



Drake Music

@

Music Mark 2020



SUPPORTING
CONNECTING
INFLUENCING

**Reflections on issues in Music Ed
from Disabled Musicians**

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Think22 @ Music Mark

We regularly attend the Annual Music Mark conference. It's an excellent way to take the temperature of the sector, to keep up to date with discussions and to connect with our peers, friends and colleagues across Music Education.

We've also been lucky enough over the years to host sessions and even Keynote the event. A few links here, for anyone who wants to step back in time:

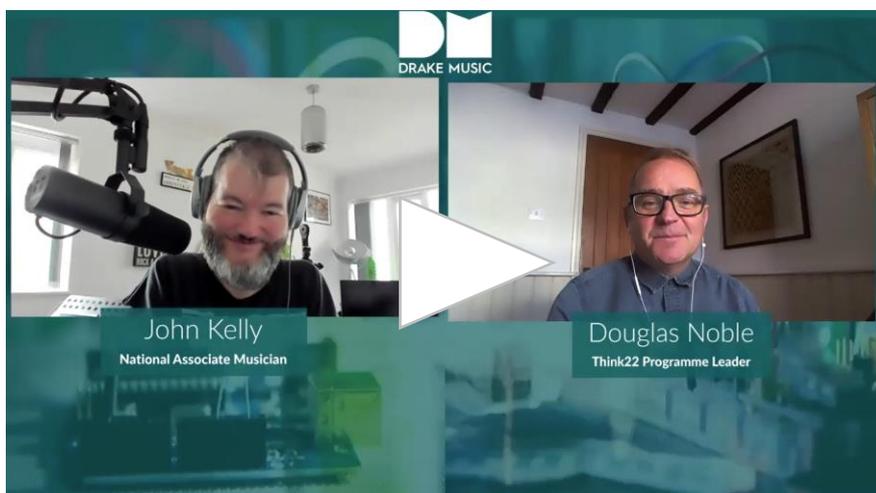
- [John Kelly's Keynote Speech](#) (2018)
- [Kris Halpin's blog on a DM Music Mark workshop](#) (2016)
- [The inaugural Music Mark conference](#) (2013)

Music Mark 2020

This year things were inevitably different, and inevitably digital. We led a session reflecting on this year of online provision and we invited some of our Associate Musicians to join us at the event and share their responses with us after – keep reading to hear from talented Disabled music leaders about their takes on some of the topics discussed at the conference.

Think22 Vlog

We led our session as an interactive opportunity to think back over this year and discuss what we have learned and will take forward. Find out more in our vlog. Plus you can [read - and add to - our shared online document](#) capturing the changes we've all experienced and ideas for which things we want to embed into our practice.



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Sarah Fisher – Associate Musician

20th November 2020, it's that time of year when the Music Mark annual conference happens! But, this time, it was delivered through the new norm, of a virtual conference. So, it was time to sit back in my office chair, and get ready for a day of music related presentations and discussions, including Drake Music's session - The role of online provision Music Education in inclusive and accessible music education.

After the initial welcome from Yolanda Brown and Bridget Whyte, the day began with a keynote from Dr Julia Jones (aka Dr Rock) on music and neuroscience.

Coming from a background in sports science, Dr Rock went on to study and use music, with Olympic teams to maximise performance through lowering anxiety and boosting motivation in the athletes. One point that Dr Rock highlighted, was that the power of music is still overlooked today, despite the increasing evidence being found to show the impact it can have. For example, in people with dementia, frequently, the last thing left is their musical memories, and this is a way to communicate with the person. Although these memories are there throughout our whole lives they become more prevalent in those with dementia.

Following this keynote we were all warmed up by Ollie from Beat Goes On through some body percussion exercises. It definitely felt a bit weird not doing it alongside others in a big room! But, as we know, this seems to be the new norm!

OPEN ORCHESTRA

After this warm up, it was time to go to different sessions and hear from different organisations and establishments. One session that I attended was from Jonathan Westrup and Hannah Swarbrick from Open Orchestra – their session was on Evidencing the benefits of ensemble music making for disabled young people, which is something that resonates a lot with me, and my experiences and work I do today.

