

Episode 2: Frank Horvat

Sat, 2/26 10:42PM 51:14

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, music, musicians, feel, depression, compose, thinking, concert, organisations, composer, vulnerability, life, world, classical music, listening, person, talking, pieces, mental health, wrote

SPEAKERS

Frank Horvat, Hattie Butterworth



Hattie Butterworth 00:03

Welcome to Things musicians Don't Talk About with me your host, Hattie Butterworth. I'm a cellist and writer in my final year at the Royal College of Music in London. And I think we need a new way of talking. I've spent many, many years feeling in the dark about issues in the classical music profession. So often it can feel like you're the only person struggling with anxiety, depression, career doubts, money, injuries, and so much more. Who do we go to when we feel we've had enough for whatever reason? Join me and guests as we end the stigma with honest conversations about the things musicians don't talk about. Hello, everyone, how are you all? Welcome back. I just wanted to say before we start the interview with Frank, that I've been so overwhelmed by the lovely messages I've received from so many different people. I wasn't expecting as many new people to follow us on Instagram and share your stories with me, so thank you for that. It's been really uplifting to hear how many of you think that this is a good idea and please keep sharing your stories with me and ideas. Let's keep this going. In this episode, I interview the pianist and composer Frank Horvat. I had such a fascinating conversation with Frank. We talked about so many things from his depression and the ways he's learned to manage it over the years, to what it means to be a musician with a mental health problem today and in the past, and the ways in which we can open up and manage our symptoms. He also talks about the fascinating ways in which he's managed to open up to his students, which I find very inspiring and talking to them about his condition as if it were a health problem like any other health problem. We also talk about his work as an activist in the arts and lobbying for human rights and environmental action through music making. He has undertaken many wonderful projects in the past. Anyway, I really hope you enjoy today's episode. Please do follow us on Instagram, @tmdtapodcast and without further ado, let's get on to the interview with Frank. Frank, thank you so much for joining us. It's so wonderful to have you as the first guest on the podcast. Reading your blog has been such a fascinating process. I found myself feeling just so reassured by your honesty, which is just something for some reason is quite hard to come by, and especially about your struggles with mental health. And I just wanted to say that, do you realise I searched for quite a long time trying to find an article online in which a classical musician sort of talked openly about mental health? And I mean, in the first sort of three or four pages of Google, you were the only person I could find, which was quite shocking to me. I don't know whether you knew that?

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Frank Horvat 03:28

Well, you know, I in the past couple of years, I have been very fortunate to have, you know, people such as yourself, reach out to me and tell me similar stories. So, you know, I feel honoured and privileged, but also at the same time, slightly concerned that more of our, our colleagues aren't talking more openly about this, because obviously we know from a lot of research and data that there's a lot of people out there that especially in our world of classical music that are very much struggling with these issues like like many other facets of society.

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Hattie Butterworth 04:06

I mean, I want to talk more about mental health in a moment, but I just thought maybe you could explain to everyone at the start a bit about yourself and what you do at the moment?

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Frank Horvat 04:17

Sure, yeah, I'm, I'm a composer, pianist, and music educator based here in Toronto, Canada, and I'm in my mid 40s right now. And this is something that basically I've, I've been a musician since the age of five, you know, either studying or professionally and in those capacities, for many years, have used music, my creative musical voice as an outlet to share things that are very important to me and that I feel passionate about, be it issues around human rights or environmentalism. Up until just a few years ago, I was very hesitant to talk... a) talk about openly and honestly about my mental health challenges and b) definitely not using my music as a platform to, to share that. But thankfully I've sort of feel like I've come full way and in a path to managing my depression and because of many years of hard work on it and focus on it, now I feel like in the last few years, really 2017 is specifically is when, when I when I finally sort of took the plunge so to speak ... and allowed the music to reflect that, and then in turn, because the music was out there, I started talking more openly or publicly about it. so...

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Hattie Butterworth 05:51

It's such a important thing, I think, because I think a lot of people might start to feel similar ways at a very young age. I mean, for me, it was the start of my undergrad when I was about 18. And yes, I heard you know, a few people in their 40s talking about it, but it felt like for everyone around me, all the musicians around me, we can't talk about it. It has to be something that is kept inside. But I just was wondering whether you could talk about your personal experience with your mental health? And when did you notice that you first had a problem?

