

Fionnuala Ward

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SPEAKERS

Advertiser, Fionnuala Ward, Hattie Butterworth

Advertiser 00:03

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Hattie Butterworth 00:35

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, and welcome back. I hope you're all having a really good October so far. And I hope you enjoyed if you listened to the episode with Matt, last week. I enjoyed talking to Matt so much and I've had some really great messages from people that found it so inspiring and, yeah, it was wonderful that we were able to talk openly in that way about an issue that feels uncomfortable still to talk about, which is exactly what this is all been started for. So I'm just pleased that, you know, it's ... it's clear that people are willing to share and talk. Even if it can feel like outwardly you still have to be quiet and silent about things that may be more personal or difficult to share. Anyway, I'm rambling on. Today is another one of those issues, to be honest. And from the start, I wanted this to be a part of the podcast journey in general because it's an issue that, you know, I've, I've dealt with it. I think so many musicians actually do deal with it on varying levels but today is going to be the first of three interviews I have lined up to discuss the issues around classical music and wealth. Because our profession is a notoriously expensive one and the ability to afford lessons and instruments and further study can be really off putting for many lower income families. So I wanted to share the stories of musicians from sort of non typical backgrounds and all of these musicians have studied in state education right up until conservatoire or university level so none of them went to specialist music schools or conservatoire programmes or anything this was, you know, they either had private musical education, or it was part of their school or County Youth Service. So, yeah, the first interview is with Fionnuala Ward. I really hope you enjoy these and thank you so much in advance to Finn, Emily and Maria for sharing their experiences on a topic that's felt really stigmatised for a long time. So I really hope you enjoy them.

Fionnuala Ward 03:44

So my name is Fionnuala Ward. I'm a pianist, um I also play the violin. I'm from a little town in the middle of Northern Ireland, kind of equal distance between Belfast and Derry so the two sort of bits of civilization. I started piano whenever I was very, very small. So basically, whenever I was about two, two and a half, my mum tells me I was climbing up to the piano and kept like tapping out... she could hear bits that I'd heard from the radio or the adverts on the t... on the TV. So she was like, "Oh, I think she maybe should be getting some lessons." I kept ...she said, I kept going back to the piano, which is maybe not the case so much now. Sometimes I don't wanna go near it. But ... so she ... I spoke to her there and was asking about how you find a piano teacher in sort of mid 90s when there's not really any internet, especially if you're not from a big city where you maybe there's word of mouth. So she kind of approached the sort of local piano teacher and he said he doesn't take anybody under six or seven. So she actually found my first teacher in a an advert in a magazine quite randomly, because...

Hattie Butterworth 04:55

Wow yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 04:55

...this this lady, her name is Phyllis Rowan, she has ... she's spoken about sort of musical interests with very, very young children and how it was good for them to do music. So I had a like a trial lesson with her and... to see how I would get on. She said "Fionnuala needs to be nurtured. " or something. I don't remember it. I remember leaving play school and my mom said, "we're gonna go and have a piano lesson." And I was like, "Okay, sure." So, so I studied with her. She was amazing until I finished primary school when I was 11 and then she was going to move away. So we needed to find somebody new and we'd spoken about boarding schools. And I'd went over to see the Yehudi Menuhin school when I was, I think I was around eight or nine. But actually, my uncle had been to boarding school and he put his foot down apparently. I only found this out recently, he said, "you're not sending her to boarding school." I think he'd had a bad experience. And I'm really glad I didn't. So then I went to normal secondary school and then had lessons with another woman up in Derry who had just moved back from London, and again, found her in a magazine, like an interview with her about her moving back home. So studied with her until I was 18 and then went to the Royal Conservatory of Scotland in Glasgow for my undergrad, and then came down to London for my postgrad at the Royal College of Music. And I've been freelancing for two years now. So yeah, that's it in a nutshell. So you've been probably quite badly hit by the recent... Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah I think everyone has. Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 06:40

Yeah, yeah. But as a as a freelancer have you been sort of ... you've I'm guessing maybe you're starting to teach in person again.

Fionnuala Ward 06:47

Yeah. So I've been ... I do one day at a school and I've been back for two weeks and I've got some of my private students coming back face to face, which has been really nice to have something to go to, to kind of schedule ... I've got my diary out again. I did a search for my diary.

