

# episode-33-ollie-west

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

raye, people, feel, ollie, music, experience, head, depression, eat, anxiety, therapy, learned, gigs, talk, feeling, degree, world, grade, thought, hattie

## SPEAKERS

Ollie West, Rebecca Toal, Hattie Butterworth

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**H** Hattie Butterworth 00:03  
Hello and welcome to Things Musicians Don't Talk About with your hosts Hattie Butterworth,

**R** Rebecca Toal 00:09  
and me Rebecca Toal.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 00:11  
Within our vibrant musical world, it can often feel that the struggles and humanity of the musicians is lost and restricted.

**R** Rebecca Toal 00:19  
Having both dealt in silence with mental, physical and emotional issues, we're now looking for a way to voice musician stories, discuss them further and to connect with the many others who suffer like we have.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 00:30  
No topic will be out of bounds as we are committed to raising awareness for all varieties of struggle, and hoped to do so with some fantastic guests along the way.

**R** Rebecca Toal 00:40  
So join me Hattie, and guests, as we attempt to bring an end to stigma by uncovering the things musicians don't talk about

things musicians don't talk about.

H

Hattie Butterworth 01:07

Hello, welcome to the first episode of 2022. Today, it's just me interviewing Ollie, because when we recorded this back in December, Rebecca was unwell with COVID. She's now fine. And I just wanted to say before we get started, welcome to a new year of podcasts and content and raising awareness and all of that. I feel like this year, we're more excited than ever about what's coming up. One of the biggest, sort of, new developments, which to be honest, Rebecca has most of the credit for is that we've created a resources part of our website. So please go and check that out. It's at [thingsmusiciansdonttalkabout.com/resources](https://thingsmusiciansdonttalkabout.com/resources). And that has basically a page for major mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders. There are also paid for LGBTQ+ support, there's a page about financial worries, there's a page about getting support for music-related injury, as well. And maybe one or two others. Please go check that out. Hopefully, the resources on there will be helpful for you or for someone else, or if someone you know is going through something and are struggling to find the right kind of support, whether that's financial or emotional, please do send them to our resources page, because the dream with it was to have a space where you know, we could support people in that way. So just letting you know that that's there. Please also follow us on Instagram @tmdtapodcast. Please follow us on Twitter. The handle is exactly the same. There's also a Facebook, which I am much worse at updating, but it is there. Give it a follow. And if you're listening on Apple podcasts, please review it - that would be beautiful. On we go to my awesome conversation with Ollie West. So Ollie West, welcome to Things Musicians Don't Talk About! How are you today?

O

Ollie West 03:42

Well, I'm absolutely delighted to be here, because we've been trying to plan this for some time now. And it just so happens that I'm isolating with COVID. Stay away basically. You can't catch it from where you are. Stay away at all costs. But yeah, so I've not driven myself nuts yet, but there are eight days to go. So...

H

Hattie Butterworth 04:08

It's quite exciting for us really because you are officially the first probably non-classically-trained or classical musician that we've had on the podcast, so welcome!

O

Ollie West 04:23

Thank you. It's an absolute pleasure. That's great!

H

Hattie Butterworth 04:26

It's great to have you here. I mean, I think it's, it's obviously we started it off, mostly for classical music as that's my experience. But actually the popular music world is something that's given me huge inspiration and given many of us I think huge inspiration because of the

greater openness there seems to be surrounding mental health, which is something that we're going to probably focus our talk around, but is that something that you've experienced, like, do you think your popular music friends are more open than your, sort of, classical music friends?

**O** Ollie West 05:01

I think that was my experience at music college certainly. So I was at the Royal Northern College in Manchester, and I studied on the pop music degree. And the great thing about that degree was it was right alongside a world class, classical performance degree. So what you got was very high echelon of players and so you've got to really see the insights, and cos it was so small as well, both the classical course and the, I mean, there were 30 of us in our year on our popular music course, so it was teeny, teeny, tiny. And I think, I think the thing that I noticed, maybe it was down to, you know, tutors and things like that. And, you know, a lot of our tutors were sort of players and, you know, people who played for big names in the industry and produced and things like that, before they were educators, if that makes sense, whereas I think a common path in classical music is to do the degree, to do the masters, to teach and a lot of it is like, you learn and learn and learn, and then you teach and teach and teach. And I think maybe that was partly because they're the teachers that, you know, you've had my other half Raye Harvey, you had her on the podcast a few months ago now, but I remember her teacher, compared to mine, who was this sort of really chilled, lovely guy, big long hair, played with the brand new heavies, keyboard player, I'd come around to his studio, we drink tea and jam and talk about music, and our lessons would always run like, nearly an hour over how long they should have, because I was the last one of the day. When you think about that compared to Raye's experience of having lessons where there were points where she was not happy to be going, you know, like nervous of it, I don't think you should be nervous of your teacher. That's madness, isn't it? I think, especially at that point where you are developing so incredibly, you're quite vulnerable. So it doesn't surprise me that mental health and feeling like you can't talk about being upset or being this and that, is more of a thing in classical music, because I get this impression that sometimes people's experiences, especially in music college and experiences with teachers can be so much, well, crazy... worlds apart, really.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 07:27

