

# Episode 3: Jasmin Allpress

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## SPEAKERS

Jasmine Allpress, Hattie Butterworth

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### 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, everybody. Welcome back to the podcast. I hope you're having a really lovely week. So today, I am talking to my wonderful friend and trio partner, the pianist Jasmine Allpress. So I've known Jasmine for a very ...like a few years now, and we've been through a lot of ups and downs, musically and personally. But today, we're going to be very brave and admit to you and each other our four biggest ever failures, because there have been quite a few that, I'll be honest, I've either downplayed or lied about to people and not gone there. Just because the shame around failure is so big in our profession, and in many, many professions, but it's definitely something that we avoid talking about. So I really hope you enjoy the episode. And please remember to follow us on Instagram @tmdtapodcast. Hello, Jasmine. Welcome to the podcast.

### Jasmine Allpress 01:44

Hello. Thank you for having me.

### Hattie Butterworth 01:47

Well, it's an absolutely no problem. How are you doing?

### Jasmine Allpress 01:51

I'm doing great, thanks. How are you?

**H** Hattie Butterworth 01:53  
I'm fine. How's your lockdown going so far?

**J** Jasmine Allpress 01:57  
My, my lockdown is actually fine. It's been a bit weird. I think as a pianist not having a nice piano is, it's been a bit of a struggle.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 02:08  
I literally wrote on my sheet of paper, how was the lack of concert slash piano? Because I know that like your little upright is probably not cutting it is it?

**J** Jasmine Allpress 02:18  
It's so out of tune. It does sound a little bit like a pub piano. But then, you know what? So many people are in the same position and some people don't even have pianos, so I am lucky.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 02:28  
Look at that, look at you. Always the optimist. It's brilliant. So, I think maybe we should probably explain who you are. 'Cause I think a lot of people are like, "Who is this woman?" So Jasmine and I, I feel like I should explain you, I don't need to ask you to explain yourself. So ...

**J** Jasmine Allpress 02:46  
Yeah, you go.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 02:48  
Okay, Jasmine and I met when we were 16 at Royal... no, not at the Royal College of Music. At Chethams School of Music in Manchester, where we both started for sixth form. Since then, I think we just realised that we had a lot in common, we both loved music, but simultaneously got annoyed at the same things I feel like, and you were very good at like keeping me sane and showing me when I was being an idiot. So...

**J** Jasmine Allpress 03:16  
Likewise!

H Hattie Butterworth 03:18

Well, maybe that's why it's continued. So then, I feel like we've also bonded because we've had a lot of failures. So ...

J Jasmine Allpress 03:25

Ah, a lovely, smooth transition.

H Hattie Butterworth 03:28

Exactly. I felt kind of bad because I literally asked Jasmine like, "do you want to come on the podcast and talk about all of your failures?" And it must have sounded like you're the one friend I know that failed. And I felt really bad! I was like "I've probably phrased that really wrong. Probably sounded awful."

J Jasmine Allpress 03:43

No, I felt completely flattered. I thought "you know what, if anyone's got a lot of failures to talk about, here I am".

H Hattie Butterworth 03:50

It's both us. This is the thing is both of us. And I just feel like it's something that for me, at least I can talk about, about you. But for me at least it's been like, the one thing I don't feel like I've ever really properly admitted to anyone like all of them at once. And I feel like I downplayed them so much, or just pretended that I didn't go for stuff because I was scared of what people think, that I didn't get in or whatever. I think we should get you to introduce what you're doing at the moment, like where you are in your musical career. And after Chethams. Off you go.

J Jasmine Allpress 04:25

So, yeah, so I left Chethams, and then I went and did the joint course in Manchester at the Royal Northern College of Music and the University of Manchester simultaneously, which was three years and then my fourth year was just at the Royal Northern College of Music. And I'm graduating from that fourth year this time very soon.

H Hattie Butterworth 04:48

So Jasmine's very clever and she already has a degree, but my goodness, you've had to... You've had to juggle two degrees at the same time, which I've always just been like, "What on earth are you doing?" But you're ... you've just been so amazing at managing it.

J Jasmine Allpress 05:01

Oh yeah. Well, this is the thing, I think, while we're here ... This is so funny, because I feel like I'm getting all this praise for stuff that I've done. And it is funny, and I'm gonna chat about it now, because a bit now, well, when else is there a good time, but I think it's such a massive thing to do two degrees at one time that actually in order to say, "No, this is really stressful. I'm actually having a really hard time" is also a really hard thing.

H Hattie Butterworth 05:32

Yeah.

J Jasmine Allpress 05:34

And so everyone sort of goes, "Wow, you managed it when I was just doing one" and stuff. I'm saying, "Well, did I manage it?" I mean, barely...I sort of got myself through it. But man, it was a hard time.

H Hattie Butterworth 05:45

People will just say, "You're inspiring. You did that. Oh, wow." But actually, where's the space for you to say, "excuse me, it was actually terrible."

J Jasmine Allpress 05:54

And you feel like 'cause so many people are like, "wow, you've, you've done so, so much, like you've done so well." It's like, you feel like you let them down if you go "actually no, I really struggled my way through it." And the thing is, they still talk ... like ask me to come to their open days and tell everyone how wonderful this course is and I wanna go "Oh it was such a hard time!" but yeah, totally calm.

H Hattie Butterworth 06:16

The joint course is a bit of a health hazard. It's like I think, like I said ...

J Jasmine Allpress 06:20

It was wonderful though.

