

Vic Isfryn

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musician, pregnant, people, gig, feel, cai, mums, fixer, trumpet player, speak, god, week, matty, thought, trumpet, pregnancy, booked, talk, suffered, happen

SPEAKERS

Vic Isfryn, Rebecca Toal, Hattie Butterworth

H Hattie Butterworth 00:02
Hello and welcome to things musicians don't talk about with your hosts Hattie Butterworth.

R Rebecca Toal 00:08
And me Rebecca Toal.

H Hattie Butterworth 00:10
Within our vibrant musical world, it can often feel that the struggles and humanity of musicians is lost and restricted.

R Rebecca Toal 00:18
Having both suffered 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 00:28
No topic will be out of bounds as we're committed to raising awareness for all varieties of struggle.

R Rebecca Toal 00:34
So join me Hattie, and guests as we attempt to bring an end to stigma by uncovering the things musicians don't talk about. Hi everybody, it's just me, Rebecca today. I have a really great

physicians don't talk about it, everybody, it's just me, Rebecca, today. I have a really great interview for you with the wonderful Vic Isfryn. She's a freelance trumpet player working sort of all around the place. And yeah, she's classically trained, but you know, she does sort of everything, which in itself is really impressive. But we do talk about her experiences, past and ongoing, with pregnancy discrimination, and the difficulties of being a musician parent, let alone musician mum, and all these kind of things. So yeah, I was really grateful to Vic, because she just, she just spoke with this kind of honesty that... not that I wasn't expecting, but was just really refreshing and she just hit the nail on the head so many times. I think you're gonna see what I mean, and I think you'll really enjoy this interview. So here is Vic Isfryn. So thank you so much Vic for coming to talk to it's just me today, no Hattie. How are you doing today?

V Vic Isfryn 01:54

I'm good. Yeah, I'm really good. Thank you for having me.

R Rebecca Toal 01:58

I got to know you when I was in NYO, I guess?

V Vic Isfryn 02:02

Yeah.

R Rebecca Toal 02:03

You were support staff when I was there.

V Vic Isfryn 02:05

Yes. How, how long ago is that?

R Rebecca Toal 02:08

I think it's 10 years ago.

V Vic Isfryn 02:10

Oh my god. Yeah, I can't believe it's been that long. I actually think that I didn't last much longer after that actually, because it's an incredibly hard job, and I don't think I realised it when I signed up for it. I was just a struggling musician that had just graduated, so I was like, "oh, what can I do? Everyone seems to be doing this house staff stuff. How hard can it be?" And then I realised it was 7am until midnight, and it was like, "Oh, my God." But yeah.

R

Rebecca Toal 02:34

So I then sort of reconnected with you recently, because you popped up on my Instagram. You posted something which we're going to talk about a bit later about pregnancy discrimination, but before we get into the beefy stuff, do you want to just tell our listeners about you, your musical background, who you are, all this kind of stuff?

V

Vic Isfryn 02:55

So um, I am a trumpet player, and I started when I was very young when I was about eight years old I think, and I started playing the cornet in local brass bands, and then a few years passed, and I ended up on some sort of brass band summer school, and I think it was James Gorley, the tuba player, who suggested that I auditioned for Chets - Cheatham's School of Music for anyone that doesn't know - but yeah, and I auditioned on a slow melody...I think I played Share my Yoke.

R

Rebecca Toal 03:28

Awh!

V

Vic Isfryn 03:29

And then yeah I got in and um, yeah, so I went there for five years, and I loved it. And I had a really lovely teacher, John Dickinson, and from there, I went to music college, I went to the Royal Northern, and I was sort of fed up with studying after that. I'd just done so much music and I think I just wanted to get out and earn money. So I was like, "I'm not doing a post grad, not doing anything, I'm going to take a year out, I'm going to see you know, how to make money as a musician" and then soon realised that it was really difficult. And yeah, so I started doing some teaching, thank God for that, because that's pretty much my first...yeah, my first job was covering a maternity leave in a music service. And it taught me everything I needed to know, because it was so difficult. I did that, and then I thought "mhmm maybe I do you need to go and study a Masters". So I went back and I went to Scotland to do one year. I did a... It was meant to be two, but again, I got this itchy feet thing where I was like "I need to earn money. I can't be spending any more and studying." And instead of staying there, or going back to Manchester where people knew me, I just moved to London. I was like "It can't be difficult. Yeah, I'm gonna do it" and my boyfriend, now my husband, obviously lived there. He, he was studying a post grad, so I just moved in with him, and fast forward 11 years and I'm here, I'm, I'm trying to make it work still, I still haven't learned much.

R

Rebecca Toal 05:12

Well, it sounds like you are making it work. So, what is it that you do most generally now?

V

Vic Isfryn 05:18

So basically, I, well, I teach two days a week, and I run like a brass hub with my husband, Cai. And that's like...takes up maybe like a day. And then the rest of the time I try and play the trumpet for anybody who pays me. I'm not a fussy musician. I'm not like a "just an orchestral musician" or just playing on... I dunno... shows or function bands. I will do anything. Maybe stretching myself thin and maybe not good at it all, but yeah, I try, I try. So yeah, it's a mix, like at the weekend, I was doing some Beethoven on Saturday, and then Sunday, I was playing with London Vegetable Orchestra on a carrot. You know, it's just what it is.