Mhmm. Yeah, I think I mean, we're going to talk more about your kind of background, but I mean, from the notes that you gave me, you basically explained that you'd began kind of being classically trained, and then suffered with what you kind of now describe as panic attacks or anxiety, which kind of made you decide to become self taught or to follow a different path musically. Can you talk a bit about that experience with starting being trained classically? And then moving into being self taught?

**O** Ollie West 08:02

Yeah, of course, well, I'm a piano player, was my principal study. And I started playing the piano when I was seven, because... honestly, I can't remember why. But that's when I started, I went through... it was kind of a slow process my teaching, I went through every single, you know, prep book one, prep book two, doing the prep test, and I did my prep test, and I did my grade one, and I remember quite distinctly being about 11 and preparing for my grade two, and

it maybe being a week before and at the time, just not thinking of it as how I reflect on it now. And for you, there's like, just, "oh, I was really scared so I didn't do it", but actually, I had, you know, I had probably what was a panic attack. I was really anxious and crying and couldn't get myself together and was angry at the piano. And, you know, I was very, very lucky throughout my time growing up to have a) parents who were both in the arts - my mom was a professional dancer, my dad's professional actor and a singer, and so they understood that kind of thing. And they said to me, they said, Well, don't do it...we'll cancel it. That's it. There was never any pressure to do it. So I didn't then I thought that would kind of be the end of me learning the piano, but what I discovered was, I kind of liked jazz music, and I liked bands and I like rock and roll and I liked improvising. And so from that point onwards, I kind of steered myself really, and my piano learning sort of wasn't from grades but it kind of came from records and listening to records, putting them on. Particularly, you know, records by like Billy Joel, who basically I learned the piano by learning his entire catalogue. And you know that, that method got me to music college, so from grade one, so there was something to be said about Billy Joel, he's a talented bloke! But yeah, that, that experience, I remember feeling petrified and so much learning was based off, you know, and even my experiences talking to adults now is like, "So what grade are you on the piano?" I was like, "I have a first class degree from a music college, but I have great one. What does that mean to you? If I said, grade one, you'd assume one thing," but you can't judge people off grades, and I learned that quite young when I realised, "oh, I can't judge myself, as a piano player based off the fact there's a piano player here, who has grade eight." But I know I could, you know, I knew to a degree, I could play better than them. That was... I've always thought grades were a bit odd. And if they work for people, amazing, and if they don't, I don't think any child, especially at that young an age, should ever feel pressured doing it.

H

Hattie Butterworth 10:50

Do you think that that's had a positive impact, you know, not being pressured by your parents to go through and suffer I suppose the the pains of graded exams? Because obviously, you're a performer now, that is a big part of what you do. You do shows, you you sing in public. Do you think that that is something that has positively influenced you in the performing you do now? Or do you still feel that you have an element of panic or have performance anxiety?

O

Ollie West 11:21

I don't get performance anxiety so much anymore. I think when I feel out of my... definitely there have been times where I've felt very out of my comfort zone, in terms of my ability to read because the thing I also learnt that I had when I was 17/18 was I learnt I had perfect pitch. And I was like, "Oh, that that makes sense" as to why I could pick up, you know, teach myself quite easily, but it did lead to a couple of situations where I'd be on gigs and have sheet music thrown in front of me and I'd never ever needed, really needed it at all. And suddenly, the piano's just like got 88 giant teeth, and it's gonna eat your hands, and there's this big sheet of dots and you go "ah I don't know, I don't get it, I can't read it" and I just couldn't process it. And definitely in those moments, I've kind of experienced some level of performance anxiety, yeah, 100%. But you know, when I... doing what I do at the moment, which a lot of it is, you know, as you say, performance-based and playing in a lot of my pay-the-rent work, as you know, there's your 'passion work', and there's your 'pay-the-rent work', and a lot of my pay-the-rent work is, you know, playing in clubs and bars and restaurants and at functions and corporate dos and

things like that, and playing and singing and I'm very comfortable in that world. I know what I'm doing. And so, you know, I don't get that kind of nervousness anymore. I guess the one regret I have about not being classically-trained is that I can't sightread very well, because I think I would like to be able to in retrospect. But who knows? It might completely damage my head. It might ruin me!

