

51 Kate Kennedy

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SPEAKERS

Kate Kennedy, Rebecca Toal, Hattie Butterworth

Hattie Butterworth 00:05

Hello and welcome to Things Musicians Don't Talk About with your hosts Hattie Butterworth.

Rebecca Toal 00:10

And me Rebecca Toal.

Hattie Butterworth 00:12

Within our vibrant musical world, it can often feel that the struggles and humanity of musicians is lost and restricted.

Rebecca Toal 00:20

Having both suffered in silence with mental, physical and emotional issues, we are now looking for a way to voice musicians' stories and discuss them further and to connect with the many others who suffer like we have.

Hattie Butterworth 00:31

No topic will be out of bounds as we're committed to raising awareness for all varieties of struggle.

Rebecca Toal 00:37

So join me Hattie, and guests as we attempt to bring an end to stigma by uncovering the things musicians don't talk about.

Hattie Butterworth 01:06

We coming today from ... can I say where we are?

Kate Kennedy 01:10

Yeah!

Hattie Butterworth 01:10

the crypt?

Rebecca Toal 01:11

The crypt.

Hattie Butterworth 01:12

...of St Clement Danes Church on the Strand.

Rebecca Toal 01:14

Very fancy.

Hattie Butterworth 01:15

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 01:16

Feels like a big outing for us.

Hattie Butterworth 01:17

It does, doesn't it?

Rebecca Toal 01:18

It's either usually my house or your house.

Hattie Butterworth 01:21

Or someone's house or somewhere weird, or ... urgh ... somewhere where there's a Hoover going on. But anyway, it's lovely to have you with us, Kate ... Kennedy.

Kate Kennedy 01:31

Hi.

Hattie Butterworth 01:32

Thought I was gonna get your name wrong then.

Kate Kennedy 01:35

It's alliterative. Once you've got the K, you're pretty much there.

Hattie Butterworth 01:37

Yeah. Kate, Kennedy! Do you like to be known as Dr. Kennedy?

Kate Kennedy 01:42

No!

Rebecca Toal 01:43

Dr. Kate?

Kate Kennedy 01:43

Dr Kate is a BBC thing. No, no, Kate Kennedy is fine.

Hattie Butterworth 01:46

Okay.

Kate Kennedy 01:46

That'll do.

Hattie Butterworth 01:47

Well, it's really great to be speaking to you today. Um, I mean, it's kind of hard to like for me just to summarise everything you do, so I was gonna get you to do it.

Kate Kennedy 01:56

Oh my goodness. I can't remember!

Hattie Butterworth 01:58

Author, writer, cellist, academic, broadcaster...

Kate Kennedy 02:02

...un...career summarises it nicely.

Hattie Butterworth 02:03

It's it's so cool, though, because like, yeah...

Rebecca Toal 02:07

before we pressed record, Hattie was just saying that she'd copied and pasted your Wikipedia page into the notes, and you were saying, Kate, that you hadn't read it. So it would be quite funny to read out who Wikipedia...

Kate Kennedy 02:21

A form of torture!

Rebecca Toal 02:21

...who it thinks you are!

Hattie Butterworth 02:24

Yeah, well, I'll compare, I'll compare the Wikipedia to what you explain yourself to be ... but can you just give us...

Kate Kennedy 02:31

It's like a really awful This is your Life.

Hattie Butterworth 02:33

Yeah! Can you give us an overview of kind of what the work is that you do?

Kate Kennedy 02:38

Sure.

Hattie Butterworth 02:39

Who you are, and all of that sort of thing.

Kate Kennedy 02:41

So ... Well, interestingly, thinking about who I am, I am largely a biographer so I spend most of my working life thinking about who people are and how they define themselves. So this is ... this is a useful act of self reflection. I started off life as a cellist, I studied in Cambridge in London, I also read English and so I've always had a bit of a split personality disorder between English literature and music. At one point, I had two CVs, one as a Baroque cellist and the other as someone who talked about First World War poetry. And that's, that's a hard career plan to make sense of. But I've spent my academic life working as a lecturer at Cambridge and now at Oxford, between English and music, thinking about the connectivity between the two basically, and for the last decade or so I've very much been interested in biography and particularly how we sit a life story alongside the work and for music that's quite interesting, you know, if you've got a symphony, and you've got a life, how do you write usefully about the two without superficially slapping one on top of the other so that's, that's where my interests are, but I'm still playing freelance various points of my life much less various other points I now all the time. And I've written a lot about the 20th century musical literature. That's, that's my area. And I broadcast for Radio Three, and Radio Four, but mostly Radio Three.

Hattie Butterworth 02:48

And what's this um...Sorry...

Rebecca Toal 04:08

What's this I hear about...

Hattie Butterworth 04:12

What's this I hear about the Oxford Centre for Life Writing.

Kate Kennedy 04:17

Ah-hah! Yes! The Oxford Centre for Life Writing - OCLW which is ... we've become known cos it's too ...

Hattie Butterworth 04:21

That's so Oxbridge.

Kate Kennedy 04:22

It's so Oxbridge. It's such a silly name for anything. So it's a wonderful research centre. It's based at Wolfson College, Oxford. And it was founded 11 years ago now by the greatest living biographer Dame Hermione Lee, who is my dear friend and colleague, when she was the president of the College. And so it's really her baby. And I took it over a few years, well, seven or eight years ago now. And I work

very closely with her and we have an international community of writers and scholars, everybody who thinks about lives, whether it's as an opera librettist or a novelist or as someone writing their memoir, all kinds of different projects and lots of students and we do huge amounts of outreach because understanding who you are and how to ... learning how to articulate that can be a very therapeutic exercise. So, unlike most other areas of academia, we have a huge outreach potential.

Hattie Butterworth 04:23

I love that. Wow.

Kate Kennedy 05:15

So that's really fun.

Hattie Butterworth 05:16

So it's not just life writing from the perspective of biography but also from autobiography, would you say?

Kate Kennedy 05:21

Oh totally! Yeah, absolutely. Autobiography, memoir, drama... I'm particularly interested in dramatised recitals ... any way of putting the life and work together in an interesting, creative way and shedding light on it. That's, that's what we're about.

Hattie Butterworth 05:34

Wow and I mean, it feels like ... with with the sort of whole history we have of composers and the way they're talked about and everything it feels like a ... an interesting and maybe even an understandable route to have gone into, having been yourself a cellist and studied the cello and everything. I was wondering if you could tell us a bit about your earlier life as a cellist, like Wells Cathedral School, you know, how was that whole experience for you and...?

Kate Kennedy 05:58

Well, so I was, I was from a ... I was the first generation in my family to go to university. I was a shocking geek as a child. I was from a pretty rough bit of inner city Bristol and I taught myself classical music through listening to Radio Three and writing it all down and memorising it. Imagine the ...

Rebecca Toal 06:14

No way!

Kate Kennedy 06:14

spellings of things like Shostakovich when you'd heard that on the radio and I used to..

Hattie Butterworth 06:19

That's so cute!

Kate Kennedy 06:20

It's so dweeby. And I used to live in Bristol Central Library and and tape all their records and memorise them all and with absolutely no frame of reference at all as to what was good music and what wasn't.

Rebecca Toal 06:20

How?! Wow.

Kate Kennedy 06:32

And so I became obsessed with classical music and and adored it and wanted to just drink it all in and, and presumably got to a fairly decent level of knowledge and was was a cellist... I, in fact, in my junior school, I wanted to play the guitar because that was the only instrument I'd seen from a non classical music family. And the headmaster said, "Well, I'm afraid there isn't any space in the guitar group, but a cello looks like one sideways so here's a cello!" And I've never heard of a cello! And I loved it and then found out about Jacqueline Du Pre through the library and, and kind of fell in love with her and wanted to be her except ideally without the tragic early death and ..

Rebecca Toal 07:07

We can hope!

Kate Kennedy 07:08

Yeah, exactly. I've made it past 42 now Thank God so...

Hattie Butterworth 07:11

Wow! What age were you at that point where the injury started?

Rebecca Toal 07:11

Nice!

Kate Kennedy 07:11

I'm doing okay. But yeah, so I practised and practised and practised, and then my music teacher at senior school thought "okay she's now kind of at a point where we can't help her", took me to the Royal Academy because he'd studied there, to play to David Strange, who was the Head of Strings at the time, who said "you should be at a specialist music school," so put me in touch with one of his pupils there. So I started having lessons privately with a wonderful cellist called Alison Wells, appropriately at Wells Cathedral School. But my parents didn't have any money at all and they said, "Well, if it costs under 1000 pounds a year for you to board and go to school, then you can go" and, and the government stepped in and gave me 100% scholarship, thank goodness. And so I went with very dodgy technique, but an enormous passion and total, total commitment, and did very well very quickly. But without the technique to support it, so I'd never heard of tendinitis and I'd never heard of any kind of tension injuries. And of course, it's a ... it's an accident waiting to happen, having this completely over-enthusiastic teenager unsupervised, practising seven hours a day doing trills and going "**sings frantically**", absolutely caning my left arm, and it was coming up to the Young Musician of the Year and I was really focused and, and something just snapped one morning. I was doing these ridiculous trills and it was my third finger, which is kind of weak anyway, and probably terrible tension, and I just remember this burning kind of bright burning pain down my arm. And I couldn't put my finger on the

strings. I just couldn't use my third and fourth fingers at all. And I tried and tried and I couldn't play through it. And so and then left it thinking "well in a few weeks time, that'll be okay." And it wasn't and then a couple of months on, it was still ... it was still unusable. And so I would sit there with my cello in the practice room, imagining playing with some Bach suites on the stand but without being able to touch ... without being able to use my left hand. I could play open strings, but I couldn't do any more. So I have a whole repertory that I've ... that at the time I'd never played but I had a sense of exactly how I'd phrase everything and what it would feel like and a different relationship to the music. 18 ... 17?

