

# It's ok to be angry/sad right now

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## SPEAKERS

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, how are you all doing? I hope you're all really well. Thank you for the feedback on last week's episode, I really enjoyed talking to Laura. And we had a really fascinating conversation and I've been thinking about it a lot because, yeah, this week has been a really tough week, actually, for me. And it feels kind of embarrassing to say that. Basically only because it's been a hard time for me with my mental health. You know, when I'm in this kind of time, and I can have weeks where it's really bad, and then it gets better and everything, when I'm in this kind of cycle of it getting worse and better, I don't really tell anybody. And I just thought, you know, in the recovery process of COVID, I don't think I'll going to be the only person feeling like I'm having ups and downs .... people with either a previous mental health problem, or one that is only recently come to the surface. And yeah, you're not alone. I just really wanted to say that...you know, if you're having a really awful awful week or a few days or whatever, you're not alone. You know, I had a really hard time earlier this week. And it was really painful. And I felt very, yeah, very down and scared. And that's okay. I've never really had the courage to say that in this way. Because I feel like having started this podcast, okay, I want to talk about the things we don't talk about, of course, but at the same time, it does mean I did have an expectation of myself to be sharing only the good parts of myself and sharing other people's stories and keeping my own sort of stuff out of it, if you know what I mean? So I was kind of had this like, imposter syndrome feeling this week, like "oh I can't, I can't record a podcast because I'm not in the space where people would want to listen. I'm not in the mental ... I don't have the security, the clarity that I normally have. And I don't want people to hear me in this place." Whatever... you know, all these negative negative thoughts. But the reality is that throughout my undergrad, I've had so many periods of bad mental health, and every time I have tried to keep going in some way with performing or just in general life, and I haven't really told

anybody about it, but I have kept going and, you know, I wanted to say it is possible to keep going. You have really bad days, and then there are days that are still bad, but you can do more things. And I think I'm on one of those days now, and I just want to ... Yeah, I want to use this energy to make a ... an episode just talking a bit about how I'm doing, a bit about ... all of that. And then also about you and if you want to share your story with me or with anybody how you go about it, and how you go about understanding the difference between being authentic and using your story to help others, and oversharing. And this is something that I've battled with so much, especially because I love... there's part of me that loves sharing my story online and loves sharing my vulnerability, but I'm always worrying "is this oversharing? Am I making people uncomfortable by explaining my problems in any detail?" You know, I just don't know where that line is. And it's, yeah, it's something I think about a lot. And I thought I could discuss an article I've read recently in Forbes that I thought explained it super well. But anyway, for the moment... Yeah, so as I said, I've had a bad week. I've had many bad weeks since the start of the pandemic. Despite the ...all of these bad weeks, I've tried to keep things going. I haven't had very much motivation for practising. That's one way in which my mental health problem manifests is I get quite unmotivated. So for context, I basically suffer with OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), but it's not necessarily in a way that you might traditionally understand OCD. So I basically can find myself trapped in thought spirals, where I will get an obsessive thought about something usually very dark or immoral. And I will think about it 24 hours a day, and feel on the edge of, yeah, something worse happening, or feeling the need to protect myself through rituals and all of that. So it's something I've dealt with for so many years, since I was eight years old, on and off. But yeah, so it's been particularly bad episode of it. I tend to have it episodically, so I will usually recover and still experience it, but nowhere near to the same degree, and then I'll go into periods of stress or whatever, or sometimes it's just out of the blue, I will experience these obsessive thoughts. A lot of the time, all the time, what ... who am I kidding? All the time. You know, I could be go down the road. It's there, it's there. And I'm trying to find a way of making it my friend and making it something that I can not allow me to be swarmed by. And of course, at the start of the pandemic, I did feel swarmed by it. And I think everybody felt very swarmed by their emotions. And it's changed, it has got a bit better, but it's up and down. So anyway, that's kind of where I'm at. And, yeah, if you're feeling, "I can't practice, I'm not motivated," I feel you, you know, I am keeping going a bit with it. I have still got to do my recital at the end of August. But at the moment, you know, I think a lot of people are being very good at reminding us that "this is a pandemic situation, this is okay, if you don't play to your optimum." And honestly, I'm in a space now where I really just want to do it, and, you know, play and not think about anything else. I've said that in the past and not meant it but I've really mean it this time, you know, I'm so tired. I just... I'm just happy to play it, get it done. And also, at the moment, I'm just trying to enjoy exploring other repertoire that's not to do with my exam, and just having fun with music and seeing how that kind of escapism can help me with my mental health. And it always does, you know, the cello, I've had a ride with thinking "is this I really want to do?" All these thoughts that a lot of people have about doubting yourself and everything, and I feel like every time my mental health gets bad, it's always the light. It's always the thing that is like, I grab onto it. And I'm like, "Oh, I feel better after practising" or "I feel better after playing the piano or whatever" or writing about it. I suppose I'm like, "oh, okay, it's you again, right? I am doing ... I am doing the right thing. It's just taking me on a very weird road." But yes, so I also wanted to say that if you are struggling or have struggled during lockdown, and you're you are a music student, you are eligible for funding to help your mental health from Help Musicians UK, and I don't know if enough people know about this grant, but it's available. They can give you up to 750 pounds, I think it is ... might be more now. Um, so to access that funding, you have to get in touch with BAPAM (the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine) and they will set you up with a consultation with a psychologist and then you will hopefully get referred to Help Musicians and they will be