Hattie Butterworth 07:06

I did the same!

Fionnuala Ward 07:08

I was like "that's £20 wasted," because...

Hattie Butterworth 07:11

2021 ... I don't know if I'm gonna bother with a diary.

Fionnuala Ward 07:15

I might just use post-its or something, I don't know.

Hattie Butterworth 07:17

Literally! So, like, I kind of want to go back a little bit and ask, you know, did you feel like this education, which mainly, probably it sounds like, isn't the most typical education. Not many people stay in state education right until Conservatoire. You know, do you feel like that did hold you back or did your background at all hold you back in any way from your musical development?

Fionnuala Ward 07:47

Well, the older I get, the more I really think about this stuff. And the more people I've been exposed to and I've networked with from moving to Scotland and then down to London, my circles become bigger and bigger and I've met so many different people from different backgrounds of education, and the things that I thought had held me back in some ways have actually really helped. Like the fact that I ... well I stayed in my... I went to state school but the thing is, in Northern Ireland, we don't have private education. I think there's a couple, but they're not even necessarily the best schools. Our schools are all merit-based so we do ... well, back in my day, I did the 11+. So basically, if you got an A, you could pick what school you wanted to go to. And there's, there's issues with that as well. For example, my sister is ... she's dyslexic, but it wasn't, she's a couple years older than me, and she wasn't properly diagnosed until she was halfway through secondary school. So for her 11+, she didn't get a good grade, even though she's extremely intelligent. No one can work numbers like my sister; I used to give her my maths homework to do. She just for fun. So she's ... and she's a musician as well. She's a singer and a violinist. And she's extremely intelligent, one of the smartest people I know. She got a C on 11+, and then was very limited by the skills that she could choose to go to. And then came out with great results at A levels and went off to university and it was fine once she had been diagnosed. So there are problems with that but I don't think those problems are like, equivalent to paying to go to school. That concept just blows my mind because it was never a thing. Whenever I moved over to Scotland to go to university, we were talking about university fees. So I started in 2011 and that was the last year of the lower fees. So nobody was taking a gap year and that was the talk of everyone. I remember coming over ... my parents took me over on the on the ferry with all my stuff and we were in IKEA getting all my pots and pans and duvet and stuff and we were having our meatballs and reading the paper and they even had ... it was all about the the protests about school... about university fees and there was a picture of the RCS. So ... but then in Freshers, meeting all these people, first time I'd met people who went to private school and they were like, "Oh, well, my parents have been paying three times that for me to go to school," and I was just like, "you paid to go to school?! What?!" The concept just blew my mind because my school was very, very intense. The sort of school that if you got an A on a module,

like your A levels, but if it wasn't good enough A, they would make you resit. You weren't allowed to go back for sixth form unless you had at least like six A's in your GCSEs. We all had to do at least 10 or 11 GCSEs.

Hattie Butterworth 10:45

Oh my god.

Fionnuala Ward 10:46

So it was an intense school, and I was... well, I was smart but I was pushed to ... I got straight A's and even on my A levels, I had an unconditional - this isn't like a bragging thing, this was just literally how... the mindset that they put me into was that I had an unconditional for music college. I could have just sacked it in and not gone back to school but I still was like, "No, I need to get four A's at A level. Course I need to do that. Otherwise, I'm a bad person." So it was a ... an odd experience. It was kind of like probably the intensity of private school but without the kind of funding or ...

Hattie Butterworth 11:27

Or the clientele maybe.

Fionnuala Ward 11:29

Yeah, oh my God. Yes. The ca-... Yeah, some of the characters I've met. But that's one of my points is that some of the things that you'd think maybe on paper have held me back, such as not going to private school, not being exposed to classical music in school as much. I feel like it's shaped my character a bit more that now I'm finished music college and I'm out in the real world, I tend to ... sometimes I tend to do better because I feel I'm down to earth and can talk to lots of different peoples. And I think your attitude is a bigger part of this career path than people think rather than ... everyone can play. That's what I've found in London, like, there's so many people here. There's four music colleges, everyone's scrapping over the jobs, everyone can play. So if you're in the pub, or getting a coffee and someone chats to you or you do something and they're like, "Oh, you play ?Oh, well, I have this gig. You seem nice. Do you want to go ... do you want to play in this thing?" Because they could literally ask anyone "Hands up who can play this instrument?" "Yes, yes, yes." But there's so much more to it than that. So I think that kind of education of being in a state school, a very intense state school but ... which was really not music, or art-based at all, really kind of rounded me out and gave me lots of different experiences that I think have really helped.