Hattie Butterworth 07:32

Okay, so like ...

Kate Kennedy 07:37

Sixth form.

Hattie Butterworth 07:38

You were still at Wells, but ...

Kate Kennedy 07:40

I was still at school, yeah. So I was in this kind of awful, tortured position of having got all this money being poured into me being there, it being the kind of fulfilment of my dreams to that point, being so desperate to catch up with the others who'd all been through a National Children's Orchestra and all these things my parents never even heard of, and had fantastic teaching all the way through, but not being able to touch the instrument and watching the time ticking on ticking on and, and and being a kind of driven neurotic 17 year old, I stopped eating to punish myself for being so weak, having physically fallen apart and obviously that isn't the route to helping much and I remember, at some point, the school saying, "Look, you have just got to look after yourself because it's either going to be hospital or it's going to be Cambridge. And it's up to you, which you're going to choose." And I thought, "yeah, okay, hang on there, perhaps I'll go back to the eating thing again." And so I went to Cambridge, rather than music college because there was no way I could have got through enough practice at that point. And then went to the Royal College afterwards, but on Baroque, because Baroque cello is much lighter and gentler on your arms. So I was kind of pushed into Early Music, just because of the sort of physical disability really.

Hattie Butterworth 10:33

Right, wow.

Rebecca Toal 10:34

So there was no real kind of support for the injury? People didn't necessarily know what to do, or ...?

Kate Kennedy 10:41

They didn't know what to do. I think they were very concerned about it. And there was another chap, who's a dear friend of mine in my year, who had a similar problem. He had the most enormous growth spurt, and so all his tendons were over stretched. And he came back after one summer holiday looking like the BFG. I mean, he's just so ridiculously tall. And he was a wonderful pianist, and still is now but

it's taken most of his adult life to work out a technique that works around his injuries. And the school didn't really know what to do, they ...there was an Alexander Technique teacher, but ...

Rebecca Toal 11:14

Hidden away somewhere.

Kate Kennedy 11:15

Yeah, exactly. And they took us ... gosh, they took us to some amazing, crazy lady in Bath, who, who was French and I think she'd escaped Paris during the war. She was very, very old and very dramatic with incredible eyeshadow. And, and all these dangly things. It was like a cave of sort of strange pendants and crystals and stuff in her house. And she would get a little bowl of olive oil and rub it on her fingers and then vigorously rub bits of our arms with this olive oil and and then we'd be sent back to school treated.

Hattie Butterworth 11:44

I shouldn't laugh but that is amazing!

Kate Kennedy 11:47

I mean, she was quite cool but...

Hattie Butterworth 11:47

Basically marinating you.

Kate Kennedy 11:49

Exactly! We could be yeah, a bit of salt, you know, 20 minutes in the oven.

Rebecca Toal 11:52

Foccaccia!

Kate Kennedy 11:54

Yeah, but that was the treatment at the time.

Hattie Butterworth 11:57

But I mean, talking about the like ... being that age and and having an injury ... and, I mean, before it started, and before the sort of Young Musician of the Year burning pain thing, which is so interesting, because that's exactly what happened to me at Chets.

Kate Kennedy 12:11

Is it really?!

Hattie Butterworth 12:12

...in my, in my last year. And I've ... I remember having a similar response to it with eating but I kind of had a more ... healthy eating thing. I went gluten free and stuff like ... and vegan.

Kate Kennedy 12:26

That's a lot healthier.

Hattie Butterworth 12:28

Well...

Rebecca Toal 12:29

I dunno!

Hattie Butterworth 12:31

But do you think it was because you didn't feel you had an identity as a cellist anymore that you needed to use like another thing to cope? I guess it's ... I don't wanna put words into your mouth, but was it before that all happened that you wanted to go to music college?

Kate Kennedy 12:46

I was completely sure where I was going. I was going to go to music college. I was going to be brilliant and ...

Hattie Butterworth 12:52

Right, as a performer?

Kate Kennedy 12:52

Yeah, absolutely.

Hattie Butterworth 12:53

Nothing to do with Cambridge or academia.

Kate Kennedy 12:55

No, I mean, I loved writing and I loved literature. And I was very happy to go to Cambridge and I was jolly lucky to get in with my 2 A levels from a music school, particularly I couldn't write and had to dictate them and messed up my English A level which no, as an English professor is ... it was, in fact, Cambridge, let me in not knowing that there'd been a problem.

Hattie Butterworth 13:13

Wow.

Kate Kennedy 13:13

And that was incredibly fluky, otherwise I think my life would have been very, very different because being able to go to Cambridge set me on a completely different path and has meant that academia and being a writer has been open to me. And, and that was incredible. In fact, the reason I changed to study English when I was at Cambridge in the middle of my second year was because a very rude flatmate called me 'Kate who only talks to musos', and I thought "god, they're right I only... I can only relate to classical musicians", which is, what? 0.0001% of the population. "I need to ... I need to get a second level to my personality." And so I changed to do English, because my whole life was about music, all

my identity was in music. So now, in my 40s, I have this, I sort of returned to this strange split in my identity at 17 or 18, where in my head, I'm a musician, but actually, oh, you know, on paper and in person, I'm an academic, I'm a writer, I'm doing English and my my life is in a different ... a different place. And so the book that I'm writing now called "Cello, a Journey through Silence to Sound" takes this moment of split and I kind of identified it ... really sort of articulated it to myself only very, very recently ... I've completely ignored this and spent a lot of my career focussing on other people's lives and writing other people's biographies and not necessarily as a displacement activity, but because that's what your PhD is, and then that's what your book is, etc, etc. And never really stopped to think "well, hang on, I was a cellist once. I remember that being quite important to me" and, and so just a few years back, I was having some publicity photos taken as you do for literary festivals or whatever, and sitting there and feeling all gauche and smiling and turning this way and that and kind of wanting it to stop. And then the photographer said, "Go and get your cello because, you know, that'll be interesting." And I said, "Well, look, I'm yeah, I'm not really a cellist. I'm not gonna be doing a concerto. I don't need a publicity photo with the cello." And he said, "No, I just ... I'm interested in how the light might shine off the instrument." So I did and as soon as I had my cello, and I was noodling away, playing Bach and just messing around, I was absolutely happy in my own skin and under the lens of the observer, I had my shadow back and I had my silhouette complete. And for me, that was the moment where I thought even after all this time, even after all the stuff that I've done, after the unfocused, odd career that I've potched together, as you summarised at the beginning, you know, 'what am I?' Academic, broadcaster, writer ... who knows ... stuff. Stuff to do with music and literature. I still feel that I'm a cellist, even against ... you know, against the odds, and so that, if that feels that strong for me, with the little career that I have had, and, you know, whatever little potential I had, what would it be like for Jacqueline Du Pre? What would it be like for Julian Lloyd Webber after 30 years of an international career not being able to play anymore? What's it like for the principal cellist to the Berlin Philharmonic, whose right hand doesn't work? What is it like if someone is separated from their instrument, or if the instrument is destroyed? What's lost and what is that relationship between body and object? And so that's been my research project for the last few years, when I've taken my cello on my back, quite literally, right around Europe, every possible corner of Europe, playing to people and playing in weird and wonderful places, and meeting people and having adventures and following these particular stories, these particular biographies, but also thinking about how you see an instrument differently, how you might listen to it differently, how you can have fun with it and play around with it and, and what happens when it's destroyed? And what happens if it's resurrected? And, and these are all the kind of thoughts that have have spun this book into, into being. And it's been the most wonderfully therapeutic experience because I, you know, when you're, when you're structuring a book, you think, "well, what's the driving force? What's the principal? What's our jumping off point?" And so I used this idea of the photographs as my kind of way into my story and so begins a journey. And of course, as a literary person and academic, I know I'm doing that. I know what my structuring principle is, you know...that's how you write a book. But actually, it's surprised me by becoming true that I have actually been on an emotional journey with the cello in the course of writing, which is almost ... as a cynical academic is really funny, because it's actually turned itself around on me and I find myself at the end of the book, playing almost full time and, and loving the cello and having a new cello that's wonderful that I can't yet afford, so if anyone listening would like to help me ...I'm gonna be crowd funding for it, but, but, you know, it's a new identity. And it is a dormant part of me that has been neglected, even through music college really. But since those early years, where it was absolutely what I burnt to do, and now I've found a way of

reconciling all the funny identities I've created ever since, with the 18 year old in me who sat there in the music room, not being able to touch the instruments, and made something very creative out of it. And, and it's helped a lot of other people along the way, which is really another unexpected, glorious spin off from it all.

