

# Episode 6: Laura Serra

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## SPEAKERS

Laura Serra, Hattie Butterworth

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### H 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 ... what are we are on now ... this is the sixth episode? Wow, that has been a journey. Thank you, everyone, for the incredible response I had from the episode with Laura last week. If you haven't listened to it yet, I really do urge you to go and hear it because it's, yeah, it changed the way I've thought about my self as a musician, actually. Even within a week, I think a lot of things have changed and the perspective I previously had has sort of shifted. But today I'm actually talking to another very inspiring person who is called Laura, Laura Serra, and she is a Spanish pianist who is currently studying her masters at the RCM. And she previously was on the performance science degree that is on offer at the RCM. And if you want to find out more about the performance science degree, she does go into detail about it, but you can also find out online, on the RCM website if you're interested in it. It is a really fascinating degree. So yeah, I hope you're all really well. Yeah, please do keep sharing your stories, sharing the podcast, thank you for everybody that has spread the word. And I really look forward to sharing more episodes with you in the coming weeks. Laura, thank you so much for agreeing to come and talk today. How are you doing? First of all?

### L Laura Serra 02:13

I'm good, thank you. Thank you so much for inviting me. I'm really excited about it.

### H Hattie Butterworth 02:17

Oh, lovely. Um, so can you first of all, tell everybody a bit about your musical background? And

sort of the work you're doing at the moment and where you're at?

**L** Laura Serra 02:27

Yeah, of course. Yes, so I'm a final Master's student at the Royal College of Music. I'm doing piano there, so I have my recital really soon. And a few years ago, I did the also the MSc in performance science at the College aswell. So now I'm trying to find a way to combine both. So that's why I started coaching musicians, which is kind of an, an initiative to offer musicians with psychological resources to cope with the demands of our career. So yeah, I mean, I studied my Bachelor's in Madrid. And now here I am.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 03:12

Okay, wow, that's amazing. So about the performance science degree, I think a lot of people are really interested in it. And actually, I think when I had my first year of undergrad at RCM, we did have a introduction by the head of the performance science. And I just wonder, wonder if you could explain a bit about what it involves, you know, how is it? How is it ... how's the course structured?

**L** Laura Serra 03:35

So it's a really interesting course. It's divided into a few modules: we have performance education, we had performance psychology, health and wellbeing, health and wellbeing in the performing arts, and then we have to do our own dissertations or like research skills, and that's kind of the the big module of the programme. And yeah, this what the performance science course does this, it teaches you how to do research, and in this case, in the music fields. And then once you are in the course, you can do your own research on your own topics. So you can choose to go more into education or performance skills or health and wellbeing. You can also go into music therapy. I did my research on to the impact of sleep in musicians health and wellbeing so I focused...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 04:37

Oh right! Was that your dissertation?

**L** Laura Serra 04:39

Yeah, so I did a study with a few participants from College. And yeah, I looked into how sleep impacts then their daily lives, and their practice and even their performance, and then how everything is a cycle, and if it affects their life and their mood, and then that impacts their sleep at the same time. And ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 05:02

So what ... was it this research that sort of inspired you to start coaching musicians the

So what ... was it this research that sort of spurred you on to start coaching musicians the initiative?

L Laura Serra 05:09

Exactly, yeah.

H Hattie Butterworth 05:10

Was it that? Yeah. So can you explain then a bit about what Coaching Musicians is? And you know, what motivated you to set it up? And did it come from a personal experience? Or was it your research that sort of showed you that there was a gap in ... gap in the market sort of thing?

L Laura Serra 05:27

Yeah. So yeah, what I saw when I was doing my research is, we, as musicians, like, we are kind of struggling with the same issues. So we'll say like, how to focus on practice, performance anxiety, even mental health issues. And from the performance science course, I was seeing that there is a lot of resources out there that are already known, like coping strategies, or knowledge and health and wellbeing of what we can do better to cope with these challenges that we face. So what I was seeing is like, "okay, there is this knowledge out there, theoretically, we know it, but then musicians don't really know about it, we just feel sometimes we feel alone in this journey." So that's when I thought, "okay, how can I provide all this knowledge I got from this course?" And all the research out there that there is, and provide it to musicians because, you know, sometimes it's there, like you can go to Google Scholar and find studies on a lot of things. But, you know, they are quite dense to read. And sometimes, not everything is useful, and we don't have that much time to read all these articles. So my idea was to, yeah, just to provide a more accessible way for musicians to access all these resources and, and coping strategies.