H Hattie Butterworth 06:21

Yeah So maybe we should start there. If you want to go first we decided we're going to admit

Yeah, so maybe we should start there. If you want to go first, we decided we're going to admit our four biggest ever failures as a musician and general human being. Because we so often keep them hidden and downplayed or don't want to talk about it or like part of the past, just don't want to go there. Yeah, it's just nice to feel like they're out in the open. You know, there's no shame around them now. I don't want there to be any shame, like for my failures, I don't know about you. But I just feel like I had a lot of shame, and I don't like that.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 06:50

Yeah, I think that's the thing, even like before this chat, and I've just chatting to you and like we've been friends for years. And even so I was thinking, "oh my goodness, this is a really scary thing to have to admit so many failures in such a short space of time."

**H** Hattie Butterworth 07:05

I know! I'm was thinking that! I was talking to my parents just before and I was like, "so I'm gonna like talk about my four biggest failures." And my mom was like, "oh, remember that one in that church, like when you played really badly." And I was like, "that wasn't even one of them. Now I have five." She was like "that was such a terrible time for you, wasn't it? It was really traumatic." And I was like, "Yes. And I've clearly, like just erased that from my memory, because it was so traumatic that I didn't even write it down." So anyway, do you want to go first, and give us your top four?

**J** Jasmine Allpress 07:35

Yeah, yeah. Um, so I do have four that I wrote down. I don't think they're ranked necessarily. However, I think the biggest one that came to mind straightaway, when you asked me about, to talk about your failures was: at the age of ... the grand old age of 17, or however old I was, and I didn't get in, I'd applied for lots of conservatoires and lots of universities because I didn't know which one I was going to do. And essentially, I didn't get in. I went for Oxford. I really fell in love with the place but I didn't actually get offered a place. And I also didn't get offered a place in basically everywhere that I auditioned for conservatoire-wise, apart from the RNCM which obviously I'm now at. That was ... I think that is the biggest one, because it was like you everyone else around you, especially at a specialist music school, is getting places here, there and everywhere. They're getting scholarships, they're going off and they're doing amazing things. And I was there like, "I have literally not gotten anywhere. This is terrible." So that was the biggest one, I think. And then when I was thinking about other ones that really affected me at the time...So I am a pianist, but I also play inverted commas "play the violin."

**H** Hattie Butterworth 08:54

You do. It's very good. Jasmine is a very good violinist.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 08:59

Not anymore. I haven't practised it in years. But..

**H** Hattie Butterworth 09:01  
Anyway, continue with your failure.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 09:06  
I will. I used to, I used to love playing with other people on the violin. I think that was the main thing. And it's probably why I love chamber music now. I used to play in National Children's Orchestra on the violin and then I applied for National Youth Orchestra. It was like a kind of this natural progression. And loads of people got in and I never got offered a place in NYO and it really affected me actually. Because I worked so hard for it. And I think that was the other thing, was playing the violin was admittedly one of the first failures that I wrote down, because I used to apply for so much stuff on the violin and just not get it. And I used to wonder and I'd be like, "Am I just really bad?" And I think actually "no, maybe maybe it was a sign that my calling was not was not the violin."

**H** Hattie Butterworth 09:55  
Ooh that's interesting.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 09:56  
But that was that was another one. Yeah. And then I had ... I did have another one. They're all they're all linked I think, which ... I mean, you mentioned I did a bit of conducting. But I do see conducting as a bit of a failure, because I ... like ... I think I go through these little fads where I'm like, "I think this would be a great idea to do." And I go all at it, and I throw everything at it. And then when it doesn't kind of work, it is, it's just a kind of a bit of a letdown. And I think I spent basically, I spent three years at Manchester University, well, sort of two proper years being a student conductor there. And I tried so hard, and I tried so hard to love it as well. And it just wasn't bringing me joy. And I think that that was a bit of a failure, because I had such high hopes for it as well. And I was thinking I could, I could potentially be really good at this. And then I think it's admitting that actually, "no, you're you're not as good as you think you are. And also, you don't love it enough. You don't love it enough." So that was another media.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 10:55  
That's really interesting you said that, because to everyone watching you, it looked so ... well, I think it looked so natural. And like it was like, "yes, go Jasmine. Oh, my goodness, this amazing woman in front of this incredible orchestra, like just going for it." I was just so proud, like, every time I watched you conduct, it's like, "yes." But the thing is, like, it felt like a failure to you because it wasn't what you were meant to do. And like, that's fine. And you shouldn't feel pressure from people saying, "Yeah, you're great at it" or, "oh you look so good, or whatever" to make ... you know, that doesn't make it any more of a success if it doesn't feel like it's really the thing you want to do.

J Jasmine Allpress 11:31

Yeah, I think that's the thing. And I think it's when you feel like people have been really trying to help you and, and really trying to push you into it, saying, "Oh, you've you'll be really great at this, like I can see it." And I've actually having to come back to them and say "no, it doesn't feel right. It's not natural." I actually find standing up in front of a group of people and telling them how to play their instruments really hard. It's because it's difficult, isn't it? It's a really difficult one to balance actually your own interpretation, but telling other people how to create, that is a really weird one, when you've got musicians sat in front of you that I like, "are you telling me how to play my instrument?" And then I had ...um... Hattie?

H Hattie Butterworth 12:16

Hello, I'm here, I'm here.

J Jasmine Allpress 12:17

Oh, you're here. You're here.

H Hattie Butterworth 12:18

I know, I'm just listening intently.

J Jasmine Allpress 12:19

You're just giving me space to speak. It's lovely.

H Hattie Butterworth 12:22

I am yeah! Makes a change doesn't it?!

