

MIAW Sophia Kannathasan

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SPEAKERS

Rebecca Toal, Sophia Kannathasan, Hattie Butterworth

Hattie Butterworth 00:02

Welcome to the Musicians' Injury Awareness Week with Things Musicians Don't Talk About.

Rebecca Toal 00:07

Chronic playing injuries are a part of our lives as musicians, either through our own experience or that of our friends and colleagues. Playing related pain is even more common with up to 90% of musicians reporting pain in relation to their instrument at some point in their lives.

Hattie Butterworth 00:23

After asking openly on our Instagram, whether someone would like to speak about their injury experience, the response was overwhelming. It became clear to us this is an issue about which musicians feel misunderstood. We are determined to explore it further.

Rebecca Toal 00:38

Musicians' Injury Awareness Week was created by us at Things Musicians Don't Talk About for the week or the 15th to the 21st of November, in the hope that we can share the stories of musicians, teachers and physicians. Through podcasts, social media content and resources and live events in partnership with the UK conservatoires, we are ensuring that anyone struggling with injury can have access to peer support and the correct medical advice.

Hattie Butterworth 01:03

We urge you to take part in any way you can. Use the hashtag #MIAW2021 and tag us @tmdtapodcast if you want to share your own journey with an injury.

Rebecca Toal 01:15

It honestly means the world that you're here and you're listening, and we can't wait to share some inspirational stories with you.

Sophia Kannathasan 01:25

Hi, I'm Sophia, and I'm currently in my third year studying at the University of Leeds. I'm taking what's called a placement year, so I'm currently working in a concert hall. So I started playing the violin when I was six, so about 15 years now. And I got into the violin because my parents wanted me to learn an instrument and they just picked for me. I actually did not have much of a say in what I played. But it was clearly a good decision on their behalf because I've loved playing it ever since I was six. And in terms of what I've done since, I currently play with the Chineke! junior orchestra which is part of the bigger Chineke! Foundation which promotes diversity in classical music. I've played in orchestras in Leeds and London. I'm originally from London. Both my parents are Sri Lankan. And yeah, I've just done quite a bit of performing. I think in terms of what I'd class myself, I'd definitely say a performer. I decided to do music quite last minute, I guess in comparison to most people. I only really had the instinct to do it when I was about 17 or 18. And I think just because I was too scared to go into it until that point. I knew I liked playing the violin and I really loved performing, but I was too scared. And when it came to deciding where I was going to go after leaving school, I decided that I wasn't ready to enter conservatoire at that point, because that is probably the ideal place you'd go if you want to be a performer. But I just thought I wanted a more well-rounded experience before I really decided to do performance as a career. So my plan right now is to go to a conservatoire to study a Master's degree in performance after I graduate from Leeds. I just wanted as a varied experience as I possibly could have, and I think ... not to toot my own horn, but I did choose the right place! One thing that I've always been insecure about, which is very related to my injury, is my technique. I didn't spend my youth thinking, "Oh, I'm going to go to Conservatoire. I'm going to spend my life playing the violin", I just played the violin because I loved playing the violin. So my technique is something that I've always felt is lacking, so I think this year, my plan is, alongside working, just to spend time to completely break down my technique to make sure I have the best foundation I can possibly give myself. So, in about February I think, just after my semester one exam in performance, my teacher and I were just talking about what I want to work on. Obviously, I had a semester two performance coming up in a few months. So we were just talking about what I want to play and what technique I want to work on. And my right hand specifically has been ... not a pain, I guess, and not literally but it's just been something that I've not found as easy to work on as my vibrato or any other things in the left hand. I did, looking back on it, probably the worst thing I could have done, which is always focusing on my right hand when I was playing the violin, which, I don't know how it works for other people, but when I focus on something a lot, it almost is counterproductive because it just made me tense even more. And I would just get stressed about "why is my right hand not being loose?" Because I was staring at it all the time! That is what led me to being injured, I was just so tense that after a while, essentially from my right elbow down, it just started hurting so much. So much that I couldn't do anything, not even just playing the violin. I couldn't hold a pen, I couldn't type, so I went to the doctor, and they diagnosed me with golfer's elbow, which is basically on the inner side of your forearm, it's just swollen, essentially, I think is the right word for it. I think that's what they told me. And the only cure for that is rest. So I think it was about five weeks that I literally had to rest my arm. It was hard. I just blamed myself constantly. And I was like, "Oh, you did this to yourself." And considering I want to go into performance after I was like ... I became a bit of a drama queen, I will be honest. "What am I going to do after? How am I going to do anything?" And it was not a great time for my mental health just because I love playing the violin so much, and not being able to play it was also horrible. Yeah, it was, it was not a good time. The first week or two was definitely me just being really sad... I couldn't do anything. It wasn't even just the violin, I literally could not do anything else with my right hand. After about two weeks, I started realising "I need to stop

basically throwing myself a pity party", and just doing what I could which...I spoke to my teacher again, and doing mental practice, and still listening to the pieces that I wanted to play, but from a different perspective. So I started doing score study a lot more, which is something I should have been doing before. Not being able to play really made me think about what else I could do to stay as connected to my repertoire and, and to the violin as possible. I still do it now and I still do score study now. Only realised this after being injured, how useful it is, because essentially, anything that's not for a solo instrument is chamber music. Violin sonatas are chamber music, you are playing with someone else, so it is so useful to be able to know what they're doing, and it just makes the performance so much better. I am healed now - luckily, it's not chronic or anything, so hopefully, if I take care of myself, this shouldn't come back. In terms of healing, it took five weeks of me not doing anything with my right hand, which obviously weakened my hand. As soon as ... I couldn't even hold my phone properly without feeling like I was going to drop it. It was five weeks before I could play the violin again, but in terms of actually being able to work on what I was working on before my injury, it took much longer than that, maybe two months? So when I was able to actually pick up my violin, which was about two months after I initially started feeling the pain and stuff, it was very slow. I was so scared of injuring myself again, that I, I took it incredibly slowly. Maybe I started with about five minutes, and then every few days I'd start increasing it by a minute to be honest, because I had just experienced what it was like to be injured, and that was my first violin related injury so I was just like "I'm not doing this again." So I took it very slowly. I think what I realised after focusing so much on my right hand is that if you have tension in your right hand, it's definitely in your left hand as well. It's just a bit more dormant that I'm not noticing it. So I think right now what I'm working on is just being less tense in general when I'm playing the violin. Just ... I try to readjust every 5 or 10 minutes just to make sure everything is as calm as it possibly can be and in terms of...especially my right hand, I don't focus on my arm itself. I just focus on my bow being an extension of my arm if that makes sense? It was just trying to strengthen it just out ... not even just with the violin, just holding my phone, holding a pen, slowly using it to type a bit more, just trying to get it used to doing everything that I was doing before. I didn't want to push myself too much. If something started hurting, I stopped doing it immediately. I went to a personal trainer for a while just to ... because I, yeah, I didn't go to a physiotherapist as such. Again, that might've been a good option! But I think because of COVID anyway, I was probably feeling weaker in general, just by not being able to do much because I think it was in the middle of one of the many lockdowns we had. I definitely do this a lot more now, and I should have done it a lot before but just reminding myself that I actually played the violin because I like playing it, not because I'm under some obligation to constantly be improving and be like working on my technique. It doesn't always have to be about that. Because if it's just about technique, it's a very sad time I will be honest! So I think, if I could tell myself something before I got injured, it would just be to remind myself every now and then how much I like playing the violin. Because I do, otherwise I wouldn't have cared enough to get injured in the first place.