H Hattie Butterworth 07:02

Yeah. And your Instagram ... is ... you have a website as well, for this Coaching Musicians, and you also have an Instagram, is that right? And from your Instagram, it's so ... it's just so lovely look at, each post is so clearly laid out. And, you know, you click on it, and everything has a different very clear structure. And it's exactly right. You know, yeah, we there must be information out there about mindfulness and, you know, practice strategies and all of this, but there aren't many people that sort of have taken the time to put it into a format that is, you know, readable. And yeah, so ... that's fascinating.

L Laura Serra 07:41

Yeah. And sometimes as musicians, we kind of struggle also with time.

H Hattie Butterworth 07:45  
Yes.

L Laura Serra 07:46  
So we don't really have the time to read all these things. So I wanted to make something really visual that people can kind of scroll down and, and even just like looking at through for a minute, it could be useful either way.

H Hattie Butterworth 08:01  
There are all different types of learners aren't there? I mean, that's kind of why I think it's lovely that we can have a conversation and people can listen to it, because some people don't, don't enjoy sort of huge swathes of, you know, articles and information.

L Laura Serra 08:17  
Yeah.

H Hattie Butterworth 08:17  
And for you to have broken it down is, is really interesting. And I just thought as well, if you could explain a bit about know that the word Coaching Musicians, you know, what, what is coaching? And how is it different from sort of therapy? Which I think people are a bit more... you know, understand a bit better?

L Laura Serra 08:38  
Yeah. Yeah, that's an interesting one, I've been ... I was ... had doubts about it as well. And I looked into the literature, but like, the definition of it is, and the difference of it is really blurred, like, you're not sure where is the line to separate therapy from coaching? But from my personal experience, what I think or what I like to see it as is, coaching is more about thriving, it's someone that is there for you that probably a bit more experience on what you're doing, knows what the challenges are, and knows already about ways to cope with them. So a coach is there to kind of guide you through the process, in this case of performing or having a career in a music... in music performance. So what... that's where I see the difference. I don't know if I made myself clear, but it's just yeah, a coach is there to help you thrive instead of, instead of recover.

H Hattie Butterworth 09:55  
Yeah, okay. Because we can have problems on different levels, I suppose, can't we? And there are issues where you might feel, "Oh, I don't really need to see a therapist like, but I could

really do with some support in a different way".

**L** Laura Serra 10:12  
Exaxtly yeah.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 10:13  
And that's what it's there to do

**L** Laura Serra 10:14  
Exactly. As well with therapy, they, sometimes there is the stigma of going to a therapist, and some people don't feel comfortable with it. It's a shame because it's nothing to be ashamed of, but on the other side, coaching is more, as you said, is the support. It's someone like ... it could be even your teacher, like your instrumental teacher, someone that has already gone through these challenges that you're facing? And it provides you with ways that can help you overcome them. And, and succeed at it.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 10:58  
And did you ever have any coaching? Like were you ever coached? Or did, was most of your experience from reading and researching? Or did you actually engage in any of it yourself?

**L** Laura Serra 11:11  
Well, at the moment, whatever experience I have is really anecdotal. It comes more from what I've read, I guess, also, I do a bit of teaching to children. And that kind of involves some coaching as well. Kind of, it mixes with pedagogy, and but yeah, for the moment, the experience, I'm trying to get more experience into applying it to musicians. I guess I'm still finishing my studies, and yeah, that will come I think with time.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 11:46  
Yeah, so what would you like to do with it, eventually? Do you have a plan about the future with, with coaching?

**L** Laura Serra 11:54  
Yeah, um, how I see myself, I guess, in an ideal future would be to open a space where musicians can come in, and help them in, at an individual level, coach them and offer all the opportunities that maybe a conservative don't, don't provide or so like, let's say, an office

where there is a meditation department, yoga department, sports department and psychologists and to work in a team to support musicians. And I think that would be my ideal scenario. But yeah, I would like to just keep, keep getting knowledge and keep informing myself, and work with musicians one to one, see what works, what doesn't, and then kind of form the basis to establish a more, a more bigger issue like, yeah.

H

Hattie Butterworth 13:00

So you, you've clearly spoken to a lot of musicians through your, your research, and through your degrees and everything. And I'm just wondering if you have a, an opinion about why issues like performance anxiety, or stress and, and all these negative things we come across inevitably, why do you think they're an issue? What are people saying to you when you ask them?