H

Hattie Butterworth 13:06

It would be really interesting if you could briefly explain going from being self-taught to making the decision to undertake the popular music performance degree. And you know, your... the steps you've taken to become a singer songwriter, just sort of take us from your, I suppose, teenager years up to the point in which you started that degree.

O

Ollie West 13:32

I kind of ended up on that degree by accident to be honest. Sixth form was kind of the place I discovered classical music that I really enjoyed for the first time and so, you know, I discovered Claude Debussy really, who was one of my favourites of all time, and I fell big, like deeply in love with Claude Debussy's music. And I was actually, when I applied to the Royal Northern College Music's popular music course, it was because I was... the only reason I saw it was because I was applying for composition courses. That's why... and I just happen to see it there and I thought, "Oh, might as well" I didn't even look at the course, I just thought "Oh, a popular music course in a Royal Conservatoire. That sounds fun." So I ended up on the course by accident, because I was applying for composition courses. And I was only applying to composition courses because I heard music by like Debussy and Ravel and Faure and all those kinds of French, late 19th-century composers and I just fell head over heels and was trying to write things like that. And I have a sort of quite bad habit of getting an idea and clinging hold of it and then sort of doing anything in my power to try and make it work. So I was like, "Oh, I can.. I want to compose music like that." And so I just spent 85% of my time trying to write music like that and then also writing like, pop tunes, which was kind of weird and gigging at bars and open mics and things. So the pop course ended up being the right way down for me. I had a couple of offers for composition, but, you know, I was very, very impressed by the RNCM and it was the it was the right call in the end because being at the RNCM allowed me to do that kind of composition stuff and can push myself as a classical writer and as a composer and work more in like theatre mediums and stuff. And then, which is actually probably what I would have wanted to have done, having got two years into a composition course and not really been able to pursue my career as a songwriter and singer. So...

H

Hattie Butterworth 15:43

I think it's really interesting, because there's this whole thing, isn't there of like, people that are not classically trained, and maybe you don't read music fluently, or, or can, you know, or sight read fluently, or whatever, there's this whole thing of like, do they really understand the sort of core classical repertoire and where it's all come from, but it's really interesting that, like, you have these two passions side by side of like discovering Debussy, and Ravel, and all of that, and music, which is really not only accessible, but like really exciting and interesting to anyone,

if they want it to be. But then also alongside that, having this like, real passion of pop music, and I think that's maybe something that isn't said enough that actually like the two can be side by side, and many pop musicians really love elements of classical music.

**O** Ollie West 16:33

Ever since then, I've really, and being at the RNCM actually, another great thing was I got to watch loads of classical music live, and I got to go see Raye, and all sorts of things and discover amazing music. And you know, it's like, you know, I loved... fell in love with people like Mahler and Vaughan Williams and Elgar and stuff. And, you know, not, I wouldn't, I wouldn't call myself a niche, classical...you know, I don't know much about classical music. I don't pretend to be an expert, I think I'm an enthusiast. And I love trying to emulate parts of it, and sounds and harmonic structure and things like that, in elements of bits into what I kind of write and, you know, that's a massive, I find it massively inspiring, and... but yeah, I guess coming back slightly to the grades thing, that's where I wish I maybe could read music because I think I would probably be... I could sit and read scores along with it, rather than just going... I can follow a melody when someone's playing it, but you know, like, having an understanding of where the score is going and being able to sort of conduct it in your head almost is an entirely different kettle of fish that I probably am now at age where I don't have the time or patience for it. If I had more theory to back it up, I would probably like myself better than I do. You can always I can always spend my time finding holes in things I do. But you know, I'll try...I'll try to avoid it.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 18:10

Oh, my gosh, that's so funny. It'd be really great now to talk about your journey with your mental health, which you kind of explained to me...I don't know if you'd explain it as having 'started' two years ago, or if that's when it was at its worst, but it'd be great maybe for you to explain the issues you've experienced and maybe how they began and what they felt like when they began.