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Frank Horvat 06:27

Oh, that's a challenging question to answer because of the fact that you live in denial for so many years, right? And you live in denial, and you sort of have to try to go back and figure out "well, was there sort of specific moments? I don't think so. I don't think it's very dramatic." I feel for myself personally, it was sort of festering for many years. I really think that it probably

started in my teenage years, when life became very demanding, I mean, life for any teenager is very demanding. But I think for musicians like us who are practising hours on end, taking lessons, going to school at the same time for people that might have, you know, financial constraints, you know, maybe having a part time job or even trying to pay for things, these are all very time demanding things in a competitive world we live in, I think I started to put a lot of weight on myself emotional and mental weight in. And it's really interesting because I grew up in a very loving household, very, very supportive parents. To this day, my parents are my number one fans, and I love them dearly. So it wasn't like I was getting pressure from other people, although we do live in a classical music world where sometimes you know, there can be a lot of pressure coming from families and parents and stuff like that, but for me, it was very much always on myself. I am my greatest critic, you know, to this day, you can be very, very hard on yourself, and there's nothing wrong with being constructive with yourself, but you have to walk a fine line and find balance so ... and then those early years, there was no balance. It was all hyper-manic, just focused on "okay, I achieved something but that's not good enough, because I still have to get to the next level, the next level, the next level." A human being can only take so much of that before you start to see cracks.

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Hattie Butterworth 08:37

Um, it's a very relatable place you come from, I think, because for me as well, I mean, I just had such a source of shame coming from my mental health problems, because my family was so supportive and no one in my family had really talked about it before, but everyone was just ... it was like a such a supportive unit that I felt like an outlier. And like I shouldn't be struggling and I shouldn't be talking about it because it wasn't something that was part of me, it was an alien... alien kind of construct. I just was wondering sort of if you could talk about the things you turn to to manage your depression, and what did the recovery process look like for you?

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Frank Horvat 09:19

So for me, the number one important step that I took to recovery was admitting to myself that I have an issue, I have a condition and that it's treatable. And that was ... that was the hardest. That was absolutely the hardest. It wasn't to talk, to open up either to my loved ones or to a therapist, or even publicly. I actually find all of that stuff, since I took that crucial first step, to be the the easiest, very easy compared to just admitting it to myself, even though my loved ones were encouraging me to seek help, because they could see something is wrong, I would just not listen. And it took many, many years, it was maybe, you know, until I was well into my 30s, you know that I, I sort of figured it out that this is not the right way to live, and that I deserve to be happy, and I deserve to be fulfilled, despite whatever type of world as a musician I live in, whether I have ups or downs or successes or failures, or whatever, or rejection or promotion, it didn't matter. So once I did that, then it was ... I was home free. It was almost ... even though there was still a long road ahead, because that was sort of like the turning point. And then I worked with a psychotherapist for quite a long time and found that whole experience to be quite valuable. And then I also did quite a bit of work on myself physically, making sure that I was physically healthy, and it's fascinating because now we live in a world where the medical profession is studying the links between mental and physical health. And back then, you know, there was ... I didn't know anything about this, but but I just knew that if I was outside, if I was going for a walk, or going for a run, or spending time in green space, away from music, with no earbuds in my ear, nothing, not listening to anything and just experiencing

and enjoying nature, that would be a huge thing. And then I also discovered meditation. Meditation has been a ... has been a important practice that I've discovered only in the last three or four years. And I've added that into my, my sort of my daily life routine. And being a person who's always thinking, you know, just like thinking about music, thinking about melodies, going through my head composer, it's like, you know, you have to calm the mind, and the mind has to take a break. And so this was my ability to do that. And, and diet. Diet's been absolutely huge. Changing my diet in the last 15,20 years, has really made a difference. When I ...there's there's definitely a correlation or the odd time I eat bad food, there's a reason why I feel depressed. So it's I think we ... our body is a machine and it's all ... everything we put in or take out is all interrelated. So thinking of everything as a whole and interconnected and, and thinking of it holistically that way.