R

Rebecca Toal 06:06

Exactly what you trained to do.

V

Vic Isfryn 06:08

Exactly. It's exactly where I thought I'd be when I was studying and having an hour and a half trumpet lesson a week... I knew, I just knew about those weekends of playing Beethoven and then a carrot. I just knew it was coming.

R

Rebecca Toal 06:20

I mean, obviously, we're both trumpet players, and I feel like it takes a lot of courage, especially if you've been like classically trained to put yourself out there into situations that are not quote unquote, "classical". Did you find it scary at first? Or has it always just been that you've been like, fine with putting yourself out there?

V

Vic Isfryn 06:38

No! Oh my god. I ... so at music college, I wonder if you felt the same, but we were just told that orchestral musician ... that was it. You were aspiring to get a job. You're aspiring to be, you know, on the every extra list of every orchestra in the UK. And you would ... that ... I just ... that's all I thought about. I was like, "Right, okay, this is it. This is all I need to do." And learning every trumpet excerpt, going to auditions - like I remember my dad taking me to auditions abroad, Spain... And just thinking, "Yeah, this is what I want." But actually, I didn't know about the other side of it. I had no idea that you could earn money...I dunno... playing in a function band even like, I don't know why, because I'd seen function bands, and I'd seen trumpet players up there, but maybe I had this weird ... not snobbery, 'cause I'm not a snob. But maybe I thought, "oh well, if this is not classical music, this is not what... I would never do that." But then when you leave college, you don't have many options. You're, you're left with a hell of a lot of rent, and you don't really know how you're going to pay month to month. And so when someone says to you, "Are you free... I dunno, to come to do a function gig 11pm till 1am?" You're just gonna be like, "Yeah, I'm gonna do it."

R

Rebecca Toal 08:03

Yeah.

V

Vic Isfryn 08:03

And you're like, "I don't know how to improvise. I don't know how to do any of this stuff." And I mean, still to this day, like, if things are out of my comfort zone. I do get nervous. But you just have to say yes to everything, no matter whether it's like, the most... I don't know, like a school show, or whether it's ... I dunno, the top of your game, like, it doesn't matter. It's all... to me, it's all the same. It's got to be it's... I'm paying my mortgage. I've got a daughter, I'm pregnant with my second like, I can't ... not even be fussy, I just ... there's no point! I wanna play my trumpet. Doesn't matter what it is. So yeah.

R

Rebecca Toal 08:39

I guess it sounds kind of like the same way that you kind of were thrown in the deep end with your first teaching job with a maternity cover, it's like, you just have to learn it as you go along, and like, there's so much just blagging it that you're just like, "I have to be a performer, even when I'm like in rehearsal." I have to be like, "Yep, I know what I'm doing. It's all cool. Like..."

V

Vic Isfryn 08:57

Yeah, you really do. And I think I was listening to, I was listening to another podcaster a few weeks ago, and they were talking about - and it really resonated with me - when you leave college and you get asked to do ... I dunno, a function gig or a show, and you turn up and they're like, "here's your mic" or "here's something" and you've never done this before, and you're like, "Oh my God, I don't know how to clip my mic on" like or, "Oh, my God, I don't actually know how to do this." And they were talking on this podcast, and he was saying that there should be like a mentor scheme of someone just giving you the basics, and I was like, "I could have done that. I could-..." Not could have done it, "I could have done with that." And still to this day, you sometimes are chucked in at the deep end and you still don't know. But you do what you said like you just have to act and put on this performance like you know exactly what you're doing. And it's terrifying because you don't want to be the one that's like asking questions.

R

Rebecca Toal 09:54

Well, yeah, and because it's like ... the fact that people have asked you to do that gig in the first place like means that you want to be asked back, so you don't want to be an idiot, but at the same time, you don't want to be like, "I know what I'm doing. Like, don't give me advice if you're going to give me advice." It's just this really weird, like middle ground of "if you're gonna... if you're gonna tell me what to do, that's great, but I'm not gonna ask."

V

Vic Isfryn 10:16

Yeah, 100% just like, yeah, fake it till you make it I think. I think that's still pretty much what I do every day.

R

Rebecca Toal 10:24

So you mentioned you already have a daughter?

V

Vic Isfryn 10:26

Yes.

R

Rebecca Toal 10:27

Can I ask a little bit how that is managing being a parent and a freelance musician, because I feel like there's so many questions I have?