L

Laura Serra 13:25

Yeah, so well to start with music performance anxiety, is that a common type of anxiety that affects musicians at any skill level, and it can shorten your career if it's not properly treated, or properly coped with. How usually music performance anxiety presents is through a combination of symptoms, so it can be like worrying too much about doing a mistake, and then the implications of making a mistake, what is your teacher gonna think? What is the, the public is gonna think? What your colleagues are gonna think... all these worries about it. And all of that makes you kind of narrow your attention onto the threat instead of onto what you're doing, which is the performance and performing music. So that can put you in a state of physical tension and mental tension and you just want to get out of there like, you know, you're ... probably your breath is short. You have tachycardia, palpitations, tightness in the chest and dry mouth and all these things is ... imagine being in that state and having to perform a beautiful piece of music in front of, of the public is, is that mental and physical state of tension that doesn't really allow you to be present and to enjoy what you have, and what you have to do. And how ... what I see about, like, yeah, the issue about performance anxiety is that it can happen the day of the performance, but it can happen weeks before, or months before. So like, you have a lesson and you start to have all these worries, you start to ... even you can start to avoid situations where you know, you're going to have these anxious behaviours, and maybe you cancel lessons, or you can even cancel concerts the last minute and, you know, all this mental state can go on for months, and it can really affect your, your wellbeing and your health.

H

Hattie Butterworth 15:50

Yeah.

L

Laura Serra 15:51

Because it's, it's in a state of distress. And then maybe you have to I dunno... you have to postpone an exam, because you have performance anxiety symptoms, and then in usually, on ... inside the culture of a concert is not ... it has yet to change, but sometimes some people

don't like to talk about it or are ashamed. Or is this like, failure and how other people are going to see you as you failed. And it's totally not that, and I think what I see from my study and from my research is that most of my participants, were dealing with these, these issues at a certain level, some people have stronger, stronger symptoms, and some people have lesser or better ways to cope with it. So yeah, I think it is important that the issue about performance anxiety is, it's around as well, the culture around it. And that's why I think what you're doing with a podcast is, it's great because it's about changing the culture and the ways we talk about it. And not being ashamed and just being aware and accepting that we all face these challenges and there is ways to, to cope with them.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 17:17

Well, yeah, thank you. And thank you for saying that in such a clear way, because I think I have felt exactly as you described, you know, and I think a lot of people will have. And it is debilitating, you know, it is really debilitating. And I think we don't give ourselves enough...We don't understand how much that shouldn't be...It shouldn't be as debilitating as it is, you know what I mean? It's not something that we should have to put ourselves through. But I think you're right, because of the stigmas and because we feel we can't talk or the implications feel too big, you know, it's hard.

**L** Laura Serra 17:55

Or we have to give the perfect performance.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 17:57

Yeah.

**L** Laura Serra 17:58

It's a lot of issues around that. And ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 18:00

I see, yeah.

**L** Laura Serra 18:01

And we are humans, in the end. You know, any kind of performance is gonna, is gonna make all the symptoms arise, like public performance... even now, during the podcast, I was a bit nervous.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 18:14



HATTIE BUTTERWORTH 18:14

Yeah, I am. I am as well. Yeah. I think it's, it's the thing, isn't it of perfection.



Laura Serra 18:21

Yeah.



Hattie Butterworth 18:22

And also, I don't know, if you agree about the, the fear of failing and what failing actually means as well, because I think we can feel that we failed, just by feeling anxious a lot of the time? Like, I can wake up on the day of a performance or a few days before, feel these terrible emotions and then feel already like I've failed



Laura Serra 18:42

Exactly, like you ...



Hattie Butterworth 18:43

See what I mean?



Laura Serra 18:44

...Enjoy it. And



Hattie Butterworth 18:45

Yeah.



Laura Serra 18:46

And probably because of being anxiety, you're gonna make a mistake, and then it just all becomes really blurred and difficult to cope with.



Hattie Butterworth 18:57

So what are the ways that you have seen most beneficial to dealing with this level of performance anxiety?





