“Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers: A Comparative Study of Beginners and Experienced Improvisers”

Module Six (BMPF7010)

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“Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers: A Comparative Study of Beginners and Experienced Improvisers”

Project Proposal

Context & Position

My work as a vocal coach takes place across diverse settings, with a broad range of clientele. For example, one day I may be teaching at an independent mixed boarding school, and the next working in a youth centre located within the top 10% of the most deprived areas in the UK. Within this, I also operate my own vocal studio where I work with clients of all ages, genders, and levels of experience. Regardless of the context, the aim of my work remains the same: to empower my students with the skills, technique, and experience they need to achieve their aims as singers. These aims can vary significantly, but most commonly, I work with ambitious, teenage girls, who may be considering working professionally, or who will want to work towards exams and performances. Therefore, this will be a cross-contextual study.

Improvisation is a core component of my teaching practice, as I specialise in Contemporary Commercial Music. It is also a required element of both Rock School Limited and Trinity Rock and Pop singing exams. Within this outcome-focussed context, it has proven to be emotionally complex for students across the board. This research will aim to provide strategies to best support students with this element of musicianship.

This research will not be situated directly as part of my teaching process. However, I will select a small sample of female teenagers (13 – 19 years old) for interviews, from both within and outside of my pool of students. Interviews will occur outside of lesson time.

Justification

Not only is improvisation a component of CCM singing exams, but it is considered a necessary skill for the working vocalist (Wasbotten, 2022). More importantly, however, is that the ability to improvise is thought to contribute to a freedom of musical expression (Biasutti, 2015). Furthermore, something unique can occur during improvisation: a sense of 'flow', in which an individual reaches a state of total creative concentration and fluidity, in which expression goes beyond the idea of the 'self' (Forbes, 2020). In these moments a deeply meaningful connection with other musicians can be achieved (Landau & Limb, 2017).

Considering this, it is of little surprise that improvisation is often described as a mitigating technique for Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) (Heasman-Cossins, et al., 2025; Wang & Kim, 2025). Improvisation requires an inherent ability to be flexible, and vulnerable, and students must learn to "Accept, Adjust, and Adapt" to successfully master the skill (Robertson, 2023, p. 8); developing these skills is regularly cited as a means of combatting the symptoms of MPA (Osborne, *et al*., 2014; Juncos, *et al.*, 2017). Collectively, this body of literature presents a strong case for integrating improvisation within my pedagogical practice, particularly in cases where MPA is prevalent. This is fortified when considering evidence that suggests teenage girls (the demographic I most commonly work with), in particular, are susceptible to the symptoms of MPA (Papageorgi, 2021; Papageorgi, 2022; Ananias de Lima, et al., 2024; Thomas & Nettelbeck, 2013; Alexander, 2012; Wehr-Flowers, 2006).

I have made a concerted effort to incorporate improvisation into my teaching practice, due to the benefits previously discussed. However, the outcomes described in these studies conflict with my own pedagogical experience. When teaching improvisation I am often met with apathy, anxiousness and behaviours

which imply MPA (including crying, laughing or total refusal to engage), and these are behaviours often cited in the literature (Engelsdorfer, 2018).

I explored this apparent paradox in my previous research and concluded that there were contexts in which both conditions could be true. However, the lack of research that specifically focussed on the adolescent female demographic made it more of a challenge to identify the conditions in which improvisation might exacerbate or mitigate the effects of MPA. Furthermore, the two key papers that conducted research on improvisation as a mitigating factor for MPA (Heasman-Cossins, et al., 2025; Wang & Kim, 2025) conducted the research under conditions that would be difficult to replicate in an educational context, for this demographic. This highlights the need to examine how improvisation functions within outcome-focused educational settings, particularly for adolescent females who are statistically more susceptible to MPA. Hearing the voices of this underrepresented demographic, alongside those who have navigated the learning process of improvisation, may help to identify the contextual and psychosocial conditions under which improvisation functions as either a mitigating or exacerbating factor for MPA.

Intended Impact

- To generate an insight into the experiences and attitudes of professional, female, singers when learning improvisation
- To contribute to the experiences and attitudes of adolescent, female singers as they learn to improvise.
- To advocate for the adolescent female voice within the wider academic lexicon.
- Develop a framework to identify the conditions under which improvisation may cause or mitigate symptoms of MPA.

- To develop a pedagogical strategy to ensure improvisation can be accessible to all my students.

Outlined Intention

At the core of this research, is the assumption that knowledge is constructed through lived experience, meaning it is possible for multiple truths to coexist (Mounce, 1997; Crotty, 1998). This reflects the relativist ontological position (Easterby-Smith, 2012). The aim of this research, therefore, isn't to identify one, singular outcome, but to present an insight into the experiences of participants; there will be an inherent understanding, therefore, that truth is transitory, coming in and out of existence depending on experience.

There two elements to this research. On the one hand, it is situated firmly within the Interpretivist framework; it does not seek to find definitive answers, but to enhance our understanding, making sense of our experiences as conscious beings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). However, there is also an element of the transformative approach within this study. It has been acknowledged that there is limited research into the adolescent female demographic within vocal pedagogical research (McRoy, 2026). Furthermore, research into improvisation often focusses upon the experiences of instrumentalists (Hargreaves, 2014), with singers often being viewed as "not fundamental to jazz as "serious" art" (Pellegrinelli, et al., 2021). Within the jazz sphere, women are also most present as vocalists, with there being a drastic disparity between male and female instrumentalists within both professional and pedagogical jazz environments (Wehr, 2016). This may indicate that it is not a simple coincidence that research in vocal improvisation is lacking, but that there is a gendered element to the exclusion of this data within the research dialogue. Therefore, this research intentionally centres this underrepresented demographic, in order to improve vocal education at all levels.

I will achieve this through the use of:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with adolescent girls. This will allow me to gain an in depth understanding of the lived experience of participants (Al Balushi, 2016).
- **Semi-Structured Interviews** with professional musicians (vocalists). This will allow me to hear about their learning experiences, and current experiences in the world as improvisers to help identify the contexts best suited for pedagogical improvisation.
- **Analysis** will then take place within the Hermeneutic phenomenological framework, drawing from my experience with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) I will code and analyse the results with full awareness of my own role within the research.
- **Narrative Literature Review** using hermeneutic principles; recognising that literature synthesis is, in itself an interpretive act shaped by my bias and positioning. (Winter, 2020).

Individual Learning Outcomes

- Develop my ability to successfully deliver a research report, including, though not limited to, developing administrative, analytical and writing skills.
- Develop pedagogical confidence when teaching, not only improvisation, but all elements of singing that can emotionally challenge students.
- Develop strategies to safely introduce improvisation to students for whom it may induce anxiousness.

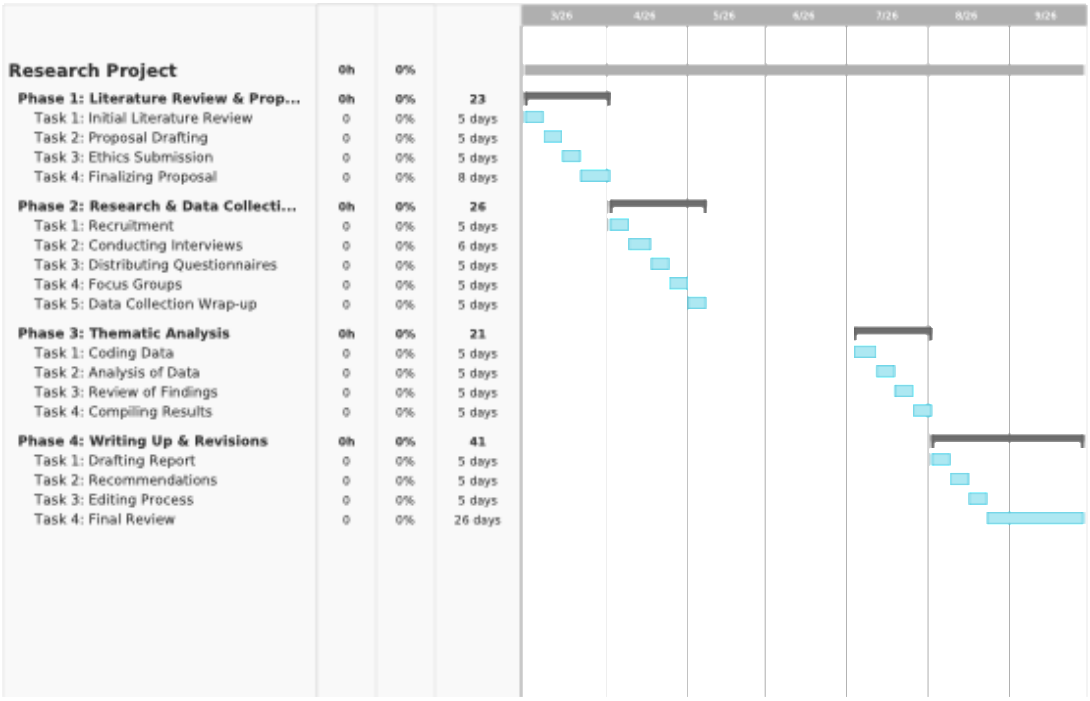
Ethics & Insider Research

Whilst this research is shaped around my own experience as a vocal pedagogue, it is imperative that I maintain a reflexive approach (Galdas, 2017) to ensure my

research does not become a “well-composed rhetoric of a well-meaning, but **biased**, researcher’s opinion” (Thirsk & Clark, 2017, p. 4). This would be a disservice to the demographic that I am hoping to serve with this research. Reflexivity is “essential for good qualitative research” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 37), and I will endeavour outline when my own experience is relevant to my research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Maintaining a reflexive journal, and discussing my research with my tutor will help me to achieve this.

I must also pay due diligence with regards to power dynamics with interview participants. Due to the timescale of the project, it will be necessary to interview my own students. Students may consider participation to be a “requirement” (Humphrey, 2013). I will take time, therefore, to reassure students that participation is entirely voluntary, and that consent can be withdrawn at any stage of the process. Selection of participants from my student pool also presents an ethical quandary when considering the wider narrative of the piece. My experience with my students is the catalyst for this research; there is an ethical dilemma therefore, in participant selection. I must be aware of not only selecting students whose experience reflects my current narrative of this phenomenon. There is a spectrum of experience with regards to the improvisation learning process. I must be careful not to select students who sit at the most extreme end of that spectrum as this may lead to a report that sensationalises the experience. To counter this, I will aim to sit comfortably within the unknown and find participants from outside my own network, whose experience will be completely new to me.

Gantt Chart



Research Project	**0h**	**0%**	
Phase 1: Literature Review & Prop...	**0h**	**0%**	**23**
Task 1: Initial Literature Review	0	0%	5 days
Task 2: Proposal Drafting	0	0%	5 days
Task 3: Ethics Submission	0	0%	5 days
Task 4: Finalizing Proposal	0	0%	8 days
Phase 2: Research & Data Collecti...	**0h**	**0%**	**26**
Task 1: Recruitment	0	0%	5 days
Task 2: Conducting Interviews	0	0%	6 days
Task 3: Distributing Questionnaires	0	0%	5 days
Task 4: Focus Groups	0	0%	5 days
Task 5: Data Collection Wrap-up	0	0%	5 days
Phase 3: Thematic Analysis	**0h**	**0%**	**21**
Task 1: Coding Data	0	0%	5 days
Task 2: Analysis of Data	0	0%	5 days
Task 3: Review of Findings	0	0%	5 days
Task 4: Compiling Results	0	0%	5 days
Phase 4: Writing Up & Revisions	**0h**	**0%**	**41**
Task 1: Drafting Report	0	0%	5 days
Task 2: Recommendations	0	0%	5 days
Task 3: Editing Process	0	0%	5 days
Task 4: Final Review	0	0%	26 days

Project Report

“Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers: A Comparative Study of Beginners and Experienced Improvisers”

Introduction

Having studied for a BMus in Jazz Vocals at a UK conservatoire, improvisation has been a core part of my professional and personal practice. However, my relationship with the task is complex; it was not something I was taught as a child, or teenager, meaning I arrived to university with little experience. Though my natural ability carried me so far, I felt the curriculum was not suited to singers, which led to experiences of real humiliation. I was once asked, for example, to solo over the changes to a jazz standard with no accompaniment, illustrating the harmony. Whilst my instrumentalist peers were able to do this with little trouble, I, being the only singer in the room, was left totally at sea. I was admonished for not being at a good enough standard for fourth year (despite graduating months later with a 1st), and left the classroom in tears.

Whilst this teacher did apologise, this situation contextualises the environment in which my improvisational learning took place. Though I gained insight within my 1-2-1 lessons, the negative experiences instilled a sense of inferiority. This led me to believe that it was my experience of improvisation that caused my own MPA. I was surprised therefore, to see how insecure it appeared to make my students, most of whom are adolescent girls, particularly as my approach to teaching is holistic in nature (Chapman, 2016), with an equal focus on wellbeing and ambition, depending on student need.

The aim of this research, therefore, is to garner insight into what these needs might be through centring teenage girls' experiences of improvisation. The focus upon adolescent girls is deliberate; despite the fact teenage girls are more likely to sing, there is a deficit of research into their voice development and experiences within the academic lexicon (McRoy, 2026). When considering the motivations behind this research, and the presentation of its findings, a transformative orientation is taken (Mertens, 2007), aiming to highlight the voices of an underrepresented demographic who have, until now, been structurally excluded from the research. This sits alongside an interpretivist approach to the data itself, in which multiple, even conflicting, truths are treated as equally valid; the transformative stance shapes why this research was undertaken and how its findings are presented, whilst the interpretivist stance governs how participant experiences are gathered and understood. This research therefore hopes, in sharing the voices of this underrepresented demographic, to encourage pedagogical advocacy and change

Literature Review

Conceptualising Improvisation

Within academic circles, the term 'improvisation' is discussed in many ways, meaning the act's true significance can only be derived when considering the context and intention with which it is used. A spectrum exists, across which numerous improvisational frameworks sit, each accommodating different forms of spontaneous music creation (Azzara, 1992; 2002; Kratus, 1990). For example, within a therapeutic context, the intention is not to 'make good music'… but rather to 'create an intimate interpersonal relationship between therapist and client, through the musical event' (Pavlicevic, 2000, p. 272), and the therapeutic language used within this exchange is studied closely as part of that process. Making good music, however, is an essential outcome of improvisation in a non-clinical context in which a learnt, musical language is used to communicate and explore musical

boundaries (Brown & Pavlicevic, 1997; Pavlicevic, 2000; Menezes, 2010; Atkinson, 2020).

These two examples represent either end of the “improvisational spectrum”, across which, sit various frameworks that have a vast impact upon pedagogical approaches to improvisation. For example, Heasman-Coussins *et al’s.*, (2025), study which explores the use of vocal improvisation as a means of mitigating MPA, sit in between these two extremes. The process was pedagogical in nature; participants developed aural skills, learnt musical licks, and practiced improvisation within a melodic, rhythmic and harmonic framework. However, the intended outcome could be described as therapeutic in nature; whilst one participant expressed an increase in self-efficacy due to skill acquisition, the musical ability of participants was not formally assessed.

Improvisation and Vocal Pedagogy

This raises a wider, philosophical, pedagogical and ethical question for vocal coaches: what is our role as a vocal coach? And what should our aims be, when using improvisation in the vocal studio? Even from a pedagogical angle, it is impossible to ignore the impact emotional wellbeing and personality can have upon an individual’s ability to develop vocal techniques. For example, stress-induced muscular tension has been linked to voice disorders such as vocal nodules and Muscle Tension Dysphonia (Çakmur, 2020; Yosunkaya, 2021; Hölmqvist, et al., 2013), whilst perfectionism and trauma have also been shown to impact vocal function (González-Sanvisens, et al., 2026; Monti, et al., 2017), recommending that psychological factors be addressed as part of vocal training

This links to the concept of a *holistic* pedagogical approach (Chapman, 2016; Chapman & Morris, 2023; Sell, 2003). This approach encourages teachers to create a safe and open dialogue with students, recognising that, to master the full palette of the voice, one must understand one’s emotional map. Using this

approach can reveal medical, physical or psychosocial challenges, meaning teachers are, in many ways, first aid responders in these situations; teachers may need “to assume a role other than vocal technician in order to help students find the resources or help that they need” (Brand, 2016, p. 15). However, care must be taken to ensure lessons don’t become “counselling sessions of the unburdening-of-the-soul type” (Sell, 2003, p. 60) in which the *singing* element of the lesson is lost. Maintaining this balance is both an ethical, though (considering the unregulated nature of the industry (Norton, et al., 2019)) extremely challenging, imperative for vocal coaches.