Hattie Butterworth 12:57

Yeah, so when you arrived in RCS, and you know, you hadn't really experienced that kind of like musical education before, like, did you feel very much like an outsider or did you kind of feel like very motivated all of a sudden, or how did that work?

Fionnuala Ward 13:18

Well, in Northern Ireland, we ... especially not ... I'm not from Belfast so I grew up having, I took violin lessons through the library board at schools. And then the one kind of thing we have is the Ulster Youth Orchestra, which is unbelievable. It was just... it's still one of my favourite experiences. So I got to do that for one summer before I went to college. And that gave me actually a really good taster of intense

rehearsals and the kind of people that I would meet. But again, not being from Belfast, where they have some more music education thing, there's still not a lot, but I've never played chamber music before. And that's what I really, really wanted to do. So I remember going to RCS, and even in my interview, in my audition, they said, "Do you have any questions about ...or do you want to ask anything?" And I said, "I'm just really interested in chamber music and this sort of stuff." And they're like, "you'll have opportunities coming out your ears, like, it'll be great." They were like, "play with your friends, put your own groups together, you can do whatever you want." So I think maybe not having that-...sort of all that musical contact and kind of resources as a teenager aside from my private lessons, whenever I went to music college, I was absolutely buzzing and raring to go. And I had... I think maybe I think some people can maybe arrive after having gone to especially like a musical boarding school and they can be pretty burned out and nothing... Like "oh, great orchestra. Oh, cool, another string quartet. Oh, eight hours rehearsal". Whereas me, it was all brand new and I couldn't believe that I was now surrounded by people who were the same age as me who wanted to do the same thing. That blew ... completely blew my mind. It was so cool. I still feel like that now, almost 10 years later, I'm still like, "so cool I'm in this environment, all these people's love all the same things that I do. It's really, really cool."

Hattie Butterworth 15:24

Yeah, I totally get that. Like when you were saying I arrived at music college and like, everything was really exciting, I kind of thought like, "Ah, I had that when I started at Chethams." So I went to Chethams when I was 16, which was a lot later and there were lots of people then that were like really burnt out that had been there since they were eight. And I suddenly felt like, "oh my god, I'm with all the people I want to be with. Like, they all love the same things as me." And then I got to London and it was like, "I'm done now. I'm so tired. That was too much, like two years of that was too much. I can't do another four. Like I'm so like really, really, really tired of this," and it was like a continuation of a lot of stress and a lot of years of like competition and people comparing themselves and not knowing like ...

Fionnuala Ward 16:16

It's a really fragile age. You were a teenager.

Hattie Butterworth 16:21

Exactly.

Fionnuala Ward 16:21

There's so much you're going through.

Hattie Butterworth 16:26

Yeah, exactly. And it's like "this is the time you want to give me like marks and pitch me against my peers and like tell me that getting this kind of scholarship is like make or break or ...". Urgh, I can't I... you know, I'm it's been obviously a huge ride at music college but I think it's great that you like went somewhere and felt that fresh kind of revive. Cos I think, I think I'm not alone in being we know quite a burnt out music college person.

Fionnuala Ward 16:59

Oh no, I don't know anybody that's not burned out in some way.