V

Vic Isfryn 10:35

So yeah, we got married, and then we were like, "Yeah, let's think about having children." And at the time, it was my husband, Cai, who was almost wanting a child more than me. And now, really, like he is the best dad ever and it is 50/50, and we do really share everything. But it's not having to go through the pregnancy and the nine months of I mean, obviously, I'm only speaking for myself, because I'm sure that other women love being pregnant and that is amazing and I'm very jealous, because pregnancy just does not suit my body. So when we were talking about having a child, like, a lot of it was based on "Oh, my God, my career, like, how is this going to be affected?" But I did have some friends, especially brass musicians that had children. So I was like, "surely it can work. It has to work." But then, little did I know that as soon as, sort of, telling people that you're pregnant, it changes everything, and it changes almost their opinion on what you are able to do. And with the first one... so obviously, Matty, who's nearly three now, I just sort of accepted, I was like, "Okay, this must, you know, it'll get better once she's born." And when she came along, I did get asked for some work maybe more after she was born than when I was pregnant, but the child care stuff, that's still like a minefield. Like, honestly, that blows my mind. Every week, me and Cai sit down with a calendar. We're like, "Right okay, we've got a clash on Tuesday night, we've got clash on Thursday night, what we're going to do here?" And our families don't live anywhere near. Like, my mum lives, six hours up north, and Cai's family live five hours to the north Wales, so we really have to be so organised. So any last minute things that come in, if he's already working, and that gig came in first, then I'll just have to say no, or vice versa. I'm sure there are ways around it. I think we're not quite at the situation yet of asking a stranger on like ...there's these apps called Sitters, and I know a lot of musician mums use them. I just want to wait till Matty's a bit older. But we will have to because it's, it's work and we have to work to pay for her food. So I mean, it's really important that we continue to do that and also to teach her that you don't have to give everything up just to be a mum and a dad, like you can do it. It's just, it is, I'm not gonna lie to you, it is difficult, and it's quite stressful. And sometimes having a week, where I just teach during the day is actually a really lovely week, because I don't have to think past five o'clock.



R

R Rebecca Toal 13:31

So I can never imagine a point where I'm like, "Okay, I feel like my career is stable enough that if I had kids now, I would be able to recover it." Like was that a problem for you, that you were like, when will I feel ready to...?

V Vic Isfryn 13:47

Yeah, I know exactly what ... so I was expecting...so when I was younger, I was expecting "when I have kids, I'll be, I'll have a job. Or I'll be you know, like a regular somewhere." You know, or something like I'll be really stable, I'll know each month I know what's coming in. It... that never happened. And I think that when it got time to starting to have kids, I was like, "Do I wait for that?" That may never happen. And I'm so glad that I didn't wait it because it still hasn't happened. I'm still not in a job. I think that I just had to trust that ... I just continued to work hard. And things have, some things haven't recovered really from before having Matty. There's some things that I did before that I haven't done since. And I'm not expecting to do that type of gig again. Am I sad about it? Absolutely not, because I think if you can't take me as a mother, or a pregnant trumpet player, then I have, I don't want anything to do with you. Although that sounds like I'm really confident and like, "Oh yeah, I'm not gonna work for you again." Actually, no, it probably really upset me at the time and it's taken me a while to get over that and not, not resent having children, because I don't at all. But you do ... sometimes there's like a doubt that does creep in your mind, like, "Have I done the right thing?" And the answer is, yes, I absolutely have. But you can't help those and so anything to do with career, you just have to trust the process that you as an individual will continue to work hard, whether that's trying new things, or whether you recover what you had before.

R Rebecca Toal 15:29

Sounds like just one of those decisions that you just kind of have to ... if you know that, that's what you want, and you just have to kind of disregard any career things or just be like, "Right, well, I know, this is what I want. And then let's just see how it goes."

V Vic Isfryn 15:42

Yeah. 100% Yeah, exactly.

R Rebecca Toal 15:44

You don't have to answer this, but like the logistics of playing a wind instrument or brass instrument whilst you're pregnant, what was your experience?

V Vic Isfryn 15:53

So like, at the beginning, like, obviously, morning sickness took over everything. And that was awful. But really, it was just being uncomfortable towards the end of playing, I think I felt ... not that I lost any power because I didn't, but I felt like I had to sort of adjust things a little bit

more. And just the way you sit I think like that because I was huge at the end, and I was just so uncomfortable. And then sickness for me came back with a vengeance in the last I think it was like the last eight weeks. Or maybe it was 10 weeks, because I was abroad. I was working in Cologne or something maybe I can't remember. I had to fly there. I was abroad. And I think it was Cologne, and I was doing a show there for a week. And I remember sitting in the pit, and I was like, "I'm gonna be sick. I'm gonna be sick. Gotta hold it together, hold together, I'll be fine. I'll be fine." And I kept having to run out. I was just like, "I'm going to ... I'm being sick constantly." And it was possibly the worst week of my entire career. It was embarrassing, not about being sick, but I just literally couldn't play the trumpet. I just ... it was terrible. And ... but I was... it was one of the things where I was like, I don't want them to think I can't do this because I can, I can it's just such bad timing. And I kept saying "it's not because I'm pregnant. It's not because I'm pregnant. I've got sickness bug." But really, I should have just been like, "Shit ha-..." Oops sorry, I swore, I don't know if I'm allowed to...

R

Rebecca Toal 17:23

Yeah, no, it's completely fine.

V

Vic Isfryn 17:24

Shit happens. Like, someone gets ill, you can't help that. You can't... It's my body at the end of the day, but other than that, it was actually... it was okay. It was just bad timing on that week, and being told by Ryanair that I couldn't fly back because I was too pregnant. That was,

R

Rebecca Toal 17:40

What?!