Hattie Butterworth 18:24

Of course, yeah. I mean, you talk about now finding this resurrection of love and affection for it and your identity as a cellist. How was it then to be on the other side of that? And would you explain your relationship with it, say, at music college and uni as being one of hatred? Or would you not quite use that word?

Kate Kennedy 18:44

That's interesting. Yeah, gosh, thinking back. I don't think it was one of hatred, but it was quite distant. I think actually, it's interesting, you say that. I think I probably hated my modern cello. My poor old modern cello, I did really abuse it, all its strings fell off. And it's sat behind the TV.

Hattie Butterworth 19:03

They are expensive.

Kate Kennedy 19:04

This one wasn't. This is rubbish. But um, yeah, because I had this beautiful baroque cello, and that was a new start. And I got that just before I went to music college, I was borrowing a Baroque cello when I was at Cambridge. And I had this beautiful new cello, and so I think it felt like I'd had some awful messy divorce with my modern cello and, and it was just something I wasn't going to engage with. And it got to the point where it was physically unplayable because the strings had flopped off. And it just sat there for years and I only played Baroque and sometimes I even tuned it up to play a bit more modern, but it was definitely a Baroque cello. And, and so that I think perhaps I projected my anger and fury at it letting me down so badly onto my poor beaten up old cello that that I didn't touch at all.

Hattie Butterworth 19:49

More through neglect rather than outright hatred.

Kate Kennedy 19:52

Yes, I think so. But it but it was, it was a scapegoating perhaps. That rather than hating myself and abusing myself by starving myself, I could neglect the the modern cello that I didn't want to touch, didn't want to...

Hattie Butterworth 20:04

The thing that was causing me pain and the association with it. Yeah, wow.

Kate Kennedy 20:07

Exactly, and it did cause me pain. If I played it, it hurt so therefore it sat behind the TV with its strings flopping off.

Rebecca Toal 20:13

This is so fascinating, like I'm totally...

Hattie Butterworth 20:16

It's really hard...just keep talking!

Kate Kennedy 20:17

It's really interesting. I'd never thought about it like that though, that kind of projecting onto the object is so interesting.

Hattie Butterworth 20:24

Isn't it, yeah?

Kate Kennedy 20:24

And it is only now ... it's during the course of writing this book that I have a brand new modern cello. I've been borrowing one forever from the Royal College, which isn't that great and it's hard to play and again, that's not helped over, over my adult life so far, that it's a difficult cello to play, and not well set up and it needs a lot of money spending on it. And of course, I've never invested financially and emotionally in my playing, particularly on modern, because I've, you know, I've got a family, I've got a career, I've got other stuff going on, and I've pushed it right to the sort of bottom of my consciousness. And it was only when my husband mentioned just a few years ago, was talking about the cello and I was thinking ... he was saying to me "Do you not miss playing?" And, and I immediately felt like I wanted to cry, which is very unlike me.

Hattie Butterworth 21:09

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 21:09

And it felt like someone pressing on a bruise you didn't know you had. You know, and I suddenly thought, "Oh, yeah, actually, I really do."

Hattie Butterworth 21:17

Yeahhh.

Rebecca Toal 21:18

It strikes me that like what you just said about somebody pressing on a bruise that you didn't know you had, even though so much of this is about your internal identity, you've discovered so much about that through external things like the photographs, through writing about other people.

Kate Kennedy 21:33

Yes, that's interesting.

Rebecca Toal 21:33

And I'm wondering, with your identity, because I also almost did English literature instead of music college?

Hattie Butterworth 21:39

And me as well.

Kate Kennedy 21:40

I can recommend it, it's great.

Hattie Butterworth 21:43

Damn.

Rebecca Toal 21:44

But there was there was such a feeling of like, "I can't let anybody know, from my English life, that I'm actually a musician."

Kate Kennedy 21:51

Yes, yeah, absolutely!

Rebecca Toal 21:51

"And I can't let anybody in my music world know that I'm considering English." And even when I got to music college, because I did trumpet and harp, I was like "I can't let anybody ... I had to have like different websites or like..." I can't have both of my identities side by side, otherwise, it will compromise both of them.

Kate Kennedy 22:01

Yeah. Yes.

Rebecca Toal 22:06

Did you have that too?

Kate Kennedy 22:07

Absolutely. And I still do. Yeah, it's, I have colleagues at Oxford who have no idea that I ever played a cello, probably less so now because I'm about to produce this great big book called Cello, which is a bit of a giveaway, but, but even having ... I think one of my graduate students did my website. And he's put a picture of me, he's put the picture of me playing the cello, which is from this photo session, on it. And when I saw that, I thought, "oh, no, that's not right. I'm not a cellist, that shouldn't be there." And then as it happens, I'm now writing a book about the cello so it stayed. But it struck me as wrong and in the wrong place, and not part of that public narrative.

Hattie Butterworth 22:38

It is a really lovely photo, though.

Kate Kennedy 22:40

Thank you.

Hattie Butterworth 22:40

I can understand why that... Because... I don't know. Like, you look so right with it.

Kate Kennedy 22:45

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 22:46

Well, I...

Kate Kennedy 22:46

I was so happy playing it.

Hattie Butterworth 22:47

It looks like that, yeah.

Kate Kennedy 22:48

And also, I think because it's ... again, it comes back to a relationship to an object that it ... because it's not about me, both ... those photographs were about the cello. So

Hattie Butterworth 22:57

Interesting.

Kate Kennedy 22:57

I'm, I'm happy for it to be about the cello, and I'm happy to celebrate the cello as a body. And, and in a way in doing that, perhaps we learn to celebrate ourselves. But it is one step removed; a cello is a barrier between you and an audience and it's a torso shaped barrier, and it's one that you hug, it is like a like a teddy bear or something comforting and concealing, which I don't think singers have, and I think there's a vulnerability about just presenting your physical self and your sound, unmediated to an audience, whereas a cello is ... you know, you cuddle a cello on stage and it is like a partner.

Rebecca Toal 23:31

Unless it's causing you pain.

Kate Kennedy 23:33

Exactly. Exactly. And then it's an abusive relationship.

Rebecca Toal 23:35

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 23:36

I guess as a broadcaster, though ... And this is what I've enjoyed about the tiny bit of - if you call this broadcasting, I don't know.

Kate Kennedy 23:44

This is broadcasting, you've got a microphone.

Rebecca Toal 23:46

Look at you go!

Hattie Butterworth 23:46

We got microphones. We've got an interface over there. Yeah, okay. But that's what I have liked is that with my performance anxiety and things, I ... I've often spoken about it getting in the way, the cello got in the way of sometimes of me feeling I can express myself. So I'm just wondering, did you find ever that broadcasting and academia was in any way a relief? Or was it always just a sort of, "I can also do this"?

Kate Kennedy 24:10

No, it was such a relief. It was such a relief. And I find it so easy to gabble live on the radio, because when you put your finger on a note, it's either an F sharp or it's not and it's out of tune. Particularly with Baroque, there's absolutely no ... there's no vibrato to hide behind. Whereas when you waffle on like this, you can you can talk nonsense and then you can say "so, so in other words..." you know.

Rebecca Toal 24:30

Yeah!

Kate Kennedy 24:30

So for me like, it's so much easier.

Hattie Butterworth 24:35

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 24:35

And in fact, it's so much easier. I'm a real liability because particularly when you're broadcasting in lockdown, and you're sitting in your pyjamas talking to a laptop screen, you can say anything and then you forget there's actually probably someone out there listening and ... but yeah, it is... It is almost cheating, I feel, for me. I would be much, much more nervous playing. But then of course, the more I play, and the more regularly I'm doing concerts, the easier that gets, obviously, because you know, when you're out of practice, you jolly well should be nervous doing a concert because there's a chance it's not going to be great, and ...

Hattie Butterworth 25:06

But how is ... how has your experience been, now coming back to the cello? Playing more at the moment? I mean, how often do you play? What kind of music are you playing? Is it mostly modern? Is it quite a lot of baroque still? Like, how's your cello life now, in the process still of finishing this book, and everything?

Kate Kennedy 25:23

it's really joyful. It's really, really joyful. For a long time, I wasn't sure how to play if it wasn't sort of good professional paid work, because I don't know what my ... where my level is. And so someone who has freelanced for quite a long time, trying to find a place in amateur orchestras is really tricky. And I do slightly struggle with that, that I don't quite know where I ... where I sit within it all. But I'm just starting to find that ... I'm leading Oxford Sinfonia and it's a mixture of people, lots of them are music teachers, some of them aren't, some of them are fantastic players who I assume are probably freelancers or, or have chosen not to, but could easily have been. And that's really fun, because it's easy enough that it's not scary. And it's good enough that it's still quite satisfying. And I can feel myself every concert just growing as a player and being very physically free and, and that's great. And it's ... there's no pressure on it, you know. And then, then the odd freelance gig, which will be anything you know, Durufle Requiem, Messiah, whatever, just normal freelance-y work feels absolutely fine. And that in each one, I can feel myself kind of creeping up a little bit more to where I was, and finding it less complicated. I've remembered how terrible my sight reading is, you know. I did Stravinsky Dumbarton Oaks, the other day and my goodness... counting.