Hattie Butterworth 17:02

By the end. Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 17:03

Yeah, that crawl to the end when you graduate. And it's like, "Ah." I think, um, with the age range of when you're going to school, I think it was, maybe I felt that I was missing out, but I think at that sort of age, I think ... like I think it really helped me ... like I never really came to the decision. There wasn't a day where I was like, "I think I want to do music." It was always since kind of before I can remember. The thing that I did and that I was good at, I obviously had my ups and downs. I had a bit of a wobbly one after we spoke about going to Yehudi Meuhin. And the main reason was that I was... just didn't want to move away. My parents were going to move to England if I wanted to go and my sister would have to move and as an eight year old, I was like, wanted to throw up, and it was too much. And I had my friends and I had other things, my parents made sure that I got to do everything else. I went to ballet and football club and Irish dancing and swimming club and I went to the cinema and I did all these other things. So they made sure I had all these options, just so I could be a normal kid. And that the music was always because I wanted to do it. I mean, they knew -... like they made sure I practised because they were like "we're paying money for this, you know. We can't really afford these teachers we're sending you to," but if I had turned around one day and said, "I don't want to do this anymore," they would have talked about it. But I think they would have been like, "okay, it's your decision, that's fine." And there would have been no bad blood or like "we put all this money in." It would have been like, "regardless, this is a great thing to do and teaches you discipline, compassion and creativity." So regardless of what age you do it for, it's still a worthwhile investment. So I think being able to go through school without the kind of pressure of "well, you're going to Chets or Yehudi Menuhin ... this is why you're here." So if you quit, I think as a teenager, you can seem like that's a failure. Whereas I was able to have a natural progression. Music was always there. There's lots of other things I was interested in, like there was languages and art and English, they were all kind of like things, but had all about the whole way through. But music was always going to be the one. So I think that set me up for studying it at higher education I'm doing for a job where I'm very settled ... there was no kind of question because I was able to question... I was allowed to question it.

Hattie Butterworth 19:39

Yeah, yeah. Do you also find that like, I'm assuming yeah, you teach in schools you said, so you teach kids who probably like in terms of music, have a kind of maybe a similar structure to what you had where they have so many other interests, maybe they're it's not their one thing they probably, you know, they might do something totally different, but...

Fionnuala Ward 19:59

But sometimes it's so had to schedule lessons because they're like "oh they have something!" ... being a kid because everyday... Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 20:07

Yeah, I think I think that's really like, awesome that anything can happen and you haven't put all your eggs in one basket so early on, and it's like, yeah, it's that pressure that can really kill it. And I think a lot

of prodigies struggle with that. And I've read quite a lot of articles about prodigies who talked really openly about how it's actually been an incredibly long term, incredibly difficult process to try them to re-...like find the love in it for the right reason.

Advertiser 20:44

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Fionnuala Ward 21:44

Yeah, I'm just thinking about this about "prodigies" in like sort of quote marks or the Wunderkind or whatever, because maybe I was considered that whenever I ... because I was so young and showed an aptitude. But I think about myself and my mindset, and I'm very, I-... even more so was a child, I was extremely sensitive. And even now I have struggles with my mental health and I think maybe even if I hadn't done music, I probably still would have ended up struggling with my mental health. And I think about at least people who have this natural ability from a young age and how we treat them, and it's so so hardcore on people who are more sort of predetermined to be very, very sensitive people. And I just think it's absolutely nuts...

Hattie Butterworth 22:36

Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 22:37

...that all of this pressure can be put on people who are more inclined to have that sensitivity and then, and it makes me, it makes me sad. It makes me think that this was probably the only way that I would have ended up doing music is if I'd had the childhood and education that I'd had because if I think if I was shipped off to musical boarding school, I probably would have broken down completely. I've had a couple of breakdowns. Each of my degrees has kind of had a breakdown in the final year, but I think I probably would have packed it in if I was a kid and was shipped off. I wouldn't have been able to handle it.

Hattie Butterworth 23:10

Yeah, because you haven't made the decision... Like you, obviously, you can make a decision as a kid, but you don't really know, I suppose, do you?

Fionnuala Ward 23:19

The decisions you should be making as a kid are "do you all want to go to the swimming pool?" or "do I want to go to the cinema?" "Do I want to wear my pink jumper or my blue jumper?" It shouldn't be "do I want to be a professional musician performing at the Carnegie Hall?" It's not the decisions you should be making at that point.

Hattie Butterworth 23:36

No, definitely flipping not. I just I want to talk as well, because ...

Fionnuala Ward 23:44

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 23:44

...we've been talking a bit about Conservatoire and all of that. I mean, how, especially in London, where it's no surprise to anyone that the rent is ridiculous, the lifestyle is ridiculous. To be sociable, you have to spend money to be...

Fionnuala Ward 24:02

You walk out the door and 20 pound falls out your pocket. Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 24:04

Isn't it?! Like every day, it's like at least that every flippin day you leave the door like, so I just want to know, how did you manage that in your postgrad, like, what's your experience? What did it like...What was it like?

Fionnuala Ward 24:17

It was nuts. It was ... it was hard. I think my previous experiences contributed that in the fact that I went to Scotland where the fees were lower. I was in the last year of the lower fees, where it was disgustingly cheap. It was 1820 a year. Oh god I miss it.