It is important, however, to consider this through another lens. Research into the benefits of singing for wellbeing is well established: singing has been shown to reduce cortisol levels (Fancourt, *et al*., 2015) and to have a positive impact on self-identity; as Bannan (2000, p. 300) writes, “singing we are brought into the world, and through singing we make sense of it”. This is certainly echoed in Grape *et al.,*’s (2003, p. 65) in which, for amateur vocalists, singing lessons were a means of “self-actualization and self-expression as a way to release emotional tensions”. This suggests that many amateur vocalists (teenage girls falling into that bracket), come to singing lessons for *therapeutic* purposes. However, there is an ethical imperative to ensure singing remains the central focus of the session (Sell, 2003), particularly for this demographic; though they are not professional *yet,* for some, this may become the case. The singing teacher’s role, therefore, is stretched across the spectrum of vocal development at one end, and creative expression, and wellbeing, at the other. It is when pedagogical strategies are used for therapeutic purposes that teachers risk entering uncharted territory which places their student’s emotional wellbeing at risk.

Improvisation, an act that can be both pedagogical and therapeutic in nature, exemplifies this tension. Within my own practice, I have seen the emotional challenges that improvisation presents when used pedagogically. Further challenges may arise, therefore, when teachers look to use pedagogical

improvisation for psychosocial gain. For example, if using improvisation to mitigate the symptoms of MPA, teachers risk using an emotionally triggering exercise with a vulnerable person, who may be, knowingly or otherwise, seeking out a therapeutic relationship. It is at this stage, that teachers may find themselves operating without the sufficient framework required to safely manage that situation (Pavlicevic, 2000). The question of *what* improvisation is, therefore, cannot be separated from the question of *who* is doing it, with *whom*, and with *what* intended outcomes. To understand why improvisation elicits such varied outcomes, it is necessary to garner insight into the neurological, psychological, and cognitive processes that underpin both MPA and improvisation, as these are the mechanisms that fundamentally determine the contextually dependent relationship between the two experiences.

The Dynamic Relationship Between Improvisation and MPA

There is an apparent contradiction within the literature, surrounding the relationship between MPA and improvisation. At one end of the spectrum, there are studies that suggest the teaching of improvisation can *mitigate* the experience of MPA (Heasman-Cossins, et al., 2025; Wang & Kim, 2025). At the other, there is research that recognises that improvisation can be a *causal* factor for MPA (Root, 2021; Hirschorn, 2011; Wehr-Flowers, 2006; Alexander, 2012; Engelsdorfer, 2018). However, the term “paradox” feels, in some way diminutive. This study conceptualises that the relationship between MPA and improvisation is dynamic and contextually constructed, in which the psychological impact of improvisation is dependent upon the circumstances.

In order to explore this relationship in its entirety, it is necessary to briefly outline MPA. MPA sits along a continuum, and is experienced in many ways, and in numerous contexts (Kenny, 2011). MPA can manifest mentally (experiences of anxiety, and cognitive impacts, such as memory failures), physiologically (increased heart rates, sweating), and behaviourally (shaking, poor performance

quality) (Irie, et al., 2023; Burin & Osório, 2017). Often, it is linked to perfectionism, low self-esteem and the fear of evaluation or judgement (Mei-Yuk, 2011; Burin & Osório, 2017; Thomas & Nettelbeck, 2013). It is important not to reduce MPA down to the extremes, in which the symptoms can lead to a total breakdown of a public performance. It is necessary to recognise that MPA can occur a one-to-one teaching setting, as this is a context that is central to young musicians' development (Gaunt, 2006). If an exercise within the learning space can trigger MPA, it follows that the student's relationship with that space can be negatively impacted. Conversely, if it can improve the symptoms of MPA, then it would feel a loss to not incorporate it as a tool within pedagogical practice.

The Neurological Structures of Improvisation and MPA

The dynamic relationship between improvisation and MPA can be reinforced with a greater understanding of the neurological processes behind the two phenomena. Symptoms of MPA (which are mental, behavioural and physiological (Burin & Osório, 2017; Irie, et al., 2023) in nature) can be explained by the neurological processes that occur. Under MPA, the amygdala becomes activated (Moreno-Gutiérrez, et al., 2023; Yoshie, et al., 2009). When this occurs, there is a two-tiered impact (Kim & Gorman, 2005). On the one hand, the amygdala fires upwards, impacting the prefrontal cortex. This includes the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC) which shows increased neuronal activity under anxiety. This is responsible for regulating emotions, specifically fear (White, et al., 2023; Mathew, et al., 2004), self-monitoring and psychological processing (Mathew, et al., 2004; Kim & Gorman, 2005). This triggers mental symptoms of MPA; such as the shift away from task focus, and towards a hyper sense of self-awareness under evaluative conditions (Osborne & Franklin, 2002; Irie, et al., 2023). Kim and Gorman's study does not directly address MPA, but anxiety more generally, and as Kenny (2011) argues, one should avoid total conflation of MPA and other anxiety disorders (such as Social Anxiety Disorder, or General Anxiety Disorder). However, the neurological parallels between the two conditions are nonetheless illuminating.

On the other, the amygdala also fires down to the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) Axis. This triggers the body's physiological stress response, which includes disruption of fine motor skills (Yoshie, et al., 2009). This could perhaps explain the impairment of performance quality that occurs because of MPA (Irie, et al., 2023). Whilst Yoshie *et al's.,* (2009) study focusses on pianists, the impairment upon fine motor skills is relevant to vocalists; trained singers have undergone years of sensory motor training in order to achieve extensive vocal agility, through a highly complex biomechanical instrument that lives *within* the body (Zarate, 2013). Even minor disruptions to this complex network would impact the singer's vocal output.

Though an exploration into the neurological processes behind MPA may feel far-fetched in the context of this study, the neurological process behind MPA is *diametrically opposed* to the process that occurs under improvisation. This could mean that improvisation is the perfect antidote to MPA (Heasman-Cossins, et al., 2025; Wang & Kim, 2025). Alternatively, it could mean that they are opposing and incompatible states. A study that used functional neuro imaging to explore brain activity during improvisation with 6 skilled jazz pianists, revealed that the dlPFC was deactivated during improvisation (Limb & Braun, 2008). As Limb and Braun's study shows, the deactivation of the dlPFC means the brain is not "regulating conscious control of goal-directed, predictable, or planned actions" (Limb & Braun, 2008, p. e1679). It allows the improviser to function without the interruptions of cognitive processing, providing the opportunity for freedom of expression. Questions could be raised as to the transferability of these findings, given the difference in levels of experience, age and instrument. However, the instrumentation gap is, at least, narrowed; this neurobiological process appears to reflect the experiences of vocalists who took part in a phenomenological study into the *flow* state whilst improvising, in which there was "a loss of self-consciousness" (Forbes, 2020, p. 4). Some of these vocalists went so far as to say that analytical thoughts impeded their ability to improvise well. This could suggest, therefore, that deactivation in the dlPFC, and suspension of cognitive process that manage fear

and self-monitoring, is necessary for good improvisation. Furthermore, the activation of the rostral prefrontal cortex (rPFC) during improvisation indicates that improvisation can facilitate true expression of “someone’s unique, musical voice” (Landau & Limb, 2017, p. 30), which suggests there is an intrinsic connection between improvisation and one’s sense of self. It is possible to infer, therefore, why improvisation may feel like such a daunting and exposing task for students.

A caveat to this experience of flow and improvisation is the balance between skill and challenge: in order to achieve flow state, the demands of the task at hand must broadly match the individuals ability to complete it (Forbes, 2020; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). If these elements are not appropriately poised, individuals are vulnerable to anxiety (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009), and negative thoughts can be “fatal” to successful improvisation (Forbes, 2020, p. 798). This puts beginners, whose ability is often outweighed by the initial challenge, at something of an impasse. The prospect of improvisation, in itself, is often a source of apprehension for students (Root, 2021; Hirschorn, 2011; Wehr-Flowers, 2006; Alexander, 2012; Engelsdorfer, 2018). This could mean they arrive at the task in a heightened state of apprehension, inciting activation within the dlPFC, thus locking them out of the state that invokes a positive improvisational experience, and consequently reinforcing the anxiety that initially prevented it.

Improvisation as Intervention: The Promise and its limitations

The neurological contexts outlined above, show how improvisation could be considered something of an antidote to MPA, as the two exercises are diametrically opposed within the same neurological structure. Furthermore, it is important to note that the relationship between neurobiology and the brain's cognitive and psychological responses is not binary: whilst the firing of the amygdala can trigger the cognitive and psychological symptoms of MPA, the experience of these symptoms can also negatively impact the wiring of the brain itself, thus exacerbating the problem (Okon-Singer, et al., 2015). However, because this

relationship is bidirectional, it is possible to see that, positive experiences of improvisation could help to reshape those neurological associations. This suggests that pedagogical practices around improvisation could be central in maintaining a positive dynamic between the two phenomena.

Understanding what constitutes a positive pedagogical experience, however, requires looking beyond the neurobiology, and towards the psychosociological factors that surround improvisation. This is particularly important when considering the experience of vocalists who consider their voice and sense of self to be inextricably intertwined (O'Bryan, 2015; Monks, 2003). This is, compounded, when considering the neurological links between improvisation and self-expression (Landau & Limb, 2017) – when asking students to improvise, teachers are asking students to perform a potentially self-exposing task, using an instrument that can be linked to one's identity. Studies have suggested that, for the adolescent female, there is already a strong sense of vocal identity (Baker, *et al.*, 2022; O'Bryan, 2015; Sweet, 2015; Sweet & Cassidy Parker, 2019). This perceived talent, therefore, becomes, not only an *expression* of one's self, but intrinsic to an individual's *sense* of self (O'Bryan, 2015), increasing the risk of psychological impact if their ability to exercise that talent is affected (Caputo Rosen & Sataloff, 2021, Oakland, *et al.,* 2017). Singers often come to improvisation later in their learning journeys, and there is a perceived "lag" between vocal and instrumental improvisation (Hargreaves, 2014). This suggests that there is also a disconnect in a singer's general ability, and their ability to improvise. Parallels can be drawn here to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in which people, who have spent their lives developing an identity through language, are no longer able to accurately express this identity; as Arnold suggests "our self-image becomes more vulnerable when our expression is reduced to infantilized levels" (2003, p. 3). Singers may experience something similar, when learning to improvise. Students, who have grown and developed a strong vocal and musical identity, may find themselves suddenly unable to express that identity with the same ease and sophistication they are used to. Thus, a discrepancy appears, in which one's internal self-concept and self-

efficacy is challenged, reducing confidence, and leading to symptoms of MPA (Engelsdorfer, 2018).

Teacher's, therefore, are asking a lot of students, when introducing improvisation into the vocal studio. Improvisation is a task that invites students to be open and express the truest parts of themselves. This, however, has potential to be both hugely cathartic, or exposing. Consequently, it feels imperative to understand the experience of those learning improvisation to ensure teachers can support students in discovering the benefits of the task.

Adolescent Girls: The Psychosocial Context

The preceding discussion has demonstrated how self-concept, identity and self-efficacy are central to understanding the dynamic link between improvisation and MPA. The impact of this is, perhaps, exacerbated when working with teenage girls. Generally, adolescence is when an individual begins exploring their identity and formulating their sense of self; this can be influenced by their own self-concept, and the views and judgements of those around them (Gajalakshmi & Meenakshi, 2023). Engaging in improvisation, a task that has an intrinsic connection to one's sense of self and musical expression (Biasutti, 2015; Forbes, 2020), therefore, may demand creative vulnerability at a developmental stage in these relationships are still being understood.

It also feels relevant to place this experience within the context of the times we are living in. Factors such as social media (Choukas-Bradley, et al., 2022), the pandemic, global upheaval, and the climate crisis present a unique psychosocial backdrop for young people in modern times (Di Quirico, 2023). It is little surprise, therefore, that experiences of poor mental health are increasing nationwide (Proto & Quintana-Domeque, 2021). However, young women appear to experience this more acutely with recent studies showing that 27.2% of young women (aged 17-22) had experiences of poor mental health (Stentiford, et al., 2023). This could,

perhaps, stem from heightened evaluative pressures as a result of social media, which has contributed to the exacerbation of body image pressures on female teens (Choukas-Bradley, et al., 2022) and academic pressure, that stems, not only from familial expectation, but from within competitive school cultures (Stentiford, et al., 2023). This psychosocial backdrop may be a contributing factor to the higher levels of perfectionism amongst female adolescent musicians (Patston & Osborne, 2016) and explain why this demographic are more susceptible to the symptoms of MPA (Paul, et al., 2024). This further suggests teenage girls may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of improvisation. Sophisticated and satisfying improvisation requires conditions that facilitate freedom of expression, and creative risk taking. The average teenage girl, however, is often learning improvisation in an evaluative setting, whilst simultaneously negotiating intense psychological, and cognitive changes surrounding identity and self-development. This environment is not conducive to that "loss of self-consciousness" (Forbes, 2020, p. 4) that facilitates a positive, and elegant improvisation.

So why, given these unique circumstances, and the demand for the inclusion of improvisation within graded exams amongst this demographic, is there so little research into pedagogical improvisation and teenage girls? Improvisation pedagogy often focuses on instrumentalists, with vocalists frequently taught using the same techniques, sometimes in the same room as instrumentalists at conservatoire level (Hargreaves, 2014)." However, singers often approach improvisation from an aural approach, whilst instrumentalists can grasp theoretical concepts more quickly (Hargreaves, 2014). If, as is often the case in a group setting, improvisation is being taught theoretically, vocalists may lag their instrumental peers. This, perhaps, reinforces the stereotypes of singers being viewed as "not fundamental to jazz as "serious" art" (Pellegrinelli, et al., 2021). Furthermore, singing, traditionally, is considered to be a "feminine" practice (Davies, 2019), and female instrumentalists are largely outweighed by males in industry and educational settings (Wehr, 2016). One, therefore, would be forgiven for questioning whether this oversight is, potentially, structural. To rebalance this,

and prepare young singers, whatever their gender, for higher education and professional environments, further research into effective pedagogical techniques, which truly factor young peoples' experience, is imperative. The present study aims to contribute towards that goal.

Methodology & Methods

Within this research, I am taking an interpretivist stance, with a transformative and hermeneutic phenomenological orientation. Though, traditionally, interpretivism and the transformative paradigm are not considered to be philosophically aligned, in this research the two positions occur at different layers of the research process. The transformative stance is a result of my desire to challenge structural imbalances: this appears in *why* I am conducting this research, and *how* I present the findings of the data collected. However, the process of gathering and interpreting the data is interpretivist in nature. All perspectives are considered truths, even when they conflict. I did not incorporate questions on gender imbalances and prejudices within my interview script, and in many cases, participants reflected their own experiences and opinions on this without being prompted by myself.

Ontological and Epistemological Position

When considering an ontological position within the field of vocal pedagogy, it is vital to recognise that the relationship a singer has with their voice is nuanced and is intrinsic to their sense of self (O'Bryan, 2015). This research, therefore, is situated within the relativist ontological position, in which there are many truths (Easterby-Smith, 2012). This is perhaps best described by Mounce's (1997) analogy of reading over the top of a pair of glasses: the words become blurry, and then clear again once he looks through his spectacles; "the change is not in the page. What has changed is my vision field or experience" (Mounce, 1997, p. 11). This paper does not, therefore, seek to prove that improvisation is *either*

unilaterally a trigger or mitigating factor for MPA, but to recognise the conditions under which either may be the case.

How that understanding is gained, is influenced by epistemology (Levers, 2013). It is hard to deny that mastery of the voice goes beyond the mastery of the vocal mechanisms itself, and “without the ineffable qualities of empathy and emotion, trained singers are not much more than finely calibrated tone machines” (Helding, 2020). Therefore, to study vocal pedagogy, within a purely objective lens feels somewhat diminutive. Epistemologically, therefore, the aim of this research is not to identify concrete solutions, but to contribute to the wider tapestry of understanding surrounding this topic.

Methodology

Due to the philosophical underpinnings of this research, a qualitative approach is necessary which will allow for a focus on individual experience and non-numerical data (Mishra & Alok, 2017). Qualitative data has been praised for its ability to reveal “subtleties and complexities” within research (Anderson, 2010, p. 2). Given that the aim of this research is to present a tapestry of experience that represents “multifaceted human behaviour, with all its context-bound subtle nuances” (Husén, 1988, p. 7), qualitative data collection is a suitable approach.