Rebecca Toal 26:43

That's hard!

Kate Kennedy 26:44

It's really hard. Yeah, so that, I'd forgotten because when you're playing Baroque, it's generally guessable.

Rebecca Toal 26:50

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 26:52

...which really worked for me. But

Rebecca Toal 26:54

It's also interesting that you say your sight reading's not so good, but then you spent so much of your time in the library transcribing.

Kate Kennedy 27:01

Yeah, yeah, it's funny isn't it? But rhythms I'm appalling at, I mean, I'm dyscalculic so I will reverse and flip rhythms.

Rebecca Toal 27:08

Okay.

Hattie Butterworth 27:08

Oh me too!

Kate Kennedy 27:09

Hopeless, absolutely hopeless.

Hattie Butterworth 27:10

I didn't know there was a word for that!

Kate Kennedy 27:12

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I've only known that because my 10 year old and my 17 year old are both massively dyslexic and my 10 year old's at a special school. And so ... and they've got it from me. It's a unhelpful gene, I think, that I've passed on.

Hattie Butterworth 27:24

Or not.

Kate Kennedy 27:24

But who knows? But it is no help for counting, I can tell you that. There is no way you could spin that as an ability because it isn't.

Hattie Butterworth 27:32

It's so interesting. Like, I'm smiling, because it's just interesting that you, even now, you kind of want to put yourself in a box of like a level.

Kate Kennedy 27:43

Yeah. And yeah, that's interesting.

Hattie Butterworth 27:45

I'm just like, you've gone through so much sort of adversity with your injury and everything, and it's still like, "Oh, am I, am I at the right stage? Am I ... Am I not good enough for this ensemble? Am I not...?"

Kate Kennedy 27:55

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 27:56

And that's so much of what like you felt at music school, isn't it?

Kate Kennedy 27:58

You're right! But also, but I have arrested development, because for most of my 20s and 30s, I mean in my 20s, I was playing freelance. But for most of my 30s, I had babies, and I had an academic career, expanding on a lot of radio work and lots of writing, and there just wasn't time to play, unless it was going to earn enough money that I could cover the childcare for instance, I mean, practical reasons as well as emotional. And, and so I think I ... in my head, I am still early 20s as a player, and I am still thinking, "is this the right ensemble to be playing with?" And "is this where I should be?" But of course, all my colleagues are running major European opera houses or are fantastic soloists. And so there is that weird, disjunct that, that, you know, my friends are all fantastic principals and big orchestras. And yet there I am playing with amateur groups. And in my head, I'm a cellist, but I also know I'm not, you

know. On, on one level of that, you know, when you were maybe at Wells that you wanted yourself to be or ... ? Yeah, exactly. And I was on the same trajectory and mine's gone on a very crazy journey, whereas theirs has stayed going straight ahead, or not as the case may be. I mean, that is also an interesting...

Hattie Butterworth 29:07

Yeah, and I think it's happening more and more as people realise that actually, being a musician doesn't have to be linear. I think it's one thing we say all the time. And yeah, I think Rebecca especially you've been someone that's always been okay about having quite a few things, quite a few interests...

Rebecca Toal 29:28

Yeah, I mean, sometimes to my detriment.

Hattie Butterworth 29:31

But, like that's so freeing for me to know that you're so okay with that, like you're just just intrinsically okay. Because I think for so long, I was like, "I have to just be obsessed with the cello. And there's ... nothing else in my life is allowed." But you're sort of like ... you've always sort of had either running or like, yoga or...?

Rebecca Toal 29:50

But, thank you.

Kate Kennedy 29:51

I wonder whether it is also a generational thing, or whether it's a music school thing, that for me the very the idea of diluting anything about what you do, it's about being a fantastic, brilliant soloist, and diverting into writing reviews of theatre productions or writing books or, or using music in a different way is missing the point always, so you have to be practising, you have to be pushing yourself and that was my mentality. And I don't know whether it was a generational thing, because perhaps careers were more linear. I mean, you know, this was...

Rebecca Toal 30:22

I think there's such a huge disconnect between being like a holistic, like, well-rounded artist, and yeah, people that live that are, you know, being a good artist to them means having all these different interests and informing yourself through different pathways, or the kind of obsessive musician who's like, "I can only practise" like ...

Hattie Butterworth 30:22

Yeahhh, that's true.

Kate Kennedy 30:22

...sort of mid 90s. Or whether ... or whether it was just me or whether it's a specialist music school and it was perhaps my background that I had got this incredible huge break at a formative age. And I desperately wanted to make the best of it. So I wasn't going to dilute it with other stuff. And so ever since then, my meanderings around expressing myself to do with music and literature have felt to me

quite unfocused almost until now. And I find that I've that I almost build my career backwards so that I can make sense. So now I have a career talking about literature, music in the 20th century. And sometimes that's writing a book, sometimes it's making radio documentaries, sometimes it's performing on stage. It makes sense of my cello CV - like you were saying, Rebecca, these kind of two different identities - and my literature CV, and now I can make a virtue of it, but it's taken till now to look back and go, "Yeah, I totally meant to do that. There was a plan all along!"

Hattie Butterworth 31:41

The kind of masochism side of it.

Rebecca Toal 31:42

Yeah, like, I won't go out, I won't see people, I won't like absorb art, I will just play and that's how I will get to this point.

Kate Kennedy 31:48

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 31:48

And it's ... I don't know whether you know more about it from doing biographical work, but it feels like, maybe the more masochistic side is more of like a ... maybe more of a modern thing? Because we have to get to places really quickly in order to make the money. Whereas I feel like, historically, to be an artist you had all this time. And like, yeah, money wasn't like, amazing, but it was your life rather than just...

Kate Kennedy 32:14

There was more space around the edges.

Rebecca Toal 32:16

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 32:16

We're all going at it much faster. Yeah. Yeah, that is interesting. But of course, as a biographer, the people who are masochistic and lock themselves away to get brilliant make much less interesting subjects.

Rebecca Toal 32:19

I wonder whether there's that.

Hattie Butterworth 32:28

Yeah!

Rebecca Toal 32:29

That's really true.

Hattie Butterworth 32:29

I think... yeah. So I, I have read quite a bit of the Ivor Gurney biography.

Kate Kennedy 32:36

Have you?!

Hattie Butterworth 32:36

You're obsessed.

Kate Kennedy 32:37

Good for you!

Hattie Butterworth 32:38

And it was just so cool. It's ... I don't know if if you wanted this, or whether you ... I haven't read anyone else's review on it, by the way so this is just me, like, going for it.

Rebecca Toal 32:50

You're a worthy reviewer.

Kate Kennedy 32:52

Yeah. Your review will be just as good as any... and if you're about to say it's rubbish, in which case, no...

Rebecca Toal 32:56

Yeah, you're terrible reviewer.

Hattie Butterworth 32:57

I... And I know it might have been because I knew I was going to meet you. And so then you also are slightly more motivated to read something, d'you know what I mean?

Kate Kennedy 33:04

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 33:05

But I really couldn't put it down, in a way that other biographies of artists, I have to re-read the page like three times.

Rebecca Toal 33:14

You're good at putting books down, is what I would say.

Kate Kennedy 33:17

Some books deserve to be put down. Depends on the book.

Hattie Butterworth 33:19

And I just think there are so many biographies that are like ... I'm not gonna name names because I really actually don't know, but I have read some which, gosh, I have to read three times. It's just full of like references that I don't get. And it doesn't feel either that I get a full impact of who the person that I'm reading about, or what their life actually felt like. And I was wondering whether this style of biography is something you've been inspired to do based on maybe other types of biography, but I feel like the composer biography in general doesn't feel like it uses the style that the Ivor Gurney one does.

Kate Kennedy 33:58

That's so interesting. Yeah, yeah, so you should be a reviewer. You can keep that as a ... I'll stick that on my dustjacket. It's a ... yeah, no, you've absolutely... you absolutely hit the nail on the head with it. So, so because of my strange identity as a literature person, you know, I'm an English lecturer at Oxford. I was a music lecturer at Cambridge, I kind of sit weirdly between the two. And I am deeply, deeply immersed in literary biography and in the way that we write about lives and in what Virginia Woolf says about the way we approach her life and what lives we tell. And I have wonderful, very, very eminent literary colleagues who I'm constantly in discussion and dialogue with which is a huge privilege. And so, I bring that kind of hat or that life whatever to musicology. And they are different worlds and it is really interesting having one foot in an English faculty and one in a music faculty, because the way, as you say, the composer biography has developed is nothing like the kinds of debates that we have in in English.

Hattie Butterworth 34:54

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 34:54

And the kind of wacky, creative ways we have of grouping lives together or of telling lives in different directions or of messing around with them and putting ourselves into the narrative and just being creative and seeing where the where the boundary is between the ways we might write a novel, for instance, and the ways we might write a biography might be. And so I absolutely draw on that tradition when I approach writing about composers. And there is a whole world of exciting projects to be done animating the lives of composers and finding different ways to tell stories. And it isn't ... I don't want to be, you know, I don't want to say "new musicology is 40 years behind English literature," because it's not a race. You shouldn't put things in boxes, but it is ... its concerns are different. And I'm really, really interested in how we make those lives more readable, or just making the writing more artistic.