L

Laura Serra 19:06

First of all I think, and what I realised a few years ago, when when I finished my bachelor's, I was in this state of not only having performance anxiety the day of the performance but kind of a generalised anxiety about my piano lessons and, and yeah, bit about everything related to music. And what I see, that happened because of the ego involvement, like I was getting all these, all these anxious feelings and thoughts because I was vulnerable. I was like, I was worried about what people might think of me and what would ... Yeah, ... it was, I guess I was mostly that or what ... I was ... the pressure I was putting on unto myself as well. What I found really useful for me is kind of putting a bit of distance from my, from myself, and starting to manage other areas of my life, like not only focused ... I was really focused on, on my performance and my practice and, and life is more, there is more than practice, and music and I started to focus on ... I dunno, on sport and doing exercise and yoga. I started as well to take care of my sleep, and, and even with my diet. And once these health pillars were taken care of, then I was already feeling much better to perform. And I think that's something that musicians forget about, like, we want to be these awesome performers, we want to be the best musicians. And then we don't care about our health, you know, you see a lot of musicians just practising and practising and, and focusing on, on work and what they have to do. But then you see them, they are not taking care of their own health, and how can you be your best as a musician, if you don't take care of yourself. And that's where I came across with meditation as well, which I've recently started. And, well I've been trying on enough, and it's something that takes practice as well, but how I see meditation really useful as well is to, it gives you the tool to put this distance between what happens in your life and yourself, and not relate so strongly to it. And also set what's happening and not wanting to control everything that happens. To treat performance anxiety, or, or the symptoms related to it, sometimes you have to step out from it and take care of other aspects of your life.

H

Hattie Butterworth 22:07

Yeah, that's a really good point, I think because it is something that needs healing. And I think we probably sometimes find ...feel that we weren't heal from it or that it was too much...

L

Laura Serra 22:19

Yeah.

H

Hattie Butterworth 22:20

We're too in the music that it's almost like a romanticised thing to suffer for it, you know what I mean? But actually, we deserve a lot better than that. And I think it's so much about a mindset change, isn't it? And you talk about the ego, which I think is a really interesting thing to bring bring up, because there have been people in the past that say, you know, if you get nervous, that's a very selfish way to feel because you're not really thinking about the music. But, you know, anxiety isn't necessarily something we control. I think it's probably something we react to, isn't it? It's like, the way you react to it the way you view it is so important.

L

Laura Serra 22:01

L Laura Serra 23:01  
Exactly. Yeah.

H Hattie Butterworth 23:03  
Yeah.

L Laura Serra 23:03  
It's just seeing that anxiety as a threat, and then you reacting to it, and wanting to escape from it. And that's what anxiety is about is a, an imaginary threat, that becomes real to your reality. And the issue about the ego involvement as well is that as musicians, sometimes we relate too strongly to what and how we play. So if you play greatly, then you think, "Oh, I'm a better person". Or ... put it in easy terms and easy words, but it's not that simple. But it's happened sometimes you have a good day, you perform well, and you think better of yourself. And then... but that can happen the other way around as well. And if you have a bad day, then you do terrible performance, that has happened to everyone and, and then you think less of yourself. And I think that relation of ourselves with music can be problematic sometimes and, and if you're going to think less of your self because of having a bad day, that can really impact your self esteem and your confidence. And I think it shouldn't be that way? Yeah.

H Hattie Butterworth 24:28  
No, I think you're so right. I was just gonna say how it relates to, in a way, like, how our body image even, on some days is good, and then we feel better about ourselves, and on some days, it's bad and we feel worse about ourselves. And it's, it's kind of like that. There are lots of things in life, where if our ego or anything, is too attached to you know, an outside something...

L Laura Serra 24:55  
Yeah.

H Hattie Butterworth 24:55  
Something outside of ourselves, you know, whether it be the way we look or the way we play or the way people see us or you ... And I think what I've learned from meditation as well is that it's no kind of like 'miracle cure', it's just kind of like it flattens the difference between how you feel, you know, how things affect you in the outside world.

L Laura Serra 25:19  
Exactly.

H Hattie Butterworth 25:19

How much, yeah.

L Laura Serra 25:20

And you know, some people say, "Oh, but then you live this life of non-attachment, and you don't feel anything." and I just want to clarify, that doesn't happen. If any of you are an experienced meditator, I think what you learn is to, to accept what's happening inside and outside of yourself, and not attached to it and let it go, even if it's a good thing, or a bad thing. And kind of just be in the present moment. And I think that what meditation teaches you is to use ... it teaches you how to use your attention and you choose where to put it. And I think that's a skill that nowadays with all the distractions and technology and everything, it's really useful, just being aware when your attention goes, and it gets distracted, and take it back to what you were doing. And if that happens in a performance situation, like you're doing a concert, and your mind wanders, and you gotta be present and focus in the music to be able to express what you're playing. So if you don't have that ability to take your attention from one place to another, then it can be really hard when you get distracted to, to go back to the present. And, and I guess that's when memory slips happen, and, and mistakes. And it's probably because as humans, our attention is limited. So you're gonna get distracted anyway. But if you have that training of, of taking your attention back to what you were doing, I think that will be a really valuable skill. Do you think that comes with experience the kind of ability to bring yourself back in a stressful situation? Totally, I think ...