V

Vic Isfryn 17:40

That was awful. Because obviously when I went out there...I think you're only allowed to fly when you're ... 34 weeks is like the cutoff point I think of being pregnant. And I think when I was flying back, I happened to be 35 weeks or something, or 36. And I was massive so I showed the doctor's letter, you know, when I was boarding. And they were like "Can you just hold on there Madam?" And I was like, "Oh my God." And they were like, "Yeah, you can't fly back because you're too pregnant." And I was like, "But I can't, I can't stay here." And they were like, "Well, sorry, there's nothing we can do." And I was like, "Oh my god!" like getting really flustered, and I was like "urgh!" So eventually after lots of arguing, lots of tears, I had to sign something and speak to this big boss on the phone to say, "If I happen to give birth in the air that I would be, you know, responsible for everything." So I finally got on the plane and then when I got home, I was like, "I'm not working again until after this baby's born."

R

Rebecca Toal 18:39

But it feels like so many of those decisions, or like so many of those experiences would only be helped if people genuinely were like, "Do you feel capable enough to do this?" And there wasn't

helped if people genuinely were like, "Do you feel capable enough to do this?" And there wasn't a fear of actually telling people like "I'm pregnant and this may affect my ability but right now I feel like I'm able to do this."

V

Vic Isfryn 18:57

Yeah felt that assuming thing is ... blows my mind because I think I saw something that you wrote on Instagram recently or was it a few weeks ago about mental health. Assuming that you can't do something rather than just ringing you up and being like, "Hey, have you ... Are you free for this? Are you feeling like ...?" Not even asking "are you feeling alright?" Just saying "Are you free?" and for you to then be like, "Do you know what? Now's not a really good time. So I'm not going to do it." But it's the assumpt-... it's just the assuming drives me insane. Just ...

R

Rebecca Toal 19:33

Yeah, if you just normalised saying no to things for people's wellbeing, that would then give people the confidence to say no if they weren't feeling good, which would then mean that they wouldn't assume whether you could do something or not, and you could take charge of your abilities and schedule.

V

Vic Isfryn 19:51

That's it without the fear of just never being asked back or being truthful or like, you should be able to say "I'm not feeling good right now, but I'm on it. I am getting to the place." And for that fixer or person to be like, "Brilliant. I'll give you a ring back in a few weeks time. See how you're doing that and keep checking up on you." Like, that's all it takes. But they don't exist. It doesn't exist.

R

Rebecca Toal 20:17

So I felt like this is a good point for you to tell your story about the thing that you shared about a fixer - don't have to name names - but like, do you want to just give a summary of what happened?

V

Vic Isfryn 20:30

Yes, so yeah, I won't name names because, I mean, I'm desperate to, I really am desperate to. This is another thing: Why can't I? This is another mind-boggling thing. But anyway, that's a different story. So yeah, so obviously, I decided...so in January, I got offered this gig, and it was to perform alongside a DJ. Another thing that I was just gonna, you know, go with, absolutely. And it was a really well-paid gig. It was very late at night. I think it was like 11pm or something like that gig. But it was ... he booked me in January, and it was gonna happen May. So I was like, "Okay", so in January, I'd just found out I was pregnant, and I've suffered, I suffered from an ectopic pregnancy a year and a half ago which almost killed me. And then I suffered a miscarriage the few months prior. So I wasn't ready to tell anyone I was pregnant at that point,

because it was very early, I hadn't had a scan yet, so everything was up in the air. But anyway, he booked me for this gig. And I said, "Yes." And in my head, I was working out the dates, I'll be like, "Right, okay, if things go well, I'll be six months pregnant at the time. That's fine. Completely doable. Six months should be feeling great. All good." So I didn't say anything, and then time was going on, and things were moving quick and I had to send in a photograph, which ... I don't know why. Well, obviously we do know why. Um, send photograph in, send biog for people to approve this gig, this events planner, to approve of the people that she was booking. And the fixer got in touch me and said "The event planner's approved everything. Here's your purchase order, can you send me invoices? Here's gonna be your hotel." Everything was finalised, it was all done. And then I think, when was it...So it was yeah, it was like February, I decided because I'd had the scan. Everything was good. I was past 12 weeks. Um, I was like, "I'm just going to mention to him, I'm pregnant. Um just in case..." Well, not even just in case, I just didn't want the shock-horror on people's faces for me to turn up to a gig and be like, "Oh, oh, you're, you're pregnant!" And for me feel awkward and bad about something amazing thats happening to me. So I thought "I'm just gonna warn people now." So I emailed him and said, "Just to let you know, I'm pregnant, and I will be six months-ish at the time of the gig. This will have no impact on my performance, it will be all good. Just thought I'd let you know." And bearing in mind, every email between the two of us took like a week for him to reply. And I got a reply back within 45 minutes, being what I posted on Instagram, which was "On that basis, we won't be going ahead with the gig" basically. "And I'm going to put blank in for you. So we're going to replace you." Then the sentence that really made me laugh was "and then we'll be in touch when you're ready to do more gigs." So, I remember getting this email and ringing Cai my husband in... the anger and ... but ... my anger comes out in tears. And I was like, "I'm so angry." I was like "He's taken money from me. Like, this is crazy. How has he got away with this?" And Cai said, "Right, you've got two options. You can either, you know, be upset about it and I don't know... or you can turn this into a positive and you can raise awareness and you know, tell people about this, because it can't continue to happen." And so I posted it, but I mean, the emails that I got back from him, I haven't posted, which I'm really tempted to post because they're horrific.