From watching a brief video of a participant who used a head tracker and eye gaze in music sessions they were then able to use this in other lessons, benefiting their learning overall.

Other benefits, which resonated with me, were the chance to play with others, and not be segregated or left out due to being disabled.



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The repertoire is built on through the participants choice and interests – it is young person centred, which gives each individual and group their own autonomy over the music, which can lead on to more independence and a sense of ownership.

As well as this, they are able to build their musicianship skills, especially as Open Orchestras provide a sustained period of project sessions, allowing the students to build on the skills over time. This advancement of musical skills can lead on to build access for post-18 life. This, again, is something prevalent in my work and experience. As much as it can be hard for those of us with disabilities in education doing music (especially those in mainstream education), having the skills and ability to develop this outside of school, when there is often less support around, is a great bonus and the benefits are wide ranging.

As well as the personal achievements, the participants have the chance to perform to audiences, both as large shows, and more intimate, informal sharing with teachers and parents, which is (usually) always such a rewarding experience, for all attending!

Near the end of the day, we - Drake Music - had our session and we discussed some of the challenges and experiences we have had from delivering online music sessions this year due to Covid-19. It provided a chance for those that attended the session to raise points and discuss these in more detail and, hopefully, provided useful information for those interested in providing more music-based work in an online capacity, especially within disability settings.

To end our day, the DM team had a debrief on good ol' Zoom to chat and catch up about how the day had gone. It was a fun, enlightening day.

Hopefully sometime soon, we'll be able to see each other as more than just one small box on a screen though eh!?



Sarah Fisher, Nov 2020

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Kris Halpin – Associate Musician

I've attended Music Mark with Drake Music many times, and it's always a good day. It's normally a nice rarity to have a sector event almost on my doorstep; Music Mark usually takes place in Kenilworth, here in sunny Warwickshire.

This year's event, of course, couldn't be more on my doorstep - this being 2020, it was another virtual event. Another day, another Zoom meeting.

I've made no secret of the fact that I find online events way more difficult than I previously imagined. It all seems very convenient, especially as someone who spends a lot of time on the motorway between the Midlands and London. Work from home? What could be easier? Turns out, most things.

By now I think many professionals are familiar with the term Zoom Fatigue - that strange, exhausting feeling that comes from being online for long periods of time. There's lots of reasons and ideas around why this happens - certainly more than I can get into here. Suffice to say, the 2020 model of working is much more tiring than it first appears.

With that in mind, I was wary of spending most of the day at an online conference. I have to say however, given the restrictions, Music Mark had done a very impressive job. The bespoke website for the event was very well designed and thought out, and the scheduling of the various Zoom sessions was very clear. YoLanda Brown was an inspired choice for a presenter; I've attended events hosted by her before, and she did a fantastic job of pulling the whole thing together.

DR ROCK

The first event I attended was with Julia "Dr. Rock" Jones, author of *The Music Diet*. Starting out in the field of Sports Science, Dr. Jones has studied the neurology and psychology around music consumption and its effects on the brain. This session was a real deep dive into how the brain works and how music influences our brain activity - heavy but exciting stuff.

The science is beyond my ability to unpack here, but the overarching message is simple - music is hugely important to our wellbeing, and has been for a very long time. Dr. Jones referred to the earliest musical instruments, dating back some 40,000 years. Music is inherent to who we are, and protecting it, especially in these difficult times and especially for young people, is vital.



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LEWISHAM MUSIC SERVICE

Another interesting session, led by Max Wheeler and Charly Richardson of Lewisham Music Service, was “*Wot U Call it?*” An exploration of rap music in the context of music education. This was another fascinating deep dive into a subject; both Max and Charly are incredibly knowledgeable and clearly huge fans of rap music. One interesting point that came from the session - the pair were criticised by one attendee for the fact that two white people were discussing Black music. Charly acknowledged the problem, and in my opinion, responded very well and thoughtfully. He pointed to his own white privilege giving him the platform to speak about the subject at a conference, and the need to step aside for black voices in the future. But, he pointed out, as much as we don't like it, we're not there yet.