Hattie Butterworth 35:36

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Kate Kennedy 35:44

Making it a work of art to tell their stories.

Hattie Butterworth 35:47

That is literally what I couldn't believe. I'm a bit of a 20th century music geek.

Kate Kennedy 35:52

Oh cool.

Hattie Butterworth 35:53

I've had a big obsession with Al Gore for a long time. And Walton and Britten and ... Anyway, it's another thing... It's another side of my life. But having those interests and having read the biographies of Elgar many times and Britten blah blah blah ... it was never something that I wanted to read.

Kate Kennedy 36:14

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 36:15

Whereas I feel like the style with the Gurney biography, it was always something I wanted to go back to and read and read and read.

Kate Kennedy 36:21

Well then, it's done its job. That's exactly what ... you'd be exactly who I'm writing for. Someone who has an interest in music and 20th century music, but it's a book they actually want to read it. That's yeah, fantastic.

Hattie Butterworth 36:31

Because with the Elgar ones, it was like, "oh, I ought to read this because I'm interested in him. And I really want to get to know more about him." But, bloody hell, they're so fucking boring.

Rebecca Toal 36:42

Well, I feel like so many of those biographies are what something you said about the framework is the pieces of music that they composed, and it's just like filling in the gaps between or something. And it's like, well, that's not really...

Kate Kennedy 36:54

Yes, exactly ... Gap filling. And actually, when you ... when you try and ... when you start writing a biography and try mapping that out, you have your your washing line of events, your sort of timeline of the life, and then you have your washing line of pieces, and they don't fit together really well. You know, how do you say what he had for breakfast on the Tuesday in which he finished writing Symphony no. 3, and make that interesting? Or make it in any way a kind of linear narrative with the drive behind it? It's jolly difficult so you have to find different ways in.

Rebecca Toal 36:56

...interesting.

Hattie Butterworth 37:24

Yeah, I was also really glad you didn't give like a massively long, like, boring, dilly dally about his childhood. And that you went like straight to the...

Kate Kennedy 37:34

I cut it! I did do that. And then I thought "I'm too bored even to read that myself." "I'll start when he's 20."

Hattie Butterworth 37:43

Because that's when it gets really interesting.

Kate Kennedy 37:44

Yeah. Exactly. The linear cradle to grave or, or 'the sperm to worm biography' as we weirdly call it is, is really quite hard now to publish. And I made the choice with Gurney, because there is so ... I mean, for your listeners, Ivor Gurney was born in 1890, died in 1937. He was the weird thing of being, a little bit like me, he was a poet and composer. And it's almost unprecedented today, apart from going back to John Dowland or Thomas Campion, you don't find someone who is equally brilliant in those two areas. And by brilliant, I mean, not like me, he was brilliant. So that in itself poses a structural problem: you've got to look at all the poetry and you've got to look at all the music in the same breath and the life and hold it all together. So there's a lot of stuff with Gurney. Um, he was in a lunatic asylum, he was in the First World War, and so there's a huge amount of archival material and historical knowledge you have to hold alongside the events of the life. And then he's locked up in 1922 for the rest of his life, for 15 years. So then you have the whole history of British psychiatry to meld into all the stuff that you've got, and he's still churning out music and poetry like there's no tomorrow, which there wasn't for him. There was no tomorrow, he's writing, you know, writing into a brick wall effectively. So, so there's a massive amount to hold together in one book. So I had to make the decision that actually if I tried to be too clever with this, and if I tried to muck around and do it by theme or, or start with the death and work backwards or anything like that, it would just be jolly confusing, because so much of his material's unpublished, so I'm holding together a lot of manuscripts that people have never seen, songs they've never heard, because they're still all in archives, as well as all this material. So I had to make it linear and you know, start with him early and end with the death effectively. But within that I messed around as much as I could possibly within my framework, which is why he starts at the age of 20.

Hattie Butterworth 39:34

Argh, so good.

Kate Kennedy 39:35

And I simply looked at the first three chapters and thought, "Well, what do we really need?"

Rebecca Toal 39:39

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 39:39

Pulled out the bits we need and then backfilled it from the age of 20 onwards. So when we're thinking about his mother, I will pour in the stuff you need to know about his mother, without it having to be in chapter one and two.

Rebecca Toal 39:50

Well, they do always say like, "don't start your biography with 'I started the trumpet at the age of...'"

Kate Kennedy 39:57

Or what's worse is "my great-great-great-great-great-grandfather played the trumpet..." "And then let me tell you about his sons and cousins. And then let me tell you about theirs."

Hattie Butterworth 40:00

Don't. Seriously.

Kate Kennedy 40:05

By which time you've lost the will to live.

Hattie Butterworth 40:07

Oh!

Rebecca Toal 40:08

Oh! Two questions.

Hattie Butterworth 40:10

Ooh.

Rebecca Toal 40:10

After you milady. Yeah, go for it.

Hattie Butterworth 40:12

Okay. I'm just really fascinated to know why a lot of your subjects have been, and are continuing to be, musicians, performers, composers who have lived through adversity. And actually quite, quite a lot of them, I suppose, have had that specific experience of mental illness, which is something that obviously...

Rebecca Toal 40:34

Mental illness yeah!

Hattie Butterworth 40:36

Woo! That's quite funny. Mental illness woo! Why do you think you wanted to talk about complicated people like Gurney, for example, who have stigmatised lives? It's very easy to say, "he went into the asylum in 1922 and then, you know, the rest of his life was there," full stop, kind of thing.

Kate Kennedy 41:02

There's so much more to it than that.

Hattie Butterworth 41:03

Yeah. And what I'm trying to say ... why, why take the risk of being ... of choosing people with such adversity and difficult stories and painful stories?

Kate Kennedy 41:14

Yeah, that's really interesting. So, so I started working on Gurney during my PhD. In fact, my PhD ended up being about Gurney, but I'd actually, having ... you know, playing full time and having left the college for years before, went to Cambridge to start a PhD on women ambulance drivers and the first world war, until my PhD supervisor realised that I was playing full time as well. "Why don't you write about Ivor Gurney?"

Hattie Butterworth 41:36

Oh, my gosh.

Kate Kennedy 41:36

...because no one ever has... you know... talked about the music and literature in ... at the same time, because I was equally trained to do both and that's oddly unusual. So, so that's how I ended up with Gurney. It was just that it actually makes sense for me as someone in an English faculty who is a professional musician, to look at Gurney if I'm interested in first world war poetry and first World War war writing. So that's how I ended up with him. It wasn't that I was drawn to the stigmatised, damaged life, and yet, I became obsessed with the asylum and spent years and years, leafing through medical case notes and through the British Medical Journal, and tracing the experiments that they did on some of the patients. And, you know, Gurney was given malaria at one point, and I can track it through all sorts of different reports and extraordinary things, and became really, really fascinated by it. And I'm very, very interested in how people identify themselves against enormous odds, like how you ... who you are. If the asylum says your patient number 4260, or whatever it was, how you maintain that you are, in fact, Ivor Gurney and you're a poet, and you're a composer and how, how you write that identity into being, as as a form of self-preservation effectively, but it was a ... it kind of segued into that.

Hattie Butterworth 42:01

Wow.

Kate Kennedy 42:02

And, and I think also there are ... it's hard to find lives that aren't complicated. I don't think I seek them out. What I found really fascinating with this cello book is I thought this would be a book that would be joyful, and, and it seems to be all about the Holocaust! It's really bleak, and then it is, you know, there are there are wonderful joyful things in it and lots of fun encounters and adventures, but, but I am automatically drawn to stories of war and stories of, of destruction or surviving against the odds. And, and that is fascinating. And I you know, a therapist would have a lot of fun with that, at great expense I imagine. There I was, thinking I was writing about the cello... There I am in Auschwitz, you know, it's quite something. But I think perhaps if I were to be more philosophical about it, that when you are pushed to your limit, whether it's in the trenches, or in a concentration camp, or in an asylum, everything becomes in stark relief, your relationship to your instrument, your relationship to your craft, to your identity, to whatever it is, has to be held up and held on to. And so at that moment, for the biographer, there's the moment to think about what a cello means, if you are the baseline in the camp orchestra in Auschwitz or what your poetry means if you're writing in an asylum, and nobody is publishing you, but everyone thinks you're mad. What does your same voice mean to you then?

Hattie Butterworth 42:02

Wow, yeah.

Kate Kennedy 42:11

So much more than if you're having a nice career, you know, middle aged, bit of a paunch. 2.5 children, whatever and a nice wife. It's, you know, it's when it's absolutely pushed to the limits that it becomes fascinating for me I think.

Rebecca Toal 44:30

I was just interested in Ivor Gurney himself, because I haven't read the biography yet.

Hattie Butterworth 44:35

Well, that's not very good preparation Rebecca.

Rebecca Toal 44:37

I know, I'm sorry, I was teaching! But... [wedding bells]

Hattie Butterworth 44:42

Oh my ... beautiful. I love it. *sings* I mean, this could be the bells of Gloucester.

Kate Kennedy 44:48

It could be. We are obviously in Gloucester cathedral.