Hermeneutic phenomenology feels, therefore, a suitable framework for this project. Hermeneutic phenomenology centres the idea of ‘experience’, whilst recognising that no experience can sit outside, or independently from, an individual’s life context (Neubauer, et al., 2019). Given that this research aims to explore specific contexts in which improvisation can both trigger, or alleviate the symptoms of MPA, using a methodological framework that itself *centres* the ‘lifeworld’ of research participants feels apt. Within Hermeneutic phenomenology, there is also a focus towards “illuminating details” (Kafle, 2011, p. 191), as opposed to complete resolution. Hermeneutic phenomenology also allows for research that

is born out of the researcher's own experience, with the intention of developing one's own practice, and contributing to the improvement of the wider practices one is part of (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

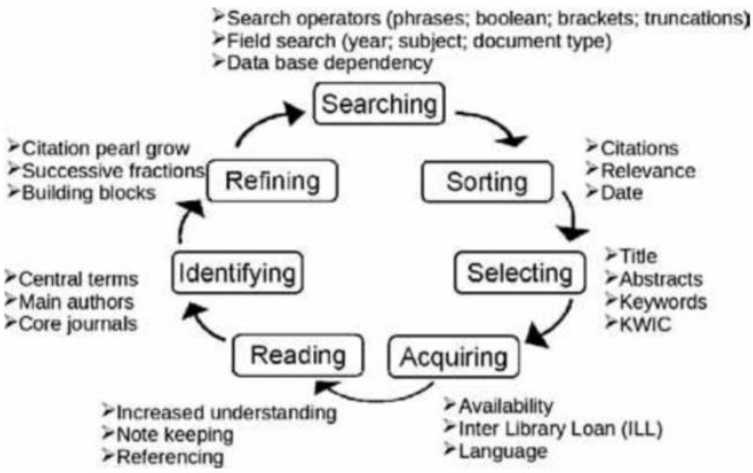


Figure 1: The hermeneutic circle of reviewing literature and techniques associated with different stages of the hermeneutic circle.

Methods

This research began with an exploration of the literature, using Hermeneutic Circling which provided a clear and thorough strategy for literature searching and analysis (see Figure 1) (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). I then underwent the process of writing a narrative literature review. This type of review gave me the space to gather and synthesise the literature around this topic "to demonstrate the value of a particular point of view" (Paré & Kitsiou, 2017, p. 161). This research aims to do just that, due to its demographical focus, which will, in turn, help me better support my students.

As this research is rooted within the hermeneutic phenomenological framework, interviews, and specifically, semi-structured interviews (to maintain focus), were of "paramount importance" (Ramsook, 2018, p. 17). One aim of qualitative research

is to gather data with depth (Bearman, 2019). I, therefore, utilised the approach proposed by Bearman (2019), focussing on open ended questions, with an emphasis on gaining insight through discussion surrounding participants' experiences. The semi-structured approach provided clear direction (Ramsook, 2018), as often learner participants are inclined to deviate towards topics they are keen to discuss, or believe the interviewer wants to hear (Bearman, 2019). Interviews took place both in person or over zoom. For adult participants, consent was given both at the start of recording, and via consent form. For young people, written consent was given from a parent/carer, and verbal assent was secured at the start of each interview. Field notes were also taken in a study log to describe the non-verbal cues and the wider context of the interview, to be used to support the transcription process (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

This study used data source triangulation using multiple participant groups (Carter, et al., 2014). This research aims, partly, to highlight the voices of adolescent females. However, there appeared to be a great deal of value in also understanding the experiences of professional vocal improvisers. This allowed me to draw comparisons, and elicit theories as to how and when improvisation may draw positive and/or negative experiences. As I went on in my research, however, I felt less of a need to identify predicting factors for either scenario but felt compelled to use triangulation of this kind to "to capture the richness and diversity of phenomenon perspectives" (Moon, 2019). This, perhaps, stems from the transformative leaning of this research. In examining my own philosophical approach to this research, I came to realise how underrepresented this demographic is within the vocal pedagogical sphere. Before focussing on developing the predicting factors, it felt necessary to first identify and explore the experiences of teenage girls. Understanding these experiences has provided a clearer foundation for future research, as is often the case when data is collected with qualitative triangulation techniques (Moon, 2019).

Participant Selection

Allen (2020) references the feminist perspective practice of “research on women, by women, and for women” (p. 39). All participants in this study are, therefore, female. Research “on” women is born out of concerns surrounding the invisibility of women within the sociological and educational leadership research. This research, similarly, aims to address the lack of female representation amongst the literature, which is of great significance when also considering the cultural attitudes towards women and, perhaps, consequentially, vocalists, previously discussed (Pellegrinelli, et al., 2021; Wehr, 2016). The research is also conducted 'by' a woman: as a female vocalist, I share a cultural understanding with participants that can benefit interviews (Bassett, et al., 2008; Allen, 2020). Finally, it is 'for' women, seeking to improve women's experiences of improvisation culture, and so centres women's voices (Allen, 2020).

Adolescent Females

Great care was taken when selecting participants for this project, as it is considered highly important that participants “possess real experiences and intimate knowledge about the phenomenon that is studied” (Ramsook, 2018, p. 16). It was necessary, therefore, to speak to adolescent girls who had regular experience of improvisation (all students were grade 5+ standard), either in lessons, or in performance. Six participants were therefore identified through purposive sampling (Dahal, et al., 2024). As no one in my immediate network taught improvisation to this demographic, I decided to interview my own students, to ensure I was speaking to young people who I know have insights into the topic. Furthermore, when interviewing teenagers, research has suggested that a shared understanding between interviewer and participant can be beneficial (Bassett, et al., 2008). Ethical considerations surrounding power dynamics in this situation are addressed in the ethics section of this chapter.

Participants' ages ranged from 13 – 19. This meant I was able to interview young musicians with varying levels of experience in improvisation. The oldest participant of this demographic was currently on a gap year before studying jazz vocals at a UK conservatoire. Even though she was not of school age, specifically, it felt important to hear the experience of someone who had chosen to study improvisation further. Her insight offered a unique, long-term perspective on the dynamic nature of the relationship between improvisation, anxiety, and pedagogical practices, that younger participants did not yet have the experience of.

Professional Musicians

Once again, care was taken to ensure that participants selected had sufficient experience of improvisation within their own work and practice (Ramsook, 2018). This was particularly important for this group as one of the main roles of professional musicians within this research was to garner insight into their long-term relationship with improvisation. Whilst I dispute the opinion that teenagers are untrustworthy sources within research (Bassett, et al., 2008), they do not yet have the benefit of hindsight around their learning process. It was hoped that interviewing musicians would provide an alternative perspective on pedagogical strategies and a more mature analysis of their learning environments.

Five female musicians were interviewed, and selected through purposive sampling (Dahal, et al., 2024). Participants were chosen through my own network and using snowball sampling (Dahal, et al., 2024), in which participants suggested other improvisers for interviewing. Musicians interviewed are known improvisers within varying contexts, from klezmer, to jazz, and free improvisation.

Immersion with the Data

It was only after the process of interviews that I discovered Alsaigh and Coyne's (2021) framework for data analysis within Hermeneutic phenomenology. This paper provided an outline for me, as an early career researcher, to follow during data analysis.

This framework begins with *immersion,* which can be achieved through transcription, and listening to the audio recordings. All recordings were uploaded to Notta transcription to produce a written text for interpretation. The use of AI was an extremely useful time saving tool (Eftekhari, 2024), however, AI transcription tools do not always provide the full depth and richness of a manual transcription (Abdul, et al., 2025). To combat this, I listened back to the interviews and edited the AI generated transcriptions in order to create a written text ready for thorough interpretation (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

The next phase was *understanding,* which involved a thorough investigation with each sentence of the text. *Open codes* were generated, formed directly from the participants' language to ensure that I, as the researcher, was not directly imposing my analytical beliefs onto the participant's own experience. The aim of this phase, was to remain objective, centring the voice of the participants, before aligning these essential meanings with my own understanding (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

The third stage is *abstraction.* This began with the use of Nvivo to assist with the organisation of these *open codes* into broad categories. I then, drawing upon my experience of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), manually, identified sub-categories and themes, incorporating my own knowledge and understanding garnered from my literature study and experience.

Following this period of immersion, I was ready to synthesise the themes generated, to test whether the raw codes, generated directly from the participants' text, aligned with my interpretation of it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For areas in which that wasn't the case, I looked back and reanalysed the data, until I was able to

seamlessly ally the two horizons of experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). Here, I aimed to illuminate all perspectives of the phenomenon (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) (recalling Mounce's (1997) analogy of the glasses feels fitting here). The final stage of the analysis process represented a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1975). This represents the integration of the themes and findings inferred from the interviews (the participants own horizons, and world views), with my own perspective and interpretation (my horizon) (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). This integrative work culminated in my synthesised findings and discussion chapter.

Ethics and Insider Research

As both researcher and teacher to several participants, particular care was needed to manage the power dynamic this dual role creates. Other areas of my research, in which the relationship between student and teacher has been thoroughly analysed, have demonstrated the unique positioning of vocal coaches. It has been posited that students can come to "worship" (Matai & Phillips, 2023, p. 11) their teachers. There is, therefore, a unique power dynamic at play here, and students may also believe participation to be a "requirement" (Humphrey, 2013). Parental consent was, therefore, maintained for the adolescent participants, and parents/carers were asked to discuss with their child before participation was agreed (See appendix 5). I also read an assent statement to teenage participants before recording, reminding them that participation was not mandatory, and answers would have no impact upon their lessons/lesson outcomes. For adult participants, a consent form was sent out prior to interview, and verbal consent was given before the interview began. The right to withdraw from the project was declared to all participants.

Confidentiality was maintained through the adoption of pseudonyms in interview transcriptions, and all data was stored in a password protected folder (Ramsook,

2018). Recordings will be deleted upon the completion of this project (5th October 2026). Ethics approval was granted by UWTSD (See appendix 6).

Positionality Statement

It is also important to outline my role as researcher within this project. The choice of topic is inherently rooted in my experience as a vocal coach, and this is, perhaps, because my research philosophy is "rooted in life itself – a life that was inherently contextual, emotional and social" (Morgan, 2014, p. 1047). Furthermore, I approach this research from three angles: learner (exploring existing information), researcher (generating new information) and teacher (using this information within my pedagogical practice). Therefore, I needed to ensure these roles were balanced (Poulten, 2023; Nikkanen, 2019), recognising when each individual role took precedent, to ensure I was fulfilling my professional and academic obligations.

The aim of this research is to further my own understanding of this topic, in order to best serve my students. According to both Greenhalgh (2018) and Webber *et al.*, (2023) this is also the primary focus of a hermeneutic review. My experience, understanding, and interpretation, therefore will be present at every layer of this process, impacting how I conduct, interpret, and present the research, who I work with, and the conclusions I draw.

I use improvisation within my own practice and teach improvisation as part of exams and performances. My experience as a vocal coach has shown that improvisation can be a real trigger for MPA. This, however, has been supported by my own learning experience in which MPA was triggered by improvisation in performances and learning environments. Understanding this connection was a real motivation for this study. As a professional improviser, however, I have also seen the benefits of improvisation, so I feel I can approach this research with a level of openness. However, to maintain credibility, and trustworthiness in this research maintaining reflexivity is paramount (Nowell, et al., 2017; Lincoln & Guba,

1985; Galdas, 2017). This was achieved through a research journal (Watt, 2007), and tutorial meetings, to maintain regular self-reflection.

Limitations

To achieve thorough saturation within the research process, participant diversity is recommended (Laverty, 2003). Because of the need to interview participants who had a known interaction with the topic (Ramsook, 2018), I was only able to draw upon my own student pool. Most of my work with adolescent females happens within a UK private school. This could, perhaps, imply, that there is a lack of economic diversity amongst participants. This project could have benefitted from interviewing young people who were learning improvisation in a variety of contexts, such as music clubs, state schools, and youth centres. There is, perhaps, an irony in the fact this research aims to amplify an underrepresented demographic, when the participant sample is drawn from what is potentially a privileged demographic (though the personal circumstances of participants were not explored).

Scheduling interviews with students around the end of term/exam period proved difficult, delaying analysis and reducing momentum. This meant there was less time with the data which is not ideal when conducting Hermeneutic phenomenological research (Ramsook, 2018).

I am an early career researcher. Whilst I had studied the theory behind the interview process, I feel my interview technique could be improved. My interviews with the young people were often short. Whilst there was depth to the interviews, I believe more experience with open ended questioning could have helped uncover other themes.

Findings and discussion

Relationship to Improvisation

Initially, when composing the research's finding, the participants' relationship to improvisation was going to be measured within the context solely of private, solo, improvisation. It felt, initially, that private improvisation would provide the most natural backdrop for an honest display of what improvisation means to participants, free from external forces which may alter that perception. However, upon further reflection, it felt that this was a potentially reductive approach. For our younger participants, particularly, there was a starkly dynamic shift in their relationship to the task when an external audience was introduced. To an extent, that was also discussed by the professional musicians, where certain types of audiences triggered a sense of anxiety around the task, even within their current practice. Darcy articulated this concept as "[in inverted commas] 'The Room'. Uh, The Room, capital T, capital R":

Darcy: *The Room is, like, massive…It's a, it's a big thing, like, to be perceived… So yeah, so much of performance in The Room is, is there when I'm on stage… And that definitely, you know, when it comes to performance, heightens your abilities in some ways, but also there'll be a lot more safety measures that I put in place ...to risk myself flopping in front of The Room.*

Professional musicians all discussed how it was improvising in front of their peers, or musicians, that triggered this sense of "The Room" (though using adjacent terminology). Edith also discussed how she, would have to resist the temptation to "come up with… a nice little thing" (perhaps a prewritten solo, or idea) in preparation for a big performance. Ironically, for younger musicians, and professionals, when looking back at their learning process, being "in my room" (Susannah, Charlotte, Alice) appeared as a common theme. This version of 'The Room' was a safe place, which enabled creative exploration and freedom. Delilah, also, spoke of how enjoyable improvisation was "when there's no stress onto it,

like, no people watching and stuff.", and Penelope said improvisation can be fun, "when in the comfort of, like, being alone".

Private improvisation being "fun", was cited by five of the six student participants, whilst, for professionals, fun was found across both solo and performed improvisation. This is something that is backed up in the research, in which improvisation was shown to generate smiles, indicating enjoyment, amongst a group of novice singers, and, non-professional, but able singers (Weiss & Peretz, 2022). The literature also suggests, however, that the ability to find pleasure in improvisation is easiest within a therapeutic context, in which there are no boundaries for students to adhere to (Carroll, 2023). This also links to the results of the research which suggested that improvisational practice could become a mitigative technique for MPA within vocal pedagogy (Heasman-Cossins, et al., 2025). The focus, here, was therapeutic, as opposed to outcome focussed singing; the relative "successes" of improvisations were not assessed as part of this research. This supports the theory, posited at the start of this research, that the relationship between improvisation and MPA is a dynamic, and contextually dependent relationship.

Susannah's experience with improvisation is, perhaps, best placed to demonstrate this. When asked whether she would ever consider improvising as part of a performance she said: "I don't think I will ever find it fun" and "I can do it, I just don't want to". Susannah's relationship with improvisation, however, is perhaps more nuanced than those quotations may suggest. Whilst her aversion to public improvisation is absolute (she "would die" if she made a mistake in a performance, whilst improvising), she did disclose that she regularly improvised whilst in her own company, because it was "fun". When asked how this made her feel she said:

Susannah: *Honestly, not really… I kind of just feel the same- ... I'm so used to doing it at home. Like, I do it all the time. So it's like, it's like if I'm, like, brushing*

my teeth. Like, I feel neutral- ...before and after I do that. Well, maybe I feel cleaner after I brush my teeth, but I just feel normal after I sing.

On the surface, this may appear as though the impact of improvisation on her wellbeing is minimal, though, the comparison between improvisation and "brushing my teeth" is an interesting one. As an isolated incident, brushing (or not brushing!) one's teeth will not have a major impact upon one's dental health. However, the cumulative brushing of one's teeth maintains oral hygiene, whilst neglecting the task completely could have a detrimental impact upon it. Perhaps the same could be said here; Susannah's regular, improvisational practice plays a role in the maintenance of her creative and psychological welfare. When asked whether she thinks she will ever stop improvising she said:

Susannah: Probably not, just because, like, if I'm listening to a song, I wanna join in, 'cause, like, otherwise I have FOMO [*fear of missing out*]- ...if I if I don't join in.

Meg: Yeah.

Susannah: Maybe that wasn't the best way to say that, but, like, that's like-

Meg: Yeah

Susannah: ...*you* get it.

The implication here is that improvisation connects Susannah to her music making self. When alone, she can participate joyfully in music she loves, through improvisation. The "*you* get it" is an extremely telling moment within this statement. Having taught Susannah for many years, we have discussed, on many occasions, the relationship between ourselves and improvisation. However, in this moment there was an unspoken understanding between us, an understanding that perhaps

that surpasses student/teacher, interviewer/participant dynamics, but enters musician to musician territory. Susannah is broaching the understanding of what improvisation can give: the opportunity to explore and creatively engage in music that you love. Despite this, however she adamantly refuted ever improvising in front of an audience, and was steadfast in the belief that improvisation was, entirely, a private practice for her. This specific experience provides the perfect representation of the dynamic relationship of improvisation and MPA in action.