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Hattie Butterworth 12:58

I'm also just wondering if you could explain to people a bit about what your depression feels like. I mean, it's not something that's easy to put into words, I know. And I know you've done amazing things with putting it into music, but I just wondered if, if you could describe it, and how you would describe it?

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Frank Horvat 13:19

I guess the first thing I would describe it as, if I have to pick one word, is emptiness. There's just this awful, awful feeling of no feeling. You know, there's been a lot of surveys done, I don't know if you've heard of this survey that actually came out of the UK maybe a few years ago, comparing different professions and which ones were most prone to, to depression. And, and unfortunately, our our way of life is the one that was reported the most and, and I often wonder that ... what, what makes us so prone to this, you know, as a community and I think that because we're in the business of feeling all the time, you know. You know, as musicians, we, you know, that's that's what we do. We need to, we need to feel, we need to evoke feeling, we need others to feel. And I think depression is, is maybe a manic way of sort of like going the polar opposite, and it goes too far the deep end because we're always working so hard to, to emote and of course we could have trauma. Anybody, any individual person can have specific traumas or scarring things in their life that happened that can just trigger it randomly. But I think sometimes I'm on, I'm on such an incredible high and adrenaline of putting out an album or getting feedback from people about it or performing a concert. And then... and you just crash and you .. you just can't feel anything and you're crawling to try to get to this happy medium, you know what I mean? ...of where you just you're not anywhere on the pendulum, it's sort of just right down the middle, and, and for me, that's always been the big challenge. And even sometimes when things are going great, you know, I just ... my body like can't help but just crash the other way, and it has been ... I've gone through periods where I just can't ... I can't get out of it for weeks, you know, I have been stuck there. Thankfully, the, the length of these periods in which I'm in a period ... in a state of emptiness, it doesn't happen very often anymore, but, but when I...I am able to get out of it far quicker, but that's what it feels like. And when it was really bad, at its apex, it was, it was literally weeks, weeks that I just couldn't crawl out. And then the more you want to get out of it, the more you try to courage yourself, "come on, you can do this", then of course, there's the pressure, and also putting... trying to put a brave face on it. That puts extra strain on the whole thing. Perhaps you're trying to have a big smile on your face, or perhaps in my, my position as a music educator working with a whole

bunch of students on a particular day, well, you don't want them to know about this, you don't want them to see this. So you have to pretend to be something you're not, and the more you're pretending to be something you're not or what your true self is emotionally at that given moment, of course, is further trauma to your system, so it's sort of ... it can be very tough that way, I think we have those added layers where it's not just the issue itself of being down, but then it's the pressure you put on yourself to get out of it, and also the sometimes the need to just turn it off. That's not healthy. But we don't, as musicians, we often don't have that luxury. We have to put it aside for a sec, and then we'll get back to this depression thing later, which of course is not right. Yeah.

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Hattie Butterworth 17:16

I mean, I definitely have been in situations where I know I have a stressful period of concerts or performances, and my mental health is feeling, you know, fragile. And just the idea that I'm going to have to pretend to one audience after another, or one group of beautiful people I meet organising the concert after another that I'm fine, and that I'm ... that I'm settled, that, that is for me quite a triggering situation. And it makes it even more, even more difficult to accept the situation you're in and accept your mental health problem when every situation you meet, you also feel this absolute shame for not being your true self.

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Frank Horvat 17:58

Do you do you feel do you feel in those kinds of situations, like, you can't control your feeling of vulnerability?

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Hattie Butterworth 18:06

Yeah, definitely. Yeah,

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Frank Horvat 18:09

That's, that's a big thing for me too. And the magic, the magic on my road to managing all this has been to take vulnerability as a, as a fear. It's a fear mechanism that it can be and I've tried to turn it around that vulnerability is actually something that I use to my advantage. To be in front of an audience, and not just ... yes, you need to be confident as a performer to be in front of an audience, but as a true artist, there's also something to be said about vulnerability as a good thing and trying to balance that between the confidence of doing the technique that's required to execute the performance but, but also that. So for me, I think writing music about mental health, and then performing that music and talking about it like we are today, this is all wonderful therapy for me, and that's why what you're doing, your podcast, is a fantastic endeavour, you know, because hopefully people will listen to this and then it will motivate them to talk themselves like you and I are talking right now. I think that's the huge thing.