Hattie Butterworth 24:43

What.

Fionnuala Ward 24:45

And then whenever I was there, there was a big loophole. This is where... in Northern Ireland, I love it but it's a difficult place but there are a couple of perks. So this loophole came in that if you were studying in Scotland because Scottish students don't pay their fees.

Hattie Butterworth 25:02

Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 25:04

So, yeah, there was this loophole that it was like, if you were from the UK, you pay UK fees but if you ever had an EU passport, you got your fees paid by SAS, which is the Scottish student finance. So there was this ... all the Northern Irish people were like, "Oh, hold on. I have dual citizenship." So we're allowed an Irish passport and a British passport. For my personal reasons, I only have an Irish passport. So I ... long story short, my mum was like "we'll apply! If you get one year knocked off, all the better. Every little helps." So I got my second, third and fourth year paid. So my undergrad was less than two grand. And then I just had my student finance, like my maintenance and all that stuff. So that is one of the main reasons why I have put myself in a lot of debt to come to London, because I was like, "come on, comparatively to the people who came here after me who are paying nearly 40 grand just for their undergrad," I was like, "it's worth it to go to London. If that's going to make the difference to my career and get me to where I want to be, I'm going to do it." So my parents, because they ... my parents are retired and we're working class family, they couldn't help me with my undergrad. They helped me a little bit with my postgraduate. I didn't get any scholarship, any fund... I've never had a penny of funding,

which I now take in a sense of pride because I feel like I've gone and done it anyway. Like I kind of feel like I've proved a lot of scholarships and funding grants wrong because it kind of ... it hurts because you think "well, they don't believe I can do it. They don't believe I'm worth investing in." But I feel a sense of pride that I've done it anyway and I'm making money as a professional musician. So my parents were able to help a little bit for fees. I took out the student loan, which covers half and then worked. I've been teaching... I've been teaching since I was 16 and my whole way through undergrad as well, I was teaching, I did a lot of choral work. I worked in the cafe at the RCS. Yeah, so when I came to London, I already had teaching lined up. But I do remember, at college, they didn't ask me anything. And another conservatoire I auditioned for, it went really well. Got through the first round, got through the second round and then I had the interview and they were seemed really happy, really impressed. And we're chatting to me about my pieces. I had this sort of modern piece by a guy from Azerbaijan and were really interested. And then they asked me, basically, "so how are you going to pay for it?" I was like, um, I was like, "Well, you know, fingers crossed for scholarship. I'll obviously be applying to all the big grants and the funds like all the usual ones, every, the usual suspects, everybody's going for." And I said I've... I also ... I've been working for 10 years. I worked my whole way through undergrad so I said "I'll be ... if I did get into London, I would be looking for a teaching work, choral work."

Hattie Butterworth 28:15

Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 28:15

Whatever, and they were like, "Oh." And I did not get into that college.

Hattie Butterworth 28:22

Oh, my God.

Fionnuala Ward 28:23

Yeah. So that was like, "right. So you thought I played really well. But I'm poor. So I can't go there."

Hattie Butterworth 28:31

So do you think that's to do with commitment? For the...?

Fionnuala Ward 28:35

I don't know... I have heard from other people who study there that they ... you have to pay your fees earlier and it has now, I don't even want to talk... I don't know if it's good to talk about it. But it has now been on like one of those lists and some paper about how ... something about people with the richest families go there. So ...

Hattie Butterworth 28:54

Okay.

Fionnuala Ward 28:55

That worked out well. College didn't ask anything about money, but they also didn't give me any money. And then this is, this is what we were talking about that the whole scholarship thing. It feel it's a bit of a

vicious cycle, because I didn't get a scholarship for Scotland either, but again, it was pretty much free. So that wasn't a factor. And then, at Masters, people play the different conservators off each other. It's like fantasy football...

Hattie Butterworth 29:23

I know.