This idea resonated with me for a different reason. I've encountered friction for using the term “Disabled Musician” - people challenge me with something like “*Why aren't you just a Musician?*”. Some people see the term as unnecessary; after all - why isn't it just about the music? But the playing field isn't level yet, and I'm in a group that is poorly represented and understood. I hope there'll be a time when I can “just” be a musician, but for now - like it or not - I'm a disabled one. We're just not there yet.

Charley & Max were keen to engage with the problem of White Privilege in music education, but it will ultimately take those privileged voices to have the self-awareness to make space for underrepresented groups. Charley & Max represented that allyship thoughtfully.

DM SESSION

In the afternoon I made a small contribution to the Drake Music session led by Douglas Noble & John Kelly on the role of *Online Provision in Music Education*. This topic is arguably the headline of the sector in 2020. The Coronavirus pandemic has had a previously unimaginable impact on the sector. With lockdowns and social distancing in force, it's been mostly impossible to deliver traditional sessions, and moving online is something we've all had to adjust to.

I make no secret of the fact; I really find online delivery very difficult. That's not to say it can't be successful - I believe I've had many wins - but it is nonetheless a huge challenge. So many aspects of the connections we rely on to deliver good work are now limited or removed altogether. The obvious stuff, like playing music in a room with people, is of course gone, but I realise how important the fine details were; body language, rapport, energy - all things difficult to read or find in the confines of a

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Zoom call. But why is online delivery so difficult? This session set out to unbox one of the problems. Some of the key headlines that emerged were:

- **Online sessions can be exhausting “Zoom Fatigue”** - structuring sessions that acknowledge the extra fatigue. In longer sessions I personally implement Screen Time breaks, where every participants takes 5 minutes away from there screen (I do encourage people not to check their phones in this time!)
- **Time feels different in the virtual world** - The natural pace of a session is often not obvious. Real world sessions often fall into a tempo that is absent on Zoom.
- **Group size** - Working in smaller groups can definitely help. I’ve led music sessions with maybe 15-20 young people. A manageable task in a “real world” session, but impossible to manage digitally.

Our hosts handed over to musicians in the sector, including as myself, Sarah Fisher and other DM associates to talk about the impact 2020 has had on our work. It’s been incredibly hard for everyone. In some ways I know I’ve been relatively fortunate; tiring as I find it, moving to online delivery has been largely frictionless. Sarah Fisher raised some good points about the many new access barriers online delivery creates; it’s nowhere near as simple as “just” doing it online. I work with young people who find it very difficult to remain engaged with an online session, and understandably so. It’s difficult to know what the future holds, and - if anything - I felt the most important part of the Drake Music session was simply the chance for music leaders to take a breath and talk about the impact all this has had. That shared experience, with understanding peers, was very valuable.

Under very trying circumstances, I feel that Music Mark 2020 went as well as possible, and the passion and expertise of the presenters was evident throughout. The sector has been hit incredibly hard by the pandemic, that much is clear. But even the hardest hit remain resilient. Music is vitally important, to us as music leaders and to the young people we work with. I haven’t met a musician who hasn’t been impacted this year, but I haven’t met one who has given up either. No matter how hard the circumstances, the music has to Play On.



Kris Halpin, Nov 2020

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Sonia Allori

At the Music Mark Conference 2020 I attended the following presentation:

“Can Compose - A panel discussion on Composition with Judith Robinson (Sound & Music)”.

As a deaf and disabled composer, I'm always interested to learn more about how creative music composition can be taught and encouraged in schools. This panel discussion, led by Judith Robinson from Sound & Music, was an interesting mix of music practitioners and leaders, composers, university music students and young people studying music in school. I enjoyed the broad range of the opinions and the work discussed, but would have loved to see the inclusion of a D/deaf or disabled composer or educator or practitioner in the mix.

The panel members were each asked what composing meant to them and the answers were insightful and delightful!