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Hattie Butterworth 19:21

Um so with you on that. And it just reminded me, as well of a ... we not a podcast ... a blog post

I'm so with you on that. And it just reminded me, as well of a ... ur, not a podcast ... a blog post that you wrote, which I think is probably the most poignant moment of my week almost was when you talked about your 10 year old student you had who wanted to come to your concert that was based on your piano pieces written about your depression, and their mum spoke to you and said "is this you know, is this going to be a suitable concert for my son?" And you just, you just talked in such an amazing way about why it's important to talk to young people about it as if it was just another illness, because this is something, and especially in classical music, it's very difficult to be vulnerable. It's very difficult to say to people that look up to us, "yes, I'm also struggling. I, you know, I'm not ... even though I'm on stage, that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm totally secure person all the time." And I just been thinking about that blog an awful lot. And whether you ever thought that opening up, like, the way you did would damage your career or damage your reputation with children? Has that ever crossed your mind or something you've dealt with?

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Frank Horvat 20:35

Oh, yes, absolutely. I've been teaching piano and music for many years, going concurrent to my, my performing and composing life, and, you know, as a independent freelance musician, we need to earn a living to pay bills, and so forth, and teaching is a very important aspect of my life, and it's something that I, I take a lot of pride in, is being the best teacher I can be to my students. And so, you know, one of the things about teaching is, is that I ... which is very different than performing, is that performing, it's technically it's all about me, the performer or the composer. But teaching is the complete opposite. You as a performer/composer have to completely shut that off and put everything on the student, right? And, and making sure that they're comfortable, they're motivated, they're, they're organised. So when the mother of that student, you talk about told me "yes, we'd like to come to the concert." Gosh, that was one of the ... one of the hardest sort of moments, spur of the moment things, that have ever happened in my in my career, because it was like, I had to explain to her what the concert was going to be about. And I did the concert, the child attended, I think he might have been about 10 or 11, at that point, and I knew he was in the audience. There was many people in the audience, you know, from various walks of my life, or various members of the public, but but knowing that he was in the audience was, was very challenging and it sort of stuck in the back of my mind, as I performed the pieces, my compositions and talked in between the pieces about that, even though I was talking to the audience, as a general, I was sort of thinking about, you know, how do I talk to him? What was interesting about that whole scenario is the week after the concert, when my student came for his next lesson, he told me how much he very much enjoyed the concert, and he's not a, he's not a chatty type of student. And I remember talking to him about it, and it was really, for the first time, when I talked openly, very openly and honestly, one on one with a person about thinking of mental health as a health issue. I was talking to my students about it in a very, very objective way. And I was ... we were talking about mental health, or the issues I've had, just as if I was to tell a child that I had a heart condition, or I had cancer, or that kind of thing. And I've talked about how, you know, in an objective way, how this has been a challenging thing in my life, but I've gone to medical professionals to get help, and now I'm doing better. And he nodded and, and was very calmly, you know, receiving that and I thought to myself, "This is so invigorating and enlightening, because if you can talk to a child about this, that and they grow up thinking that that having a mental health issue is not something that you should be ashamed of, or that you should hide, or that you are ... you are not a great person, that this is something like if I fall off my bike, and I go to the hospital and get a cast, this is a similar type of situation" and, and I thought to myself, "Oh, my gosh, he ... this 10 year old boy has given me this other building block of

thinking that I'm .. I'm going to be okay. And anybody else is going to deal with this is also going to be okay." And, and side note that this student is still my student. This this student we're talking about, and we have this wonderful relationship and he's advancing, he's so super talented. And so obviously, it didn't affect my relationship with him or his family, in fact, it probably strengthened it that I, I showed my vulnerability in that situation.

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Hattie Butterworth 24:53

Yeah, I mean, it reminded me about you know, all of those, especially at the moment with the Black Lives Matter movement we see time and time again, examples of where children aren't the ones that discriminate, you know, children don't have the judgments and the learned behaviours that we might have, and I think that opening up in the way you did, is almost just adding to that whole ... it just just proves that whole truth that children are going to respect the person that you are, if you portray yourself to them in a respectful way, as well.

