And so they're coming into their music teaching with all that baggage, their own musical story.

And so, it's the job of hubs to really work person-centered with teachers to figure out what makes them tick. You know, could they do singing? Could they do instruments? Can they do tech? What would really motivate them as musicians, never mind the pupils? And then once they develop that musical identity, then they can teach with confidence and effectively. And, you know, live music is really powerful compared to say backing tracks in the classroom. If you can spend 10 hours, 20 hours as a teacher, refining your ukulele technique or your singing technique, figuring out some songs that are going to work for your voice, then that's going to have a huge impact. We know the power of music to bring people together, and often in specialist settings, in my experience, there's less of a hierarchy between teachers and pupils, not always, but can be, you know, it's more like, collectively we're figuring things out together. And special schools can have amazing atmospheres. Any community can benefit from music, and we've got to demonstrate to teachers that that's really possible.

Yusef Sacoor: I was going to follow up and ask if you think that those challenges around funding and around anxieties over being a non-specialist teacher teaching music, do you think that those kind of difficulties are even more prevalent when working with young people with disabilities, in and out of SEND settings, specific settings, I suppose?

Ben Sellers: Well, secondary schools, I mean, gonna go off topic a bit. Secondary schools obviously having lots of music cuts, but they do still have specialist teachers. I think primary schools, it's a similar issue, I would say. I don't know what Jess or either of you guys think.

Kris Halpin: Well, it's probably worth drawing an important distinction for us that we are artists, we're not educators, we're not in the educational space.

Nicci Halpin: And we don't work in schools.

Kris Halpin: We don't work in schools and also...

Nicci Halpin: Our own children don't go to school, so!

Kris Halpin: We're quite outside that system as home educators. And I guess what we're interested in is the visibility of high-quality disabled-led music making. It's not like we're completely out of the loop, you know, we're not music teachers, we're not working with a music service. But what we are interested in is just improving the visibility of really high-quality stuff made by disabled people. Cause there's a real problem of, you know, you said ages ago, Nicci said, right, a long time ago, we were like, 'The bar could be really low and we would still get a pat on the back'. It would still be like, 'Oh wow, yeah, you're making music with disabled people, that's great.' And it's like, that's not good enough. We don't deserve a medal for the sort of participation of creating a bit of space for disabled people. Our job is to like lead to the really high-quality work, at the risk of shifting it all back to AO.

Nicci Halpin: Yes, but this also goes back to what you just said, Ben, a while ago, about the instruments, where you have to start from the bottom up in terms of what can somebody do, and then what instrument can work for that person. Because obviously we do have the CMPSRs and two members of AO do use the CMPSR but it doesn't work for everybody. And so, we have

just done a project with Orchestra of the Swan and we managed to figure out another instrument for another member, just on the fly, because he didn't have an instrument and it was ‘Okay, can you use this?’ And it turns out yes, it's called the Artiphon. The Artiphon Chorda. It's not, it’s not perfect. It's not, it’s not going to be long-term that he's going to be able to use it, but it worked for that moment. And so it gives us a jumping off point now to move on from.

Kris Halpin: Yeah but you have to be able to think really fast in the space. Our friend Curtis in AO, for him in terms of mobility and accessing even a lot of accessible tech or stuff that's framed as being accessible is not accessible to him, certainly like you know a MiMu glove or something wouldn't be working for him. But really then, and I would say that this applies obviously to teachers and educators, it's like, I always tell people, the people who are really good, and I learned a lot from Ben, Ben and I have done a lot of work together over the years, the really good practitioners can think fast. And actually that's, you know, how you approached it with Curtis. I don't think people realise how tight these projects are, those intensive periods, Jess, you obviously know what those projects can be like. You have to be able to think really quickly and creatively about the solution that you're presenting someone in terms of how you make music accessible.