H Hattie Butterworth 27:26

Yeah.

L Laura Serra 27:27

And you know if you start practising in your room, maybe practising a few minutes of meditation, but I think is useful as well, to practice in anxious situations where you, where you perform, and then you, you bring the skill you learned by sitting down in your room, into the concert stage. And I think that's what makes the difference in a way.

H Hattie Butterworth 27:53

I see yeah.

L Laura Serra 27:54

You need...Yeah, you're practising ... it's great to practice in your room to get used to it. But then you got to use it in real life as well, and practise it as well, and that takes time. As you said, it's not like magical pill that you swallow, and suddenly, your attention is better and...]==

H

Hattie Butterworth 28:14

Yeah, I think that's the big misconception with anxiety. I've had a lot of people say, "Oh, I feel like, I don't want to be anxious on the day of a concert, I don't want all those feelings. I don't want the sensation on stage of, you know, feeling zoned out or feeling like I'm losing control or going to make memory slip... I don't want all those" and it's the sort of thing isn't it of when, when you don't want something, it's gonna wanna come back even more. Yeah, and I think there's not enough people saying that, actually. And that's something I only learned through ... yeah, you know, healing myself for other issues. And then I realised, actually, if I resist any mental state, then it's going to be even stronger and even harder to overcome.

L

Laura Serra 29:01

Yeah, that's ...

H

Hattie Butterworth 29:02

It's all very well as saying this. But there are times of course, when you feel like I've meditated on the day of a concert, everything's gone fine, feeling all right, I've done everything I could possibly do. I'm really prepared. Everything's fine. But then you go and you play and something went ... goes wrong, you know, something feels off or you make a big memory slip. And I think for me anyway, those are the times when I feel like I failed the most because I thought I had it together. And then I don't and I'm just wondering if you had like any advice for for that scenario where you feel like you have everything together, but something just completely isn't there and goes wrong.

L

Laura Serra 29:42

From my personal experience and what I've read to date, useful things is first of all, to accept that state and say to yourself, "Okay, that's the situation, there is no more I can do, you've done all your best." And I think self talk is a really important tool. Even what you say to yourself is gonna impact really strongly to your behaviour. So, if in that moment where you really feel of the situation and not comfortable at all, you say, "Okay, I've done my best. I'm here. I'm just gonna try and enjoy..." I know it sounds a bit... It's, it's easy to say, but it's not as... it's hard to do. But it's trying to say to yourself, "yeah, you've done your best. Now, focus on the music and keep going." And then as well there's other tools, like key words, like when you're practising, you can practise these, and let's say you're practising and you notice that your, your attention is going away, and you have one word that brings you back to the present. And then that word brings you back to feeling your body, feeling how ... if you're a cellist, for example, how you're sitting down, how it feels to be on the chair, your feet on the floor, and kind of bringing back that body sensation can really ground yourself in the present. And I feel that is quite helpful when you are in a performance state, and where you are anxious, it's going back to that feeling as "Where are my feet? Are they on the floor? Am I feeling them?" And you can keep performing, that's the that's the beauty of it, it's like your mind is is trying to feel, but at the same time you are performing. And that's something I use, for example, when I run, when I run

long distances, I start to get tight. And I start to feel I start to think "okay, how do my legs feel?" I ask myself, "are they tired? Why are they tired? What, what is that tiredness? How does it feel?"

**H** Hattie Butterworth 32:14  
Yeah.

**L** Laura Serra 32:14  
And all these things. They are just tools to bring you back to the present.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 32:23  
Yeah. Entering into it as well, isn't it? It's not seeing it as something separate from you.

**L** Laura Serra 32:29  
Exatly.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 32:30  
And it's saying, "Okay, how does it really feel? You know, how do I feel it? I'm just here, I can't be anywhere else, so I might as well just feel how I feel." Yeah, yeah, I really like that. Yeah, I just, I just want to move on now and ask a bit about the relationship between the way we perform as musicians and maybe how people perform in sports, because it's something that I think actually is quite similar, but the relationship isn't very often made. And you have, on your website and your Instagram, you talk about this book by Josephine Perry, which is called Performing Under Rressure.