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Frank Horvat 25:30

You're so right, I read a book recently by the Dalai Lama, and he basically, very bluntly stated, "nobody's born a racist", you know. It's true, you know, no one is born a racist, no one is born with sort of preconceived notions. That's why we, as adults have so much to learn from children, especially younger children, because they look at the world quite objectively and, and in almost this matter of fact, nonchalant type of way, and we have to, we have to keep adopting that and not worrying about what people think of us. And that's very, that's obviously a lot easier said than done. My big dream in life, is to visit schools, you know, and visit universities, and I've been fortunate to give talks on this topic to, to some institutions, but I really want to go deep in and I think, sort of try to get every school of music to have a very important component of what students are offered and even specific programmes that's part of the curriculum, as part of attaining your degree, has to be working on these aspects, you know, because that didn't exist when I was in, well I was in University studying music in the 90s, and these things just did not exist, and I'm hoping that because we're talking about it so much, and there's more emphasis on this within our society, I hope that we start to make these changes.

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Hattie Butterworth 26:59

Yeah, I mean, even in the past four years for me, since I started suffering, I feel like the conversation has just grown and grown, and there are things that exist now that didn't exist when I started, and I know that was only four years ago, and it's just amazing, the change that's happening, but thank you.

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Frank Horvat 27:17

This is great. I'm really happy to hear that, because we definitely need to keep hearing that, you know, and now I hope that some of the leaders within classical music community, they are the ones who start talking about this more. So, you know, as we're talking now, I mean, the world is entrenched with COVID, and because people are more isolated now, I'm just concerned that maybe these types of things will not be discussed as much, or maybe because now even

life as a musician is even more scarce because of this, people not talking about their issues more, do they have the resources available, I think this is very, very important, we have to look out for this because once the pandemic lifts, who knows when it will be but when it lifts and we can sort of return to this type of thing, will people be in a position to be able to go back to activities they love? And my fear is that some permanent damage won't be done, where it might be very difficult for them. So I think now more than ever, you have to make sure that we emphasise this.

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Hattie Butterworth 28:22

I agree. I'm sad to say I won't be surprised if there are more people who come forward, saying that they're starting to suffer with mental health problems or whatever, in our industry after this pandemic, because, you know, it's just the ultimate instability, isn't it? I mean, what is it, 80% of musicians are freelancing, and obviously, that doesn't exist at the moment, so it's going to have a knock on effect. And I think we have to be real and honest about that now and say that "you aren't alone, you people are not alone". And if people start discovering they are experiencing symptoms, whatever they might be, that they have the faith to seek help.

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Frank Horvat 29:02

Absolutely. That's that's the big thing. That's ... we always talk about ending the stigma around mental health. Well, that's, that's, that's the number one stigma. Admitting you have a mental health issue is still for many, many people is a thing that somehow ... a statement of their character, rather than a genuine medical condition that can be treated and managed, right? And and I think we still, as much as I've been talking about it very openly these last few years, I still come across people that that I know for a fact are either think that way about others who are going through it or who are suffering about it, and they're ... they've bought into that, that stigma, you know, so we have ... there's still a lot of work we have to do about that for sure.

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Hattie Butterworth 30:00

Yeah. I've been listening this morning to the wonderful album you have on your Spotify, which is called You Haven't Been, which are piano pieces that you wrote about your depression. And I was just wondering what the composition process was like for that album? And I was just struck with how hopeful so many of the pieces were to me. They felt, you know, some of them felt very sad, but some of them felt extremely hopeful. And if you could explain the composition process, whether you wrote it whilst you were going through your depression, or whether it was a sort of reflection on the depressive episodes, or if you could just explain a bit more about it?