On the surface, it may appear as though Susannah has presented two, contradicting and incompatible experiences. To examine, whether this is the case, it is important to understand *why* the experience of public improvisation is so difficult for her. She described public improvisation as “exposing”:

***Meg**: Do you think the exposing element of it, are you happy to explore that? Like, why that might feel exposing?*

***Susannah:** Yeah. Um, it's like, because, like, if I'm doing something, like, if someone was listening to me they'd be like, "Oh, I know what you're thinking. Like, that's why you're doing that. You're thinking- ...this way, so you're doing it this way."… And it's just I don't like, if, if someone's, like, trying to analyse me, be like, "Oh, she's doing this because of this", why do you need to know that?*

***Meg:** Okay.*

***Susannah**: You don't need to know that.*

It is hard to ignore the fact, here, that, for Susannah, the result of an improvisation is a direct, unfiltered presentation of her own, internal psyche. The very thing that makes improvisation her “mantra” and, it appears, an intrinsic element to her being, is the trigger for the improvisation getting “stuck in my throat” when an audience, of any kind, is present.

For others, however, improvisation as an expressive outlet is exactly what they enjoy about the task. For one of our professional participants, improvisation acts as a means to “show my personality” (Alice), whilst for Freya, improvisation is “an act of… you being yourself”. It is not only professional musicians who had this insight, however. Charlotte, for example, described improvisation as “a creative way to...sing what I'm feeling”. It is important to note, however, that Charlotte was 19 years old at the time of interviewing, with a place secured at conservatoire to study jazz singing. For Charlotte, and all the professional participants, there was pleasure and excitement in improvisation's expressive nature. This may suggest that finding joy in this kind of communication, rather than feeling exposed by it, distinguishes those who go on to improvise publicly — though whether this joy precedes confidence, or develops alongside it through experience, cannot be determined from this data alone.

Charlotte, however, discussed a real journey with improvisation; describing how, “at the beginning, there were tears involved”. As her teacher, I had real concerns, during these moments, about her wellbeing. I feared that I was, perhaps, pushing her towards a task that was beyond her emotional capacity; I interpreted these tears as that feeling of exposure, cited by Susannah. However, I was reassured during the interview, that Charlotte “didn't go back to my room and then cry the whole, the whole evening. It was just whilst I was doing it.”. When asked, with the benefit of hindsight, what the root cause of those tears were, Charlotte stated that is was “the fear of being judged- ...and the fear of getting it wrong.”. This, perhaps, further explains why Charlotte managed to break through that emotional barrier; there appears to be a real, musical, motivation to overcome those challenges. Even when on her own, Charlotte self-monitors her improvisations for errors, and her worst experience of improvisation was being asked to sing at a jam in front of a musical family. She displayed an eagerness to appear “impressive”, particularly amongst “die-hard musicians my age”. There is an external, motivating factor,

here, therefore; to be perceived as *good* at improvisation, and, in turn, the fear of not being perceived in that was enough to be a *demotivating* factor.

Juliet displayed a similar sense of motivation around learning to improvise, describing it as:

> *…a good skill to have 'cause, like, my friends are very good… I'm, like, very jealous. I'd, like, try to start doing it- ...myself so I can, like-...learn.*

There is an understanding, here, that improvisation can have a positive impact upon one's perception as a musician, amongst her peers; she explained how improvisation might make people think "oh yeah, she's so musical". In the same breath, however, she recognised the personal impact of making a mistake would "affect people's view on me".

It feels relevant here, to circle back to Susannah's perception that improvisation provides an insight into her inner being. Juliet didn't describe how mistakes might impact someone's view upon her ability, or singing, but specifically "on me". This feels significant, and Juliet was not alone in identifying this sensation. Susannah and Penelope also highlighted the difference between making a mistake whilst singing a song, as opposed to in improvisation.

Susannah	Penelope
"It's just 'cause, like, I'd rather do something that's set and, like, just be told, like, 'cause it's easier, and then I don't have to think about it. And then if I mess up...then it's like, I just messed up 'cause I didn't know enough. Not I	*"Um, probably like shyness 'cause there's not like a, a script that's like set out before me that I can follow or like a, like notes that I know that I have to do. Um, it's kind of all up to me."*

*messed up because **I** just messed up."*	

There is the implication here that mistakes within improvisation are not simply a reflection upon one's musical experience, but a reflection upon one's *whole*. This may be due to the idea that, for all participants, singing is a central componant of their self-concept. Furthermore, all younger participants said they either sang all the time or could see themselves singing in their future. Singing clearly *matters* to these participants. However, for these participants, it appears to go a little deeper. Covington's (2009) Self-Worth Theory suggests that humans live with "a powerful psychological reality: To be able is to be worthy, but to do poorly implies incompetence and reason to despair of one's worth" (p. 142). This sense is compounded when thinking about singers, where "their personal identity is formed and represented" (Xu, 2026, p. 323) through the voice. When improvising, a further layer of protection is removed; when learning written material the mistake can be externalised *("I just messed up 'cause I didn't know enough", Susannah).* When improvising, errors appear to be internalised by participants, and become, in some ways, a direct comment upon their ability, and thus, there self-worth. This further supports the idea that, as Freya suggests, improvisation is a "very existential practice". This was, perhaps, to be expected amongst the professional participants, as studies have suggested (Biasutti, 2015; Forbes, 2020), though the fact that musicians as young as 14 have a sense of this is a striking finding.

Age and Time

Improvisation is often introduced at an awkward stage of life for young musicians. Teenagerhood, and young adulthood were mentioned by seven out of nine participants as being a factor that can exacerbate the anxieties surrounding improvisation. Alice insightfully registered how improvisation requires you to

“open yourself up and be, be vulnerable when I think you're already going through quite a vulnerable time as well”.

The vulnerability required, perhaps stems from the intrinsic connection between improvisation and one’s sense of self, and musical expression (Biasutti, 2015). Some external, age-related factors were cited as a cause for this vulnerability, such as the impact of social media, and the challenges of relocation when starting conservatoire. However, the focus was largely upon the idea that youth itself, and, a subsequent lack of maturity, means young improvisors do not always have the capacity to manage the emotional demands of the task itself. Freya, who studied improvisation at conservatoire later in life, stated “if I went to a school like that at 20, I'd have had a nervous breakdown probably.”

There is, perhaps, an implication here, that with youth, comes a lack of resilience to the rigour and challenge of the task itself. Edith also spoke of her early years at conservatoire, describing herself as:

“*such a baby. So I was very, um, naturally self-conscious a bit anyway as a musician – at that age”*

This sense of self-consciousness was also demonstrated by three of the younger participants:

Susannah	Delilah	Penelope
Susannah*: But I feel like pa- like, at this age especially, like, everyone will probably feel the same way.*	**Delilah:** *And, like, I think when you, when you're a teenager that, like, takes, like, a big hit.*	**Penelope:** *But, um, yeah, I think, yeah, I think, yeah, just being conscious of how people look at you is something that, um, has developed*

Meg: *Okay. So you do think there is an element of your age that makes it feel worse-* **Susannah:** *Yeah* **Meg:** *...than it would otherwise?* **Susannah:** Mm-hmm (nods head). *'Cause, like, people at, I don't know, but, like, at this age people are so judgey. So it's like, if you do something wrong, you know that they're gonna, like, notice it-*	**Meg:** *Okay. So you think as you become a teenager, you feel maybe less confident or less-* **Delilah:** *Like, more self-conscious.*	*like as, as I've become a teenager...um, more and more. But yeah, I'm, yeah, I mean, it does le-hold me back and that's probably why I'm, I get, um, more anxious nowadays than I used to when I was younger, but-*

This sense of self-consciousness due to age, therefore, appears to have a great impact upon a student's relationship with improvisation. Furthermore, studies have shown that there is a neurobiological basis for this, in which both the neurological and perceptual experience of self-consciousness was higher in adolescents than children, and adults (Somerville, et al., 2013). This was demonstrated, neurologically, by the activation in the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) which aligns with other studies that connect activation within the region to the experience of self-consciousness (Eisenberger, et al., 2005). Forbes's (2020) study (in which professional musicians claimed that, only when they were free of self-conscious

thought and feeling, were they able to produce a musical and creative improvisation) also reflects this. Interestingly, in their study of the neuroscience of improvisation, Limb and Braun (2008) highlighted the general *deactivation* within the PFC, and large parts of the mPFC, during free, and creative improvisation, which perhaps explains this. It is also important to note, however, that focal activation within the frontal polar portion of the mPFC was detected. They posit that activation in this region is associated with the ability to express "one's own musical voice or story" (Limb & Braun, 2008, p. e1679). The neurological picture here, therefore, is highly complex: in order to achieve expressive, and free improvisation, perhaps through achieving a sense of *flow,* an individual's mPFC should be broadly deactivated, in order to inhibit self-consciousness, whilst maintaining activity within the frontal polar portion of the mPFC. For teenagers, this is perhaps a challenging state to achieve given the intense maturation process that occurs in the region during adolescence (Zimmerman, et al., 2019).

The implications of this framing are very real. Unlike many other themes that have been identified within this study, a student's age is not a resolvable issue. It is certainly true that teachers can aim to create a safe environment for students, as will be discussed in due course, but there is perhaps some comfort for students in the fact that all professional participants cited the importance of time in building confidence with improvisation. Both Edith and Alice stated that it was only once they left conservatoire that they felt they had really got to grips with the practice of improvisation; and Freya recognised the benefits of committing to improvisation later in life. There should be value in recognising that "it takes time sometimes" (Darcy, PM) for both teachers and students, when there can be real pressure for immediate results for both parties. As Edith suggests, improvisation:

"is not something to have figured out by the time you've maybe finish a course, if you're studying a course, or to have figured out b- by the time you're 30 or before you have your first child. It's music, and the pursuit of musical meaning is just a li- it's life's work."

Exams

Exams, as a concept, however, sit as a juxtaposition to the idea of improvisation as “life’s work”; for many of the students, improvising in an exam was cited as a trigger for symptoms of MPA, and this was echoed in the experiences of professional musicians who had taken exams as part of their conservatoire training. Exams, furthermore, often demand certain requirements (the display of specific scales, or musical language), which impose a quantifiable framework upon a student’s progression. The impact of this was described by Penelope who said improvising in
an exam:

> *“wasn't like fun and like breezy improvisation. It was like, it was important improvisation, I guess.”*

The implication of this, for Penelope, was greater concentration, “emotionally just kind of, yeah, working out what to do next”. This is no surprise given the research that suggests analytical thought can impede upon finding ‘flow’ in improvisation (Forbes, 2020). However, for our student participants, who had improvised within the RSL syllabus (where the harmony remains, largely, diatonic across 3 – 4 chords), the exam always sat within the remit of their ability. This, perhaps, indicated why the exams, for these participants, whilst, nerve-wracking, were not debilitating. As Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2009) suggest, when ability can meet challenge, the conditions for a positive experience for improvisation are met. Whilst the experience for our participants was not, perhaps, wholly positive, all but one, of the participants who had improvised as part of an exam did not describe any physical symptoms of MPA. Interestingly, it was Susannah, who was the exception to this. She was first asked to improvise, without having been prepared for the part of the exam in lessons (this was before I was teaching her). She described the experience as “humiliating”, saying she was “so embarrassed, I

started laughing", despite getting a good mark in the end. Laughing is a common symptom of MPA (Engelsdorfer, 2018), though the fact she received a good mark, indicates that the quality of the improvisation itself wasn't entirely compromised. This goes to further highlight that Susannah's experience is perhaps unique amongst the student participants.

One professional participant also described symptoms of MPA within improvisation in an exam context:

Uh, my brain, it is kind of...It, it just shuts down. Yeah, totally breathing goes. Um, you try and shut your eyes for dear life. You can't hear as well. ***(Alice)***

Alice describes the mental, physiological, and behavioural symptoms of MPA, such as the cognitive memory lapse, loss of breath, and, later in the interview, poor performance quality (Irie, et al., 2023; Burin & Osório, 2017). However, Alice was also able to identify a specific trigger for that anxiety:

"it was understanding to kind of put a filter on that and make it more detailed because they wanted to hear these exact notes. They wanted to hear this exact outlining, and I think nobody really sat me down, but I still didn't get it. Um- ...and it never felt like a free thing"

The suggestion "I still didn't get it" perhaps implies that Alice's ability could not meet the challenge of the task at hand, which, as shown, creates a negative context for improvisation (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). However, what feels more likely, as Alice also displayed a level of confidence within her ability to improvise whilst studying, is that the exam represented the tip of the wider, challenging learning environment, iceberg.

Morality in Improvisation

Darcy was my second professional interview, and she introduced the wider concept of “morality in western music”. For her, improvisation played a pivotal role within her pedagogical practice, particularly with younger, vulnerable students:

“When we're looking at recital, it's quite moral. Like, a lot of the Western scale stuff is moral. It's like it's right or it's wrong… It's you, you did it correctly, you emulated correct, correctly, or you didn't… So I think the very different thing with improvisation is the only person who's judging it in a way is them... And I think for people who've been through a hard time, I think improvisation is way more, like, healing... So I just think the, the potential for improvisation to be very healing is massive.”

What Darcy is describing here corresponds to the therapeutic impact of improvisation; as Diane Austin, leading vocal psychotherapist, writes, during vocal improvisation “Healing can occur because clients can discover and connect with their true voices. They can experience themselves freed from the tyranny of *shoulds* and *oughts.*” (2016, p. 625). The experience for many of the professional participants, including Darcy, however, feels diametrically opposed to this understanding. Edith and Alice, who both attended conservatoire, described the “mechanical” (Edith) process of learning, whilst Alice described feeling constrained and judged by her ability to demonstrate her theoretical understanding through her improvisations:

Edith	Alice	Darcy
Edith: ..I more so mean, yeah, at, at [conservatoire] doing a lot of transcriptions and then weaving that into what you were also wanting to say.	“it was understanding to kind of put a filter on that and make it more detailed because they wanted to hear these exact notes. They wanted to hear this	And it is interesting actually because I think one of the reasons I didn't do [jazz] degree was because I didn't like

Meg: Yeah. **Edith:** And I felt that style of sort of transcription, harmonic transcription, melodic transcription wasn't quite meeting what I was m- what was coming naturally- **Meg:** Yeah **Edith:** ...out of me. So it just felt a bit kind of disconjointed.	exact outlining, and I think nobody really sat me down, but I still didn't get it. Um-...and it never felt like a free thing"	the sounds that were coming out of the vocal students. So I saw a lot of people coming out of [conservatoire] and... And I actually didn't like the standardization of tone that often came from people- ...studying jazz.

There is a real sense with Edith and Alice's quotations that the culture around conservatoire education left both participants feeling as though they *should* and *ought* to sound a specific way.

This experience was reinforced by Darcy, who didn't attend conservatoire. She described this sensation of 'conditioning' amongst vocalist peers from the neighbouring conservatoire, who she would see performing at her local jazz jam. Darcy identified that conservatoire instrumentalists enjoyed working with her because she was "less conditioned" than the conservatoire vocal students; both Alice and Darcy acknowledged that this conditioning led to a reduced musicality across the board, and in Alice's case, herself too.

Alice	Darcy

Alice: I think actually that is another thing I haven't said. People who were deemed to be good at improvisation, they were just spitting out loads of notes, and it wasn't enjoyable. **Meg:** Mm-hmm. **Alice:** It wasn't enjoyable at all. And if I sang like that, I don't know, that's not enjoyable. **Meg:** Mm. **Alice:** I don't think that's something I want. That's not something I wanna listen to. I want... I think improvisation now, I see it as a way to like have fun. Um, and the audience is like from, if I have to do jazz gigs, like they enjoy it from a nostalgic way.	**Meg:** There's, there's something about that conditioning, that lack of conditioning for you that feels ...There's like a freedom in it potentially that ...Is that sort of- **Darcy:** There's a musicality in it. **Meg:** Yeah. **Darcy:** Because I actually feel like the musicality sometimes was getting blindsided by, like, posturing.

It feels necessary to explore from whence this sense of morality derived, and this appears to have resulted in the cultural championing of musical display of theoretical understanding.

The Hierarchy of Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding over Aural Ability

Before dismantling the cultural foregrounding of theoretical knowledge over aural ability, it is important to recognise, once again, the inherent paradox that sits within

the experience of the study's professional participants. All participants perceived that the acquisition of theoretical understanding enhanced their ability to improvise.