Jess Fisher: Yeah, I'm just going to chime in. I feel like I'm on the beginning journey of my teaching journey within Inspire Music - shout out to them, they are great! And I'm starting my first session on Monday this week, yay! But I think going into it, I was a bit like, ‘Okay, I'm going to take the things I know that work’, but I told them, the first day I'm going in with very low expectation, because those kids will be like, this isn't working. And I said, I need to be okay with them saying that this isn't working. You need to be okay with having a plan, but also being able to be flexible with that plan. And I've learnt very quickly, there's nothing like a disabled practitioner. So I am going into a school like, ‘Hey I'm going to work with your pupils who have additional needs but guess what I also have additional needs, and do you have XY and Z because otherwise I can't do my job’, and that's been a very interesting challenge to figure out how I can support the young people by making sure that my access needs have also been met. It's been a very interesting journey and it's a journey I've still got to go on, but I'm excited to see how it works and how it might not work, but I'm just gonna go with the flow.

Yusef Sacoor: One of the things that we wanted to talk about next was the positive changes that you've seen since you've been involved in making music or in music education and talking about adaptive instruments and being artists first and foremost. Does that feel like a big positive change that has occurred in the time that you've been doing this in terms of platforms for disabled people and disabled people being educators and being the people in the classroom.

Kris Halpin: I think that's changed a lot. Look at me just chiming straight in. I think that's changed a lot in 10 years. That's when I sort of came to the table, because I was just a young, struggling musician. Probably not that young (laughing). But, you know, struggling, facing a lot of barriers to music, and I was just trying to find an in and then the sector sort of went, ‘Come, give us more, we want to see you’ and people like the idea of me being in schools and meeting those young people and I think the opportunities... It felt, 10 years ago it felt like this real strange kind of novelty like I remember I say this all the time in keynotes and stuff but, I've travelled all over the world performing and people would say to me you know seven or eight years ago they'd be like ‘I've never seen a disabled person on stage before’ and I remember thinking, funnily enough on a trip with Ben to Japan, we were delivering some work there. And I just had this moment of going, you know what, this is great for me, but systemically, this is really, really not good. But I do think that it's changed quite a lot. And I do think there are loads of opportunities and I don't feel

like there was this weird novelty of being, a performer using a wheelchair and using this wearable technology that I don't think is like, I'm glad that it's gone really. There's so many more great disabled musicians and there's so many more spaces for disabled people to perform and be visible.

Personally, my own journey with education. I actually left education a few years ago. I was a music teacher for a brief period. I was working for Services for Education in Birmingham, fantastic organisation, I was really glad to work there. But for me, systemically the barriers, this is the knotty bit, the barriers remain once we got to the level of being in a school. Like you have organisations like Music Mark, who obviously I'm really proud to work with and my role as a Champion. I'm really proud to work with the hubs that I do. I've done a lot of work with Lancashire that Ben mentioned earlier. The drive and the commitment to inclusion is really, really strong there and at lots of levels, but for me personally, when it came to going into schools, that's when I faced the real access barriers. And I guess if I'm being honest, I probably am painting a bit of a cynical picture - I welcome Ben and Jess, please chime in and shoot me down if necessary - but it just feels like I couldn't access it. I didn't, I faced real physical barriers to access in SEND schools, which is ironic. And I realise there's lots of pressures, but I was like, I don't know how to make music feel important enough at the structural level in terms of like the schools being on board with the value of music. And I guess that's where I started to get very frustrated, that we know the value of music. We know how important it is, and we all talk about it. But my experience as a teacher was quite different and it ended quite quickly because I just felt like I was hitting a lot of barriers, both physical, literal barriers, but also kind of attitudinal barriers of just feeling like once you got to a school level that people didn't see the value in it. That's a very small cross-section of schools that I've worked in, so I don't think that's representative of schools in general. I mean, I don't know if it is or isn't quite honestly, I haven't worked in that many of them, but for me, it was a complicated experience.

Yusef Sacoor: Yeah, it sounds really tough and Jess, I suppose you alluded to that in SEND settings as well. Ben, is that, do you see those challenges in your day-to-day work?