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Frank Horvat 30:44

Well it's, it's definitely not so you know, with a clear cut, "oh, I was going through depression, all of a sudden felt better, and so now I'm going to write a piece about it", you know, it's like, to this day, I still have good days and I have bad days, right? Thankfully, much, much fewer bad days than there once was. But I can definitely still go through that. And I was no different then, writing many of those composing many of those pieces. Some of those pieces were definitely

composed when I was in a state of depression. Very few actually. Remarkably, the interesting thing about, for me, at least ... I don't know about others, but the interesting thing about me being depressed is that I really don't feel like doing music. By the way, here's another stigma ... and we look at this and famous composers and things like that, you know, you listen to Chopin. "Oh my gosh, you know, it's so melancholy and sad and blue. He must have been so sad when he was writing it." Well, how do we know that we've just created this story to sort of romanticise, you know, depression that he might have went through. For me, I know that I can't do it, because, you know, as I said, before, I feel empty. I don't feel like doing anything. So it's not like I, I feel ... "because I'm depressed, now I feel inspired. And I'm going to go and I'm going to be creative. And I'm going to compose, you know, and it's like, I'm gonna, I'm gonna bring out all this incredible melancholy music." No, that's, that's the, there we go. That's, that's what I was talking about, before that, the stigma around it as part of, it's almost like a choice that I've made to be depressed, so then I can be inspired, you know. It's like, this is all, you know, bull, you know, pardon my language. So a lot of those pieces, it was more definitely, to answer your question, it was more of a reflection, of, of being in a state and looking back on it. And, and that was a very therapeutic thing. They were actually very easy pieces to compose. They're not actually very difficult to play. They very simply ... simply state feelings, through the sound of the piano reflections of how I felt in those particular times, and that's why whenever I get an opportunity to perform those pieces live, it's sort of like an extension of that creative process when I was composing the pieces, because it's just like one step further, a more of ... more of a reflection to play them into talk about the pieces and what inspired the particular themes of these specific pieces. So ... but remarkably, it was very therapeutic. And I was worried when, when I was writing it, and once the whole collection was done, I remember talking to my, to my wife, who's also my manager thinking, "Okay, how are we going to share this music?" And, and "am I taking a risk here by putting out an album about being in a state of depression", you know, and what I was most worried about wasn't just ... I'm not so much worried about what people would perceive of me or the music, I was more concerned about would I be making people depressed? So we actually did a lot of research online, from many mental health studies, talking about "does music on melancholy, sad or depressing themes make people more sad when they listen to it?" And everything that we read, thankfully, told us "no, it's actually the opposite" ...so I finally, I finally figured out after all these years "Why is Chopin so darn popular?" Well, there you go. You know, it's like even though I mean, so much ... so much of his music just conveys this this sadness or Satie I mean, you know ... so many a wonderful composers we love to listen to and that people who don't even know much about classical music, they're just drawn to that music, that repertoire, right? And it makes make sense because there's something welcoming, comfortable, soothing, that ironically, can help bring people out of it. Like anything I compose I'm very ... I take a very artistic approach to my practice, and that is I only compose and will put out there, what music that moves me, or that is a reflection of me. That's a very strong thing, whatever I compose. And, but that obviously was taking that to a whole other level, and to see the reaction has been quite amazing. So I'm happy that I got over the inhibition of, of that, and it's gone, gone further with it. So...

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Hattie Butterworth 35:46

I kind of want to turn now to talk about your work as an activist in the arts, because it feels very frequently like being sort of quote unquote outspoken about issues around mental health or climate change and human rights... It's not best practice within our profession. And I've even had, you know, a few friends who say, I'm scared to write my opinions on Twitter, or to retweet something I care about, because it'll look unprofessional, or it'll look like I, you know, I'm not

centrist enough. I'm not ... I don't fit the mould of being a classical musician, enough. And I just thought, I'd like your ... to hear your thoughts about why you think it's important for musicians to speak out about these issues.