**L** Laura Serra 33:10  
Yeah.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 33:10  
"Psychological strategies for sporting success." So have you found there to be a link between sports people and musicians in their performance? And is there anything we could even learn from sports people about how we perform

**L** Laura Serra 33:26

Definitely, so ... well, from my research, and the research course, most of the literature that we study actually comes from sports. The study I did on sleep, it was actually from a sports coach that teaches athletes to sleep better for performance. And if you think about it, sports, it has a lot of similarities and a lot of differences. First of all, we both use muscles, I mean, they use bigger muscles and you know, bigger movements. And we use probably more about, it's more about our fingers. But it all comes down to the use of our body. And that's one thing. The other thing is, is the fact that we all perform, we all have to get onto a stage in our case on... in their case into a stadium or a room space full of people and perform a series of precise movements. And all the mental states that you get during performance and before and after, are really similar to what, as musicians, we experience. And not only musicians, you know, anyone who performs ... a dancer, an actor, a public speaker. So in the end, I think it all comes down to performance. And also, the similarities between sports and musicians in this case is the need to plan it, to plan ahead. We spend lots of hours practising alone, they do practice as well, they do their training on a daily basis, they have to sacrifice other aspects of life, like socialising, because they have to train. We have, in musicians, we have a lot of that, we sacrifice some things because we need to practise and that practice needs to be constant. And yeah, then there is competitions, we, as musicians and sports, we both have to face several ... situations where you, in which you are judged. And I think that can be a really stressful situation for both. And it's... the ways to cope with all these demands at the physical and an emotional and, and psychological level are really similar. And all the ... on my webpage for now, most of the the resources I put there, as you well said, they come from a sports book because they can both be applied at the same ... at both fields. If you think about injuries, as well, what happens to an athlete and what happens to musician when he or she gets injured? How do we cope with not not being able to play or not being able to do our sport? And all these little things that make us really similar? And yeah.

H

Hattie Butterworth 37:06

And I think also, it's preparing for one big moment, isn't it?

L

Laura Serra 37:10

Yeah.

H

Hattie Butterworth 37:10

We're performing, and it's all those hours. And as you were saying it, I was thinking "goodness, yeah, it's all that time that we then have to prove in just one performance."

L

Laura Serra 37:20

Exactly.

H

Hattie Butterworth 37:20

And that's very similar to them, I, suppose.

**L** Laura Serra 37:23

They have their big competition they and if they fail that, then you know their life is ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 37:29

Yeah, but it's that thing as well, isn't it of like, we're all ... we all understand that Andy Murray, for example, a tennis player, he's not going to win Wimbledon every year, you know? You know, most of the big tennis stars will have a one year where they're really off, really not performing well and all of this, and I think that is accepted more maybe? And the ... yeah, it just feels like there's more awareness for sports people around performing and the stresses around it than there is for musicians.

**L** Laura Serra 37:59

Definitely.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 38:00

I don't know, if you agree? But the fact that you're looking to sports books, you know, it sort of shows that there are more people talking about it in sport, maybe.

**L** Laura Serra 38:10

It says a lot about it, yeah, definitely. Like in sports, they are becoming more aware of, of, of the needs to have a holistic approach to, for the athlete and to the whole world. And I think the music field is a bit behind in that sense. And I think it relates again, to the culture around conservatoires and classical music, and the aim for perfection. But I think it's changing, like, with initiatives like yours, and the MSc course, and you see there is a few courses in the UK, and even in Australia and South Africa, you see, there is an interest to, to make all this knowledge that in this case comes from sport, apply it to musicians into the music field, and I think it will, it will catch up. It just needs to be ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 39:15

So kind of related to sport, but not really, you do a lot of yoga, I seem to remember. And I just was really interested, if you could tell us a bit about why you practise yoga? How you came to find yoga and just how you feel about it in general?