**O** Ollie West 18:40

You know, when I say "started two years ago", I think that's kind of the point at which I acknowledged it. When I think you know, when I look in retrospect, now, especially having had, you know, a lot of therapy going back across the years, I've suffered with some of the things that I reflected in therapy, since I can remember, you know, in terms of self-doubt, not liking yourself, self-confidence, body confidence... A lot of that has been all my life really. But sort of two years ago, it didn't really come to a head ... there wasn't really an event that sparked it, but I think there was just a noticeable like, "I don't feel okay anymore", like, and I think I'd taken a lot of what I was feeling like as a "okay, well, that's just the way it is, isn't it?" So... "that's just life, you know? I don't have depression, blah, blah, blah". You know, I don't know, I think maybe, you know, to my discredit I had a lack of belief in some of it, and I didn't feel like it could happen to me and things like that. And maybe I was quite proud. And I'll accept that now, that I was probably proud. So, which is why I didn't seek any kind of assistance earlier. But yeah, about two years ago, I thought, "Okay, I'm going to need to... I'm going to chat to somebody about this" and kind of, what that was able to do was kind of categorise things for

me and be like, and then be like, "Oh, well, it actually sounds like you're really ... you have quite severe anxiety. And while you're at it is some depression and side of this" and, you know, being sort of slowly served this meal of shit I didn't know what to do with really, this big platter of like, all you can eat mental health conditions, all of which somewhat applied to me. And I was like, "Ah, okay." So, you know, when you go to a doctor, and they tell you, you're, you know... And it's quite odd, the NHS, they make you feel like a child again, and like a " on a scale between zero and eight, how are you feeling? When you're..." "How would you say your...?" and you're like "what the hell is this?" And then they go, "Oh, you scored 14 out of 28, which means you're this likely to kill yourself." And you're like, "what, what? What does that mean?" And like, honestly, like, "oh, we put you at sort of medium risk..." Anyway, the point it came to a head was probably about a year and a half ago, where, which was timely, not deliberately, and I don't think due to the pandemic, kind of when the pandemic started, that's probably when it came...was at it's worst, and I was at my parents' house. And there were some very, very dark points in there, where I...I hesitate to say, well, well I don't know why I hesitate to, I probably was, I was suicidal at that point. But, then recognised it and was like, "I need to, I need to not do that", you know. I scared me a lot. Your sort of fear of like, "oh, I don't want to do that to myself". And that was quite important, because it made me go, "Okay, I actually need to not do that, because that would be pretty bad for everyone involved." You think at the time, um, it's a very quite an easy solution, like an escape. But, you know, it doesn't quite work like that, because you'll escape forever and that's not what you want, actually. Well certainly for me, that's not what I wanted, actually. I think what I wanted, was to click my fingers, and just sort of be in a white room with some fruit or something, just chill out for a few days, and not have any problems. But that's not how the world works, so instead of doing that, instead of ending up in the White Room, you know, I sought some help, and had quite a lot of different types of therapy, some of which have been success...more successful than others, I'd say, you know. Obviously, there's different strokes for different folks. The therapy I'm having at the moment is far more reflective on your past and looking at, like, why you feel things and why you are like you are and how you change your perspectives, whereas a lot of what I had before was CBT, which was going "okay, do you feel this? These are techniques to deal with it." Which short term I think was like, "oh okay, I can control this to a degree." And then like after another year, you're going like, "Okay, well, this is still controlled, you know". And so now I'm at a point where I do still have therapy I feeling well, you know, I feel like I'm existing better and I understand a lot of what I am better. I am on medication. I'm not very good at taking it, but I am on it.

H

#### Hattie Butterworth 24:12

I think you touched on so many, like really important things. Yeah, thank you so much for sharing that and especially about the 'medication and struggling to take it' thing because that is really... that is...you're not alone in that. It's a really interesting one and I think as well the thing you said about ...it's a really good way you put it of like it really scared you so you kind of were scared into doing something about it because you realised it wasn't what you really wanted, but it was like a wake up call for something being really wrong, which I think is a brilliant way to describe it because actually, that really normalises it, it's like I dunno ... the way you described it as well as like "I kind of wanted just be in a white room." That's a really good way of explaining it. I always explained it as like, "I don't want to die, but I just want to go to sleep and wake up in like a month when it's all over." And when I'm you know, and even though these might not be like you wanted to end it all, it's still like those are kind of in the same league of like suicidal thoughts, because they do mean you don't want to be in your current reality, you know. But I'm really, really grateful that you shared that because I think, especially



in the pandemic, there were times I felt the exact same way. Yeah, it's like, it's a difficult thing to put into words, but I was, I'm just so pleased that you managed to, like realise that wasn't what you really wanted.