able to give you access to a grant and it doesn't go directly to you. It is paid, invoiced from your therapist or whoever you see, and they are very open about the type of therapy you want to receive or you think will benefit you. So I really recommend if you've been struggling, please use that. It's still there. It hasn't been cut. It's still a resource and I've used that and it's been ... yeah amazing for me so please do use that. So it's okay to feel like you're confused or not ready to ... sorry, or not ready to get back to performing. I totally understand you, you know, yes, technically from the 15th of August performances go back and indoor performances and we have this whole, you know, five stage plan from the government about returning to performing. And ... It's scary because we don't know for sure how long that will last, and we don't know what it really means, and then people like me who were looking for a job after graduating, it's just such a stressful time, you know, because I don't know for sure where I'm going, I'm looking for a job in anything right now, because I want to eventually do a Masters, but I don't have the funding right now to do my Masters. So, yeah, it's going to be a weird year. But it's okay if you're feeling like you need more time. I would say, well, I'm just kind of saying this to myself, you know, if ...it do-doesn't need to be a rush. If you need to take a break, do something else, do different type of work, please put your mental health before the stress of performing and the stress of having to feel like you have to get back on top form or whatever, just wanted to say that as well. Now, I want to move on and just talk about this article I read as I was thinking, "bloody hell, I really want to share more about my story, and especially my journey with obsessive compulsive disorder, because it's been with me for so many years throughout my degree." Urgh, not fun. Not fun. But I was sort of thinking, I just don't know, I don't know where the line is. Where's the line between "this is ... I'm owning my story. This is me, this is what I, this is what I suffer with. I want to help you. This me, you know, I don't care." Where's the line between that and using my story to like, get sympathy or pity? Or, you know, I don't know, I just I find it hard. And I worry that people misinterpret it when I open up. I mean, usually people are incredibly, what's the word sympathetic and kind, and say that it's helping them for me to talk about it. But I still worry, I still really worry because I want to be authentic and private, but I don't want my privacy to sound like coldness or any of that. So this article, basically, I loved it. I made so many notes. I just, I literally I was literally like thinking, "I want to know ... how do I know if it's oversharing?" I kind of Googled like, "what's the difference between oversharing and bravery?" or whatever. And it came up with this article. I was like, "Yes. Okay, this is everything I feel is true." So it basically said, "sharing your personal problems, has become more socially acceptable, but where did we cross this line into oversharing?" You know, and owning your story has led to some confusion because we have people you know, that do open up on a level that makes others uncomfortable or worried or whatever, on Facebook, or whatever, and put a whole post and or stories that scare people. So they basically said that "authenticity is being brave enough to be yourself, and genuine enough to live according to your values." So is opening up being brave, to be yourself? Are you being brave to be yourself? And are you being genuine enough to live according to your values? That's one of the things. And then the next part of authenticity apparently, is "what you say and what you do, must live up to what you believe." So are those two things ... do they feed into what you really believe? And yeah, so authenticity has become twisted in a way and people sometimes use the internet like a therapist. So that's kind of how I have interpreted, the way that it gets a bit twisted, is that people don't seek professional help are looking for a way to feel better or to feel listened to and heard, and then can go full the other way and just push all their stuff on people online. And feeling like their problems are being dealt with that way, but it's not healthy because you can alienate people who feel sort of uncomfortable with the amount of personal information you share. You know, and it can lead to people even taking advantage of you if they don't have your best interests at heart. You know, if we just share every single part of our brain or every part of our story, it can feel like "oh my goodness, I'm trapped" or ... you don't know who's going to be listening and who's going to be taking what