**L** Laura Serra 39:32

Yeah. Yeah. So I started yoga in Imperial College because as as college musicians from the RCM, we can join their activities and I just wanted to get to know people and I thought, "okay, I'll try yoga then." And I joined the society and at first I think I was getting the physical benefits like you start to feel stronger, you start to feel more flexible. And it then becomes a way, a form of meditation as well. So it's like meditation in movement. And then how I felt is, by doing yoga, then I felt more grounded in my own body. Even when playing, I could feel a bit stronger. And just by being flexible, I felt more comfortable when I was playing. So, I think, yeah, but some of the benefits of doing yoga is that it's not a high impact, high intense way of doing exercise. So the risk of injuring yourself is quite low, if you do it in a gentle way, and you still get all the benefits, like balance, you get stronger, you get more flexible, and all of that, then can be used to perform with your own instrument and to feel more comfortable within your own body. And I think yoga also teaches you to accept your limits, like you might do a pose and then not be really flexible and just go halfway instead of do the whole pose. But that's okay. It's a journey, and it's a process and, and it feels good to accept that. And I think then this acceptance can be applied to other aspects of your life. So it becomes a skill, almost, a life skill. So I think yoga for musicians, yeah, it's really valuable. Just because of that, because of the acceptance, and then also, because of the physical benefits of it. Yeah. So do you do it, sort of, do you follow an online video? Or now that you've learned a lot of moves, do you tend to just follow the pattern that your body wants to go in that day? Or how do you do it?

H

Hattie Butterworth 42:12

Oh, yeah.

L

Laura Serra 42:12

Yeah, so how I practise now is, I usually have, have my morning routine in which I wake up and then I do a bit of yoga, usually I do it with a YouTube video. In ... at the moment, I'm following 'Yoga with Tim' it's called. It's an American guy. Or there is also 'Alo Yoga' which have really great videos. And I usually follow like 30 minutes, yoga flow. At the moment, I still feel I need someone to guide me. I ... when I tried to do it without the video, I kind of get a bit distracted and I don't go much into the flow. But there's a lot of YouTube channels available for that now. And they are free so it's really easy access. And yeah, just follow this 30 minute routine, and then do a little bit of meditation. And that kind of gets me started on, gets the day started in a really good mindset. And physically as well, I fit... I feel more grounded and aligned.

H

Hattie Butterworth 43:23

Do you feel that helped during the sort of intense part of the quarantine as well? Did that help to have a routine?

L

Laura Serra 43:31

Oh yeah, definitely. I think that's kind of what helped me get through it. It was kind of having everyday something to look for like waking up.



**H** Hattie Butterworth 43:43  
Yeah.

**L** Laura Serra 43:43  
Having your own moment of peace and calm in the mornings and, and then start your day. Plan... Do all the goals you have set and do a bit of practice. But I think it's important ... when you establish a routine, your body gets used to it, and then your body kind of looks forward to it. So it's something to be excited about it. And I think during this quarantine, it has really, really helped me to keep the motivation going. Yeah.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 44:21  
So if you were going to say to somebody that was interested in you know, mindfulness and meditation, how would you say is the best way to go about starting all of this because it can feel like quite an overwhelming lifestyle. There are a lot of people that sort of enter into it completely and make a whole you know, life out of, out of it. But what would you say to someone if they want to just to start having a go and looking into it.

**L** Laura Serra 44:49  
So what I would say is first, don't set too many unrealistic goals, like start with something really small. I was like, "Okay, I'll do a 10 minutes yoga session on Mondays. And I'll try to stick to that to a month." it's, if you think about it's 40 minutes during one month. So it's like setting, really, really small goals of something you want to start. Same with meditation I started with two minutes, because I couldn't, I couldn't sit down more more than that. I was like, "oh, I need to start my day." So I started with two minutes. So I think that's part of the success is, is not starting all the way through, like, "Oh, I'm going to do yoga and meditation every day", because then probably is not going to happen, and then you're going to feel frustrated. And then you'll stop doing it. So what I see that works is, yeah, just setting really, a really small goal that you can stick for it for at least a month, and see how it goes, see how you feel. And another useful thing could be joining a society or joining some yoga classes, because then if you do it with other people, I think it's a bit more motivating that doing it by your own. And, yeah, just accepting that some days, you might not do it, and it's okay. You won't lose any, any progress you've made so far. And you can always try it the next day again.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 46:31  
Yeah, I also really recommend people to check out your Instagram and your website.

**L** Laura Serra 46:37  
Oh thank you.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 46:37

So can you tell people how to get in touch with you or find out more about what you do?

**L** Laura Serra 46:43

Yeah, of course. So, well, I'm on, on Instagram @coachingmusicians, and my webpage is the same, it's coachingmusicians.com. And if you want to reach me at a personal level, you can just go to my Instagram, which is LauraSerraMusic, or like Facebook. And I'm really interested in, in working with people and at the moment working with other college students, and they write articles for my webpage. And so I'm always open to collaborate and, and yeah, and help people if I can, and then ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 47:24

That's so great.