O Ollie West 25:44

Well, I think I still and you know, us, doesn't ever, like, go, you know. I think a lot of these things you can learn to put at bay and you can learn to exist with. The way that the therapist I talk to at the moment described it was suicide...suicidal ideology, so this idea of, you know, escaping it, or when actually the reality... like the reality of suicide, suicidal reality is death, which is actually what you...you don't want death, you want escape. But the form of escape the most... the one way you can think to escape is via this other route, which is not, you know, but then when you actually come onto it, you go: "urgh, no, that's, that's,..." you know, and you know, there were points where it was close, there were close calls, but you were like, but, you know, I always was like, "probably isn't the right thing to do". Yeah, probably, probably isn't good thing to do also...

H Hattie Butterworth 26:49

In a dark time, it can, it can take up a lot of your thoughts, you know? It's just something that crosses your mind more than it should. Does that make sense? I don't know if that was the same for you. But it can be something that some days... yeah it takes up a large part of your brain and I think people might not understand that it's not necessarily that you that you always want it, but it is something that's very difficult to like, make shut up, when it's clearly something that your brain is thinking it wants, or thinking it needs in order to get peace. But I'd absolutely love if you'd be comfortable to kind of talk a bit more specifically about, you know, what you maybe experienced back then and maybe what you experience day-to-day with your depression, like what does it look like? And maybe what did it look like at the start? Was it just a general feeling of like, low mood? Or how would you kind of describe it to people?

O Ollie West 27:44

Uh I think at the beginning, it was it spiralled itself quite quickly, because I wasn't sure what it was. And combined with quite severe anxiety as well, which was all you know, and my anxiety stems from me feeling like I'm not good enough. And that is all through, you know, as a musician, as a performer, as a writer, as a person, as a caregiver, as a boyfriend, as a driver, you know, it literally in lots of stems, it's quite deeply, you know, you'll be happy to know it's quite deeply rooted in me. So, the combination of, especially in the beginning, really not understanding what I was feeling, and why I was so low, and feeling like I should be grateful for what I did have, and the good things, but then still being angry that I was depressed, coupled with not knowing, they'd spiral quite easily because I'd then become so worried about it, and then I'd be angry with myself about it, and then that would make me more you know...So in the beginning, it was very, very, very, like loud, is probably the only way I could describe it in my head, it just felt constant and loud. And all the time, just going "urghhhh" into your sort of skull, like white, almost like white noise, regardless of what I was doing, there was something there. And when... during the pandemic, actually I worked quite a lot as a, I started delivery driving for a supermarket. You know, for Tesco's (other supermarkets are available), and the problem was



in the van, you're on your own, like all day, you know, nine hours, like nine hours in a van, and you know you saw people every ... when you did your deliveries, but there's a lot of alone time and especially in a weird world where everyone was like shielding or behind the door or like, you know, it was very odd and no one really knew what's going on. And I think in those periods, I would really work myself up, I could really spiral myself to the point where I'd have to pull over and like, stop and go for a walk and wander around and stop working, or because I was like, I can't drive this vehicle anymore. So I guess that, plus a lot of therapy is what I experience now, which is I, you know, I live day to day. I don't, I'm not consumed by those thoughts anymore. I'm not consumed by depression and sadness, and it doesn't affect my every, you know, it literally would affect everything I did. I think what I experience now is the thing that I am notorious for, which is overworking myself. So I am tired a lot, and that's a sort of separate thing. But in terms of my actual depression, and anxiety they are, they are present, I know how to handle my anxiety slightly better, I think the thing for me at the moment, especially with the world coming... Well, I say that as I sit here with COVID, on the day after the highest number of cases in the whole UK, I'd say as the world's coming back to normal, I think this whole like, I feel like I have to take every gig or else I'm not good enough, I'm not working enough, or I'm not going to enough money or this anxiety, that's what's really prevailing my head at the moment, but through therapy, I learned a lot about myself, I learned a lot about my depression, I learned a lot where that stems from in terms of my experiences as a teen and adult and all sorts. And I kind of learned how to... obviously the meds do help, but you know, I've learned to a degree how I can control that, and the only times where I feel like I can't control that are where really I know I'm too tired and too busy. And I know that's relatively self-inflicted. So yeah, definitely, definitely got a much broader understanding of my mental health. And I feel to a degree, you know, mental health in general and how things affect other people's things, you know? So, yeah, that's kind of where I was and where I'm at.

H

Hattie Butterworth 32:22

I really like the way you explained kind of that overwork thing as like thinking as a freelancer, or as someone that has you know, gigs in fits and starts that you can have periods of time where you feel like you're not doing enough. And that's actually something that Rebecca...she might have shared it on her Instagram... I slightly wish she was here right now to give her like two penny worth on it. She's also got COVID and I don't think she's in a great place. But she was saying, yeah, she really struggles with that thing of like, even though she's doing lots of different things, and cumulatively, they all make her very tired. it's like, she doesn't quite feel as though it's enough or like, it should make her as tired or as worn out as it does. I don't know... it's this this whole thing, isn't it of like what is enough as a musician? What is enough in this world where things are being cancelled and rescheduled and...? It's a really, really tricky time to feel like the work you're doing is either enough or fulfilling or the right kind of work or whatever. Your experience, like in the delivery truck, and like having to pull over and kind of collect yourself, like I think that's something I've experienced so many times in like different places, and I'm just wondering, was that more of an anxiety kind of induced thing?