Darcy	Alice	Freya	Edith
Darcy: I was, um, trained, I suppose- **Meg:** Mm **Darcy:** ...at various points by people in improvisation during my degree, and I guess like the theory around it for me is really strong… So I might take for granted how much it's integrated into my practice.	**Alice:** But then maybe, you know, but where I am now of improvising, I don't know. I don't think about theory as much now, but it's there. It's there that grounds me and roots me.	**Freya:** But I can play chords and stuff, it's no problem. Um, I've...It w- again, wasn't natural, but I've got a thousand exercises for that now.	**Edith**: I think it did serve me to a level. Um, and there's probably no question that what I'm doing now, even though it's not in that genre- **Meg**: Mm **Edith:** ...you know, quote unquote, a lot of that learning is still internalized. **Meg:** Yeah. **Edith:** It's still within me, so it still would, would come, it still comes out.

			Meg: Yeah. **Edith:** Um, particularly whether it be sort of more modal stuff or different modes, and I'm like, "Oh yeah, you know."

However, the institutional veneration of that knowledge appeared to place some of these participants under real pressure. For Alice and Edith, this was partly because they were singers, being taught alongside instrumentalists. It appears, that for these two participants, theoretical knowledge, gained through transcription, and harmonic understanding (from inference, the focus upon chord/scale relationship, though neither specifically used this terminology), were central components to their degree. For Alice, the impact of this was stark, whilst for Edith it was, perhaps, a little more understated:

Edith	Alice
Edith: We were all sort of in there together and sort of expected to do it all, yeah, together. **Meg**: And did, did that work for you? **Edith:** Um, yes and no… I think, and again, it maybe sort of comes back with my relationship to the whole	**Alice**: But as a singer, you felt like everybody was on a little step up, or on the third l- step of the ladder… And that you were constantly...You weren't even on the ladder. You were so far below, um, that as soon as you would try to take a step up, somebody would shake it, and you'd fall off… Um, and after doing that improvisation for such

thing...of being like, "Okay, yeah, maybe this isn't gonna be for me." But, um, no, I think it really depends how you internalize music, whether it's by ear… or much more theory based, and so I noticed that with different musicians. Even some instrumentalists that were much more inclined by ear, um, but they're physically pressing the notes Meg: Yeah Edith: from where they're, where they are. Whereas the voice, it, you know, it's all in your mind. Um, so that took a lot of, kind of, resilience and pushing through on the...in pressured moments. Um- Meg: Mm-hmm Edith: ...but that served a real purpose. That was really helpful. Um...but… [pause] yeah. Um [contemplating], it was helpful, and it wasn't helpful maybe. Meg: Yeah.	a long time, you're sat, and you're kind of like made to like compete in a way with these other instrumentalists around you. Like, can you hold your own?

Edith: Yeah. Combination.	

Edith's self-correction here is notable, and, with more interview experience, I would have explored this thread fur. However, a lot can be gained from this disclosure. Firstly, Edith's suggestion that she "took a lot of, kind of, resilience and pushing through on the...in pressured moments", implies, firstly, that there *were* pressured moments. Despite the benefit of the challenge, the use of the word "resilience" highlights that there was an element of struggle, and part of this was singer specific, as audibly presenting theoretical understanding had to be done "in your mind" as opposed to "physically pressing the notes". There is a tangibility for the instrumentalists, that vocalists simply do not have. Alice was more direct in the impact of this, and her analogy evokes a sense of hopelessness. She later goes on to describe the feeling of being "set up". This could perhaps imply that the gold standardisation of theoretical knowledge demonstrated does not best serve vocal improvisers.

Within the literature, Bell has presented a three-stage learning process as "conception, imprinting and application" (2013, p. 39). It is at this first stage that the disparity between vocalist and instrumentalist is made clear. "Conception" involves learning the theory (understanding chord/scale relationships for example). Bell argues, however, that, for the singer, the theoretical knowledge is close to meaningless if it is not supported with the aural ability to translate that knowledge.

The next stage, cited by Bell is imprinting. This involves internalising the language. Whilst, for the instrumentalist, the process is very clear cut (it involves practicing the scales, and licks etc in all 12 keys), and, interestingly, Bell describes this process as a mechanical. For the singers, however, the process appears to be somewhat vaguer than is described for the instrumentalist, and something of an extension of the conception process. Listening appears to be the key, though Bell makes an astute observation. Singers can use their ears in a way instrumentalists

cannot, and this can, sometimes, get them a long way. The language Bell uses, however, reinforces the “moral” hierarchy previously discussed:

> *“While an instrumentalist needs a certain work ethic and discipline to be merely competent, a vocalist can go quite far simply singing what they hear. However, the jazz language is complex, and once improvisation in the language becomes a goal, many singers find themselves at a loss to reach it.”* (Bell, 2013, p. 40)

Whilst it is true that, all professional vocalists stated that vocal improvisation was instinctively *easier* for them, to say they are “simply singing what they hear” perhaps goes to undermine the work, and innate talent of the singer. Whilst it is true that, “ears have their limitations” (Darcy), in reserving the term “competence” for the instrumentalists, Bell has reinforced, though subtly, the idea that innate, aural ability displays a *lack* of competence.

This is an idea that is reinforced by both the professional and student participants:

Darcy	Juliet	Charlotte	Alice
“But I think what I found was I did feel insecure because people who are learning jazz harmony and jazz theory to that level, their ability to improvise, and this, we're talking like jazzers.”	Like, I know I'm not very, like, musically inclined, I suppose. Like, I, I enjoy music, but I've not, like, learnt the piano and, like, done, like, instruments and stuff, so I don't really know how music works,	sort of not knowing what I'm doing, even though it does come to me naturally in some way.	I felt so ashamed of it, but I ... didn't wanna think about it, that I just didn't understand the harmony that went in with improvising

	like, technically. Like, where notes and stuff should go.		

The impact for the professional participants is an internalised sense of insecurity and shame, whilst for the younger participants, there is a level of self-deprecation, as though they lack validity as singers because of this deficit of theoretical knowledge, despite being able to create musical improvisation.

The fact that singers can “go quite far simply singing what they hear” perhaps explains why so few professional participants were given a formal improvisational education during adolescence. Only one participant (Darcy) received 1-1 tuition with improvisation as a focus, whilst the remaining participants only came to formally study improvisation at adulthood. Furthermore, none of the student participants had studied improvisation with previous singing teachers. Susannah, who had to improvise as part of an exam, didn’t study *how* to improvise in her lessons beforehand. Darcy also described the “lack of musical musicianship theory that there was inside my vocal private lesson lessons”. This combined evidence suggests that improvisational pedagogy has not, historically, been required of singers. What is it about singers, therefore, that makes them different from instrumentalists in that way? This study argues that this disparity is due to gender.

Gender and Improvisation

It is widely acknowledged within the research that singing has been associated with femininity (Dibben, 2002; Green, 1997; Davies, 2019), and this was a perception that was supported within our participant base:

“you could literally almost take the descriptors of how you're taught singing and apply them to how you're told to be as a woman. It's like emotional technique, emotional feeling in pop, in pop singing.” (Darcy)

This has a historical foundation; boys, traditionally, would have access to instruments whilst working, the shepherd flute, for example. Girls, however, would be more likely to be using their hands as they learnt domestic skills (sewing, cooking, and weaving), making singing the natural accompaniment to their work (Dibben, 2002). There was, furthermore,

“the cultural expectation for women to behave with modesty and deference towards men discouraged women from singing in public, and from the explicit displays of improvisation and creativity, which men engaged in more frequently.” (Dibben, 2002, p. 123)

Sadly, it appears this attitude and expectation is still relevant today and has permeated into modern society’s education of singers.

	Darcy	Freya
1	**Darcy:** I did some research into it, and I moved over to guitar and piano in my second or third year because I realized that I was basically being taught affect, tone, breath control, which, as a woman, is very f***ing gendered. **Meg:** Yeah.	So what you're talking about with that, being younger and the gender of the not… 'Cause women aren't c- encouraged to try things. We're supposed to be, look nice...be polite, smile. I didn't even know, right? **Meg:** Yeah.

	Darcy: Like, that is literally, you could literally almost take the descriptors of how you're taught singing and apply them to how you're told to be as a woman. It's like emotional technique, emotional feeling in pop, in pop singing. **Meg**: Yeah. **Darcy:** And I just thought it was really interesting, and I started analyzing that in other sessions. I, I was asking around. And in other instrumentations lesson... people were being taught harmony... and chordal structures. And I was like, "This is ridiculous."	**Freya:** You don't know that's happening to you. **Meg:** Yeah. **Freya**: You just live and you exist, and you- **Meg:** Yeah **Freya**: ...don't question. Most people don't even think about it, right?
2	**Darcy**: And my, my, my poor female weeping heart is, like, constantly observing that there's...It's really accessible for girls to start singing. **Meg**: Yeah. **Darcy**: I think because there's so much performance of gender in singing.	**Freya:** It's [improvisation as an act] making music people might not like. It's taking risks. **Meg:** Yeah. Yeah. **Freya:** It's being uncomfortable. **Meg:** Yeah. **Freya:** Um, it's being brave.

	Meg: Yeah. **Darcy:** And also genuinely think that what you see in singing matches quite a lot of gender descriptors in the West that women are allowed to access, but men aren't. **Meg**: Yeah. **Darcy: E**motionality.	**Meg**: Yeah. **Freya**: It's being skilled. All those things are not feminine traits. **Meg**: Yeah. **Freya:** Brave and skilled. **Meg:** Yeah. **Freya**: [with emphasis, slowly] *Skilled*. **Meg:** Yeah. **Freya:** A skilled woman is like not something I ever heard- ...growing up, you know?

This concept is further emphasised when considered alongside Green's research in which girls' attitudes towards music were described by teachers as being linked to 'expressivity', 'decoration' and 'delicacy' (1997, pp. 151-152). This study also showed that both students and teachers believed that girls lacked the skills required for composition.

All this data, combined, paints a picture that suggests there is a cultural, and structural issue surrounding the perception of *how* women and girls should perform, perceive and learn music. It feels relevant to, also, recall Pellegrinelli, *et al*'s., (2021) assertion that singers, within the wider jazz culture, are not considered

to be a necessary component to jazz as a serious art form. For Alice, this went so far that she described feeling as though singers were considered “such a burden” when studying at conservatoire.

It is important to note, the structural assumption that singing as a feminine form is less technical and more emotive, was not identified by our younger participants. Freya’s first quotation perhaps goes some way to resolve this. The idea that “you don’t even know that it’s happening to you” feels important. Questions arise as to whether male singers, or instrumentalists are taught differently. If a teenage trumpet student arrived to their teacher, expressing an interest in jazz as a genre, would the teacher only teach the melodies of jazz standards? Would lesson, after lesson, be spent on the emotional motivation behind the melody? Or would the lesson be more technical in approach? Given the swathes of literature on pedagogical techniques for young instrumentalists, the suggestion, here, is, perhaps not. Alice went so far as to blame herself for not being more proactive in learning the theoretical aspects of improvisation:

> *“I think I was probably at fault for not teaching... myself the theory, but then I didn't, I didn't even kn- I didn't even know how to. It felt so overwhelming.”*

However, how can students expect to know their own deficit of knowledge if we, as teachers, aren’t sharing that with them?

The impact of this was described by Edith, Freya and Alice who spoke of the need to assimilate, through changing their dress, personality, or behaviour to appear in some way more masculine.

Freya	Edith	Alice
Freya: What I do is, I dunno if it's the right thing	**Edith:** I always felt if I was maybe wearing something a bit tighter,	**Alice:** I feel like if you showed any slight emotion... So, so I

or the wrong thing, or it's fine.I sort of... mirror them with the dress code. I don't go in, like, full femme, like- **Meg**: Yeah, yeah, yeah **Freya:** ...because I'll draw all the attention, and I think that's not my role in that ensemble. **Meg:** Yeah. **Freya:** I want to look like them, so I dress a bit like them. **Meg:** Mm. Freya: You know, slightly, maybe a slightly more... feminine version.	tighter fitted or, like, I, I... Yeah, no, or, or if I wore something baggier, more masculine- **Meg**: Mm **Edith:** ...I was then taken more to, "Oh, yeah, yeah, get up." You know, I, you know. **Meg:** Okay. **Edith:** Kind of very interesting just, just, yeah.	think as well, because all the singers, maybe if they were like female sing- w- um, singers who were my friends and women, if they've... Um, if they acted slightly more masculine in the way that the other, the boys did of like, "Oh yeah, jazz, I'm showing that I really..." And they just had... And I say masculine, but actually, they just had more, just a lot more confidence and, um, I'm thinking of... I'm, uh... You can cut the names out, but just for your reference- **Meg:** Mm **Alice:** ...I'm thinking of like [fellow jazz student] is really... She knows, she knows that she's good. Even though, that she does doubt herself, but she wouldn't let anybody see that, and that is the same way that the other musicians, the boy- the boys in our class and her class above would be.

Freya, one of the more experienced participants, was specifically citing an occasion that had occurred in recent weeks which goes to show the long-term impact this cultural attitude can have. Edith's experience goes to show that the pressure to assimilate is not only an inward pressure, but outwardly validated by other musicians. Alice's quotation goes to validate both these perspectives, whilst also introducing, and presenting an image of the masculine culture that is prevalent within conservatoires. McMullen argues that "at its worst, jazz education *teaches* sexism and racism to its students" (2021, p. 85), and given the widespread reports of sexism within the literature, and the experience of participants within this study, there appears to be truth in the argument. She suggests that this is because of the focus on the technical, as opposed to the "why" and "what it's for", meaning the creative, ambiguous, emotive elements of music. DiPiero (2023) suggests that this is because chord-scale theory, which is widely used across conservatoires in jazz education, is a "white masculine technology" used to give music, rooted in afro-diasporic culture, a legitimacy within Eurocentric, patriarchal institutions. For example, jazz history classes traditionally have included the "valorisation of canonical masculinist narratives" (Burke, et al., 2024). My own experience of jazz history included a listening list spanning 100 years, that excluded vocalists and female band leaders entirely. When this was raised, the response was "no woman has ever influenced the evolution of jazz" showing the entrenched view that vocalists, and consequentially women, have not influenced the 'intellectual' progression of the genre.

The theoretical superiority within a conservatoire setting creates a culture in which, as DiPiero (2023) describes, "jazz nerds are as capable of fixating on and performing their identities through music theory" (p. 60). There is the implication here that the centralisation of theory within jazz education has been developed in order to allow people to talk about the impact of music in a *masculine* way, which perhaps further emphasises why our participants feel the need to assimilate. Talking about the "why" and "what's it for" of music requires a vulnerability, and

openness that would not traditionally be acceptable within a traditionally masculine environment, and this experience was supported by participants:

Freya	**Alice**
There are, there are topics we [group of male musicians] can talk about as, like, cool alternative people, and there are topics that, you know, feelings, mm-mm {shakes head}. Um, insecurities, mm-mm.	So I feel like as soon as you'd show vulnerability as like a woman or that you doubt yourself- It's like just another reason for other people to doubt you.

Furthermore, it goes to prove that if the valorisation of theory has occurred to legitimise jazz within a Eurocentric environment, singers, and women will feel the need to demonstrate that knowledge to also gain legitimacy amongst their peers and institutions. This concept is represented even within the student demographic:

***Meg**: When you think about improvising moving forward, is there a way or a style or something that you find exciting?*

***Charlotte**: Definitely more fast-paced. Like, um, something that really shows off vocal agility...um, excites me … and makes me feel that, well, it's not impressive, but to a non-musician, that sounds more impressive than... you know, a, a slow ballady sort of thing.*

This demonstrates Charlotte's internalised opinion that pace and technicality (considered masculine) is impressive, whilst a "slow ballady sort of thing" (often considered more emotive, requiring an emotional vulnerability, and therefore more feminine) is not.

The point here is not that Charlotte wants to be able to sing with pace and agility; there is real joy and expression to be found in this type of singing. The issue lies in the fact that the slow, emotive is *not also* considered impressive in equal measure. Furthermore, It is important to note that the implication is not that women and singers cannot get a grasp of these concepts, but that the gendered stereotypes within a patriarchal structure (masculine being technical, and feminine being emotional) limit the progress of individuals and institutions (Maus, 1993). The tragedy of this is reflected by Darcy:

***Darcy**: It, it's, it's a pretty shitty situation for everyone actually, because I know that, like, with my piano practice, me stimming out and doing butterfly patterns and... it, it gives me such an amazing feeling... rather than just being a front woman in a band and having all those eyes on me.*

***Meg**: Yeah.*

***Darcy:** And vice versa. Like, there's probably a lot of people who would love to express their, their voice and they might be male.*

***Meg**: Yeah.*

***Darcy**: But they're more technical. I don't know what it's like from the other side. I know that… I was being slightly conditioned and pigeonholed. Not by anyone specific, anyone specific, but, like, a bigger culture... of gender and singing.*

If fast and agile, and slow and emotive were to sit at opposing ends of the musical spectrum, and all music along that spectrum was regarded with equal status, improvisation may become an increasingly appealing, and accessible task for more musicians.