Here are a few examples:

“Composition is asking questions”; “Composition is your voice in the world”; “Composition is like food, keep experimenting”; “Composition is recapturing a memory”; “Composition is saying something, sometimes about things that go beyond words”.

When I think back to being a fledgling composer at school, many moons ago, there seemed to be a lot of rules to follow and - although it's good to learn from the past in order to learn and be inspired and to create the new - the repertoire of examples back then was woefully slim pickings Western classical music and a smidgeon of world music.

I have no doubt that all of these years later things will have improved, but it was good to hear about what's happening currently with composition in the music curriculum and to discuss the notion that some classroom music teachers might still be a bit afraid of it!?

Learning and communicating has for all of us been changed as we progress through the pandemic. This has brought many things to light, including the need for more inclusion and transparency, but also highlighting digital poverty.

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In learning how to write music there is the need for young people to have platforms to connect and share what they think about and what they create that goes beyond the, sometimes oppressive, peer-pressure model of social media.

Ideas that circulated in the panel included:

- the importance of having more artists and composers embedded in schools to breathe life into the curriculum;
- for there to be a more visible network of young composers;
- to have more informal music industry connections and relationships and learning;
- for music teachers to have easier routes into finding out about current and future music opportunities available in their own geographical areas and beyond

The transferrable skills of being involved in the arts and in making music at school have long been discussed and range from self-expression, increased confidence and means of communicating, to reinforcing interaction and collaboration.

Young people need sounds to inspire them and hopefully the music curriculum can evolve to allow more freedom of expression and individuality where they can develop their own musical voices. Can educational spheres find creative parameters to include more diversity, and the tools to measure and identify these?



Sonia Allori, Nov 2020

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Oliver Cross – Associate Musician



Since the pandemic started, I haven't left the house for work or to meet anyone, so it was good to have an invitation to attend Music Mark 20 Conference online on behalf of Drake Music. As a neuro-divergent person, I enjoy in person conferences, but I find them challenging, especially if I don't really know anybody there. I find the element of social interaction with new people hard and it can cause me real anxiety. It can also be very tiring and hard to process all the information from multiple presentations in a day. As part of my access arrangements, I had note takers at school and university so without a similar facility I've come away from conferences in the past with the feeling that I've heard good things, but also struggling to remember much about it.

MUSIC MARK DIGITAL CONFERENCE

One of the really good things about this conference was that the pre-event information was very good. I was able to plan all the webinars I wanted to attend and not have to worry about moving around the conference space to find things. There was a good choice of content and a really strong focus on things I was interested in, in particular inclusive music projects. For me the best part about this online conference was that all of the material was available on their site after the event. This



means that I can interact with the content in my own time and at my own pace. It's a game changer for me and from now on, I hope all conferences will do this.

SOUTHERN MUSIC HUB ALLIANCE

I've watched the session on Psychological Evaluation of Music-Making Experiences of Young People Before and During Covid-19 Pandemic back several times now. It is based on a study done by a partnership involving Southern Music Hub Alliance and the University of Sussex and it really resonated with me because of the work I had done with the Essex Inclusion Collective, a partnership between Drake Music, Essex Music Education Hub and Youth Music. I'm not an academic but the key findings for me were that music education does have a positive effect on young people's sense of wellbeing and their sense of connection to each other giving them a real sense of community. This was particularly the case with disabled young people who benefited from being able to make choices about what music they played.

I could relate to those results as it was very much what I and the other staff members found with the Essex Inclusion Collective. It is so important that the Brighton study shows how to turn these positive feelings about music projects into evidence, vital if we want them to grow. We need to have positive results evidenced in order to get funding so that all young people can have access to inclusive music projects.

If you would like to know more about the on Psychological Evaluation of Music-Making Experiences of Young People Before and During Covid-19 Pandemic. [Here is a blog by the author Marusa Levstek \(@LevstekMarusa\)](#) and [ResearchGate](#).

If you would like to know more about the Essex Inclusion Collective, you can [find some great videos from the people involved in the project on the DM site](#).



Oliver Cross, Nov 2020

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