O

Ollie West 33:53

Yeah, 100%, so I started having quite bad panic attacks and anxiety attacks. So I had to ... I ended up with another set of meds to sort of put those, like beta blockers, sort of put those at bay because I could, I could rile my... what I was saying about spiralling, I could rile myself up

so much that it would just, I wouldn't be able to breathe, you know, like...

H

Hattie Butterworth 34:19

That's something actually, like the worst place I've experienced that has been in like a concert like a classical concert, which actually used to give me a lot of shame because I'd be like, "I should be enjoying this right now". But I would honestly felt like I was either gonna lose my mind or like pass out or something. Because it is often situations where you feel like either you can't escape or like, as you say, like there's no space to just release. It's really interesting the way you explain that. But I also kind of would like to hear your opinion or your experience with being like a man with mental health problems and a man who has experienced suicidal thoughts, just because there aren't many men who are happy to... well, maybe there are, maybe it's getting better... but I mean, there are...there's a massive problem, basically, as you obviously know, with male suicide and men feeling like mental illness is either a failure or something that can't be discussed or whatever, but were any of those kind of toxic thoughts in your head at the start, before you decided you needed help... Was that anything that was a barrier you think, either your gender or the way you've been brought up to view mental health issues?

O

Ollie West 35:39

Yeah, potentially, potentially like, I had a belief, certainly, that, you know...and, to an extent, I'm still slightly guilty of the belief that I need to look after everybody, as not, not necessarily, because I'm a man, but just because of how I'm built, and in terms of how I am, you know, structurally built, and my kind of my, you know, my father is one of the most wonderful caring people in the whole world, and will look after you and take you and he'd take anyone under their wing, and both my parents are, you know, incredibly high up executive head teachers of primary schools, you know, so they are, they both have always ... it's this whole nurture, thing. So I think in my life, certainly, in the groups of friends in my inner circles and stuff, I've always seen myself as the one who should be the strong one, who should be looking after everybody, who should be taking care. I feel like some of that, especially when it comes to like, my ability to look after Raye, who, you know, if you've only just tuned in, is my other half. The fact that I, I felt quite early on, I used to feel like I was failing as a boyfriend, because I was not looking after her, like I couldn't fulfil that part of my role. And perhaps that's a gender stereotype. And, obviously, yes, men are notoriously not very good at talking about crap like that, you know. I think I'm in quite a unique circle, where we are relatively open with each other and a few of my friends have had some quite unfortunate and traumatic events happen to them and have been handling their own issues so we have all been quite open with each other in my inner circle, but you know, certainly with my family, it's quite a new thing for us to be talking about because when I had my breakdown, I had a home. And I hadn't lived at home in six years when I came back for COVID. So I hadn't lived there at all and my parents and my brothers kind of had to just sort of watch me kind of crumble really, like a sort of shell of me. And I think that was a bit ...that was quite an eye opener for everybody involved, because it's not that we haven't talked about it at home, it just just wasn't really ever an issue like, or at least I didn't think it was. It was like, I didn't think that was something I'd ever have to deal with, rather naively. But in terms of being a man, and experiencing those kinds of things, yeah, it's, you still wouldn't see certain things, but I think it is getting better. I think people are talking more, you know, I've noticed that family members, I'm relative...I'm pretty much well as you can hear I've done, I

was quite ashamed of it for a while, I was trying to hide it. I can't be bothered anymore, Hattie... I'm just like, just, you know, this is what I experienced. This is my life. This is what I've been through, and if people are scared off by that, then whatever. They'll come around, I think, and they just need their time. What I don't think is helpful maybe is, I think people who aren't ready to talk yet, just need time. And I think I know a few people in my close circles who I feel like, you know, who I don't think are toxic are thinking the way they do, but I think you know, there'll be moments where they'll go "so Ollie, what was it like when you went to the therapist for the first time because..." And you'd be like, "Oh, well, it's like this and blah, blah, blah." And they're like, "right, yeah, yeah, hmm." Well, we'll get we'll get there. You know, it's not shaming people for having not spoken. It's people who are choosing to finally speak, congratulating them, rather than going, "Ah, don't bottle it all up, let it all out!" you know, because people will be like, could be overwhelmed by that. I feel like by being a man who is open about stuff like this, I would like to think that maybe there is someone listening to this, who is a man and, you know, from a very privileged, cis, straight, white man, you know, I would didn't feel like I had a right to talk about anything that was wrong, but actually, mental health affects everyone and we just got to, you just got to chat about it. And it doesn't matter what you do, or where you come from, just talk to someone if you're not okay you know? That's what I find.