J Jasmine Allpress 12:29

I had another one, which I think it's, it's funny now that I look back on it, but at the time, and I'm sure you remember this, was when I had my assessment at Chethams. And already, I think like Chets was a massive leap from where I was before. I was at a normal like state school. There was hardly any music going on. And I went ... I suddenly arrived at this music school and everyone was just insane. And, and it was really scary. And I had that assessment, and I played a Bach fantasy and fugue. And it went horribly. And I just couldn't remember anything that I was supposed to play, like when you forget even how to play your instrument. I had to ask for the music. It was just an absolute shambles. And I remember coming out just saying that that was horrendous. And the lady that was doing the assessment was also doing a masterclass

later that evening. I won't name names, and she ... basically 'cause she was sat on my panel had just been like staring at me with this look of like, "I can't believe how badly you've just played that." She did this masterclass later in the evening, and this girl forgot what she was playing. She like lost her memory, tried to carry on and managed to get to the end. And she said this lady just was like, "you know, I really appreciate that you managed to get to the end, you really tried" and she stared directly at me as she said it and I just remember thinking, "oh my goodness, I've just I've absolutely failed this. I've just like I have ruined, like her opinion of me. I've ruined my assessment. I ruined this piece of music." I just ... it went awfully. At the time, it was just horrendous. Now I look back on it. I think "yeah, that's actually really amusing." But at the time...

H

Hattie Butterworth 14:17

No, it was awful. I remember you coming out there at the time and like you were very good in Chethams, most of the time, you were very good at just sort of laughing things off and being like, "Well, that was absolutely horrendous. I was absolutely terrible." And we both were just so angry about the whole situation. But oh my goodness, like I think a lot of people will relate to a similar like performance experience. And it does feel like your whole world just shatters before you. And it's like there's absolutely no point in carrying on. And I mean, I do want to talk more to you about like how you managed the failures then how you dealt with it and everything. Maybe I should go ahead and say my failures.

J

Jasmine Allpress 14:57

Yes.

H

Hattie Butterworth 14:57

And you can, you can comment.

J

Jasmine Allpress 14:58

I will.

H

Hattie Butterworth 14:59

You can say what you think? So I think maybe then, courtesy of my mother, I'm going to start with, when I was ... you probably don't even know this Jasmine. When I was ... how old was I? I'm going to need my mother to come and help me. But I think I was probably ... I'm going to go with 13 to 14. And I'd been playing the cello properly, properly, about two years. So I started when I was like, eight for about a year or two. And then I gave it up for a few years, and I decided I was going to be a horse rider. And then when the horse riding and gymnastics didn't work out, I came back, gave it another go. And, sorry, anyway, I'm going on a tangent. But when I was about 13, I, yeah, played in this church in Hereford, where I'm from. And my dad accompanied me on the piano, and I played a grade four piece, which is called Shepherd's Hey.



And I just, I don't know, it was probably the first time I properly performed and I just couldn't play it. Something happened. And I just could not play it. And it was at a time where like, I was so in love with music and I so wanted it to be the thing I did. But it was like, so exciting that I'd had this opportunity, but I just remember afterwards, my mom looking at me, like, "Is this really what you want to put yourself through?" Like, you know, because everyone ... my whole family knew that I could play it so much better. But I got to the church and like, just couldn't get through it. I just couldn't get through it and everyone in the congregation would just sort of say, "Oh, well, it's a good opportunity, isn't it?" And everyone had this face of like, "that was painful." I just remember being like, "I don't want to be a cellist. This is terrible."

**J** Jasmine Allpress 16:35

I think like, that's the thing, everyone ... well, I mean, a lot, everyone, that's pretty mortal and normal has an experience like that when they're younger. And it doesn't go quite right, and it's the pitying look. You just wish people wouldn't do it. I mean, it's a natural reaction, isn't it?

**i** 16:50  
But

**H** Hattie Butterworth 16:51

It breaks you. It breaks you in half. Because all you want is for someone to say... I think it's the thing of like, you want someone to say, "you're fine, however you play", but people know how much it means to you, so they give you that look of like, "I know you're not fine with how you played." Anyway, so the second one is, it's literally ... I'm like Jasmine. We are, we are similar. So I was rejected from the National Youth Orchestra. But for some reason, I just didn't really admit it to anyone. You probably remember this. It was in my first term at Chethams. And I'd literally told everyone I was going for it. My teacher before Chethams had been like "you're definitely going to get in." I was like, "I'm definitely going to get in." So yeah, so I played ... sorry, I did my audition, I didn't get in. I did get on the reserve list, but for some reason that didn't matter to me at the time. The reserve list was just like for losers in my opinion. So yes, I literally had probably the biggest musical breakdown of my life after that, and I hid it from most people. Cried a lot in the loo. I even remember the day I found out, I went into a practice room. This is so funny. I just started playing Faure Elegie, like so melancholically to myself, just being like, "Oh, I won't let this faze me, I've failed." Faure Elegie going on in the background, it's just me crying my eyes out play the cello. It was it was quite funny. That was terrible. And then I decided I wasn't going to re audition for it in Upper Sixth. I was too traumatised by my failure. Then we get to music college auditions. And once again, I had this like real cocky confidence going into it and I was like, "I'm gonna get a clean sweep of conservatoires." So I went for all the conservatoires. Fine. I got a few ... Well, I got places, kind of where I wanted to. And I just assumed I would get in, quite frankly. But I didn't get into the Royal Academy of Music. I didn't get on the reserve list. Didn't get absolutely anything. I just got a salty letter saying "you didn't get in." I remember and I tore it up and threw it in the bin. But I kind of wish I'd have framed it now. So I think it is the Royal Academy Music and this is the one I am ashamed to say, I very

rarely admit to someone. If they ask me "why didn't you go to academy?" I tend to just say, "oh, you know, just didn't want to. Didn't really find a teacher I wanted" or like, you know, but actually, no I didn't get in.