R

Rebecca Toal 24:34

Yeah?

V

Vic Isfryn 24:34

So obviously, I emailed him back and said how disappointed I was and "I'll be seeking advice from the MU and in no way am I asking to be reconsidered for this gig."

R

Rebecca Toal 24:45

Yeah, well done.

V

Vic Isfryn 24:46

And just to let him know for future that you can't do this. And the emails I got back from him were just him trying to pin the blame on the event planner number one, and number two telling

were just him trying to pin the blame on the event planner number one, and number two telling me that I shouldn't be doing a gig like that at six months pregnant because it's not safe for me.

R

Rebecca Toal 25:05

Pardon my French but absolutely fuck off.

V

Vic Isfryn 25:07

Yeah, what a wanker. And this literally, as I was reading it, he was tying himself up in knots and he was trying to say to me, I should have been honest from the start. I was like, "Number one, that's none of your business" like you can't tell me to be honest from the start when I wasn't telling anyone I was pregnant. I'm not going to be honest with you about

R

Rebecca Toal 25:27

You don't know him!

V

Vic Isfryn 25:27

And then he tried to pass off and say that another musician that works for him when she was pregnant, like trying to be like, "Oh, my I've got other musicians that are mums. And it's, you know, I'm not discriminating like, it's one of them."

R

Rebecca Toal 25:40

It sounds like, "I have friends who are black."

V

Vic Isfryn 25:42

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Yeah. "Or my best friend's gay, I don't have a problem with it." It's like, come on, like you're an idiot. So he then went on to try and say that if I'd been honest from the start that him and the event planner would have been able to make a more informed decision. I was like so you mean, "you just wouldn't have chosen me? And then got away with it?"

R

Rebecca Toal 26:03

Yeah. And also like, it seems kind of irrelevant at what point they ... like if they'd have booked you a a month earlier, you wouldn't have been pregnant, if they did booked you a few months later, you might not have known still.

V

Vic Isfrvn 26:14

Vic Isfryn 26:12

Exactly. That's yeah, that's the whole thing, that he's just completely and utterly made himself look like an idiot. But he's, from what I can gather, he in his mind won't think he's done anything wrong. I think he's that type of person. So after these emails, I decided to email the MU and send them everything I've got. I'm still waiting. I don't know what's going to happen. So far all I've got is because I'm not employed, I can't go down the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, I can't go down that particular route. There could be another option for me...

R

Rebecca Toal 26:51

But that in itself is so flawed that self-employed people don't have this protection.

V

Vic Isfryn 26:55

Yeah. So basically, it doesn't matter, like it's fine. "She's self employed. It really doesn't..." It's like yes, it does!

R

Rebecca Toal 27:01

It almost matters more.

V

Vic Isfryn 27:02

Yeah! Because I need it. I really needed it. I'm not speaking bad of the MU. Um I haven't really ... I mean, I've been a member for years and years and years, and I've never really used them. I'm just, I'm not ... not because they're not going to help me, I'm just not hopeful because of the system. Like, I'm not hopeful that I'm going to get anything from it. I'm not even hopeful that he'll be made to apologise, and I'm not hopeful that he'll be blacklisted. I just ... I feel that I'm glad that I spoke out because I'm hoping that other fixers will just look at the way they book musicians and stop giving it to the same people over and over again, the same males. I just want to open the door for people to start thinking like, "oh, do you know what? She is ... I dunno... Let's get her in instead. Make it a bit different. Oh she's pregnant? Even better." Not even better, but show the way. Show like how we can make this like a positive experience for just everybody to look up to people that are pregnant or not pregnant or female, male, whatever. But yeah, I don't know whether it'll happen. I don't know.

R

Rebecca Toal 28:18

Yeah, I just totally admire you for taking the situation and just putting... like, making it a positive because you're right, that, you know, it's always so unlikely in these things that anything big will change, but just even just one ... like I know, so many people who have seen your post. The fact that, you know, I hope that more people will have the bravery to say, "You know what, I am pregnant, and this will not affect my performance." And if then somebody comes back to them, that they won't feel like it's okay for them to have had the same response that you had.

V

Vic Isfryn 28:53

Yeah, exactly. I think that that's just the main thing now that, as I said, whatever happens with the MU happens, like I can't ... there's nothing I can physically do about it. I'm not, I'm not a solicitor, I haven't got any legal knowledge to take this fixer down by myself. I ... who knows what will happen? But I think the main thing is to pave the way for women who want to be mothers, and want to still carry on their career and know that it's possible to do it all. But in order for women to be able to do it all, we've got to bring awareness that it's happening now and just say, "That's not okay. And you cannot get away with that." I think a lot of it as well, during my first pregnancy, I think I mentioned this earlier, like I let so many things slide. I didn't talk to people about, you know, not getting booked for things because I think mainly I was maybe embarrassed that I wasn't getting ... that it wasn't busy, and I knew it was because I was pregnant and not because ... But then you can't help those doubts creep in your head and go, "Oh my god, I'm just maybe not good enough anymore or..." you can't help that.