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Frank Horvat 36:36

Gosh, there's so much I could say on this. First thing is, okay, you know, how a big thing in our classical music world is, are we still relevant? That is a big talking point, right? How can a, an art form based on traditional white, European traditions still be relevant in a world that we live in? And and probably you, and maybe many people listening to this podcast, probably feel "Yes, we are still relevant", right? After all, that's why we're participating in this, and this is why we do it, so we do feel a relevance. So if we do feel a relevance, though, then we have to relate to the world we live in. I mean, I ... it's, it's a no brainer, so I was cringing when you were telling me about your friend or somebody or colleague, you know, who was like, "I don't want to post anything on Twitter that I believe in." And I was just like shuddering it's like, "but you're an, you're an artist. You, you have things to say, right?" As artists we are, we are wired to say something, to get on a stage, or a platform or an album, and to share. And for me, personally, I feel that it's just an extension of that. My music is, is my number one way I share who I am as an individual and what I believe in and, and using then platforms like social media to, to share that even further or to supplement that, is is just a natural extension of who I am. So I'm fearful, maybe being a bit bold here, but I would actually question the artistry of somebody who doesn't feel that they can speak out of certain things, because then I would question "well, what are you trying to say in your own performance?" Because for me, in the human brain, I feel it's all interconnected, whether you're using a musical instrument, your singing voice, a tweet, an album, a live concert. For me, it's all the same, we have been placed on this planet as musicians to, to share and communicate. That's what music is, it's a form of communication. So I do respect some people who don't feel like it's ... they don't feel comfortable, perhaps they like using their instrument only to say something because they don't feel comfortable with a, you know, a Twitter post or, or a blog or something. And I respect that. I do respect that. But at least then use your music to say something, you know. Use programme notes, if you don't want to talk in between, in between the pieces of your concert, and you only want to say something relevant and important to make this world a better place, then say it through the sound of your instrument and the repertoire you pick. Who wrote the repertoire, you know? Do you have proper representation, you know? And I'm a person, you might think, "Oh, I'm a, I'm a white Male of European descent, you know, from my, my family comes from the hotbed of classical music tradition in history." You know, I have, I have nothing to lose. In fact, I want more diverse voices to be, to be heard, because that means my art form will be ... I can collaborate and share more openly and I will reach more. We're all going to benefit from being a more inclusive world, you know? And so that's what's always driven me, other than injustices.

H

Hattie Butterworth 40:38

Yeah, it can, it can feel like the arts industries as a whole, it can be very difficult to remain environmentally conscious, because so many orchestras and projects look for funding in places that sort of aren't in line with artists' values, whether that be from a bank, or from an oil company or something, there are a lot of examples of orchestras that look to these sources of funding. And I think it was on the Music Plus podcast, you spoke to Chris Gunness about a

concert tour you did in which you only took public modes of transport, and you only took environmentally friendly sponsors. And I was just wondering what your experience of this was, and whether you had any advice for musicians looking to fund their projects in an ethical way?

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Frank Horvat 41:27

Well, it's, it was a lot harder than when I did that. We're talking about I did a big concert tour called the Green Keys tour back in 2010 and 2011, where I toured all of Canada and most of the United States over one year, just as you said, using public modes of transportation and, and offering concerts, talking about climate change and performing music on the theme. And I remember in organising that endeavour, the number one thing was to find sponsorship, and find sponsorship that will practice environmentally sustainable activities. I have to say that I was very successful in that respect, finding companies in that there are a lot of companies out there. And I think as musicians, one of the hardest things that we have to do is ask for help. Sometimes when I feel down, and in a bad mood, I call it begging, "oh, I have to beg today", you know, and, and but just asking for help in a mutual, agreeable where situation where they're helping you financially and, and meanwhile, they're getting some, something out of it with exposure of what you're doing, is it's a mutually agreeable thing. So I was able to find many, many sponsors, in both nationally and locally, that were from businesses that were practising environmental practices, and we used it as a platform to, to showcase their work and what they're doing and organisations in each community. And it really worked out and I was able to avoid ... I didn't have to go to any places that you know, where I, you know, we'd say ... I guess, call it selling out. I didn't have to sell out or go against my values, and I think it's easier today because more and more companies are doing this. And I think it's really amazing that yes, a lot of, you know, in the past, many traditional cultural and musical institutions and organisations have taken quote, unquote, taking money from the devil, as I like to say, and thankfully, a lot of organisations now have standards in place where they're not doing that and furthermore, some who have taken it, perhaps in exchange for a, say naming a concert hall, that's starting to reverse and, and they're like, taking the name away. And I'm like, so like, "This is amazing. This is awesome." When I first started off as an environmentalist, you know, honestly, it was a long road and I thought, "there's no hope, you know. These, the, these organisations are so bound by money from big oil or, or some coal company or some financial institution that's heavily into funding unsustainable, you know, industries, that there's just no way." And even though even though that still exists, we still have a lot of work to do to call out various cultural organisations and holding them to a higher standard that "this is not acceptable". Just like we need to keep uh holding them account to you know, making sure their organisations are inclusive, based on gender, and on, on racial ... on race as well. For me, the environmental thing is for sure. What about orchestras that tour? You know, that's started to become a thing you know. It was always very prestigious, like here in Toronto, you know, we would have the the London Symphony come or the Royal Concertgebouw or various orchestras from Europe that come on tours. And it's like, with all due respect is, you know, and we would celebrate this as a great thing, but now I'm starting to find we're having this conversation, I think, especially because of COVID, now that nothing is happening, and we look outside and like, scientists have told us that air pollution is down significantly since we stopped flying everywhere, because of the shutdown of the pandemic, and it's just like, you see, this is a world we can live in. And we don't need to have, you know, these types of outdated archaic models of the way we as musicians do our career in order to have success.