The Wider Impact

Onus, therefore, cannot be placed upon the vocal teachers for not incorporating theoretical improvisation into their lessons, as discussed by numerous participants:

Darcy	Alice	Delilah
When I was studying music at degree level, I was shocked at how the lack of theory... the lack of musical musicianship theory that there was inside my vocal private lesson lessons.	[Discussing her experience on a jazz course, aged 16] *"The singers didn't really teach improvising. They didn't teach improvisation. They just taught us the standards that we had to learn...and swing and feel, I felt like they didn't even wanna touch it. But I felt that those singing, those singing tutors or the singers, they didn't know how to explain it, um, because they probably hadn't... It's, it's like there's this whole... I don't know."*	*It's like a hard thing to like teach. I feel like, I don't know, for me, like, like at my old school, like I wasn't really taught it.It just kind of like you just like do it.*

Alice's quotation is of real interest here. The "This whole… I don't know" can perhaps be explained by this structural attitude towards singers which is strongly influenced by gendered biases. This creates a real problem from pedagogical vocal improvisation. Vocal coaching is a largely, unregulated profession (Norton, et al., 2019) in which many singing teachers teach the techniques taught to them. Historically, vocalists have not been taught theoretical knowledge. This is due to structural factors that reinforce the stereotype that singers do not have the capacity to internalise this information. Improvisational pedagogy has also, until now, been built around a framework that best suits instrumentalists, which has meant the pedagogical approach themselves have not been effective at building confidence in students. Given this context, how can we expect teachers to have the confidence to capably teach improvisation themselves?
This is an experience echoed by Alice:

***Alice**: You know what's funny? You just made me think, and I think the reason why, this is to let you know as well, the reason why I've been so jumbled trying to explain this is because if you s- if we had a chat about singing technique and breathing... I'd be like, this would be a easy conversa- Like, it would be… It would be an absolutely easy conversation of just, "Yeah, this happened."*

***Meg**: Yeah.*

***Alice**: And I'd be so clear. But I think the fact I'm so jumbled thinking and talking about this is because I can't even...I think I had to teach myself so much.*

This suggests that current system is not fit for purpose. In many ways singing is an oral tradition in which techniques and concepts are passed down from teacher to student. It appears, however, that current teaching techniques do not leave teachers feeling confident and clear in developing their own teaching strategies.

Pedagogical Strategies

The theoretical issue that has arisen from the previous research, has made the presentation of pedagogical strategies rather challenging, particularly when considering my own experience of improvisational education, which was rooted within developing a theoretical understanding. This has, of course, influenced my teaching until now, and thus influenced the experience of the participants in this research, all of whom are my students. As previously demonstrated, it was clear within their language that my own historic bias towards theoretical knowledge, that has been challenged by this research, has been absorbed by my students.

I, therefore, continued to explore improvisational pedagogy within my own practice, across my whole student demographic, which includes all genders, ages, and experiences, incorporating techniques that, initially focussed on encouraging students to lead with feeling and musicality. Edith had discussed the use of a drone and this rather simple idea, was incredibly effective. Perhaps this was due to the lack of harmonic framework. I would then do call and response across the drone, introducing modes and harmonic ideas, before inviting students to reinvent them rhythmically or melodically. This progressed to short chord sequences (e.g. I–IV/I, then I–IVm), with time spent on pivotal notes to help students navigate the more challenging passages. This appeared highly effective; the key was time — the longer I spent on the exercise, the more comfortable students became. Whilst students did cite call and response being a useful technique in developing improvisational skills, this strategy feels more cohesive, and structured.

Juliet	Charlotte
Yeah, I'd probably just be like, I don't know, like, "Listen to this song and sing it back… but change it and… change it a little.	**Meg:** If you were to introduce improvisation to a young singer- ...is there a way that you would, an

	approach that you think would be valuable? **Charlotte:** Um, for me, what worked best was probably call and response. **Meg:** Mm-hmm. **Charlotte:** Um, and then you'd slowly ask the student to make it their own a little bit, make small tweaks-

This concept is supported within the literature as ‘audiation’, and though participants did not use this term explicitly, it feels the most apt to describe their aims:

Alice	Edith	Darcy
But for me, I feel that my brain or my ear's been exposed to it. I just kind of see it as just like similar patterns that happen. **Meg:** Yeah. **Alice:** Sorry, and, and I can hear it before it's about to happen, so, so	And I think that's the main thing about improvisation, whether you're by yourself with your own, uh, with maybe a piano or guitar that you're playing, or it's a drone- Meg: Mm-hmm Edith: If you're doing it by yourself or doing it with a	It- it, again, it's like fast-tracking to the thing I really believe in. It's like when your voice is moving across certain patterns that you know really well- **Meg** Yeah

even though I wouldn't actually know what to call it, if it's going from a, a two to a, to six or whatever, or it's going to the minor or something, I'm really bad at that. I can hear and because it's familiar, so I can just kind of... I feel like I float over it.	group of other musicians- ...or collaborators, it really is just to listen and to not just only, only sing when you hear it in your head. **Meg:** Mm-hmm. **Edith:** Um, not just for the sake of making noise.	**Darcy** ...I think it's really good for building strength. **Meg** Yeah. **Darcy** I need to do more of it myself. **Meg** Yeah. **Darcy** But I also feel like I probably focus much more on the other kind of strength, which is the ability to quickly unlock new patterns.

At its simplest, audiation is “the hearing and comprehension of music in the mind” (Shouldice, 2018, p. 117). It is a concept formulated by Gordon (1999) in which the learning of musical output is aligned to SLA, where theoretical understanding comes after the internalisation of musical sounds and patterns. The value of this is argued by Mitchell who writes:

"it is possible for someone to be an excellent writer of literature without knowing the rules of grammar. Similarly, it is quite possible for someone to be a fine musician without knowing music theory. This is not to say that it should not be taught, but that it should be there to help further understanding and audiation, not be placed before them." (2007, p. 15)

This exactly reflects Alice's experience of not being able to name the process behind improvising over ii to vi chords, her audiation skills are such that she is able to aurally interpret these changes and melodically respond. What Gordon's writing fails to acknowledge is whether comparisons can be drawn between, not only the mechanical learning process, but the psychological process, too. It feels important to draw upon Arnold's (2003) suggestion that our self-image is challenged when acquiring a new language as our expression is reduced to infantilized levels. If improvisation pedagogy leads with the theoretical, it may reinforce precisely this sense of infantilisation. When a student's theoretical understanding of music surpasses the audiation skills needed to express it, their self-efficacy is challenged. In the same way that challenge and ability must be balanced when learning improvisation (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009), perhaps, too, do theoretical understanding and one's ability to display that understanding.

How, then, is it possible to develop these skills? It is important to highlight that, despite the criticism of the prioritisation of theoretical concepts within higher education settings, there is a place for traditional methods. Two professionals, and one student participant specifically mentioned the benefits of transcriptions (Ella Fitzgerald scats proved to be extremely enjoyable for the professionals as adolescent vocalists, specifically). Familiarity with intervals and modes were also highlighted by student and professional participants alike. This research led me to familiarise myself with Gordon's Music Learning Theory (Gordon, 2007), in which a Solfege system, with moveable 'Do' (and minor 'La') is implemented (Mitchell, 2007). This feels an incredibly useful technique for teaching modes, thus familiarising students with more complex sound worlds. This system encourages

students to understand the relationship of the different modes to the ‘major’ sound they are often so familiar with and is certainly something I will explore further in my practice; the process is not linked to theoretical concepts (Lydian as #4, or mixolydian b3 and b7, for example), but to an aural concept.

Gordon’s theory goes on to discuss how, once thorough audiation is achieved, theoretical principles can *then* be applied and explained. Having undertaken such a thorough critique of theory, I found the final stage of Gordon’s process a challenging one. However, given how ingrained chord-scale theory is within higher education institutions, it feels necessary to prepare adolescent students with this knowledge. I also cannot deny how an understanding of the theory has shaped my own relationship with improvisation. As all professional participants discussed, positive improvisational practice has a theoretical grounding. Perhaps, therefore, it is not the theory in itself that elicits symptoms of MPA, but the role of theory as a gatekeeping tool, as opposed to a supportive educational technique. The argument, therefore, is that HE learning should aim to be more integrative, encouraging dual analysis of the “why” and “what’s it for” (DiPiero, 2023), meaning the focus on creativity and expression, *alongside* the theoretical constructs. When teaching improvisation to adolescents, therefore, this same process should be used, in order to balance the importance of creativity and expression, with displays of theoretical competence.

The Learning Environment

It appears, therefore, that all teaching techniques have potential to develop improvisational skills, provided the environment for students feels safe, and supportive. This removes the pressure of the morality which means students are more comfortable to make mistakes, “acknowledging discomfort and fear of potential failure” (Robertson, 2023, p. 8), which is an essential part of the learning process.

Juliet	Harriet	Alice	Darcy
Juliet: ...I think it does matter like who you're comfortable with. Like I'm so comfortable with you- Meg: Yeah Juliet: ...as like a teacher you'll, you make the space so, like I'm not afraid to like- Meg: Thanks Juliet: ..go off. Meg: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Juliet: You're not gonna be like, "Oh, what was that?" Meg: Yeah.	Harriet: Like, 'cause I was in, like, a comfortable, like, environment. Meg: Mm-hmm. Harriet: Because, so if I made, like, a mistake or it sounded, like, off, then it wouldn't really matter. I just, I don't know, it was kind of fun making up stuff.	Alice: No, none of us are obviously trained in psychology, but I think you really have to make them feel so comfortable, uh, and that just it's more accessible	Darcy: So like try and make it as fluid as possible- Meg: Yeah Darcy: ...towards improvisation… And creating a massive culture of safety between me and the person I'm working with- Meg: Yeah Darcy: ...to influence that so that they can start unlocking that feeling.

Juliet: You know? Meg: Yeah, yeah. Juliet: And that is really like, that is so like...helpful and like, I, that means a lot to me like I think.			

For Freya (professional musician) this was achieved through her teachers' improvement focussed approach:

And, like, the lessons were so different. E- each teacher was such a different experience… But they, they were never, none of them were like, "That was shit."… They were just like, "Okay, let's make it better."

For the younger participants, however, some highlighted the need for validation:

Charlotte	Penelope
...I think it's definitely important to stress how far validation can go in the moment. Meg: Yeah. Charlotte: 'Cause even though I may not have thought that it sounded very good, if you told me I was like, "Well, if	Penelope: Yeah. Um, I think kind of like highlighting the good points and then, um, just kind of, yeah, like just going over it again and, like, going into what they're, they're not sure they're doing.

she thinks it's good, then I'm fine," you know? Meg: Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Charlotte: Um, so that definitely helped me personally	

The use of validation may reinforce for students that they are doing well, which was a motivating factor for both Charlotte and Harriet:

Charlotte	Harriet
Charlotte: Oh, I love it when it goes right. Meg: Okay. Charlotte: When it sounds right and- Meg: Yeah Charlotte: ...you know	Harriet: If it's going okay, then, like, you feel more confident Meg: Mm-hmm Harriet:...to carry on, like, singing. Meg: Mm-hmm. So it's when, when going well and doing something well is a good motivator to be... Harriet: Like, I don't know, more motivated to carry on and be more confident with, like, singing.

This feels particularly important given the links made between vocal improvisation and expression of the self both within this research, and the wider literature (Forbes, 2020; Biasutti, 2015). This sense, furthermore, is enhanced when

considering the intrinsic relationship between one's identity and their voice, which leaves singers in particular, extremely vulnerable when receiving criticism (Benkert, 2026).

Darcy made a rather poignant statement on the impact that a safe learning environment can have upon a student when she said:

***Darcy**: I can see, like, scenes where I've basically found myself, like, very close to tears.*

***Meg**: Yeah.*

***Darcy:** Really emotional because I can kind of see, like, if someone's scared, that, you know, we're creating an environment where it's like that they'll feel safe. And I laugh and I...I say this is... And I reassure that this is safe. So it's like if you get to that point where someone can do it, I feel like it's a massive achievement.*

Darcy's teaching technique appears to be emotion-led. She teaches focussing on the 'why' and 'what's this for', and has, with this technique, perceived growth within, not only her students' abilities, but, and, maybe more importantly, their wellbeing. This, when working with adolescents, feels perhaps the priority. For students, it is important to remind them, as Alice says, that "it's not that deep". Providing frameworks, that feel like games (as suggested by Darcy), introducing students to music that is approachable and exciting (such as Ella Fitzgerald, as proposed by Edith and Alice) helps to contribute to the idea the improvisation can and should be *fun.* This will provide a foundation for students to draw upon in the times where the challenge feels overwhelming and provide a safe place to explore the practice without the fear of judgement that their age, and social context enhances.

Conclusion

This study's interpretivist stance holds that a solely objective view of vocal pedagogy would exclude what makes singing musical: emotion, personality, and the reflection of human experience. The culmination of this research has led to the conclusion that improvisational pedagogy should take the same stance, not just for vocalists, but for all musicians. When considering the structural and gendered issues around improvisational pedagogy, the traditional valorisation of technical prowess reinforces the “jazz bro” culture of competition and posturing (DiPiero, 2023). This succeeds only in culturally alienating those who demonstrate traditionally ‘feminine’ characteristics, whilst inhibiting others from exploring and expressing such feelings for fear of not appearing masculine. Furthermore, the instilling of ‘morality’ within improvisation appears to inhibit learning as it creates an environment of fear and embarrassment. This context, for participants, appeared to compound the neurological and psychological symptoms of MPA. When, therefore, thinking about how to remove these barriers to generative, and flow-based improvisation, priority should be given to the structural issues, rooted in gender bias. Neurological and psychosocial barriers are considered together here, given how closely they appear to interact throughout this study. Because both are so unique to the individual, however, identifying a single, unified solution is not possible, even when considering a specific demographic. When considering these barriers, therefore, teachers must take a student-by-student approach, creating a culture of safety, and security within the vocal studio. However, a more generalised approach can be taken when considering teaching techniques that are rooted in gendered bias. Incorporating aural, and audiation strategies within teaching practices will better support vocal improvisers in developing the skills needed to improvise successfully. Furthermore, incorporating ‘what’s it for’ (DiPiero, 2023) analysis within lessons will allow students to lead their improvisations with emotion, and feeling, helping to manage the fear induced by feeling the need to ‘get it right’.

On a personal level, this research has reinvigorated my relationship with improvisation, challenging a long-held sense, rooted in my time at conservatoire, that I was simply 'bad' at it. With hindsight, I can see I used to fear improvisation.

As soon as students showed any signs of discomfort, I would ignore the task completely. Developing an understanding of audiation strategies and solfège has given me tools to approach improvisation under a different framing. I can see how this same habit of avoidance appeared in interviews with both groups of participants, though in different ways. For younger participants, I could, on occasion, sense a level of awkwardness. My desire to relieve them of that feeling often meant I didn't encourage them to answer questions fully; my insecurities meant I read their short answers as boredom or indifference. Listening back, I noticed I tended towards closed rather than open-ended questions when departing from my script. Brief answers were, therefore, due to my inexperienced interview style, as opposed to disinterest or boredom on the side of the participants. With professional participants, I, on occasion, failed to follow through on certain points for fear of making participants feel uncomfortable. Again, listening back to the interviews, I believe I was, perhaps, overly cautious on this front, and may have generated even greater depth in certain answers if I had taken a braver approach to interviewing.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Participant Transcripts

Darcy – 1a

(Speaker 1 = Meg, Speaker 2 = Darcy)

Meg (Speaker 1)
Thank you for joining me today. Um, before we start, I just need to check a few things with you. Um, you know that I'm doing some research for my master's degree, and that today I'd like to ask you some questions about your experiences of singing and improvisation. There are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in what you think and how you feel about it. You don't have to answer any question you don't want to. You can stop at any time. Um, it's completely fine. It won't affect anything for me. I'll be recording our conversation so I can listen back to it later, but no one else will hear it, and your name won't be used anywhere in my research. Are you happy to take part?

Darcy (Speaker 2)
Oh, yeah.

Speaker 1 00:35
Great.

Speaker 2 00:35
I'm gonna be very honest, so...

Speaker 1 00:37
Um, okay, perfect.So before we talk about improvisation specifically, I'd love to know a bit about your background as a vocalist and, you know, musician.

Speaker 2 00:51
Um, so I've been doing music since I was a child.Never had stage fright, which was a big thing, and is still quite a big thing.

Speaker 1 01:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:04
You know, realize that that's a massive privilege actually.

Speaker 1 01:07
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:08
Um, always enjoyed singing.