R

Rebecca Toal 30:09

Yeah.

V

Vic Isfryn 30:09

But I wish, I suppose there's no point having regrets, but I wish that I could give my my then self a shake and just be like "No, speak up and talk about it and don't let this happen, and go and find the gigs and don't just ... don't just expect you know, things to be the same. You've got to work," you have to work a little bit harder, I guess which you shouldn't have to. But I wish...

R

Rebecca Toal 30:34

But you're doing it now, like, you don't have to go back and shake your old self, because you're doing it now, which I think is so admirable.

V

Vic Isfryn 30:40

Yeah, I... yeah, I just I was hoping that I mean, this post has been brilliant, because there are so many people that have come to me and said, "I wish, you know, that this wasn't happening and things need to change." And I think as well, some fixers maybe were guilty in my first pregnancy of not booking me, I hope that, you know, they've come to me now and said, "Go you for sharing!" And I'm like, "Oh, well, actually, you..." But I'm hoping that because I'm speaking out now that they look back and go, "Well, actually, we probably shouldn't have ignored her for nine months>." That's all I want is I just want people to now wake up and just be like "Yeah, that can't happen. And maybe we will ask a pregnant musician, because they need the work just as much as everybody else. And just because they're pregnant doesn't mean that they can just sit home for nine months."

R

Rebecca Toal 31:38

This is the thing it's like, well, this is presumably one of like, one of the big reasons why there's so much inequality or there has been so much inequality in female musicians, because there just isn't the support or the understanding out there for what a lot of women go through at some point: being pregnant. And the fact that it's played out so clearly that I mean, it's getting better with female brass players, but there's still ... that it's so unequal. And ...

V

Vic Isfryn 32:05

Just, I think you can probably put stuff that you're going through, that you're ... I love reading your posts, because I think that that's... you're paving a way for people to be able to sit and hopefully let fixers be more understanding of people's situations. Same way as pregnant.

R

Rebecca Toal 32:26

It's exactly the same.

V

Vic Isfryn 32:27

It's just giving people a little bit of leniency with not forcing themselves to go to work. You know, there was times in my first pregnancy, when I was working, that I would literally being sick in a bucket. And I would be having to ... I don't know, like force myself to be okay. Or when I was just so exhausted that I just didn't want to work, but I thought "I can't do that, because that's people seeing a weakness" and... it's not a weakness! It's normal! And it's normal to be able to feel like that. And I just, I don't know, what has to .. Well, I do know what has to change. It's people that are booking, its people in those prominent positions being more understanding. It's so simple, but I don't know why it's not happening.

R

Rebecca Toal 33:19

This might be really hard question but if there were like, three practical things that you wish that you'd had from whoever was employing you, well, not just then, but now! As a pregnant musician, what are some things that people can just practically do to help? I mean, just in your experience?

V

Vic Isfryn 33:37

Well, that is really tough, because I guess you are limited with what type of work. Maybe just like little things like being expected to stand up for a long period of time. Because I don't want to be that person to be like, "Oh, God, I need to sit down now." So I'm forcing myself, but it would just be lovely of someone was like, "Hold on, she's pregnant. Let's just say would you like a seat?" Fine. Leniency to go to the toilet more often. That and not being judged for that. I think I was doing the gig on Saturday, and honestly, lovely fixer, couldn't have been more supportive and it wasn't him at all. It was more my own mind going, but it would have been great if I knew

where the toilets you know, were or just like, even just like at the beginning, just to be like, "Don't worry, just go to the toilet as much as you need." But I suppose maybe that doesn't cross people's minds. So maybe that's my own fault. And I should say that.

R Rebecca Toal 34:35

Yeah, and I don't want to say ... I don't want it to come across wrong, but in the same way that like accessibility, and ableism is like... it... not that pregnancy is a disability, like that's completely the opposite of what I mean, but it's ... people should have to consider these things for a workplace environment.

V Vic Isfryn 34:50

Exactly. 100%. I feel like when you turn up to places, I don't want to have to ask, but I don't want them to be like "Oh, you have to sit down, you have to do that." It's more just a supportive reassurance. Maybe just if a fixer said, "Whatever you need, just let me know. And we'll sort it." Because more if someone said that to me, I'd be like, "okay, brilliant. That's fine. I probably don't need anything. But thank you so much for thinking about it."

R Rebecca Toal 35:21

Yeah, and if you actually did need something, you probably would ask rather than being like "I couldn't possibly ask."

V Vic Isfryn 35:26

Yeah, like, I think there's ... there was times definitely during the first time of me being sick a lot, of just having to not, not talk about it. And just because I was so frightened of people not wanting to book me again, because I was being sick in a bush outside, or in a bucket or in my car.

R Rebecca Toal 35:48

But if the support was there, you wouldn't have to be sick in a bush or a car.

V Vic Isfryn 35:52

it's a really tough one that. But it's... I think, as I said, if I could ask for anything, it would just be a fixer to say, "is everything okay? Do you need anything?" And then you would be like, "I'm all set. Thank you so much."