Fionnuala Ward 29:24

... where they're like, "oh, I want more money from here because then I don't actually want to go there. But the place I actually want to go to, if I tell them that this other place is giving me an extra three grand then they'll give me more money." And then you have people who are like just trying to like pay their rent, because of what instrument you play. Personally, I've thought about this a lot on piano, we're not needed for projects. We don't have to fill an orchestra. Like a conservatoire will have to have X amount of violins, X amount of flutes to put on orchestra concert, so there are going to be a lot more violins in one year group because they need them. Piano you're not needed for anything, so unless you kind of really, really dazzle them, if you're going to be like, "Oh, they might win a big competition, or they might be doing this," and will bring kind of glory to the name of the college, you're not really given much help. And I'd heard of people who'd had scholarships, and they're like, "Oh, I just need a bit more money," and they've just got and asked. And they've been given it, like a top up. So then ...

Hattie Butterworth 30:28

Oh my god.

Fionnuala Ward 30:28

...one time in my ... yeah, in my last year of my Masters, I was really ground down, I had a bit of a breakdown and wanted to go part time. And I went and asked, I said, basically swallowed my pride and said, "Is there any support that college could give me because I said, I just can't afford to live here. I just can't, the amount I'm working, I can't practise enough." So my teacher's getting frustrated, my marks are crap. You know, this isn't why I came here. And they were like, "no." I was like, "cool".

Hattie Butterworth 30:39

I can't believe that.

Fionnuala Ward 31:03

Sweet. Yeah. Just kind of battled on and got there. My marks were terrible. I scraped every module. A lot of people noticed, people were like, "Oh, you're doing so well! Look at all the stuff you're doing!" I'm like ... but again, I think this is carried on....I think it was a blessing in disguise. Because just like, going to a more normal school, which wasn't music-based, wasn't private, gave me all these other experiences and sort of facets to my personality and who I am and what I like. I think the whole way through my Master's, kind of nothing that I got marked for or got credit for, has been relevant to being a working musician. In the best way, like because I had to work so much, I was gigging I was teaching, as soon as I came out of college, I know so many people and I get work because of that.

Hattie Butterworth 31:57

Just a continuation of what you were already doing.

Fionnuala Ward 32:00

Yeah, and...

Hattie Butterworth 32:01

On a bigger scale. Yeah,

Fionnuala Ward 32:03

The pressure of having to be like, "right, I need to network I need to sit down and send send emails to orchestras. I need to go out and meet people so that I can play with them. I need to impress people and do all of this stuff, instead of just sitting in a practice room for eight hours a day, because you don't have to pay your rent," means that now I've come out, I'm working as a pianist, which people are like... so "what do you want to do?" And I'm like, "wanna make money playing the piano."

Hattie Butterworth 32:29

Yeah, what do you expect?!

Fionnuala Ward 32:30

Yeah, it's like, "well, you did medicine? What do you want to do? I want to make money being a doctor." Like...

Hattie Butterworth 32:35

Yeah, I just...

Fionnuala Ward 32:36

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 32:37

...think like, the most important thing you've said, and is...

Fionnuala Ward 32:40

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 32:41

...it's like, what kind of person do they want to come to colleges? Like, do you just want you know, 15 pianists that are ...

Fionnuala Ward 32:52

In rooms along the corridor.

Hattie Butterworth 32:53

Or do you want people that are gonna go out into the community and give their skills to, you know? I just don't understand that and it's like...

Fionnuala Ward 33:04

Do you want someone who's gonna come out and be able to work as a musician? Otherwise you'll have a corridor of pianists, and I've spoken to pianists before, and they're like, "how are you doing all this stuff?" and, and they just kind of practise all day, two years, do really, really well, and then they kind of come out of college and rub their eyes and they're like, "right, so why ...am I gonna play the piano? Is someone gonna ask me to play the piano now?" It's not how it works and they don't tell you that and they don't, I just feel they don't invest in the right places. And ...

Hattie Butterworth 33:41

Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 33:41

...and the kind of vicious cycle I mentioned, is that, you know, if you get a scholarship to your... if you go to a private school, if you go to a private music boarding school, you know what's going on, you show up to an audition, you're like, "Yeah, I've got it. I know what the... I know what the craic is. I know what's expected." So you'll get a scholarship, and then you don't need to worry about money. So then you practise for four years, and you do really well at your instrument. And then you go to Masters, and you're again, really good, and you get another scholarship, and you do the same. Whereas if you miss out in one rung of the ladder, I feel you're screwed. Because then I was scrambling through my undergrad, because even though I didn't have fees, I still had rent to pay. I had no money. My parents weren't able to help me. I had no funding or scholarship. So I'm still working a lot and couldn't practise a lot. As much as I wanted to in my undergrad and then at Master's it was even worse.