Ben Sellers: So this is great for me because now we're getting to the really good, knotty parts of the conversation, and I'm going to say something that I'm genuinely interested to see if people agree with it or not. So, a big part of my job is getting more disabled people in the workforce as music teachers. And we try, so hearing Jess's experience about how poor music education was for her 10, 15, 20 years ago, you have to be pretty amazing, as Jess is, to be able to do that. It wasn't necessarily normal to have a good music education 20 years ago in a special ed school. Now, hopefully it is more normal, and certainly in the East Midlands, you know, huge strides have been made in the last five, 10 years. And it will take some time for the people who are 14, 16, 18 now, they are not going to be teaching age for another five or 10 years. So, could it be we're seeing the lag, and in a few years time, there will be more people ready to be teachers, music teachers. And then at that point, experiences like what Kris had will be untenable because, you know, there'll be loads of people who are like, what's going on? These schools need to be accessible. It will become normalised to have disabled people as music teachers and then things will change. And what you guys are experiencing now, it's like you've got to break down the walls for the people to come through. I don't know. What do you think?

Kris Halpin: I really like the sound of that Ben, I think that's a really, I was going to say optimistic, but it's a logically optimistic view that you're right, there'll be a degree of saturation and hopefully there'll just be more people. And also I think it's worth a bit of a privilege check here, it didn't feel like a fight that, on balance, across our whole life. It wasn't the right time for me to do

that, we were already really, really busy. Obviously family life actually wasn't that compatible with me being a teacher. But yeah, no, I like the thought of that. It feels optimistic.

Nicci Halpin: Yeah definitely.

Kris Halpin: And hopefully you're right and in 10 years time people would be like, this is ludicrous. People are still really shocked. I pulled out of school's delivery project quite recently because, and this is in a SEND school, right? The school wasn't wheelchair accessible. And people just go, wait, what? Like, but that is a reality, like, that's a, that's part of it. Now, okay, so that school wasn't wheelchair accessible, it happened to be that none of their students used wheelchairs. But you're not playing a long game if you're just thinking about who's immediately there. I guess, Ben, what you're saying is, there is a long game here and actually this will change. And I think I'm, I really want to believe you're right, for sure.

Emma Cragg: I think that's really, yeah, really interesting to hear and hopefully a positive change for the future. I'm aware we're rapidly running out of time, which is such a shame because this is a really fascinating conversation! I just wanted to check, Jess, was there any really quick thoughts you might have on that before we move on very swiftly onto some recommendations?

Jess Fisher: I feel like for me, I mean, it's just worth noting that, like I've said, I am at the very beginning of my delivery journey. But I think what I'm really excited to do is, because everyone who knows me knows that I'm not shy about stating the obvious. So, I'm really hoping that as I go on this journey, that if there is stuff that I'm like, hang on, that's not okay and that shouldn't be happening, that I can bring those conversations to the school and I can say, 'Look, how can I make sure your pupils are getting the best education if I can't even help them get there?'. S,o hopefully I'll have an amazing experience, but if not, I'm hoping, having those difficult conversations might start to make the world a better place, and that's very optimistic, but that's what I'm going with.

Emma Cragg: No, that's great. I think sometimes we need that optimism and I think we need people like you who are willing to say when something isn't working so that we can really see those changes.

Ben Sellers: Sorry, could I, could I just jump in and, two things? So firstly, Jess works within Inspire Music who are a fantastic team. And, like Jess says, it's a, you're taking a risk, right, going in there? And what's really important is that there's support for Jess and, other people who starting on their journey and Inspire do offer that, so I think one really key message to hubs is when you've got emerging disabled music teachers, you've got to support them effectively. And it's got to be pupil-centre - person-centred. You gotta, you know, Jess has got these amazing talents, and there's all these other things about being a teacher that she's going to learn over the next few weeks and months and years. How can you make that process as easy as possible?

And the second thing is, it is so important that people like Jess, Kris, Nicci go into these schools because it normalises it for the young people as well. You know what I mean? They can be like, I literally know I can do that because this person's doing it. Amazing. Let's play some great music. But that's in the back of my mind. And as a music teacher going in, often we're the only adults or one of the only adults that that young person will have any kind of one-to-one relationship with that's outside their family. So that relationship is key, you know, and if we treat them, equally, and if we believe in them and expect them to progress at the same rates as anyone else, that's the social model of disability. And if we see the barriers in society, then they'll expect that from all the other adults in their life for the rest of their life, which is crucial. And that's how we

change society. And that's why music education is so important, not just for music education, but for all of society.