H

Hattie Butterworth 40:47

I think you have a really important thing to say though as well, coming from, you know, a family where I think I hear and I relate to this thing of like, it's not necessarily that mental health was something you couldn't talk about, it's just like, wasn't necessarily something you thought you'd ever have to deal with face to face, like, actually watch someone in your close circle struggle in the way that you've clearly struggled and, and from hearing, you know, what my sisters and my parents have watched from me as well, I think it's a very similar thing where it's like, you watch someone you know, you think, you know, inside out, them have this experience that's completely invisible. And they're explaining to you things they're feeling and saying, at least for me, mine are completely weird and irrational and can really feel like I'm very distant from everyone around me. But do you feel like it's brought you closer in any way? Or I mean, it sounds like maybe you've opened their eyes to mental illness and how it can happen to anyone, but has it in any way, like brought you closer to people through opening up?

O

Ollie West 41:51

I suppose so. I suppose I was living very, very independently of my family, pre COVID. Not in that I wouldn't talk to them. Not that I didn't love them and I didn't want to be here. I was just, you know, living and existing, and that whole experience of being at home during a pandemic, at my family home was eye opening for sort of all of us really. It was a very unique experience, and probably not one we'll forget quickly. So yeah, I think to extent that whole thing, and the fact I happen to have my sort of worst period, if you like, during that time, was quite eye opening and sort of yeah, definitely saw different sides to each other that we wouldn't have, probably if I was dealing with that on my own in Manchester. So yeah, I think so.

H

Hattie Butterworth 42:55

And do you think therapy is something that you see a kind of end goal with? Or is it something that you think is part of you feeling just well, day to day?

O Ollie West 43:08

I'd like to not be in therapy at some point. I think there's only so much you can talk and talk without coming to some kind of realisation or solution. I'm still waiting for that point where I'm okay to not have therapy. At the moment I'm not there and that's all right. And lots of people won't be there and that's fine, and you should have it for absolutely as long as you need it. Just personally, I'd probably quite like to stop soon. But if I'm ready, I'm ready. If I'm not ready, I'm not ready. So.

H Hattie Butterworth 43:40

In terms of the day to day management of your mental health, apart from coming to a greater kind of self acceptance, which is the one of the most healing things you can do, is there anything that you have implemented or that you practice to stay mentally okay-ish?

O Ollie West 44:03

I wish I had something like, really good and you could be like, "Oh, wow, that's so great you're doing that." But I don't really. I'm not very good at practising what I preach, that's what I've learned so I could say things til the cows come home, but what do I actually do? And this seems really small, but you know, I got told in that sort of weird nuts period that I had so-called "binge eating disorder", which was basically being sad and eating and then regretting it and being sad and eating and yeah... And my relationship with food you know, I talked about earlier, being a food enthusiast which I am and I love cooking, and at the same time, everything I put in my mouth I hate myself for, so trying I guess on a day to day basis to eat something and just enjoy eating. I think I try and do that every day, trying to eat something and not wanting to sort of rip it all out my body, which was kind of how I feel about it, you know, when you ate something, and it was like you could feel it hanging off your face. You know, that kind of thing. So just trying to like go, "Ah, I'm going to eat this." and it could be like kit kat, or apple or prawn cracker or you know, whatever, it doesn't matter. Just eat something and go: "Mhmm that was good." And not thinking, "Oh, you shouldn't have eaten now. You're gonna be a big fat bastard, you fat bastard." You know, it's funny when you do an impression of it, but honestly, like, that's what runs through your head, you're like, yeah, yeah, it fuels this whole hating myself part of my anxiety thing. So if I can eat something, like once a day and not regret it, then that's what I try and implement I think.

H Hattie Butterworth 46:00

That is huge. I really don't think you should underestimate that, that is like a ... that's a difficult thing to practice when you're struggling with an eating disorder, and when that's something that is part of your experience. Yeah, I mean, we just briefly going on about your experience with an eating disorder, does it feel like it was a coping mechanism for your depression mainly or has it been something on its own entirely?