Speaker 1 01:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:11
Didn't intend to become a singer-

Speaker 1 01:13
Okay

Speaker 2 01:13
...but was singing enough that it became something I just did.

Speaker 1 01:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:17
Got my first paid gigs when I was very young.

Speaker 1 01:21
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:21
So I sort of just was professionally working in music and around professional musicians at a very young age.

Speaker 1 01:27
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:28
And then, uh, studied it at BTEC level-

Speaker 1 01:33
Okay

Speaker 2 01:34
...and did that as a 15, 16-year-old.Before that, I was in loads of choirs and loads-

Speaker 1 01:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 01:41
...of different school music projects.

Speaker 1 01:43
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:44
And I'd spend all my lunchtimes in the music room.

Speaker 1 01:47
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:47
And I just played guitar all the time, like at home.

Speaker 1 01:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:50
So yeah, I was pretty obsessed with music, but yeah, I didn't think I'd... I still didn't think I'd become a musician, and then I did, and then I toured and did a lot of stuff like that in my teens with some really amazing artists-

Speaker 1 02:03
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 02:03
...who now everyone's really famous.

Speaker 1 02:06
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 02:06
And was just around, like, fuck loads of talent.

Speaker 1 02:09
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 02:09
And got a lot, a lot of stage experience very young.

Speaker 1 02:14
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:14
And then I studied music when I was 23-

Speaker 1 02:16
Okay

Speaker 2 02:17
...after doing other jobs-

Speaker 1 02:19
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 02:19
...as well as gigging.

Speaker 1 02:20
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:20
Uh, I kind of dedicated myself to it in a different, at a different level-

Speaker 1 02:24
Yeah

Speaker 2 02:24
...and did an undergrad-

Speaker 1 02:27
Okay

Speaker 2 02:27
...at Goldsmiths.

Speaker 1 02:28
Okay.In music?

Speaker 2 02:30
Popular music.

Speaker 1 02:31
Popular music.

Speaker 2 02:32
Yeah.

Speaker 1 02:32
Okay, cool.

Speaker 2 02:32
A bachelor's in music, and before that my BTEC was in music practice.

Speaker 1 02:36
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:37
And actually, when I looked at a lot of the degrees, um, the Goldsmith's one was, like, expanding on what I'd... I'd already done so much music practice that actually I needed something that was a bit more intellectually challenging-

Speaker 1 02:50
Okay

Speaker 2 02:50
...and maybe artistically challenging, and the Goldsmith's degree was really good for that.

Speaker 1 02:53
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:54
And then a lot of my artistry changed to doing loads of jazz-

Speaker 1 02:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 02:57
...around that time.That's my income.

Speaker 1 02:59

Okay.

Speaker 2 02:59
And had a jazz band for about 10 years.I was doing lots of different types of session work, but then my focus became more around original composition-

Speaker 1 03:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 03:08
...and, like, yeah.

Speaker 1 03:09
Okay.

Speaker 2 03:09
And then it really, really changed.Yeah.Don't know what else to say after that .

Speaker 1 03:13
Yeah, that's fine.That's good.It's just helped, like, paint a picture.

Speaker 2 03:16
Yeah.

Speaker 1 03:16
Um, do you have any thoughts about your relationship with your kind of sense of self and identity and your, and your voice, your musicianship?Is there a link between the two?

Speaker 2 03:33
Massively, yeah.

Speaker 1 03:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:36
I think, like, sometimes I think that...I used to smoke.

Speaker 1 03:39
Okay.

Speaker 2 03:40

And I, I just, when I was a lot younger, and I think when I was about 18, I realized that that was the most stupid thing ever.

Speaker 1 03:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:46
And it took me a little while to quit, but I, I knew that losing my voice...I still think sometimes that losing my voice is, like, could be the worst thing that could ever happen to me.

Speaker 1 03:54
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:56
That's the level of-

Speaker 1 03:57
Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:57
Yeah.I think, uh, singing is...I, I feel really privileged-

Speaker 1 04:01
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:02
...to have been able to access at a young age and realize the joy that it gives me.It's very selfish.

Speaker 1 04:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:06
Like, it's a very self-absorbed joy.

Speaker 1 04:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:09
If other people like it-

Speaker 1 04:10

Yeah

Speaker 2 04:10
...it's a positive.

Speaker 1 04:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:11
But a lot of the time I just know that I'm just getting mad amounts of dopamine-

Speaker 1 04:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:15
...from just warbling around-

Speaker 1 04:17
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:18
...and making noise-

Speaker 1 04:19
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:19
...which is good.I know a bit about that-

Speaker 1 04:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:21
...theoretically now, which is when I work with people now I know why it's good for us-

Speaker 1 04:26
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:27
...and understand that it's-

Speaker 1 04:28

Yeah

Speaker 2 04:28
...vagal stimulation and things like that.Um, so yeah.

Speaker 1 04:33
Great.

Speaker 2 04:33
I've got a really strong identity as a singer.

Speaker 1 04:36
Okay, great. Um, it would be great now to talk a bit about the improvisation aspect. So do you remember when you first started? Is improvisation something you felt that you learned, or is it something you just did? Like, how that first began to be part of what you did as a musician.

Speaker 2 04:54
Yeah, I guess, like, I think when I was young I wrote songs really little.

Speaker 1 04:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:59
So I do think of songwriting as a type of improvisation in itself.

Speaker 1 05:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 05:04
It has so many elements of having to think on the cuff.

Speaker 1 05:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 05:09
And then quite specifically, I was introduced to improvisation in a different context by a jazz teacher-

Speaker 1 05:16
Okay

Speaker 2 05:16

...in school.I was in the gospel choir.

Speaker 1 05:19
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:19
He pulled me aside and said, "I wanna teach you to scat."

Speaker 1 05:22
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:22
And so I was about 14.

Speaker 1 05:25
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:25
And there was a jazz band in school, and he invited me to be the singer with the jazz band-

Speaker 1 05:30
Okay

Speaker 2 05:30
...which there weren't any singers with the jazz band before.

Speaker 1 05:33
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:33
And he taught me how to scat.

Speaker 1 05:35
Okay, amazing.

Speaker 2 05:35
And so I remember having, like, kind of individual tuition with him on how to improvise-

Speaker 1 05:40
Okay

Speaker 2 05:40
...which was really incredible.

Speaker 1 05:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 05:42
And by the age of 15, I started gigging jazz.

Speaker 1 05:45
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:45
So I guess, I think, like, I did actually do a bit of this in my own studies where I looked at- Kind of power balance or a, a ratio balance between structure and unstructure-

Speaker 1 05:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 05:57
...in music.And, uh, jazz for me is like, I'm finding this with folk as well.

Speaker 1 06:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 06:03
But jazz specifically is so playful-

Speaker 1 06:05
Yeah

Speaker 2 06:05
...in the sense that you've got this bedrock of structure.

Speaker 1 06:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 06:08
And then you're literally encouraged to destructure.

Speaker 1 06:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 06:12
Or you're encouraged to play away and deviate from form-

Speaker 1 06:14
Yeah

Speaker 2 06:14
...and move back and, you know-

Speaker 1 06:16
Yeah

Speaker 2 06:16
...like resolve and play-

Speaker 1 06:18
Yeah

Speaker 2 06:18
... with that resolution. So I think, yeah, improvisation's been a big part of my work. And then it's interesting how that background in jazz from a young age, I think, definitely increased my confidence in terms of improvisation and also communicating collaboratively whilst improvising.

Speaker 1 06:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 06:33
'Cause I think that's incredible, like when we're able to do that together.

Speaker 1 06:39
So in terms of thinking about your experiences of improvisation as a young person into adulthood now, do you feel that there are, the be- there are a lot of benefits to it-

Speaker 2 06:49
Absolutely

Speaker 1 06:50
...in terms of, yeah.

Speaker 2 06:50
In my own teaching-

Speaker 1 06:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 06:52
...I mean, this might come up in a minute anyway, but basically when I'm teaching people singing, I say to them quite early on, "My aspiration is to get you to improvise."

Speaker 1 07:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:01
Even if they've never identified that they wanna do that.

Speaker 1 07:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:04
I'm more interested in getting people to improvise than I am to getting them to s- write songs.

Speaker 1 07:08
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 07:09
Because I feel like if you can create a relationship that's that fast between your ear and your eidetic memory, your-

Speaker 1 07:16
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:16
...your visual shape-

Speaker 1 07:18
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:18
...pattern-based thinking and your ear and your vocal expression and your anatomy, I just think the feeling becomes really positive around your musicianship.

Speaker 1 07:28
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:29
So I think it takes time sometimes, but that's my aspiration.And I find that when people start, when we work in that way in sessions, I'm always trying to lubricate the session-

Speaker 1 07:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:39
...towards that kind of action.

Speaker 1 07:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:41
So like try and make it as fluid as possible-

Speaker 1 07:43
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:43
...towards improvisation.

Speaker 1 07:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:45
And creating a massive culture of safety between me and the person I'm working with-

Speaker 1 07:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:50
...to influence that so that they can start unlocking that feeling.

Speaker 1 07:53
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 07:53
So I think it benefits all aspects-

Speaker 1 07:56
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:57
...of other singing.

Speaker 1 07:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:58
Whether it's like singing someone else's song-

Speaker 1 08:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:01
...or writing your own stuff.

Speaker 1 08:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:03
It basically means you're, you're fast.

Speaker 1 08:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:05
You can move fast.

Speaker 1 08:06
Yeah.So it sounds like you have a very positive relationship with it-

Speaker 2 08:10
Yeah

Speaker 1 08:10
...as a whole.

Speaker 2 08:11
Yeah.

Speaker 1 08:11

As a whole.Has that always been the case when you first began improvising?Is it an immediate response?

Speaker 2 08:16
No, not, not really.Like, I think when I was, I think when I started, like, gigging jazz...So when I decided to go to Goldsmiths, I-

Speaker 1 08:26
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:26
... was split between going to [Conservatoire] to study jazz because that was, like, massively what I was doing at the time. And it's really interesting actually thinking about it because that would've been a really, really different pathway, and I knew that. But I was gigging with so many people who had studied at [Conservatoire]-

Speaker 1 08:46
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:46
...that I was getting a kind of secondhand education anyway.

Speaker 1 08:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:50
But I think what I found was I did feel insecure because people who are learning jazz harmony and jazz theory to that level, their ability to improvise, and this, we're talking like jazzers.

Speaker 1 09:01
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 09:02
You know, like, there's a level-

Speaker 1 09:04
Yeah

Speaker 2 09:04
... that I was able to appreciate. My toes are curling thinking about it. Like- ... the feeling of seeing someone fly in that way and feeling them hit, not just like interesting runs, but actually really beautiful patterns.

Speaker 1 09:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:17
And, and hearing them do stuff.You know when you just kind of go, "Ooh," like-

Speaker 1 09:21
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 09:21
..."Ooh, that was banging," and everyone kind of cheers.

Speaker 1 09:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:26
I think I, I really wanted to be able to do that much more.

Speaker 1 09:30
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:30
And I think that's where, like, choosing to do the original music, popular music degree was a big step away from that.

Speaker 1 09:36
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:37
So I did feel more insecure than...I, and I still do.

Speaker 1 09:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:41
Like, I still feel like, I, I know that for instance when I, I don't do so much jazz now.

Speaker 1 09:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:45

But I know that there was a point I got to where I was practicing it so much that my ability to improvise really excelled.And now I don't do it so much, it's completely dropped down again.

Speaker 1 09:55
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 09:55
So it is a bit muscular.You can probably flex it, but yeah.

Speaker 1 09:59
Yeah.Do you have any me- recollections or memories of, you know, when you were saying about being 14, 15, and that teacher, that teacher understood.

Speaker 2 10:06
Mm.

Speaker 1 10:07
What was that experience like?Do, do you remember how that felt in, you know, those lessons or that experience?

Speaker 2 10:17
It felt really special.

Speaker 1 10:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:19
I, I just felt like, I can't really remember anything other than something positive.

Speaker 1 10:24
Okay.That's good.

Speaker 2 10:24
So I-

Speaker 1 10:25
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 10:25
...I remember like that I felt like I'd been chosen.

Speaker 1 10:28

Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:29
Which was nice.

Speaker 1 10:29
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 10:30
He'd selected me as, like, someone who was musical.

Speaker 1 10:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:34
And I don't know, like, I felt like he was giving me, he, I felt like very quickly at the time, I felt he was giving me a toolkit.

Speaker 1 10:42
Okay, yeah.

Speaker 2 10:42
And I think that that was a massive, one of those massive moments in your life that you can't predict.

Speaker 1 10:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:49
And it probably turned my life into a slight different direction.A small thing.

Speaker 1 10:54
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 10:55
But-

Speaker 1 10:56
Awesome.

Speaker 2 10:56
Yeah.

Speaker 1 10:56
Do you remember how he taught you to improvise?

Speaker 2 10:58
Yeah.So he taught me, he taught me to, um, and I, I still do this, and I still play with words like this, he taught me to look around the room-

Speaker 1 11:06
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 11:07
...and take the words.So I guess it's like looking at, uh, diction and hermeneutics, looking at expressions like-

Speaker 1 11:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 11:16
...the way we say things.And he'd get me to look at the consonants.But in a very simple way.He'd get me to look around the room and say chair.

Speaker 1 11:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:26
Table.And then scat them, but you, you elongate all the vowels.So I think-

Speaker 1 11:30
Okay

Speaker 2 11:30
...at this point it might have also been one of the first moments.Later on I had a lot more professional training with vocals.

Speaker 1 11:37
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:37
Vocal pedagogic, pedagogy.I wanna say that.

Speaker 1 11:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:40
Um, but later on I learned about like monoph, monophon- whatever, triphtongs, diphthongs and all that.

Speaker 1 11:46
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 11:46
But I think that might have been a really early introduction to how we're expressing vocals.Because even though we were doing it specifically for scat-

Speaker 1 11:56
Yeah

Speaker 2 11:57
...it was a focus on making sound-

Speaker 1 12:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:00
...that doesn't have to have a lyrical sensibility.

Speaker 1 12:03
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 12:03
And I find even in teaching singing now, I have to get people to move away from lyrical sensibility to actually get the best out of their voice.

Speaker 1 12:11
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 12:11
They have to be like, we c- we understand words.

Speaker 1 12:14
Yeah.

Speaker 2 12:14
We have to focus on vowels-

Speaker 1 12:15

Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 12:16
...to get the singing voice across.So, so yeah, he did a lot of that.And yeah, helping me understand how to move melody across a vowel.

Speaker 1 12:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 12:24
Yeah.

Speaker 1 12:25
Yeah, okay.And anything harmonically?Or was that all just natural your ears-

Speaker 2 12:31
Yeah, I think my ears were ...I feel like, I think what was happening was I was, I was harmonizing in the choir a lot.

Speaker 1 12:38
Okay.

Speaker 2 12:38
So I could harmonize from a very young age.So even in primary school-

Speaker 1 12:42
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:42
...I was harmonizing in choir-

Speaker 1 12:44
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:44
...all the time.

Speaker 1 12:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 12:45
And the teachers were like, "What?"

Speaker 1 12:47
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 12:47
So I think that's why he pulled me out, actually, of the gospel choir because I was moving around naturally with my ears.

Speaker 1 12:55
Yeah.Okay.So your nat- your aural skills actually were pretty good.

Speaker 2 13:00
I think so, yeah.They've-

Speaker 1 13:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:02
I mean, like, for years I rode on that without any education in jazz.

Speaker 1 13:05
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 13:05
Like, just basically what I could hear.And sometimes I'd get some nice rounds of applause.

Speaker 1 13:10
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 13:11
So that was-

Speaker 1 13:11
That's nice

Speaker 2 13:12
...was, was okay.

Speaker 1 13:13
It's what busts the dream, isn't it?

Speaker 2 13:15
Yeah.Although I know there's so much more.It's like a never-ending spectrum.

Speaker 1 13:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:18
So, you know, I know there's ...I, I am very aware of how my own ears have their limitations, for sure.

Speaker 1 13:24
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 13:25
Yeah.

Speaker 1 13:26
Okay. Um, are there any conditions now ... I guess you kinda touched on this, but if you could just go into it a bit more. Any conditions or, like, environments specifically in which improvisation feels harder or potentially, like, anxiety-inducing for you now or historically?

Speaker 2 13:47
Um-

Speaker 1 13:49
If the answer's no, that's also good.

Speaker 2 13:51
Yeah.I'd say, like, I've, I, I improvise in lots of different genres now.

Speaker 1 13:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:58
So there's lots that I don't feel nervous in.Like, I, I'm currently playing bass in an improvised house band.

Speaker 1 14:05
Okay.

Speaker 2 14:06
And we improvise, and I s- I actually suggested all the frameworks that we do.

Speaker 1 14:11

Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:11
Because of my study in it.