Kris Halpin: He talks a good talk, doesn't he? Yeah, that's it. Yeah, I can't argue. ~

(Group laughing)

Emma Cragg: Yeah, you can't argue with that (laughing)

Yusef Sacoor: I mean, that leads nicely onto what opportunities are available, both for young people with disabilities and also for educators and... Where can they go, if it's your own organisation, if it's something else that you want to shout out? Jess, if you just want to talk about what you're doing and how teachers can be better, how educators can be better, then go ahead. But yeah, this might be a bit of a quick fire, as I'm aware we have to wrap up soon.

Kris Halpin: Is this an opportunity for a combined effort in terms of the Able Orchestra? Yeah, so obviously we all were all part of Able Orchestra in different capacities and there are now the two ensembles. Someone's going to fact check me, probably.

Nicci Halpin: There is a North and South ensemble.

Kris Halpin: And they are based in?

Nicci Halpin: Well, there's three now!

Kris Halpin: There's three!

Nicci Halpin: There's three isn't there? There's one based at the old library in Mansfield as well.

Kris Halpin: As well as...

Nicci Halp: As well as Portland College and is it Ashley School?

Jess Fisher: Yeah.

Kris Halpin: Right, so there you go. Shameless plugs again. Check out the work of Able Orchestra. But now that there's a clear pathway for young musicians, school-age musicians to be on that path, as Jess is part of what's now known as the AO Pioneers. So there's six young adult members of Able Orchestra, or AO, as we are now referring to you guys. That's who Nicci and I work with, but Inspire Youth Arts are also deploying these amazing programs across Nottinghamshire for the Able Orchestra. But those are pathways for young people who might see Jess or one of our other musicians and think, yeah, I could do that, well, now there's an opportunity in those regions to do that. So I'm sure you can get the details for those from Inspire's Youth Arts website.

Nicci Halpin: Hopefully.

Kris Halpin: Hopefully. Yeah, of course. We'll make sure. Anyone else got any?

Jess Fisher: I was just going to say, like Ben said, I work for Inspire Music and they are an amazing hub and I would say if any teachers are listening and you're just like, I'm so lost I don't even know where to start with music, get connected to your hub because that's where you're going to start getting the help that you might need. But also, I would be biased if I didn't say look at Able Orchestra as well because look at me now!

Kris Halpin: Haha, yes, exactly!

Emma Cragg: And just a reminder actually, that we amazingly have some of Able Orchestra's music that we use, that you've been hearing all throughout this episode as you've been listening to the intro and the outro and all the transition music, so we are also big fans. Lastly, Ben, really quickly, any other organisations or places that people can go to?

Ben Sellers: So yeah, gotta mention Drake Music, which is where we met, me and Kris met, fantastic organisation who work a lot with professional development. So if you're a disabled musician, that's a great place to start. I think if you are a teacher who wants to get into special ed teaching, first of all, we need you. We need more fantastic teachers in our special schools. Go to uprisingballoon.com, loads of resources there. Go and tell your hub leader that you want to work in those schools, because there's definitely demand from those schools. And if you're interested in tech, head over to the Lancashire Accessible Instrument Library for loads of lesson plans, how-to videos, stuff like that.

Yusef Sacoor: Thank you so much, guys. And I think that's a wrap. You've given us some great insights there. I'm very impressed, and I wish the conversation was longer.

[Outro music]

Emma Cragg: It sounds like there's a load of incredible projects happening around the UK, and we're incredibly fortunate to have such passionate and active educators like Kris, Nicci, Jess and Ben working to create change across the sector.

Yusef Sacoor: Thank you again to our guests for joining us and sharing their knowledge. Don't forget to head to the Music Mark website where you can find the show notes for each episode.