O Ollie West 46:29

I think it's kind of related to a body dysmorphia kind of thing, where...and just hating how I looked, which kind of ties into the anxiety thing, I guess, and the depression thing so yeah, they're all kind of weirdly intertwined. But I think yeah, so it ties into that. It's funny, really, because, you know, I got referred to an eating disorder clinic, who then told me, it wasn't a bad enough eating disorder, to be treated by the clinic. And I was like "what does an eating disorder...?" But basically, if you're not anorexic or bulimic, they don't really... I guess, you know, for wanting to give people the benefit of the doubt, they probably don't have the resource, which is just a grand, grand letdown and shame before, you know, to, and shame on our government for letting that be the case, but not getting too political. But yeah, I basically got told it's not a severe enough eating disorder in order for the eating disorder clinics treat it as like, well who treats it then? And they were like "CBT?" And I was like "uhhh okay". And even then, they didn't get in touch with me, I was on the waiting list for 11 months. So, you know, a lot of that stuff I've tried to you know, I'm still dealing with a lot of stuff about my eating habits and my weight and my body and learning to actually like what I look like but, we're getting there, slowly and surely.

H Hattie Butterworth 48:04

Is there anything you'd like to say to finish off? Any specific kind of..I feel like I always ask this question, it's quite a mean question because it's like, sum up your whole life story in like, a minute. But any kind of final thoughts?

O Ollie West 48:23

Well, yeah, just to go off what you said really, like, I didn't feel like I was entitled to be depressed. I wasn't allowed. I didn't feel like I deserved to be depressed. Or I had any right to be because of my circumstances, my life, you know, I live a very... on the face of it, I live a wonderful life and a very passionate and extraordinary life and I have a lovely apartment, I have a lovely girlfriend, I have a lovely cat, I have a very nice family, I do things you know, that doesn't...It's nothing to do with my mental health. And if you're there, if you're listening and you feel like you don't have a right, you're feeling depressed and you don't feel like you deserve to, then it sounds odd saying you deserve to feel depressed now I look on reflection, because that's what I was gonna say and I went "that's a weird thing to say because no one should feel depressed", but if you're feeling like that, that's that's okay, and it doesn't matter who you are, where you're from, what you're doing, you're entitled to that feeling. And please just don't be like, shy, like I was for four years feeling like I couldn't say anything because of what I had. Because otherwise you'll just be a bit screwed up like I am, woohoo!

H Hattie Butterworth 48:35

I didn't see that coming, but I love it. "Don't be like me."

O Ollie West 49:53

The title of the episode is: "you'll end up a bit screwed up like Ollie."

H Hattie Butterworth 49:59

Yeah, this is your warning now!

O Ollie West 50:02

This is your pre-podcast warning.

H Hattie Butterworth 50:06

Nooooo. It's been such a, like such an absolute pleasure to talk to you. Thank you so much for coming and enlightening us with your journey and your amazing story. So thank you.

O Ollie West 50:18

Well, what you're doing with this podcast is just extraordinary, and I really, really think it's so important. I have my "What would Yuja wear" sticker on my keyboard. So it's seen the light of a few gigs in the moment, but yeah, thank you so much for having me on to talk about my little corner of life and just keep doing what you guys are doing because what you are doing is absolutely phenomenal. So brilliant. The absolute power to your elbow. 100%.

H Hattie Butterworth 50:48

Thank you Ollie, that's really kind of you. I'll pass that on to Rebecca as well and ...Speedy recovery! Speedy recovery with your COVID. And good luck.

O Ollie West 50:57

Oh, yeah, I've got eight days left. How long did that kill of isolation?

H Hattie Butterworth 51:07

Oh, yeah. And you need to tell everybody your social media and where they can find out about Ollie West & the Wildflowers.

O Ollie West 51:14

Oh, yeah. So yeah, that's the name of my ensemble - there's seven of us. We make nice music I think. You can find us on Facebook, /OllieWestMusic, Instagram is @olliewestmusic, Twitter is @It'sOllieWest, and Spotify (and all the other music things) if you type in Ollie West & The

Wildflowers, you'll find us. There's a picture of me looking solemn. And yeah, please go have a listen and see what you think and all the rest and all that kind of stuff is appreciated.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 51:46

It's beautiful, beautiful music. I mean to say that to you before we started. Absolutely love the stuff. Honestly. I had a lovely little gander through Spotify about a week ago now. It was lovely. It was really nice. You're such a talented couple.

**O** Ollie West 52:03

Yeah, well she .. Raye is dead talented. Raye is one of these annoying people isn't she? She just picks up anything.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 52:09

She's so annoying. Hate you Raye.

**O** Ollie West 52:14

Hate you for being good at life. Anyway...