R Rebecca Toal 36:06

And then I mean, I'm aware that, you know, the difficulties of pregnancy and motherhood, don't stop at the date of birth, like so after the baby is born, how...? I mean, how was it for you going back to work?

V

Vic Isfryn 36:22

So obviously, when you give birth, you're in a hell of a lot of pain. And nothing in my body felt right at all, like...Very graphic but couldn't sit down. I couldn't control my bladder, like I felt, you know, it was just awful,like I had no... it was just a really uneasy time because your body that you know so well, after giving birth is completely different. And you're like, you feel like this 90 year old woman, and you're just like, "ah," and then you've got to look after this baby, then you've got to consider working again. I went back to work really quickly after giving birth to Matty. Luckily, it was for friends. It was people that had known and I'd just given birth. So it wasn't for like fixers that I didn't know or hadn't really worked with before. So I was really supported. But it was hard to play the trumpet. My lip wasn't in. I think the last gig that I'd done was when I got stuck in Cologne. I didn't play at all so I think I hadn't played for about, I want to say like six or seven weeks. And I didn't think about it either and it was lovely. And I just thought, "Okay", and then I remember my first gig back, it was quite a blow. And my lips just collapsed. And I was like, "oh god, how am I going to do this?" But I just ... yeah, you get into a rhythm with it. But your body ... that does take some ... and not fitting into clothes or anything, that was really difficult. But yeah, going back to work was tough. I'm not gonna lie, it was tough. But it does get better with time.

R

Rebecca Toal 38:09

I feel like it ... Well it sounds like the same level of support and just letting people know that there's people there if they ... and they understand if you do want to sit down, you don't want to sit down like all this kind of stuff. It doesn't stop once you're back at work.

V

Vic Isfryn 38:23

Yeah, and obviously you're exhausted because you're feeding a baby in the middle of the night. And it's like ... and I knew I would have to go back to work pretty soon after Matty. So I chose ... I'll probably upset a lot of people here because it's like a taboo you don't talk about but I chose to bottle feed. I didn't want to breastfeed, that was my choice. And that was because I wanted to go back to work. And I'm sure that loads of musician mothers that if they're listening to this, they can say it's possible, and to me in my head, I couldn't get it around, I couldn't get around it. So I chose from the very beginning to bottle feed and it worked for us and I'll do it again. And that to me helped and eased me back into work probably quicker than if I'd decided that "this is me. This is completely me" if I'd I decided to breastfeed as well.

R

Rebecca Toal 39:14

And pardon my ignorance but is that just because it takes such a toll on your body?

V

Vic Isfryn 39:18

I think it was more to do with not being able to leave Matty so I was fully aware and like I know so many musician mums that take their babies to work...

R

Rebecca Toal 39:33

What?!

V

Vic Isfryn 39:33

And I admire them so much, like I hear of stories of women that you know, have their babies with a child minder or their husband or their mums or whatever. And then in rehearsal breaks, they go and feed them and they honestly, to me, are heroes. I'm jealous, really that they have the confidence and guts to do that. But I knew because Cai, my husband is a trumpet player as well, and he's an extremely busy freelance trumpet player. And I knew that that wouldn't be an option for me to have him come to my work, because he would most likely be working as well. I mean, we got a child minder, from a very early age for Matty because we knew the situations. So I knew, for me, breastfeeding just wouldn't be possible. So yeah, that's why I chose to bottle feed.

R

Rebecca Toal 40:28

I don't know anything about it. But I can recognise that that's a brave thing to share.

V

Vic Isfryn 40:33

And I think that was a big secr-... not a secret. I just chose not to speak about it. And everyone assumes you're going to breastfeed. Everybody assumes. So I remember when I was like, heavily pregnant, and I was speaking to my friend and she went: "word of advice." She was like, "Make sure your baby can take a bottle early on, full of breast milk." And I was like, "oh," and then she said, "Because obviously, you'll need to pump" And I was like, "Oh, God. Urr. Okay." And I was so embarrassed that I couldn't say "Well, actually, I'm going to bottle feed" because I didn't want the judgement of people to be like, "Oh, bottle feeding, you don't do that. You breastfeed." Which is crazy, because all my you know, really close friends have been supportive. They don't say anything. They don't even bat an eyelid but I've bottle fed. But I think it's like the stigma of it and you're like, "Oh, my God, I can't possibly say that." But yeah, and I think that's probably another thing that probably needs to be spoke about more is how it's possible to breastfeed while working. Because maybe that would have changed my decision. Who knows, but I mean, I'm going to bottle feed again, because it worked the first time. So I'm, you know, it worked for us as a family. But maybe that someone else can do that?

R

Rebecca Toal 41:51

Well, yeah. And I find it so bizarre in so many other areas, but also this one that musicians know how hard it is to be freelance musicians, or any type of musicians. So then to put your

own template or like assumptions on to child care, which ... and just being a parent, which is seemingly one of the hardest things you could do is like "how... you're not helping anybody."