**L** Laura Serra 47:25

Yeah, I mean, I'm still a student, I'm still learning. But if I can offer anything, and I'm always there.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 47:33

Well you have so much amazing advice and wisdom already, honestly. But I just want to finish by talking about one more thing, which really struck me when I read it on your ... I think it was on your Instagram.

**L** Laura Serra 47:46

Yeah.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 47:46

You said you were sort of talking about being psychologically well, and you talked about this as being not necessarily the absence of mental illness. And it's about reaching your best potential, and this is something that I absolutely love, because, you know, I am quite open about the fact that I struggle with a mental illness. And I agree, like there is something in ... within me that says ... that feels sometimes psychologically well, even though I might feel in the depths of, you know, not a good place, there is still this kind of light. And it's also something that Stephen Fry, I don't know if you know, Stephen Fry, he's like an English .... what is he? Reporter, journalist... Is he a journalist? So I'm just editing this, and I realised how completely stupid I am.

And Stephen Fry is obviously an actor. I have watched Blackadder ... And he suffered with bipolar. And he's always saying, you know, people with mental illness can live really full, amazing lives. And I think that's part of being psychologically well, maybe, but I'd like you to explain what you think it is and why it's different from mental illness?

L

Laura Serra 48:56

Yeah of course. So what I think ... what I've seen or read, is that being well, and wellbeing is, is the positive feeling that goes with a lack of, of illness. So let's say you don't have any illness, you, you are fine. But there's something in you that doesn't feel quite right or, or maybe you're not experiencing so many positive emotions during your day to day and something doesn't feel quite right. There's a really interesting theoretical model, which is called Perma Model. It's by Martin Seligman and he has a book that's called Flourish. And it's really interesting because it breaks down wellbeing into five pillars which is: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. And I think recently they added physical health as well. So is that understanding of wellbeing? That it comes through experiencing positive emotions, not only not having an illness or...? Yes, it's, it's about experiencing positive emotions in your day to day. You know, that doesn't mean you're not gonna have negative emotions as well. But it's... it's that positive r... Positive states that goes through, throughout your day mostly. And by but that's not the only thing, there's engagement. How you engage on to the activities you do? Are you fully engaged? Are you fully experiencing what you're living, and that has a really strong impact on your, on your well being? As well as relationships ... How do you relate to others? Caring about others... And then there is the thing that comes from meaning and accomplishment, and which usually comes in our case, through music and what we accomplished with, with our music, and as... in our lives as performers. I think that's the important thing to understand is that being well means thriving and flourishing, and not only not only not having an illness.

H

Hattie Butterworth 49:16

Yeah.

L

Laura Serra 49:42

And I was reading yesterday a really interesting definition of health, which says that is in a state of mental and physical wellbeing of an individual. And it was saying that the word health is derived from the Old English word, that means heal. And it also means whole, signalling that the health concerns to the whole person and to his or her integrity and wellbeing. So it's like, that understanding of health as a whole. As a, as a yeah. As a ... in a holistic approach, rather than just having a disease or not.

H

Hattie Butterworth 52:13

Yeah

L Laura Serra 52:13

If that, that makes sense.

H Hattie Butterworth 52:15

No, it does. Because I think also, it can feel quite easy to identify with what you're going through. And to feel that that label then means that the whole of your day is clouded by one overriding emotion of depression or anxiety, but actually, you know, I think I love what you say about being present. And it's almost a gratitude thing as well, I think maybe, yeah. And that that's maybe not ... maybe even if you're feeling like you can't conjure up a positive emotion, it's a positive state rather than a, than a positive emotion. Like, is that what you're saying? It's like, it's a state of an intention to wellness and healing and positivity, I suppose.

L Laura Serra 52:59

Exactly, yeah.

H Hattie Butterworth 52:59

Yeah. I really love that. Well, you know, this conversation has been so wonderful. And you have some incredible wisdom to share. And thank you and you know, your ... please, everyone do go and check out coaching musicians on Instagram and the web page because it's beautiful to look at, and is ... has a lot of wonderful wisdom. So thank you so much Laura.

L Laura Serra 53:21

Thank you so much for this opportunity. I think it's wonderful what you're doing.

H Hattie Butterworth 53:25

Oh, thank you. Thank you so much.