Hattie Butterworth 34:36

It feels like we don't hear about this at all, you know.

Fionnuala Ward 34:41

Who talks about it? Money is a real issue, no one talks about it.

Hattie Butterworth 34:44

And it's like, obviously, you don't want to shame people that have you know, have had ... been brought into a family that is naturally very well-connected and everything, that's obviously not someone's fault.

Fionnuala Ward 34:57

I always draw it back to like Harry Potter, where you have people who are like pure bloods are like, "yeah, both my parents play in the LSO, blah blah, blah." And if that's the case, I am as muggle born as you can get, you know. You're coming ...

Hattie Butterworth 35:13

Hermione Granger.

Fionnuala Ward 35:13

And you're like "What is going on?" Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 35:16

But you're breaking through.

Fionnuala Ward 35:17

You're given a wand and you're just like, "right. Okay, cool."

Hattie Butterworth 35:21

Literally, what I was thinking as well is like, maybe I'm wrong. I don't think I am wrong, but for the universities, both of my sisters because, you know, we come from a lower income background, both of them had nearly two grand on top of the maintenance as like a bursary but their uni gives...to ...and I don't think that exists for music college.

Fionnuala Ward 35:44

I did have that when I was in Scotland for my ... but that...

Hattie Butterworth 35:47

Did you?

Fionnuala Ward 35:47

... was my student loan... My student finance was the Northern Ireland student finance.

Hattie Butterworth 35:53

Yeah, I wasn't offered that at all. You know and that is crazy because, you know, they ... that, that is the sort of thing that college should be able to provide for students that can't ...that don't receive scholarships and can't afford the London rent. This is just an editing me saying that I've done my research and it doesn't look like the RCM or other conservatoires offer a bursary for people from low income backgrounds, though this year, the College have said that they want to offer two bursaries based purely on financial need. At least-... They said at least two bursaries. So there you go, at least two people are going to get half their fees covered starting from this year, every year from now on, but it doesn't look as though they have the same provision that other unis do for, for that anyway. So I just thought I'd say that I'm not totally correct. There is provision now but there wasn't when I was there.

Fionnuala Ward 36:58

Yeah. I mean, it was odd, because when I studied in Scotland, the fees were through SAS, which is the Scottish Awards Agency, but then my student loan maintenance grant, that sort of stuff was through student finance Northern Ireland. But then when I came to London, for Masters you don't get the student loan, like the rent ... the one for just keeping you alive. And alive and drunk, essentially. So I had to go through student-... like the English one for the postgrad loan that was 10 grand over the two years,

Hattie Butterworth 37:33

It's like nothing isn't it for London.

Fionnuala Ward 37:36

That was just that was the cover half my fees. Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 37:39

Literally. It's like, what, like, I don't know, a fifth of what you need really.

Fionnuala Ward 37:45

Yeah. Because I didn't get any scholarships, so I was like, right. Great.

Hattie Butterworth 37:49

And the scholarships I hear about, the sort of general amount you'll get is about two grand. That's sort of what...

Fionnuala Ward 37:55

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 37:55

... people have told me and I'm like, "well, that's still like, not enough." Like, who can top the rest of that up for like...?

Fionnuala Ward 38:02

Well, the thing is, I know people who've, who have managed to get it topped up because of their connections, and who end up getting everything paid. And also, I mentioned earlier about what instrument you play, and how that plays in. So pianos... It's cool to have them we don't really need them unless you're going to be ... apparently unless you're going to be like a concerto soloist. But if you think about the needs of the orchestra or the opera, I don't know a tenor that has paid any fees ...

Hattie Butterworth 38:33

No.

Fionnuala Ward 38:34

...because tenors are so rare. Sopranos are fighting each other for everything. But tenors, most of them... I really think about tenors and about like, football teams trading players because they are just fighting over the tenors to have one who's good is like gold dust. And then you think about like violas. They need violas. They need mezzo sopranos do very well too. So it's kind of like... depending on the instrument you play, you can already have a head start.

Hattie Butterworth 39:07

But then you also need personable people to be able to teach the piano. You know? They don't really think in that way like ...

Fionnuala Ward 39:07

They don't think about that.