J

Jasmine Allpress 19:34

I totally, I totally understand this. I do this ... so many people were like, "Yeah, cuz I got into all the London ones but I decided to come to Manchester instead." And I'm there like, "I didn't even have the option" and it's so ... it feels so shameful to admit that you didn't get in, that you're like "Yeah, yeah, I agree. Yeah, obviously I just decided because of like these various reasons that I chose to come to Manchester instead," and it's like no like, why, why is it shameful? Because people improve and become so much better over the course of their four years at conservatoire, wherever you're at, that actually, what, what difference does it make? And even now, like I'm four years on, like we're four years on, and it still feels like a really big thing to admit. I don't know, maybe it's, it's the institution? I don't know. But yeah, I totally get you on that one.

H

Hattie Butterworth 20:29

For me, it felt like just, yeah, the end of the world, because I wanted to prove that I could get in everywhere and I had all these choices, and I had all this kind of like, all these incredible places. I will go onto the last failure, number four, is that I got ... this was in January, I got 62 in my concerto exam. And this is a, this is, this is a hard one, because for some people, I understand 62 is a very good mark. And even like for me now, I'm like, "Do you know what? it's fine. It's a 2:1. It's fine. It's a good mark, whatever." But it's the thing, isn't it of like putting everything into it, comparing it to your old marks, comparing it to your friends'. compare... and I wanted to just like, come on here and be like, marks have been the most creatively devastating thing in my musical life. Some of the marks I've got, have just been the number one thing that have made me want to give up and I think that is so sad, because it's a number. It's a bloody number, like it's absolutely nothing other than that. And even the comments are way more important than the number but then, you know, for me at the time, it felt like such a massive failure back in January, I played the Walton Cello Concerto. I thought it went fine. I enjoyed it. I played it all through. I had an absolute blast. I love the piece to bits, like play it through whatever. I'm so proud of myself for doing it. I wasn't expecting an amazing mark, but like, I don't know, it just felt like a really big failure. I don't know why.

J

Jasmine Allpress 22:00

Marks is a big thing. Marks are horrible. I think, you know, when I like look back on my conducting failure, I think that probably was the thing that just finished me off. It wasn't even that bad a mark, but when I think when people around you are getting really good marks you just ... it's a natural reaction to compare yourself. And to question why like, "Am I just that much worse? Am I ...did they not like me? What was it?" That was the mark that I got.

H

Hattie Butterworth 22:30

Yeah. I can't I kind of want to go back to your conservatoire rejections ... that I don't know

Yeah, I can't kind of want to go back to your conservative rejections ... and I don't know about you, but it looks to me like that and Oxford must have been just so horrible to go through at, at a music school anyway, where it just feels like one success after another. And I just wondered like, what did it feel like at the time? And like, how did you deal with it? Because of course you talked to me about it. And it's probably the first time I saw you cry. I don't know if you mind me saying but I it was the first time I saw you, like probably cry. And I like..how did it feel like, how did you deal with it? Because I think I don't know, just, just how ...?

**J** Jasmine Allpress 23:08

Well, it was one of the most devastating moments I think, of my life because you're at this crossroads. You, you come to the end of school, and it's like, this is a really big decision where I'm going to go. Like I ... everyone else around me had all these options, and they had scholarships to places and they were just amazing and they were getting into everywhere. And even people that weren't going on to do music were so set and like, "I'm going to go to this university, and I'm going to do liberal arts, I'm going to do English" and they were so like, ready, and I think surrounding yourself with people like that to...It feels at the time like everyone else is succeeding, and you have just completely failed. And to have to go in and admit to people that you didn't get in anywhere is such a tough thing. And I think I'd really, really set my hopes after that, because I'd received that news in probably like November, December. And I was waiting on ... to hear back from Oxford in basically like January time, I think. And I remember because ... well we all remember this. I'd been, I'd been through like a pretty grim breakup before I went to Oxford, and then got there and was like, "This is amazing." I was there for like a few days and just was like, "it's just such a like breath of fresh air. I've met so many amazing people" and I was like, "this is the place I want to be. I know, like it feels so right to be here." To get the letter of rejection then was just like such a blow. I remember because I was at home at the time, it was the Christmas holiday. And my mum just like came and I was "I didn't get in." She was just like, "Okay, I'm making you a cup of tea and you have a piece of cake. Like, are you okay?" Because she knew what a big deal it meant for me like and also I think the fact that, like there was such a big pressure from my family and they didn't mean it at all. They really wanted me to do well. But there was such ...and there still is this real stigma about Oxford or Cambridge, I think, about whether like, if you've been there, then like, you've done well, you like, literally you have succeeded. You don't need to, you don't even need to work for the rest of your life because you went to Oxford. That's what it feels like. And actually, it's really interesting, because I have chatted to so many people that either got pooled at Cambridge or didn't actually get in who still it really affects them. It's a really big thing. And I think if you haven't experienced rejection quite on that scale before, that's the first big time if you don't get offered a place somewhere, that's the first time you are properly rejected from a place. And I remember because I went, I ended up obviously, on the joint course, which was still really great thing. I was so pleased to get onto that, because I didn't really have a backup plan if I didn't get on to that. So I remember ending up in Manchester, but for the whole of my first year, pretty much, I had this proper, like imposter syndrome. I was like, "I shouldn't be here. Like I'm not good enough. I wasn't good enough to get into these places. So why should I be good enough to be here?" It's a really big thing, I think. Because you forget that actually 17, 18 is ... you're still really young. I mean, I'm still young now, obviously. But, yeah, that that was that in a vague nutshell.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 26:32