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H Hattie Butterworth 45:47

That's really fascinating to hear about your experience with that, because, you know, it feels quite often as if we are too scared to ask for alternative methods of funding. And maybe it can feel quite easy to look to someone or look to a company that's funded people before so you know, that they'll say yes, or, or whatever. But I was just wondering if we could finish with you sharing, sort of, something you might say to your 21, 22 year old self in college or university? And if you have a piece ... biggest piece of advice for somebody struggling at that kind of age?

F Frank Horvat 46:31

Oh, that's a good one. Yeah, I think, just thinking about what I was like, at that age, for me, everything when I was in my last years of university, everything was all just about the goal, about gaining a certain level of notoriety for lack of a better word, and also to make money. So it was like h"ow, as a professional musician, am I going to get people to notice me, and, and make, and I'm going to make money at the same time?" And that's all that mattered to me at that age. And, you know, when you're starting off, of course, it's easy to be in this sort of desperate state, but let me tell you something. The ... now what have I have learned? Interesting, the most successful I've ever been in my career has definitely been in the last five years or so. I don't think it's any, it's not a coincidence that because I have stopped thinking about, "that's the only important thing", now, ironically, this is where I've actually started to get more success. Why? Because I've released pressure off my body, both mentally and physically, emotionally. And because I am, I'm able to function better, I'm able to be more productive, I'm able to compose more, I'm able to compose and put on performances that are more genuine. I think, an audience who knows nothing about music can still sense ... have a sixth sense when they're looking at a musician, and create this emotional connection, watching or listening to music saying, "Wow, there is something that is attracting me to this performer". And the performer that works really hard to eliminate all that baggage, is doing something purely from their heart because they're really motivated not just by money, or success or fame, but because they're actually giving something from themselves expressively, that they're willing to share with another human being that that comes off genuinely. And ironically, all this stuff they care about of money, and success and notoriety and fame, that will come because of that. But you actually have to get rid of all of that if you're going to make that happen. And that's what I would have told that person. Now, in my defence would would 21 year old Frank have taken 46 year old Frank seriously when he told him that? I'm not sure. But I would have definitely told him that nonetheless, say, "Hey, here's where I'm at right now. Believe it." And thinking back to that time, I don't remember anybody ever talking to me that way. And and I think that was because the institutions that I was part of, were were really, unfortunately, overemphasising this very competitive nature that our, our classical music community is just steeped in and we have to eliminate this if people are going to be successful and, and happy and healthy. So...

H Hattie Butterworth 49:58

Well thank you so much for sharing your incredible story and your vulnerability and wisdom. And I'm sure so many people will resonate with everything you've said, and it's just such a relief to find someone that's open to talking. And thank you for being the first guest, because I was ... there was a moment where I worried that nobody would say yes. So the fact that you've said yes, and you've just given us so much to think about is, is wonderful. I'm very grateful to you. So thank you.

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Frank Horvat 50:28

Hattie, it's been my pleasure, and I hope that what you've started just takes off and that what we started here today just continues to open up a conversation. So it's my pleasure to join.

H

Hattie Butterworth 50:41

Thank you. Just before you go, I want to say a huge thank you for listening, and also, thank you to Frank for the amazing interview, which I enjoyed so much. If you want to find out more about Frank, his website is frankhorvat.com and he's on Twitter [@frankhorvat](https://twitter.com/frankhorvat) as well and also has his music on Spotify and Apple Music if you want to check it out. So I guess I'll see you next week. Thank you all so much for listening.