Hattie Butterworth 39:08

No.

Fionnuala Ward 39:08

It's the ... music college is a business. Some of them are a bank. Some of them are banks. Some-... they are mostly businesses, they have to put on performances. They're expected to have X amount of symphony concerts and operas a year and they ... I mean, they could have 100 sopranos that are amazing and all apply. But they only need a couple, you know, and yet they might have only three violins who are amazing, but they need 30, so it really is not about how good you are or what you have to offer after a point. It's if they're a firm they need to fill certain jobs.

Hattie Butterworth 40:08

Yeah. And put the right people on their prospectus.

Fionnuala Ward 40:11

Oh god yeah. They're all about the potential about who's going to ...

Hattie Butterworth 40:16

Bring bring the....

Fionnuala Ward 40:18

Glory.

Hattie Butterworth 40:19

The audience in ... the glory!

Fionnuala Ward 40:21

Yeah, and I get that 100% because it's not a normal uni. They don't do their exams behind closed doors, literally they're performances. And they obviously do want to be sending the best musicians out there but I think with funding and things, things can be thought over a bit better about who...

Hattie Butterworth 40:43

For sure.

Fionnuala Ward 40:43

...gets what. And also to check in each year, I think you should be able to re-...

Hattie Butterworth 40:48

Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 40:49

Yeah, because say someone comes in has never been to music college and don't get a scholarship, maybe they're not as confident and they absolutely flourish after a year and they're like, "this is the right place." I think you should be able to reapply and get some help.

Hattie Butterworth 41:03

Yeah, that might ... I think that's how they do it in some places, but other places ...

Fionnuala Ward 41:07

I knew that places, you have to re audition for your own scholarship. But you can't... no-one else... if you don't get it when you come in the door...

Hattie Butterworth 41:15

Oh I see.

Fionnuala Ward 41:15

...That's ... you don't have another chance.

Hattie Butterworth 41:17

Ohhh.

Fionnuala Ward 41:17

I know people have to prove year after year that they still deserve the scholarship and I think that's fair. That's good. But I think everybody should get another chance.

Hattie Butterworth 41:28

I think you're so right. Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 41:30

Yeah. I also know people who were fully-funded, have their rent paid, were living at home, whatever, all their fees, and all this stuff and even from day one, they were like, "oh, no, I'm not going to be a performer. I'm gonna go do this." It's like, I know, people who are beautiful performers and studying musicians who can't come this year because they can't afford the fees.

Hattie Butterworth 41:50

Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 41:50

And it makes you so angry. I know everybody's entitled to their own choice about what they want to do. To go and study music at music college, doesn't mean you're locked down to do that. But there is a kind of attitude sometimes of like, "Give me all this money. And no I don't even want to do this." And it's ... be a bit cheeky. Especially...

Hattie Butterworth 42:10

A bit unethical.

Fionnuala Ward 42:10

...who you're talking to you. I'm like, "do you know how many students I have?"

Hattie Butterworth 42:15

Yeah, how many... How much work you have to do and how many sacrifices you have to make just to get through your degree.

Fionnuala Ward 42:23

Yeah, everyone at music college is from so many different backgrounds, and you don't know who you're talking to, and what they're struggling through or how easy they have it so nobody talks about it.

Hattie Butterworth 42:33

Exactly.

Fionnuala Ward 42:33

And I think it's good to put it under the spotlight and see that a lot of it isn't very fair. But you don't have to have the boarding school background... You don't have to do that as long as you want to be doing music. And you work hard. That's so cliché... If you hard, your dreams will come true, but it's like if it's what you want to do...

Hattie Butterworth 42:54

But you've proved it! Yeah.

Fionnuala Ward 42:56

... you can do it.

Hattie Butterworth 42:57

I think that's so true. There has to be a space for you if it's what you want. Like ...

Fionnuala Ward 43:03

Yeah.

Hattie Butterworth 43:03

And there, there should be definitely should be more provision made. I think what you've said is just amazing. And thank you so so much for sharing.

Fionnuala Ward 43:10

Thanks for having me.

Hattie Butterworth 43:11

Do you know what? Anytime, honestly. Please come back.

Fionnuala Ward 43:15

Yes of course!

Hattie Butterworth 43:18

Oh, thanks so much Finn.

Fionnuala Ward 43:19

Thank you!

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