Yeah, I mean, this is the thing, I probably I don't know, if you want background, but for like for

Yeah, I mean, this is the thing. I probably I don't know, if you want background, but for like for someone looking at you applying for conservatoires, it was just such a shock for everyone else as well, that you didn't because, I mean, you just got like, you got a second round for BBC young musician, and you got, you know, amazing awards for your playing, and, you know, you're such a great performer and accompanist and people you know, flock to see you play like so much of the time. I don't know, I ... it's just my mum, especially she's your number one fan. She thinks that you play so well. Like, we all do. You just have such an incredible way of speaking with your instrument, and I suppose the hardest thing is like to watch someone you know is just so talented, then have like the most devastating rejection and, you know, it's impossible for them to believe that ... it's impossible for them to believe that the truth, the truth about their playing, you know what I mean?

**J** Jasmine Allpress 27:34

Yeah.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 27:34

Like, because, because, I mean, you feel like you need people, you need accolades in the outside world to tell you that you're doing okay. You can't just rely... it feels like that anyway, it feels like you can't rely on what other people say or what your friends say or whatever.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 27:51

Yeah, I think it's difficult when, obviously, people, it feels, it does feel like people are really rooting for you. But that's, I think that's one of the things is, is having that self confidence and self belief that you, you're like, "okay, they didn't accept me. But I know I'm great. And, and I think I play really honestly and I, I think I'm going to improve somewhere and, and I really believe that I can make it." I still believe like school age is so hard. And especially if you're in a music school where people around you are so fantastic, and you're surrounded by so much amazing music, to kind of go "actually no, I have got something to say, and I really believe in what ... in my playing, and I really believe that I have a chance and, and a chance to make a really good career out of it. And I have creative ideas." At that time, like I ... it's a struggle to even say like, get up in the morning and go, "You know what, I do have something worth saying." So then to be rejected by lots of places ... and it's funny, because actually, a lot of the comments that I did receive from my auditions because I asked for feedback was "we just don't think you're confident enough." And I was just like ... which was an even bigger but because I was like it's not even something like you need to practice some technique that I can like write stuff down and like, I'm like, "I know how to improve that." I'm like, "how on earth do I improve this massive like wedge of what feels like my personality?" It's almost like they were saying, "this is a ... this isn't anything wrong with your playing. This is a part of you that, you know, needs developing or something." It's sort of patronising, isn't it? That's a such a hard thing to hear. Yeah, I struggled with hearing it, I think because it was such a blatant truth, that I was like, "oh my goodness, how do I improve this?" How on earth, especially when you're like you're moving on and you're, you're changing places, you're going into a first year of somewhere else, and I ... that's why I think my first year was really hard because, like, I was so aware that I was sort of playing in a box. And I was like "I have, I have so many ideas and like, like a sound I want to create, and it just feels like I'm really struggling to actually put that across." And it's

really interesting, because I think in my third year, something clicked. And I don't know whether it was like the stress of doing like my final year at university, along with the RNCM, but something clicked, and I remember just being like, "I don't care anymore, I don't care what these people are gonna think of me. I'm going to play what I'm going to play, I've got bigger things to think about. I've got my final exams coming up. I don't care." And I remember playing, and my teacher came up to me... I was doing my technical exam, and I played for the third year technical exam, I had to play a movement of a concerto, and I did the John Ireland Piano Concerto, and it was a piece that I just ... I still am obsessed with. I think it's a great piece. And I played it, and I just completely gave it my all because I was like, "I love this piece. I want them to love this piece. And I think I play it really well." And I played it, and it went pretty well, I have to say. And then my teacher came up and he said, "I've been speaking to the head of piano and he was so impressed with how you played. He said, you've really come on." And I remember thinking, "oh my gosh, it makes so much sense. Like, I don't care anymore. I don't care what they think. I don't care what mark I get. I just want to play this piece as best as I can play." So it's taken years to kind of come through and be like, "Ah yeah, that's what they meant when they said I didn't have enough confidence to come."

H

Hattie Butterworth 31:51

I remember going to Manchester to hear you play that piece. The John Ireland. And it was just the most fun, like ... quite a lot of times I watched people play and I just feel like I'm on the edge of my seat because I'm so scared they're going to either mess up or like ... I don't know, there's just this energy coming from them that's very tense. And with you, it was like, it was just as if it was ... it's hard to put into words. It was sort of just like, what you were always meant to do. Like, I was ... it was as if I was watching someone make a pot, like make a clay pot. Or like, I don't know, anything like that. It just felt like that, it was so natural, and so right. And I just was ... just, yeah. Like it was, it was so natural, and like, real, and as if you should ... just something you've always done. You know, I didn't feel at all scared. I didn't feel like you're putting on a show. You like drew people in with your sound, and it was the time I was just like, "yes, Jasmine. Oh, my goodness, Jasmine, this is so you. This is so right. I want you to play this piece to everyone in the world because it's just so amazing."

J

Jasmine Allpress 33:06

Yeah, maybe that's the thing. Maybe Maybe it's the piece that changed me. Yeah, rather than my attitude.