Rebecca Toal 44:50

Yeah, this is Gloucester.

Kate Kennedy 44:51

Because we're on site for gurney.

Rebecca Toal 44:53

I was gonna ask whether they use his work against him to keep him locked up. Was that a thing?

Kate Kennedy 44:58

That's such a good question. My goodness. I wish I had students this cool. Yes, it was, and, and I don't think they meant to, but they do. So one of the things that's really chilling that I read in the medical notes, which are written by his doctors whenever he's seen and assessed, and they make a little record of it, were that they would put symptoms alongside the facts of his biography, which, of course, for me is completely fascinating, because theresponsibility as a biographer is how you present the facts of a life in a shape that has some integrity to it. And that perhaps the subject would relate to if, if they could see it. So you get phrases like, "sits with a cushion on his head to ward off electrical waves, believes the machines under the floor are torturing him, claims to have been assistant organist in Gloucester cathedral," and you think "now, hang on a minute, one of those is true." And they're not saying that it's delusion.

Rebecca Toal 45:25

Wow. Wow!

Kate Kennedy 45:27

But the claims works very hard in that context, or, you know, "claims to be writing poetry." Well, yeah, he really, really is and there's lots of it.

Hattie Butterworth 46:03

That's so interesting.

Kate Kennedy 46:04

But it becomes ... because your life story is not in your own hands. When you hand over your all control to an institution, you are not your own person, you are a patient with a number. And so it's very easy to read that as being the institution being hostile and, and him having his own identity used against him. And indeed, there was a case, rather famously of, of a, an American asylum where some patient was kept in under delusions of grandeur, which is a very usual thing that people think they're the queen or something like that. And he believed he'd been a famous, famous composer and a famous pianist. And, and he was in an asylum until he died. And then a couple of years later, they were clearing out some boxes and found the programmes of all his concerts. And, you know, and I don't think he was in an asylum because he claimed he was a pianist, but it had become a symptom, his, his pre-patient identity and his patient identity had sort of ... you know, one casts doubt over the other effectively.

Rebecca Toal 47:01

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 47:02

So it is fascinating.

Rebecca Toal 47:04

If every musician was like assessed, based on their artistic worries and stuff, whether we'd all be in an asylum, like ...

Kate Kennedy 47:12

They'd be overcrowded.

Rebecca Toal 47:13

Yeah, like my therapist, when I often start talking about like, stressing over some piece or some note, she is like, she looks at me really weird...

Hattie Butterworth 47:22

Yeah, mine did as well.

Rebecca Toal 47:23

"Are you okay?" And I'm like, "it's just being a musician man."

Hattie Butterworth 47:26

Yeah, we just blow it off don't we? Like, I had that when I was like, "Argh!" I went to my therapist at the end of like, second year, and I was like, "I only got 68 in my recital." And it was literally like, the end of my life that I hadn't got a first.

Rebecca Toal 47:38

Yeah, and they're like "huh?"

Hattie Butterworth 47:39

And she looked at me with this look that I'll never forget, that was like, "Are you okay? What is this? Like why does this matter?"

Rebecca Toal 47:46

But then you'll say something like, "Oh, I've played in the Albert Hall," like, just like, it's nothing because it was with like, some youth orchestra or something. And they'll be like, "that's amazing. Why aren't you bigging yourself up? Like, you should have this sense of grandeur about yourself," and you're like "Nah, it's just fine. I wasn't paid," like...

Kate Kennedy 48:01

Yeah, yeah.

Rebecca Toal 48:02

"I don't understand what the big deal is."

Kate Kennedy 48:04

It's really interesting isn't it? The world does look different to non-musicians.

Rebecca Toal 48:07

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 48:07

What we see as an achievement is not necessarily what the outside world would see.

Rebecca Toal 48:11

I think that is part of the worry that people have about talking to musicians about things, is that you kind of need to be a musician to understand whether something is ... the perspective is different.

Kate Kennedy 48:23

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 48:24

...A lot of the time. And ... but then that alienates us from non-musicians. And so in the case of asylum doctors, or whatever, it's like, surely you'd need to be a poet or musician to analyse this person's work to decide whether they were actually mad or whether they were just artistic.

Kate Kennedy 48:29

Yes. Yeah, yeah, and who gets to make that decision...

Rebecca Toal 48:44

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 48:45

...and the only moment where Gurney's condition seems to improve in the asylum, is when a very junior doctor, who just qualified in Edinburgh, comes to the asylum for his very first job, basically. And he was a flautist, and very interested in poetry. And it turns out ... you can't tell from Gurney's medical records, but it turns out that he was taking Gurney for walks around the grounds, just the two of them, off record. So again, we have to be really careful what we read into and what we find written, because it's at the tip of the iceberg a lot of the time and sometimes actively misleading. And so they were talking... going for walks, and he remembered that when he got Gurney talking about music or poetry, he just lit up and he clicked into being the person he was before. But if he sat him down in... in a, in a clinic or in a room and said, "Now, tell me what your delusions are," he would be very taciturn, or he wouldn't speak to you and after a while, he refused to be assessed by any doctors. The last few years in the asylum he simply won't let anyone near him. But when he was with this ... it was Dr. Anderson, talking about music and poetry, he was himself and...

Hattie Butterworth 49:46

Being taken seriously as well probably for the first time.

Kate Kennedy 49:49

That's such an interesting like, ethical, ... Someone speaking his language and having the respect to do that. But yeah, Adeline Williams came to visit him and said "he's so desperately sane in his insanity" and surely it would be kinder to let him have one day in the Gloucestershire meadows, even if he kills himself, than to keep him locked up there forever. Which, which I think I think she was right. Isn't it?

Hattie Butterworth 50:02

...question.

Kate Kennedy 50:09

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 50:09

I think ...well, I'm even reading today, you know, obviously I'm very interested in mental health, contemporary mental health..

Rebecca Toal 50:22

No way!

Hattie Butterworth 50:23

You would never know.

Kate Kennedy 50:24

You should do a podcast!

Hattie Butterworth 50:26

I should shouldn't I?

Rebecca Toal 50:27

You should do blogging.

Hattie Butterworth 50:28

But on Twitter, you know, and that's where I find most of the information that I know is true. People are still saying that today that, you know, once you enter an asylum, you are ... everything you say is either used against you or said "you're not in your..." there's a way of saying that I've forgotten. "You're not in your right mind" or...

Kate Kennedy 50:51

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 50:51

Mad.

Hattie Butterworth 50:51

What's it called?

Rebecca Toal 50:52

Sad. Bad

Hattie Butterworth 50:53

I think it was a phrase, but it's fine. And it's funny how, yeah, I don't know...I'm just making a point of like, still, the culture of asylums is very dehumanising for people even today and often very counterintuitive in the help that they're able to give and the support they're able to give people.

Kate Kennedy 51:11

Yeah. And even worse, I think, in some ways now, because in Gurney's case, he was with doctors who were with him for years, and people knew his story, even if they might use it against him, or even if they could discount it, they at least had a longer view on him. Whereas if you are either in an asylum with changing medical staff, or are in the community with a different psychiatrist every couple of months, the backstory to you or the series of events that led to this point of crisis that is being presented to them isn't part of the equation, because there is such a turnover of stuff and the biography of the patient isn't valued in the same way, or the ways in which the patient narrates their own experience isn't paid attention to. And that means that you are doubly silenced. You're divorced from your story and your ability to express your own story is not considered, is not sort of written into your treatment. And

a lot is being missed, I think. There's a very interesting book by a woman called Barbara Taylor, who was a great historian but was... had a huge breakdown and was in Friern Barnett's asylum. It's called The Last Asylum. And she talks about exactly that, that actually the asylum and in many ways was a very good thing for her. It was one of, you know, an asylum, like Gurney's: huge Victorian institution, which has now pretty much closed and everyone's out in the community and she had this experience that nobody knew where she was coming from, and you have to start afresh each time and it's... it's really disruptive.

Hattie Butterworth 51:16

Yeahhh.

Rebecca Toal 52:39

I hadn't really thought about the fact that especially if you're sectioned, or you know, taken away to be put into an asylum nowadays, that's under the care of the police, which is another institution that's not equipped to deal with mental health in the way that you would hope, potentially in Gurney's case... yeah, just can't get the quite the right people. But I was gonna ask whether ... or what your views ... this is quite a huge question, but what your views on musicians and mental health is like nowadays, having been writing from a more historical point, can you see a contrast with how musicians are treated nowadays or...?

Kate Kennedy 53:24

That's really interesting. I imagine in the last few years, there will be much material for PhDs to come and studies and, you know, having been very... I'm very, very closely associated with the orchestra, Southbank Sinfonia, which is a fantastic institution based at St. John's Smith square, and it's all musicians in their mid-20s really, who've finished music college, finished postgrad, from all over the world, and come to London to study for a year. And so when lockdown hit, there was a new generation of Southbank players are from all over the world, many of them without very much money, all of them with their their freelancing work completely cut off, no possibility of teaching unless it's online, away from home and not able to get back to New Zealand or wherever, and the mental health implications of that were enormous. They were, they were huge, huge problems for them because you can't survive as a musician and there is so little work and it is so badly paid when there is work and when there's none and you're isolated, and that your need for a musical community is, is stymied because there is no ability to make music, it's very particularly bleak. And I think for actors as well, it was, but there is something about a musician being cut off from what you do, whether it's because the climate is so hard to make a living and there are so many more of us being turned out with music colleges than there are jobs in orchestras or, you know, whatever it is, or whether it's because it's an artificial barrier being placed, like lockdown, I think there are very particular mental health concerns. And I imagine that it was a jolly sight easier 100 years ago or so when there weren't that many great British players and orchestral playing was not as good, and we were bringing a lot of people in from over, overseas. But I would have thought that it would be easier to get full-time employment as musician then than it is now. And that of course comes with its own mental health implications.