V

Vic Isfryn 42:14

And everyone says that they "Oh, we don't judge. We don't judge." And I've got to say musicians from my experience, some, only some very small percentage, are some of the most judgmental people that I've ever come across but they're the ones that are like, "but we don't judge. We don't judge here. We don't do it." And it's like, "well, actually, you do!" And I feel like that it's because people have gone down maybe certain path of their career and a path of motherhood and a path of ... they've chosen that and they're like, "Well, it works so why wouldn't you do that?" And it's like, "Well, actually, it doesn't work for everyone." And everyone, as we were talking about at the beginning, you can't put everyone down this narrow thing of being an orchestral musician, or "this is the type of mom you're going to be." It's the biggest wide variety of options ever, and especially put motherhood into that as well.

R

Rebecca Toal 43:08

Yeah, I feel like motherhood and being a musician isn't an area that's been explored that much in comparison to other areas. So of course, like people are trying out new things, there isn't one way to do it. But I also feel like with musicians, because they're such perfectionists, but they're in like, a very liberal environment. There's this thing of like, "Oh, no, we, we don't judge like, but you got to do it perfectly."

V

Vic Isfryn 43:33

Exactly. There's this amazing Facebook group, but it's like a private Facebook group and it's called Muso Mums. And they don't advertise that they're there because it's quite a closed knit group. And you have to be invited to be part of it. And it's probably one of the best groups I've ever joined on Facebook, not only because you are surrounded by like-minded mums, because they're musicians that you can vent about certain things. And you know, it won't go any further. The only thing that I find with it is being - this is what you were saying like, not many people talk about being a mum and a musician it's because I think we all vent there so we don't vent on the outside. Because there's this...you know, we're scared... Well, I was certainly scared before, that if we were to speak out and say how difficult it was that number one, we'd put people off doing it and number two, we wouldn't get booked for work because they'd be like, "oh, we'll give them a break. They'll need sleep. They're tired. They have morning sickness. They are struggling with childcare. They're doing this." So it's almost like you don't want to speak out and you want to be like, "I'm perfect. It's so easy. Book me, I can do it all."

R

Rebecca Toal 44:55

Which again comes back to that like, people assuming what you can and can't do and your own limits of ability.

V

Vic Isfryn 45:01

Yeah, you just aren't speak about it, because of the judgement, what we were saying comes at you. So I, you know, have spoken to so many musicians over the, you know, since having Matty, and especially from the outside, I see some of these, like super mums ... I call them super moms, I don't know if they're struggling or not, because what they put out there is like, they can do it all. And then it makes me think "Why can't I do it all? Why am I having problems with a fixer? Why am I not getting booked? There must be something wrong with me." But actually, it's maybe because that particular person just hasn't spoke up about the troubles that they're having. And I think, obviously, that's like the biggest problem with social media at the minute I think, obviously, people putting up this perception of a perfect life. And it makes it very difficult for people to relate because you're like, "Well, I'm not perfect. And I don't have that."

R

Rebecca Toal 45:58

That's the thing, like you forget that putting stuff out there that you've...not like doctored or anything but just shows this certain angle of your life not only makes it harder for you next time to share something difficult, but then makes it difficult for other people to share something difficult. And it all just goes round in a cycle

V

Vic Isfryn 46:18

It is! But it's exactly the same with what you're trying to do now is trying to tell people, because I haven't read that many people's posts about suffering and dealing with mental health issues as a musician. And it is so ... it makes me feel okay, that you will feel like that as a person, because you're like, "Oh, my God" not "thank God someone else is going through that..."

R

Rebecca Toal 46:48

No, no, I understand!

V

Vic Isfryn 46:50

Like, oh my God, I ... this is completely fine. And I am not happy that someone's feeling sad or going through it, but also like, you, you just want that... It's like a comfort blanket. And I think that's what's missing from so many situations of being a musician is there's not many comfort blankets, because no one dares... "God, how dare you say that you're having a bad day?" Like...

R

Rebecca Toal 47:19

Yeah. And we're all freelancing, like, we're all our own little bubbles, and it's really hard to feel not alone in that.

V Vic Isfryn 47:28
Yeah, it really is. But...

R Rebecca Toal 47:31
Well, honestly, thank you so much for talking so openly and so wonderfully about all these things that I just have never experienced, and like I was saying before I think we recorded like, I've been trying to find people to talk about pregnancy discrimination, or just this kind of topic for ages. But you can't necessarily just go up to someone that's pregnant and be like "How are you feeling about your career right now?"

V Vic Isfryn 47:52
Yeah, because that's probably... they're like, "Perfect. My life is perfect!"

R Rebecca Toal 47:56
Yeah, why? What have you heard?!

V Vic Isfryn 47:58
No one really wants to say anything, but ... Yeah, as we keep saying, it's just better to be open and honest. And if people don't like it, they don't like it. And ... would I want to work for them anyway? The answer's yes. No, I'm joking. No, it's definitely not I don't ...

R Rebecca Toal 48:12
Yeah! Please!

V Vic Isfryn 48:14
Give me the gig! Fingers crossed that you're doing... Yeah well, you are. You're doing amazingly and with especially with this podcast, it's just so refreshing to hear. I love the last one. I really loved it. Was it Jocelyn, Jocelyn Lightfoot?

R Rebecca Toal 48:30
She was amazing.

V Vic Isfryn 48:32

Yeah, like, really amazing. So I really enjoyed that. I also have to say your theme tune...



Rebecca Toal 48:39

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