H

Hattie Butterworth 33:11

It's funny though, because I had like a similar ... I feel, maybe you remember this, at a similar time, in my ... Oh... In a similar time in my third year, I kind of had the same feeling of like, "I don't care anymore." I mean, I'd had a few months of just realising "Why am I doing this? I don't want to suffer every time I perform. I don't want this fear of failing, this fear of like, this fear anymore, basically." And I, yeah, it felt like I just, I was now excited to take a risk, rather than being afraid to fail. It was like, "I'm so excited that I can actually play a box, like a wooden box with strings on it." I remember thinking this, it's like "it's a wooden box with strings on it, that I can play and not many people in the world can play it. And I'm acting as if that is such a

terrifying thing to be able to do. Whereas actually that is something I should be so excited to do." Because I'd realised as well that all of my failures had been such a good thing, I was actually more excited to fail. Like, I was more excited to fail than succeed because my successes had been like fine. But my failures had been just so much more important to me, that I was now ... it felt like I was excited to go and fail. It was almost like I was saying to myself "Fine. If you fail, at least that means that you will have another thing to ... another experience to draw from, another thing to laugh about even" you know what I mean? Like...

**J** Jasmine Allpress 34:44

Yeah, I think it's funny because I've always watched you play and listened to you play and thought, "wow, like you've got such a personality when you play" and I think that's so inspiring. And you've always had like these strong opinions and not been afraid to say them. I've just I love it. I think it's so important, like so many people, including myself just shy away from actually saying, "Here I am. I'm playing my instrument for you. And if you don't like it, then stuff you, like, I'm going to play it anyway." And I just I love that. I think I think you do it so well. And I think the fact that you've come to this point, yeah, just really feels like a success in my eyes anyway.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 35:33

Yeah. I mean, I kind of wanted us now to talk about our biggest successes. And it's really funny because I've ... I had a list of failures. I was like, "Yeah, that one, that one, that one, that one." And then success is just such a wishy washy, like spiritual awakening, kind of, like paragraph that I've written.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 35:51

Yeah.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 35:52

'Cause it's like, I don't know, what did I write? So yeah, it's sort of like projects I create, I just see as so much more successful. It's never a mark anymore, for me. It's never like getting into an orchestra, because there've been orchestras that I've got into that I haven't not enjoyed. But you know, there have been projects that have been terrible. And like, yes, okay, it's great that I got in, but for me, at least, claiming my piano trio or doing a charity concert that I did like that, for me is the biggest success that I've ever had, like, I just loved it, I loved the fact that I did something with all my friends, to a... for a cause. And then I actually wrote my biggest success in the last few years. This is really funny, because this has made me laugh, I've been really like, I've got a reserve place in European Union Youth Orchestra for two years running. And it's so funny, because that is basically the same as what I got for NYO. But even though, you know, I technically failed, I didn't get into the European Union Youth Orchestra, I don't play with them. I can't admit that I'm on like ... in the cello section. I don't write that on any CV. But for some reason, it's just such a much better result than I ever expected of myself, because I took that

risk, and I did the audition without any expectation. But that is just such a success that like, I got halfway there. Like, I love that. I just love that. I got halfway there. That's great. Like, cool. That's success for me at the moment. I don't know. But what about you?

**J** Jasmine Allpress 37:21

Yeah. Yeah. Well, I totally agree. I think, when I think about success, it's so easy to list down all your failures, and I think for success, actually, the biggest successes have been things that actually I didn't expect to get or was a surprise or like, so I think actually, one of my biggest successes was finding out that I love playing chamber music. I just love it. And because that success has opened a door to so many things that I wouldn't have ever done, it's like long lasting things. I think just being able to ... if you just sort of win a trophy for something, yeah, great. Like you've got that trophy on your mantelpiece, but like, what, what does it lead to kind of thing? So for me, like, I think success has been, I'd agree like the the same kind of spiritual awakening things. This lockdown, I have to say, has made me really think and really be creative in a way that I think about music. And it's put like a massive emphasis on actually, what is the future of classical music? It's a really big thing, like, do we ... are we relevant? Do we have a relevance today, and actually, like I've, I've been lucky enough to be in a house full of people that are willing to hear my creative ideas. But actually, I think that is a really big success that I've come through. and I started off as someone that did play almost in a box and was afraid to speak out and afraid to actually voice my opinions in case it kind of hurt someone's feelings, heaven forbid, that I sort of, I feel like everyone has had the space and time to reflect and think about sort of going back to normal, inverted commas. But what, what I've really enjoyed is actually being able to kind of explore these creative ideas, explore new ways of playing or explore new ways of presenting classical music, especially. That to me is a success in which will be sort of revealed as whether that will be a success of classical music, after lockdown has finished I think.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 37:31

Exactly. Yeah, I've really...

**J** Jasmine Allpress 39:24

That was really, really vague.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 39:37

I honestly got that though. I think you're saying like, you don't like how we've been taught to be sort of a product of our profession. And we have the chance, I really believe, through this podcast as well, it's kind of the same feeling I had through lockdown was like, "I don't want to be that person anymore that hides parts of me as a musician, because I want to further my career. I don't want to hide these parts of me anymore, because I think our society deserves to hear our opinions because we create beautiful music. Yes, but like, how are we going to relate to people? Or how are we going to bring in further and show ourselves as being relevant if

we're so afraid of sharing our opinion, and making a change?" You know, so I love that. That's exactly how I've been feeling as well. And that would be the ultimate success wouldn't it? Like, if that is ...