Hattie Butterworth 55:19

I really want to know about the book, Cello, as much as you can tell us, because I really, I can't wait. So exciting. In terms of covering these cellists who have been through difficult things, you've been through your own struggles, how do you look after your own mental health while going to Auschwitz? While delving into people's lives, Jacqueline Dupre's end her life and even before the end of her life...Wow, that was depressing.

Kate Kennedy 55:48

I spent quite a lot of time when I was out in Auschwitz, watching Emily in Paris on Netflix. That helped. That was quite a contrast. Yeah, no, seriously, though. Yeah, gosh. I think what has really, really helped me, particularly with one of my stories, one of the biggest of the four stories was that I actually become involved in it and you know, in a creative, constructive way. And I'm constantly thinking, "I can't make this better. I cannot cure the Holocaust. I cannot fill in these gaps of people who are missing. I can't make this okay for these people that I'm deeply involved with now." But in one particular story, there's a fabulous cellist called Paul Hermann, who was a Hungarian cellist, was in Berlin, very, very famous, sort of stellar young career, he would have been the next Pablo Casals, and that was how he was being reviewed in the press. But he was Jewish, and he was hounded right across Europe, went to ... went into hiding in sort of southern France and was caught, put in a concentration camp in Paris and then shipped up to Lithuania and killed and is in a mass grave there. And, and it's the bleakest of stories and he wrote fantastic pieces, amazing cello concerto, amazing grand duo for violin and cello. Brilliant music is left, so we have something of his voice, but his cello is lost and I'm trying to find it. So this is a really long preamble, because I'm working with his daughter, who's now 90, and the last she saw of her ... of the cello and her father was when she was seven. And I have been able to restore so much of his story to her and go to these places with her and show her the places her father lived in Paris when he was writing to her and sending her copies of Ba Ba the Elephant. But she could never go there because it was the war, and that there was... sort of the borders were sealed, and she was in Holland. And I can tell her bits of his story and I can talk to her about his music and help edit the manuscript and help get it out there and get it performed. And it's meant that she, having not wanted to talk about her father until her 80s, is now so comfortable with his story and with owning this awful tragedy of her own childhood, that just now for her 90th birthday party, she put on a concert of his music and heard some of it for the first time, but 10 years ago, she wouldn't even talk about him, it was too too much. So we've kind of been on that journey together. So for me, while I am in this awful kind of dripping cell and this fortress in Kaunas in Lithuania, where I know that Paul Hermann spent his last night, and I'm there, playing the cello in this dreadful space and playing his music and seeing the fields with the kind of bumps which are these mass graves of 10s of 1000s of Jewish people, no idea where he is, but I know that he's there, I can make that a creative, positive process. She can never go there, but I can do it for her and I can write about it, and I can restore something of him and I can have his music sound in that space, you know, and play for him. And so I think that's the way I do it. Otherwise ... and some parts of it are just too bleak. You know, there are ... there are things that I learned working with the the archivist in Auschwitz, that I can't bring myself to write because they're just too awful. And areas where I can't go. You know, one of the people I'm writing about is a Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who of course, is very well known to people, not only as Raphael Wallfisch's mother, but because she was the cellist in Auschwitz, and so I'm very interested in that relationship between instrument and this very extreme situation. And, and I feel when I'm talking to her that there are doors that are simply locked, and she, with great

graciousness, and great generosity of spirit will lead me down a corridor, and I am jolly lucky to be there with her, but these doors are not for me to open or even to ask about and so...

Hattie Butterworth 58:13

Really? She's got the boundary almost for you.

Kate Kennedy 59:47

Yeah, because she has to because she can't survive unless she delineates the past and the present.

Hattie Butterworth 59:53

Yeah, wow.

Kate Kennedy 59:54

So I'm privileged to go on that journey with her.

Hattie Butterworth 59:58

And in terms of, um, when it's out, and all this...?

Kate Kennedy 1:00:03

So it's almost finished. It's about to be given to Bloomsbury, who are my publishers, and it should come out just within a year.

Hattie Butterworth 1:00:10

She's so cool

Rebecca Toal 1:00:11

So cool.

Kate Kennedy 1:00:11

So not. But yeah, yeah, it's with Bloomsbury, and it should come out within a year, hopefully. But one of ... one of the things that's stopping me from handing the manuscript over is that I am determined to find Paul Hermann's cello, because I can't find his body, but it's somewhere out there in Europe, his cello is. And I know enough about it, that I can identify it...

Hattie Butterworth 1:00:32

Really?!

Kate Kennedy 1:00:32

And I can give people enough information to identify it. But it's like, it's like someone with amnesia who's had a knock on the head, it doesn't know who it is. And its player will not know whose cello it was. So the extraordinary thing is that I've learned in enormous amounts of research, trying to trace this this cello, is that it has what has been called a burnt-in inscription. It's like a birthmark or a tattoo on it, and I've only just found what this inscription is. which reduced me and his family to tears, which is 'ego sum anima musicale'. "I am the soul of music", "I am the spirit of music." And this is what his cello says.

Hattie Butterworth 1:01:07

On the body?

Kate Kennedy 1:01:08

On the ribs. Yeah, on the ribs of the cellos.

Rebecca Toal 1:01:09

We can find it.

Kate Kennedy 1:01:10

Enscribed.

Rebecca Toal 1:01:10

We can find it.

Kate Kennedy 1:01:11

If someone out there is playing a Galliano cello that's worth a fortune, it's a beautiful cello, with "I am the soul of music" in Latin inscribed on its ribs... Now...

Rebecca Toal 1:01:20

That's pretty unique.

Kate Kennedy 1:01:20

...if I can find that, and play his concerto on it, in front of his daughter, that's when I can publish the book. Yeah. So I'm kind of ...

Rebecca Toal 1:01:27

A reward.

Kate Kennedy 1:01:29

...looking for this cello.

Hattie Butterworth 1:01:29

I can't believe how clearly like personal is to you. And like...

Kate Kennedy 1:01:33

It's so personal.

Hattie Butterworth 1:01:34

Argh, I'm just so awesome that you ... that you're writing it and that you're that dedicated that you want to delay, delay it to find this cello.

Kate Kennedy 1:01:43

I would just be kicking myself, if I published it and someone said, "Hey, I've got this Galliano with this funny inscription," I'd be like "no!"

Hattie Butterworth 1:01:49

There'd have to be a part two though, Kate, if that happened.

Kate Kennedy 1:01:51

Cello, the return. This time, it's even more personal.

Rebecca Toal 1:01:53

Urgh, Hattie. Yeah, it feels like your career pathway has been so personal to you, and your body and your cello and everything.

Kate Kennedy 1:01:53

Yeah, well without me even noticing, you know, it's only now that I can actually theorise it in this book, it's ...uh...

Hattie Butterworth 1:01:53

Return of the Jedi. Do you know... I mean, you know, you said you were not sure how much of you you're going to put in it, do you still not know?

Kate Kennedy 1:02:14

At the moment, I start it as a personal journey and you follow me, you know, you follow me going and getting a coffee and meeting these people and playing with these people and doing things in these places, and so I am the narrator through it, as I tell these stories. How much I'm gonna go on and on about the injury, I don't know.

Hattie Butterworth 1:02:34

Please do!

Rebecca Toal 1:02:35

Please, do another book!

Kate Kennedy 1:02:36

I get squeamish about talking about myself. It's such a kind of traditional academic biographer thing to write yourself in. Yeah, but I dunno... I can imagine.

Rebecca Toal 1:02:43

We talk about ourselves all the time.

Hattie Butterworth 1:02:44

Yeah, if you want any reassurance that you should...

Kate Kennedy 1:02:47

For me, it has everything...everything that you write has to have a 'so what factor' to it. I have to have a rationale for it. And largely, that is a useful structuring principle because it stops you going off on one in a book, you know.

Hattie Butterworth 1:02:59

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 1:03:00

So if I talk about my injury, it's because it launches an investigation into struggling with cellos or something like that. There is a ... there is a reason for it being there, it impels more narrative. So I will just sort of meddle with it and see how much of that I need.

Hattie Butterworth 1:03:16

But it also really ... it means you understand what it means to lose a cello.

Kate Kennedy 1:03:21

Yeah, I have a way of telling that story that somebody else might not say that.

Hattie Butterworth 1:03:26

Exactly.

Kate Kennedy 1:03:27

That's a way in.

Hattie Butterworth 1:03:27

And it's so important, though. Like, when you were talking about being in a practice room and play-... and listening to Bach, sort of wishing you could be playing it, it reminds me... I know people don't like this film, but you know, Hilary and Jackie.