you say and twisting it or, or misinterpreting it, and it's a risk you have to take I think with some parts of your story that you share. I mean, obviously me telling the ins and outs of my...the ins and outs of my intrusive thoughts, I have shared that online before, I think, in one interview with my friend, and it did make me very nervous. But I think people, if they understand the context of OCD, I think they do understand, because my thoughts make no sense, really. And no one's really do. Intrusive thoughts are something that everybody experiences. And nobody can say exactly why we have them. It's just a complete mystery. And it's quite amazing. I think I have tried to see it fun .... in a funny way, it is funny, it is amusing, you know, thinking about, whatever people think about, you know, crazy things. But yeah, I've worried that people are gonna misinterpret that and think that I'm dangerous or think that I'm insensitive, because some of the themes are about, for example, fear of becoming homosexual, or fear of being transgender, or, and it's nothing to do with actually having an issue or being homophobic or transphobic, it's totally an issue with your brain, not being able to distinguish between a kind of curious, wacky thought and your actual sense of yourself. So it can lead you to feeling very confused about your sense of identity. So that's just one example. But anyway, I thought, now I'd talk about: why do people cross the line into oversharing? So this is maybe how, you know, and this is now how I'm going to know if I'm oversharing, as opposed to being authentic. So it tends to be a misguided attempt to gain sympathy. So if you share your hardships to gain pity, instead of gain-...share your hardships to help people, it's likely that you are oversharing, rather than being authentic. And then there's another one ... and this I have definitely ... I think, I think I could say I think vulnerability ... I've been this vulnerable before, and I do regret it, I have, in the past attempted to sort of fast track a relationship, or friendship by being incredibly vulnerable and oversharing, to a degree where I think maybe it made someone else uncomfortable. So I think authentic people build relationships first, whereas oversharers will blurt out personal information to try and get that sense of intimacy without building the trust first. And then you can feel really let down if they don't understand you, or if it didn't work out, for whatever reason, or there was a crossed path, you know, if you, if you gain the trust slowly, then naturally, your story is something that you give to the people that really deserve to hear it, the darker parts of it. So then oversharers also relieve their anxiety by sharing their pain. Whereas authentic people tolerate the anxiety and think about whether it's something they need to share. I think what they're basically saying, again, is, you know, you can share your pain with someone that's trained to listen, like a therapist. But if you're sharing your pain, to relieve your anxiety and putting it onto someone that might not be fully understanding, then that's dangerous. Whereas authentic people will have spent time thinking about whether their issue is something they really need to share or want to share. Also I thought, if you know me, you'll know that I am a bit obsessed with Brene Brown, who is like a social, I think she's a social scientist...doesn't really sum her up very well. But she basically has studied into emotions and relationships between people. And she studied the whole emotion of shame and vulnerability and the importance of them in leading a fulfilling life and maintaining close relationships with people. So she basically said that using vulnerability isn't the same thing as being vulnerable. You know, if you use vulnerability, it's actually the opposite of being vulnerable, because it's your armour. And I really liked that. I thought that was quite interesting, because I think we do know if we're using our vulnerability, rather than being vulnerable. You know, are we using it against somebody? Are we using it to further our sense of closeness with someone or whatever? But yeah, I hope that was interesting. I don't really know. I'm mainly just trying to think about it for myself because I've still not gone into very great detail um ... in this but I might want to in the past... in the past? I might want to in the future, and I don't know if you would find it helpful to hear about my mental health journey of which it has been big. But I am worrying, you know, I think, "God, what are people gonna think?" What are people...What do people want to hear? Do people really want to hear about it?" I don't know. But if you want to share your story in any way, if you want to start a blog, if you want to