**J** Jasmine Allpress 40:36

I wish. Yeah.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 40:37

I don't think before lockdown, I would have had the confidence to to admit my failures in this way. I don't know. I don't honestly, I have kept ... I can't believe how few people I've told. I think that's so interesting. I don't know about you. So few people.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 40:56

It's such a ... there's such a shame about it, isn't there? I think, actually, because when I think back and I think, "Oh, I didn't get into Oxford", but actually, I've had a great time here, and I wouldn't have had that experience, I wouldn't be where I am today, if ... had I not been rejected from these places. And people say at the time, they're like, "you're gonna look back and think 'actually, it was a great thing that they didn't let you in.'" And I do now. And I think, "yeah, it's really cliché", but actually, this ... failures do make their own successes, as well because like, music in itself is such a personal thing. You, you play this instrument, and you have people listen to everything, like, I think that's why it feels like when you get rejected from somewhere, or somebody or I guess if you have like bad feedback from something or somebody doesn't like what you've done, it feels so hurtful, because you've put everything that you have into that piece of music, or how you play that or ... I mean, it is all part of you. And, and it's really hard to shift and just to say "actually, no I'm, I'm playing this music", and sort of kick the ego out of it, I guess. But it's still part of what you've brought to that performance.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 42:10

That must be it isn't it? Yeah.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 42:13

I think that is why it's so painful.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 42:16

Yeah, it feels like an extension of you. Especially if you've started playing very young, or it's been the one thing you could do. You know, for me, it felt like this is the one thing I can do, and I can prove myself in. And as soon as you start getting rejections in the one thing you feel you



can do...Oh my goodness, I missed off one of my failures that was like my biggest failure. Oh my goodness, because I was just thinking of that. I was like, "Oh, my goodness, the time I didn't get into Chethams." Totally forgot!

**J** Jasmine Allpress 42:45  
Aw man!

**H** Hattie Butterworth 42:47

Yeah, so I didn't get into Chethams, when I was 14, in year nine, and it was terrible. It was so distressing, because I had read about it, I was so obsessed with going to boarding school as well. And I just was like, "this is going to be the place I want to be, I just want to be around musicians every day. I'm so sick of my school. So sick of it. I just love the cello." And you know, my teacher at the time, I took her the application form, she looked at me like, "What are you doing? Why are you applying for this school? Like, what? There's no, there's no point ... you're not gonna get in." She had that real tone. And like, I know what she was trying to say, and she didn't want me to get hurt. But I was sort of ... didn't really listen to that and I just went for it. So for context, I was 14, and I was about grade five. Well, I had just done my grade five. So by Chethams standards that really isn't very, like, that's not really a stage that you'd enter at. But I did my audition anyway, got this rejection. And oh my goodness, I was just on the floor. I thought my world had ended and my mum went about finding me other options. But at that point, I didn't want another option. For me it was Chethams or nothing, so she was going about finding you know, junior conservatoires and everything. And I was just thinking, "I really don't want this". In my head, I was like "I really really don't want this." I wanted to get into that school. I didn't want anything else. But do you know what? That has been the best failure I've ever had. Because I then went on to find the leading light in my life, in my cello life, which is my teacher, Elaine Hyneman in Birmingham who just made me feel so differently about my playing and I went to her just with absolutely no confidence. So I went to the Birmingham Conservatoire, junior conservatoire. And from the ... like number one lesson she just believed in me and took me seriously. And I didn't have that before, and I needed that, I needed like ... I didn't need to go straight into a boarding school stressful environment. I just needed one person to believe in me and help me like see that I had the power in my playing to get better and get good. And I'm when I got to grade eight in a year from grade five to grade eight in a year with her. She was so... just believed in everything. And I remember my second lesson, she said to me, "how are we going to make this piece better then?" Like, "what do you think you could do to make this piece better?" And I was just so broken. I looked at her and I was just like, "we could get somebody else to play it. That would make it better." And she looked at me and she said, "I don't want to hear you say that ever again." You know, you have something to say with your music. Please don't ever say that. And that's really stuck with me. Because I was so just not confident, as you say. And that was such an important failure, to see that there was there were other people waiting to be in my life, that I needed that rejection to get there. You know what I mean? Anyway, that was just an aside.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 45:55  
I forgot about that. I did.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 45:56  
I know! I forgot about that!

**J** Jasmine Allpress 45:59  
I think it's amazing that you literally got to grade eight and what, like, literally no time. That is a success in itself.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 46:09  
That's true. That's true. And it felt like it ... by the world standards, because I suppose everyone understands ... most people understand what a grade 8 is, don't they? Yeah, people understand what that is. And so I could tell my friends at school, and they thought that was ... I remember my friend Meredith being like, "Well that's it now then isn't it? Like, aren't you done now?" I was like "No, dear!" I wish that were true. So I just want to finish with kind of one thing you wish you had known, or I mean I ... I asked this to my last guest as well, maybe slightly rephrasing the same question. You know, what do you wish you would know, what would you say to your self? You know, getting rejections from colleges and things? What would you say to yourself?

**J** Jasmine Allpress 46:58  
I mean, I think I'd say that it's, it's really hard at the time. But actually, it will make you so much stronger in the long term. You're, you're going to appreciate it later on. And actually, it's part of this journey, like you were saying, it totally is part of your individual journey where you end up like, had I not been rejected from all these places, I wouldn't be here. I might have ended up being a violinist, and that was not meant to be. Like, I still enjoy playing it, but it's not meant to be and piano obviously was for me. The whole conducting failure. It was always piano. Piano was such a constant. Had I not actually had to take a long, hard look at myself and say, "Is this meant for you? Were you meant to go to that institution? Were you meant to get into Oxford?" Actually having to say "no, this is the path I'm supposed to be on. This is going to help me out in the long run."