Kate Kennedy 1:03:40

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 1:03:41

...where's she sat in the room, listening to a recording of herself playing and crying. And it's like, I know, it's a different situation, because she was deteriorating towards her depth, this is Jacqueline Du Pre.

Rebecca Toal 1:03:52

Got it. Thanks.

Hattie Butterworth 1:03:53

I know, it's a different situation, but in many ways, that is such a devastating place to be.

Kate Kennedy 1:04:00

Yeah. It is.

Hattie Butterworth 1:04:01

And you really know what that place feels like

Kate Kennedy 1:04:04

It is. But at the same time, that was Jacqueline Du Pre and the loss...the stakes are so high. It's it's like tragedy, you know, sort of Hamlet. You have to be a prince to fall to make it tragic. And that's something I wrestle with, that, yeah, I was good, but I was 18. you know, and I was not Jacqueline Du Pre. And so when I sit with Julian Lloyd Webber, and he's weeping and he's telling me about the moment on stage playing a double concerto with his wife, realising that he simply could not hold the bow anymore, I can't lay claim to that. Me in a practice room at school is not the same. And so I have to ... I have to use my experience as a way of eliciting these narratives and a way of understanding, but not go "Yeah, I totally know where you're coming from."

Hattie Butterworth 1:04:46

Good point.

Kate Kennedy 1:04:47

Because I don't.

Hattie Butterworth 1:04:48

That's a really good point.

Kate Kennedy 1:04:49

I have a very happy, lovely career doing all kinds of wonderful, wacky, creative things. And I have the privilege of being able to draw on those in order to think about these very difficult subjects. Whereas they don't, you know, they have made huge, international careers, being brilliant at what they do as a cellist, and then it's all fallen apart. And that's, that's a different level of awful. So I have to ... I have to tread really carefully with that.

Hattie Butterworth 1:04:53

Wow.

Rebecca Toal 1:04:53

So to draw things to an end...

Hattie Butterworth 1:04:59

Yes.

Rebecca Toal 1:05:20

Should we do our usual segment?

Hattie Butterworth 1:05:21

Yes.

Rebecca Toal 1:05:22

We tend to do a little Win of the Week after, because we talk about such heavy things, and it's good to even just say something small, that we are happy about.

Hattie Butterworth 1:05:34

I guess, I guess.

Rebecca Toal 1:05:37

Hattie, I'm gonna make you start...

Hattie Butterworth 1:05:38

Right.

Rebecca Toal 1:05:38

... because you always have a pretty good example.

Hattie Butterworth 1:05:41

I really don't.

Rebecca Toal 1:05:42

Usually...I'm sure you do.

Hattie Butterworth 1:05:44

I'll cast my mind back to the week just past.

Rebecca Toal 1:05:49

I could start if you want.

Hattie Butterworth 1:05:50

Please.

Rebecca Toal 1:05:50

Okay.

Hattie Butterworth 1:05:51

Please.

Rebecca Toal 1:05:51

My win of the week is putting my prices up for my teaching, and finally giving my private students the Musicians' Union contract, so that like cancellation policies and stuff, are...

Hattie Butterworth 1:06:04

That's so good, so good that that exists.

Rebecca Toal 1:06:06

Yeah, particularly one student I have, he's always 15 minutes late. And he often takes an hour before cancelling. So...

Kate Kennedy 1:06:06

Good for you. Wow.

Rebecca Toal 1:06:14

But he had the gumption to ask, when I put this contract in place, he was like, "Okay, well, you know, sometimes, I might be running a bit late with my stuff, like, in the day. So like, could we have like half an hour leeway either side of the lesson just in case?" And I was like, "no."

Hattie Butterworth 1:06:31

The contract says. That's really interesting though, because that means you can't be taken for a ride

Rebecca Toal 1:06:38

Legally. I'll point to the paper. I'm gonna give them a photocopy in fact, so they can put it on their wall. Anybody else?

Hattie Butterworth 1:06:45

Kate, do you have one? Because I've still...

Kate Kennedy 1:06:47

Does it count if your win is next week?

Hattie Butterworth 1:06:49

Yeah! We've never had that before!

Kate Kennedy 1:06:51

My, my prospective win is that tomorrow night, I'm going to be left in an empty house for eight or nine days. With no internet, no children (hooray!), and just my manuscript and, and all chaos will reign at home and my poor husband will try and make everything happen along with our lovely...

Hattie Butterworth 1:07:12

So you're not going to be at home?!

Kate Kennedy 1:07:13

No! I'm going to be in friend's house. So they're often their narrowboat. Empty house, and just the manuscript and nothing else.

Rebecca Toal 1:07:18

Brilliant.

Kate Kennedy 1:07:19

And I'm not going to let anything else intrude. And I'm not going to do any ones washing and I'm not going to answer a million emails and...

Hattie Butterworth 1:07:24

No.

Kate Kennedy 1:07:25

... teach lots of people, and just concentrate on having an overview of it, because when you have lots of children and lots of lives, kind of doing a really deep dive into what you're trying to write about and having it all in your head is really, really difficult. So that's a hard won win.

Rebecca Toal 1:07:40

That's huge.

Kate Kennedy 1:07:41

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 1:07:42

Are you excited or a bit nervous?

Kate Kennedy 1:07:43

Really excited, but, but lots of things keep intruding on it like...

Hattie Butterworth 1:07:47

Yeah!

Kate Kennedy 1:07:48

You know... I just want my brain back just for a week.

Hattie Butterworth 1:07:53

That's, that's gonna be awesome though.

Rebecca Toal 1:07:55

We'll find the cello in that time, don't worry.

Kate Kennedy 1:07:57

Yeah, would you?

Hattie Butterworth 1:07:58

While you're gone.

Rebecca Toal 1:07:59

Yeah, little to-do.

Hattie Butterworth 1:08:01

We'll find it and burn it while you're gone.

Kate Kennedy 1:08:03

No!

Rebecca Toal 1:08:03

Can you imagine! Hattie!

Hattie Butterworth 1:08:05

I don't have a very good sense of humour, right.

Rebecca Toal 1:08:07

No.

Hattie Butterworth 1:08:09

I really feel like today was a ... meeting you has been a huge, a huge win. And it really feels like it because yeah, I get really nervous to interview people and to, to be with people and everything. And actually, yesterday, was the first time I was genuinely, really excited ...

Rebecca Toal 1:08:29

You were.

Hattie Butterworth 1:08:30

...because I was reading all about you and prepping the questions and stuff.

Rebecca Toal 1:08:33

She kept texting me. It's so annoying.

Hattie Butterworth 1:08:36

I was just like, "I am so excited to meet this person." And the fact that this has enabled it to happen, and, and you know, it just suddenly all occurred to me that like, what an incredible experience and also, for once, the sort of mental impact isn't so big. It's actually a real excitement ...

Kate Kennedy 1:08:54

Good.

Hattie Butterworth 1:08:54

...and like a real feeling of privilege. So...

Kate Kennedy 1:08:57

I'm really glad. Well it's been it's been really wonderful for me as well, I...I've thought about some of the things I'm doing in a different way. And it's lovely to have the opportunity to to take a step out of your life and think about it objectively. And ..

Hattie Butterworth 1:09:07

Yeah.

Kate Kennedy 1:09:08

Well, aside from being a fantastic guest, you've also provided us with two venues. ...summarise it a little. So it's been, it's been fascinating, and you've both asked such wonderful questions that have really made me reflect on my own work, which is a real privilege. So thank you! Yes, we should do a walking tour of London.

Rebecca Toal 1:09:16

Yeah, honestly it's been fantastic.

Hattie Butterworth 1:09:21

Churches. Church crypts.

Rebecca Toal 1:09:28

Yeah. And because Katie asked us to do this, if you want to follow us...

Hattie Butterworth 1:09:34

Ah, well-remembered.

Rebecca Toal 1:09:35

...on the social media, we are @tmdtapodcast on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, ...TikTok ...?

Hattie Butterworth 1:09:44

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 1:09:45

And also the website is www.thingsmusiciansdonttalkabout.com And also we have a Patreon and in case you want to hear us do our chatty episodes about once a month, or you can buy us a coffee ...

Hattie Butterworth 1:09:56

It's three pounds a month.

Rebecca Toal 1:09:57

Three months a month. And also if you want to crowdfund Kate's cello...

Hattie Butterworth 1:10:03

Yeah!

Rebecca Toal 1:10:04

...or sponsor us. And/or. Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 1:10:07

Where can people follow you and the book and things?

Kate Kennedy 1:10:11

You can follow me on Twitter. I'm not very good at it, but I am there. I think @DrKateKennedy or @DrKKennedy or something like that. I'm around on Twitter.

Hattie Butterworth 1:10:20

They'll find you.

Kate Kennedy 1:10:20

Otherwise the Oxford Centre for life writing in, in Oxford, obviously. Wolfson College, Oxford. I'm Google-able. And happy to talk.

Hattie Butterworth 1:10:30

Wow!

Rebecca Toal 1:10:30

Brilliant.

Hattie Butterworth 1:10:31

Awesome.

Rebecca Toal 1:10:32

Well, thank you so much, Kate.