make a video, or even message me and say you want to share it in this way, I'd be really happy to hear from you. Um, I just want to reassure you that actually, there is quite a definite line between oversharing and being authentic. And I think I did worry a bit too much about whether I was oversharing or not. And I think it's quite obvious when you are, because it won't be like a fear. I think you'll... you won't feel nervous about how people perceive you, you'll feel more like grabbing onto something that someone could give you. I don't know if that makes any sense. Anyway... I just basically wanted to say that. And that... yeah, I'm upset and quite angry about my future right now. Anybody else? Because it's like everything I worked hard for might not exist in the same way, and that's a type of grief, I suppose to process that and understand that it's not going to go the way I wanted it to. I'm going to have to take a different path, I'm going to have to live in a different way. And there aren't all the opportunities perhaps that there were in the past, but there are new ones, and that's nice, and yeah, yeah, yeah I could be positive. But I don't really feel like it. Yeah, I kind of just ... I'm a strong believer that there doesn't have to be a point in creating, you know, we shouldn't have to say, "Ah all that time I spent dedicated to music, oh, there was no point because now there's no jobs." Like, I am a great believer in saying there doesn't need to be a point. It's just about being present and being creative with music. I really believe that. But you know, it's all well and good saying that, and then if you're not financially supported by anybody, and you just have yourself, and you're coming to the end of your degree, it's very scary. Because suddenly there kind of is a point and you realise that every job you're going for, it feels like you're very underqualified just because everything you work for is very specialised. But yeah, it can be a very difficult place, can't it? People are being really positive about it, but I do think we are allowed to say that we're feeling let down. And to say that we're feeling angry, and all those emotions. They don't need to be hidden. We're so quick to be positive. And it can often be very toxic, because we're saying to people, "well, you know, it'll get better... it'll change." It's like, yeah, we do know that, but there also needs to be a space for us to be able to say, "this is honestly really rubbish. And I'm really struggling. And I really don't understand where my future is going. And it's a dark place. And I need help." You know, that is a phrase that people struggle with, because we feel like everyone around us is doing brilliantly. And I just yeah, once again, probably end with saying, I am doing things, but I'm not feeling great. I am living my life and getting through every day. I am finding elements of joy in every day, and I'm happy sometimes, but I'm struggling. I have a mental health problem. That's okay. I can still lead a good life. I'll have horrible days. And even if you don't have an issue that you know a name for, or if it's not, you know, on the level of something debilitating, it's still important that you find a safe space to talk about how you feel. I really want to say that because I think maybe I can be not entirely understanding that every issue is relative. And everyone has issues that need to be taken care of, and nobody is massively secure right now. So please, yeah, give yourself the space to express yourself to someone that you feel safe with. And yeah, don't leave things to get worse. Get in touch with BAPAM if you ... actually even if you're not a student I think they still can offer support. I'm not sure if it's financial, but they can offer some kinds of support I know. So yeah, I hope that was helpful in some way. Please keep in touch. Let me know if there's anything you'd like me to talk about. Or if there's somebody you know that would benefit from hearing the podcast, please do let them know. So I'm on Instagram, as usual @tmdtapodcast and @justabigviolin if you want my personal Instagram. And I will see you next week. I don't know who I'll be with...Yes, I do. Anyway, watch this space. Sorry, it was quite rambley. But I hope you're all really well. You're doing amazingly and you're not alone. I'm struggling too. It's fine. We'll find a way out I'm sure.