**H** Hattie Butterworth 48:00  
I was just saying it reminds me of ... people might know on YouTube, this girl called Ruby Granger. She didn't get into Oxford. And she was so in love ... She is just such an English student. And she loves reading and everything has been about English from year one. And she went for ... going ... she went for English at Oxford and got rejected. And therefore she immediately decided it must have been English that meant she failed. And so then she turned and did a theology degree or started on a theology degree. Only then that one year in to realise she was so unhappy, and so then switched to English at Exeter, but I'm just wondering if it was something like that with your conducting. Was it that like, you hadn't done what you wanted with piano? So you thought, well, it must be the piano. Maybe conducting is what I should be doing? Maybe that is what I'll succeed in.

J

Jasmine Allpress 48:56

Yeah, I think that was ... it was like a "oh my goodness, like I ,I feel like I failed on the piano. But I think I'd be great at conducting." And I remember, it's pretty funny because it sticks with me, that one of my conducting teachers at the University said he was like, "you're really musical and I can tell that you're really musical by the way that you conduct." But then it dawned on me after I was like, "this isn't for me." But then I thought actually "no, like, I am musical, but I can't use it in the same way with conducting as much as it's hard work learning an instrument or learning a craft of any sort, it has to feel joyful and it has to feel natural to some extent." And that's why it's funny because I started the piano was ... piano was my first instrument. And it just so happens that I mean it's stuck stuck with me through thick and thin, that it feels natural to play

H

Hattie Butterworth 49:56

Yeah, I feel the same because there have been, especially in the last year, many, many times where I felt just ... "I don't fit in this profession, I don't fit with my cello playing, I want to do something else." Blah, blah, blah. And I think the thing I've learned about that, and my therapist actually helped me realise this, so I was talking to her about the things I do to manage my anxiety or whatever, when I'm feeling really awful, she said, you know, "what, what can you do?" And I said, "do you know what? Nine times out of 10, when I play my cello, I feel better." And she just paused and looked at me. And she was like, "Do you like, do you hear what you just said?" I was like "what?". She was like, "nine of the top nine out of the 10 times that you pick up your cello, when you're feeling anxious, you end up feeling better". Does that not say a lot about how the cello is in your life where it is? And I was like, "yeah", like, in the pits of despair or whatever, nine times out of 10 I know, I can go to it. And I will feel better in some way. And it's so easy to let go of that and be like, "No, I there's something else for me, or it's not fulfilling me whatever." But actually, you know, when things are terrible, is when you probably realise yeah...

J

Jasmine Allpress 51:13

Well, exactly. And there's there's like, there's always a reason that you were drawn to the instrument in the first place. And it's so easy for that to get lost amongst criticism and negative feedback and rejection of any sort. That actually, there was a reason that you picked it up from the very beginning, because you just love playing it. And I think a lot of people miss that in their lives, even professional musicians that have been going for years. There is so much joy in music, and I, I it sounds so cringy. But I just want everyone to kind of hear that, because I'm such a believer that it has so much power for so many people. I don't know where I was going with that.

H

Hattie Butterworth 51:56

No, I know what you're saying. I know what you're saying. And especially at a time like this, we have to be honest about that I think. Yeah, everything does feel very insecure. And people are savina. "Oh. are we relevant". all of this. Well. if we break it down to the actual music. and what

it can show people and what how it can relate to people? Yes, we are relevant, but we have to change. We have to change the way that we educate people. Music is not about these successes. Music is about being you right now and how you're playing relates to somebody else, you know, yeah. It's the focus shouldn't be about what colleges you get into, what marks you get but that is all you talk about. Maybe it's a maturity thing as well. You know, of course, that's what was important. But actually, the teaching was still emphasising success. It wasn't always emphasising that what you have to offer right now, as a musician,

**J** Jasmine Allpress 52:53

I completely, completely agree with you, I really think is, is it's a thing, isn't it when you play, and it just takes one person, I played one of the most horrendous concerts I've ever done. In... it was supposed to be, sorry, I've just gone on a tangent here. But in this 'informal setting', it was it was called, somewhere in Chester. And I played and the informal setting basically meant that I was playing in a cafe, and people ... kids were screaming and running around, people clinking cups, it was so distracting, and it wasn't anyone's fault of why it happened. And they just wanted some nice music. And I'd prepared this quite dramatic programme, and I just got there and was like "I have just like, I didn't realise what this was going to be. I've prepared the wrong music, this is just going to go horribly." And I played it, and people would come and stand over my shoulder when I was playing. It was so distracting. And like kids were running around the piano, like it was just really stressful. And I got to the end like I just, it was not the best I've ever played. And one, it took one person to come up to me at the end and said "that was really, really moving. I feel really touched by your performance." And I was just like, "You know what, this was all worthwhile. That's all I needed", you know. It can connect with people that in ways in which words or just other forms can't. That's why it ... does have a power really to touch, touch people and connect with people in a really human way, I think. Yeah,

**H** Hattie Butterworth 54:31

But we have to be honest and relate to people, not just through the music, you know, but also I think we draw people in by saying, "This is who we are. This is the mistakes we've made. This is the way we want classical music to change." Thank you so much for your failures.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 54:51

No worries. Thanks for having me.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 54:55

I feel like I probably missed off a lot of information about you at the beginning but I will add it in. Thank you so much Jasmine for the podcast and sharing your amazing wisdom, everybody. Any final thoughts, Jasmine?

**J** Jasmine Allpress 55:10

Any final thoughts?

**H** Hattie Butterworth 55:11  
Yeah.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 55:14  
How ... How great is music? I don't know. That was horrendous.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 55:21  
You sound like an old lady listening to Songs of Praise. Anyway, thank you.

**J** Jasmine Allpress 55:25  
This has been lovely.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 55:25  
It has! So thank you so much for being on the podcast.