Speaker 1 14:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:14
I was like ...We're working with poets and I said, "Get the poets to give us one word, and that's our descriptor.And then as a band, we take it in turns to start."

Speaker 1 14:25
Okay.

Speaker 2 14:25
So, like, gamifying things-

Speaker 1 14:26
Yeah

Speaker 2 14:26
...is a way that I can feel more comfortable.

Speaker 1 14:28
Okay.Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:28
So the pressure's less, like everyone has to start at the same time.

Speaker 1 14:31
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 14:32
I do still find that if there's a word that comes up that ...Like, I know there's certain genres that I'm not that good at improvising in on bass.

Speaker 1 14:38
Okay.

Speaker 2 14:39
So different instrumentation.But I guess, like, improvising maybe instrumentally.

Speaker 1 14:44
Okay.

Speaker 2 14:44
Maybe that's a ...Vo- vocally, not, not so much.

Speaker 1 14:47
Not so much.Okay.

Speaker 2 14:47
Vocally I feel more confident-

Speaker 1 14:49
Okay

Speaker 2 14:49
...I think, moving across genre, 100%.

Speaker 1 14:52
When you were working actually with, you know, when you talk about, like, the musicians from [conservatoire] and stuff-

Speaker 2 14:58
Mm

Speaker 1 14:58
...can you think about anything?Was there, was that more instrumental musicians?Was there, were there vocalists as part of that, that you were working with or seeing in that context?

Speaker 2 15:08
Um, it was all instrumentalists.

Speaker 1 15:10
All, yeah.

Speaker 2 15:10
And it is interesting actually because I think one of the reasons I didn't do that degree was because I didn't like the sounds that were coming out of the vocal students.

Speaker 1 15:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:18
So I saw a lot of people coming out of [conservatoire] and-

Speaker 1 15:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:21
...coming into places around it.And I actually didn't like the standardization of tone that often came from people-

Speaker 1 15:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:28
...studying jazz.

Speaker 1 15:29
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:29
I do think that people, there, there are some people-

Speaker 1 15:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:33
...like you get in classical vocal study-

Speaker 1 15:35
Yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 15:35
...who really have a very unique timbre, and it's different.But I think that for a lot of people, there's a conditioning of their voice which-

Speaker 1 15:43
Mm.

Speaker 2 15:44
The, the, the tones that are created are very repetitive.

Speaker 1 15:47

Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:48
Anyway, so it was mostly instrumentalists.

Speaker 1 15:50
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:50
I think that's where maybe it worked with me working with them as well-

Speaker 1 15:54
Yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 15:54
...because I was doing something a little bit different.

Speaker 1 15:57
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 15:57
Not different, but it was complimentary.I got ...I, I, I worked with a lot of people who I really enjoyed w- working together.Maybe it's-

Speaker 1 16:06
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:06
...it's because I was slightly at odds with what was going on in those environments.A bit less conditioned.

Speaker 1 16:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:11
Yeah.

Speaker 1 16:11
So what does the ... I'd like to explore that condition thing a little bit more that you experienced and that you feel that you don't have. 'Cause I think there's ... Some of the people I've spoken to who have gone to done the jazz [conservatoire], not [conservatoire] but they have that condition, that experience of the conditioning-

Speaker 2 16:31
Mm

Speaker 1 16:31
...is one of the things that was quite stressful.

Speaker 2 16:35
Yeah.

Speaker 1 16:36
So what the, um, how you ...What that ...Um, I, I don't know how to phrase my question.Let me think about it a second.But-

Speaker 2 16:46
Feel free to just chat what was on your mind.

Speaker 1 16:48
There's, there's something about that conditioning, that lack of conditioning for you that feels ...There's like a freedom in it potentially that ...Is that sort of-

Speaker 2 16:57
There's a musicality in it.

Speaker 1 16:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:58
Because I actually feel like the musicality sometimes was getting blindsided by, like, posturing.

Speaker 1 17:07
Okay.

Speaker 2 17:07
Do you know what I mean?

Speaker 1 17:08
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 17:08
Like, I've been to, I was at North Sea Jazz Fest three years ago-

Speaker 1 17:12

Okay

Speaker 2 17:12
...and performed there a couple of times.And I was invited to this jam that was really massive, massive artists.

Speaker 1 17:20
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:20
And it was, like, in this nightclub, and it was great.And I don't know if you wanna take names out, but, like, [notable jazz musician]-

Speaker 1 17:27
No.Yeah

Speaker 2 17:27
... was leading it.

Speaker 1 17:29
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:29
And it was really amazing.And they were like, [Darcy] And so I got up on stage.

Speaker 1 17:32
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:33
And everyone was doing, like, Autumn Leaves, like the best runs ever.

Speaker 1 17:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:37
And I just got up on stage.It was this massive, massive crowd.And I just turned to everyone in the band, and I was like, "Can you give me a hip-hop beat?"

Speaker 1 17:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:44
And they just like, we just had the best jam.

Speaker 1 17:48
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:48
The whole room was pulsating.

Speaker 1 17:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:50
Because what I saw in that moment was like, "What's the point?It's late night.Everyone's, like, having a drink and having a dance, or wants to."

Speaker 1 17:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:59
I felt like I was watching, and I felt like I was watching people basically- It gets to the point where it's a bit like impressing each other.

Speaker 1 18:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:07
And posturing in that way where it's almost like-

Speaker 1 18:10
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:10
...math rock.

Speaker 1 18:11
Yeah. Why do you think, why do you think it's different? Why do you think the s- the vocalists left [Conservatoire] differently to the instrumentalists, like, that you were working with? Why do you think there was a difference there?

Speaker 2 18:25
I don't know.

Speaker 1 18:26
There was-

Speaker 2 18:26
I didn't, I don't know.I guess like, I mean, what I perceive is still s- a small cross-section.

Speaker 1 18:33
Mm.

Speaker 2 18:33
I worked with a lot, a lot, a lot of instrumentalists 'cause our band had depths.So improvisation was also a big part of the way our band worked.

Speaker 1 18:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:40
So we had two band leaders-

Speaker 1 18:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:41
...me and the guitarist, and we worked with about 60 to 100 depths.

Speaker 1 18:45
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 18:46
And it was like we basically just had the charts.

Speaker 1 18:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:50
Some charts would be more sophisticated about and do certain arrangements, but we're working with standards.

Speaker 1 18:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:54
We had a four-hour repertoire.It was like-

Speaker 1 18:56
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:56
...massive.And we'd, we'd basically chuck the charts in front of people on the gig-

Speaker 1 19:01
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:02
...and they'd either fly or they'd-

Speaker 1 19:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:04
...fall.

Speaker 1 19:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:04
And it was fun.

Speaker 1 19:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:06
And so I guess like in that environment, that was 60 to 100 music- musicians who weren't vocalists.

Speaker 1 19:12
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 19:12
So I really don't have a massive breadth of working with vocalists-

Speaker 1 19:16
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:16
...at all-

Speaker 1 19:16
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:17
...who studied jazz.I think I've just seen people play at place like Henry's in Greenwich-

Speaker 1 19:22
Mm

Speaker 2 19:22
...and stuff like that.Is that what it's called?

Speaker 1 19:23
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:24
Yeah, I've seen people do stuff there and bits and pieces around, but it was almost like I never felt like I could stomach it.

Speaker 1 19:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:33
Like, going to jazz jams.

Speaker 1 19:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:36
It just didn't c- it didn't do it for me.

Speaker 1 19:38
Why not?

Speaker 2 19:40
Why not?

Speaker 1 19:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:41
I don't know.Just I felt like I was being assessed.

Speaker 1 19:44
Okay.Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:46
I just, it was, I think, like, being amongst vocalist peers, maybe there's a quest- maybe there's a thing around, uh-

Speaker 1 19:53
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:53
...nervousness of improvisation as well.

Speaker 1 19:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:55
Worrying that I wouldn't get it right, but also didn't really enjoy the v- the vernacular-

Speaker 1 19:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:59
...of what was expected.

Speaker 1 20:00
And that was, so that feeling was around the vocalist specifically as opposed to-

Speaker 2 20:05
Yeah

Speaker 1 20:05
...so actually other vocalists more instrumentalists works.

Speaker 2 20:10
Yeah.I, I, I, we, I used to regularly turn down opportunities to go to jazz jams-

Speaker 1 20:14
Yeah

Speaker 2 20:14
...because I just found it quite boring.But I liked working with my own band.

Speaker 1 20:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:19
And I'd still work with some of those musicians.We do, like, a residency every year.

Speaker 1 20:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:24
And I'm going next week.

Speaker 1 20:26
Oh, okay.

Speaker 2 20:26
And it's like, basically when we work together, it's, there's some people there who've got such incredible ears-

Speaker 1 20:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 20:34
...that when I work with them, having known them for now, like, 22 years-

Speaker 1 20:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 20:39
...some of them, the, the musical connection is so strong that it's very joyful.

Speaker 1 20:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:43
So it's a bit different.Yeah.

Speaker 1 20:45
Yeah.Yeah.Um, do you think there's a relationship between how you're feeling emotionally and how your improvisation goes in terms of ...Yeah.That connection.

Speaker 2 21:04

Um, should we, am I, shall I s- keep talking about jazz or just generally?

Speaker 1 21:08
Any im- yeah.We're not specifically-

Speaker 2 21:10
Yeah

Speaker 1 21:10
…on the genre.

Speaker 2 21:10
Yeah.I'm gonna move away from jazz.

Speaker 1 21:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:11
So I think, yes, definitely.

Speaker 1 21:14
The, the research that I'm doing is not genre-specific.

Speaker 2 21:17
Yeah.And, and, and voice as well, or should I move to talk about instrumentation?

Speaker 1 21:21
Actually, all of it is

Speaker 2 21:22
Yeah.So definitely, like 100%.So for instance, yeah, especially with instrumentation.

Speaker 1 21:28
Mm.

Speaker 2 21:28
I think with voice I've got certain phrasings-

Speaker 1 21:31
Yeah

Speaker 2 21:31
…that are, like, known and comfortable.

Speaker 1 21:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:34
And I, I can even think, I'm literally in my head-

Speaker 1 21:37
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 21:37
... can literally ... 'Cause I think that we work with archetypes of sound. That's been something I've been saying for a while, is like we have, like, a library of sounds in our head. So I guess inside my library, I've got my top, my top hits.

Speaker 1 21:50
Okay.

Speaker 2 21:50
And so when I'm improvising, if I'm feeling a bit shit, I'm more likely to, in a weird way, be, like, weaving together stuff that isn't entirely original to my own brain.

Speaker 1 22:01
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 22:01
But then I think if I'm feeling more comfortable, I think I try new things.

Speaker 1 22:07
Okay.

Speaker 2 22:07
And if I'm feeling really playful, I try more nonsensical things.

Speaker 1 22:11
Okay.

Speaker 2 22:11
So I'm more likely to make sounds that are less, like, vocally pleasant.

Speaker 1 22:17
Okay.

Speaker 2 22:17
Or I might, like, talk.

Speaker 1 22:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:18
Or I might do, like, tapping sounds or-

Speaker 1 22:21
Okay

Speaker 2 22:21
... you know, different kinds of tones entirely. And same with instrumentation. Like, if I'm playing guitar or bass or I'm accompanying, the tonality would just ... That's probably the biggest indicator of mood.

Speaker 1 22:34
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 22:34
It'll become, like, really suspended and-

Speaker 1 22:37
Yeah

Speaker 2 22:37
...a bit more indie.

Speaker 1 22:39
Yeah. Does it always feel like an output regardless of where you're at? So, like, if you're feeling, um, if you're in a more negative head space, does improvisation feel like a positive way of, like, channeling that negativity? Or is there part of you that's like, "I can't be bothered with this today."?Or is it always like, is it always a good outlet?

Speaker 2 23:01
I think it's always pretty generative for me-

Speaker 1 23:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:04

...and progressive.Like-

Speaker 1 23:05
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:05
...I actually find recital, like, i.e.playing my own songs-

Speaker 1 23:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:08
...much more boring.

Speaker 1 23:10
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 23:10
And less predictable-

Speaker 1 23:12
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:12
...in terms of how I feel.Improvisation is pretty much always, like-

Speaker 1 23:16
Positive

Speaker 2 23:17
...yeah.I go to my studio, and I improvise piano for, like, an hour-

Speaker 1 23:22
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:22
...regularly.And I wake up in the morning, and the first thing I do with my tea is improvise guitar for, like, an hour.So-

Speaker 1 23:29
What does that, when you're in that space, what does it feel like?

Speaker 2 23:33

I guess, 'cause I record myself, so I often do pra- practice research stuff where I look back-

Speaker 1 23:37
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:37
...and I try and work out things and see what's happening in my head.

Speaker 1 23:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 23:42
And I think what's, I think I s- you can see it in my hands.

Speaker 1 23:46
Okay.

Speaker 2 23:46
So I often record my hands from above, and you can literally see that it's like I've had an ...I think I love variation.

Speaker 1 23:52
Yeah.

Speaker 2 23:53
So I really love finding theme with my teeth.

Speaker 1 23:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 23:55
And then when I've settled upon it, I almost get my little dopamine hit, and I move.

Speaker 1 23:59
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 23:59
And you can see my hands. They stop, and they sit on the keys, or sometimes they withdraw slightly to the edge. And then I sometimes close my eyes, and I, I bas- it's like sensory. So I, I'll allow the fingers to kind of do something I don't expect.

Speaker 1 24:13

Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:13
And then I let my ears hear what they did.

Speaker 1 24:16
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:16
And I do things like butterfly patterns.

Speaker 1 24:19
Okay.

Speaker 2 24:19
So I go from, like, reverse to in.

Speaker 1 24:21
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 24:22
And I do patterns that feel like they're playing with- Or yeah, visually playing with patterns or playing with whole tones and things like that.

Speaker 1 24:30
Do you ever create sort of frameworks within yourself, within your practice to follow?You know, like harmonic frameworks-

Speaker 2 24:39
Yeah

Speaker 1 24:39
...or rhythmic frameworks for your improvisation?

Speaker 2 24:42
Yeah.Like, um, s- definitely.It just depends.I'll move around quite a lot.I'd like to expand it.

Speaker 1 24:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:50
It'd be nice to maybe set myself more games.

Speaker 1 24:52
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:53
I think gamifying and setting challenges is really, really beautiful for, like, opening up sounds.

Speaker 1 24:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:58
But yeah, I do. Like the other day, I was just doing shifting pentatonic across diatonic notes, and then moving into chromaticism. But, like, basically working with a pentatonic pattern that kind of, uh, every time it goes up, I move down one finger and do the next pentatonic. And I was, like, improvising along that-

Speaker 1 25:16
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:16
...which was really nice sound.

Speaker 1 25:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:19
It start- sounded like Coltrane-

Speaker 1 25:20
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:20
...like Alice Coltrane.

Speaker 1 25:21
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:22
And it's interesting 'cause I wasn't trying to sound like anyone.

Speaker 1 25:24
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 25:25
But the pattern makes me start realizing that that is what's happening in that music.

Speaker 1 25:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:30
So yeah, so I use quite a lot of patterns.Sometimes I use things like dissonance.

Speaker 1 25:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:36
So I'll improvise around dissonance-

Speaker 1 25:38
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:38
...for quite a while-

Speaker 1 25:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:39
...to try and ...Do you know how they say, like, when you eat foods, it's good to get used to eating bitter foods, it's good for your gut health?

Speaker 1 25:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:45
I think I do that with, I do that with music.

Speaker 1 25:48
Okay.Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:48
So I challenge myself to basically work with dissonance-

Speaker 1 25:51
Okay

Speaker 2 25:51
...so that I'm not ...So th- 'cause I've, there's a lot of sweet sounds that I love.

Speaker 1 25:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:55
But I think working with the bitter sounds is also quite interesting.

Speaker 1 25:59
Important.Yeah, for sure.

Speaker 2 25:59
And I, and when I listen back to my improvisations, sometimes those are the bits where I'm like, "Ooh, that's cool."

Speaker 1 26:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:06
Like, "I could release that."

Speaker 1 26:07
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:07
Like, because they sound ...I don't know.We get, like, conditioned into-

Speaker 1 26:11
Yeah

Speaker 2 26:12
...a palette of sounds and words.

Speaker 1 26:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:14
So yeah, moving away from that feels quite strong.

Speaker 1 26:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:17
It impact, it's quite empowering.

Speaker 1 26:18
Is there a difference to that feeling that you have when you're on your own practicing for an hour, improvising for an hour at a time to, like, if you were doing that in a more performative setting, so like if you were in gig or-

Speaker 2 26:30
Yeah

Speaker 1 26:30
...in front of an audience or?

Speaker 2 26:32
I mean, I don't really do, I don't really do-

Speaker 1 26:34
Yeah

Speaker 2 26:34
...a lot of that-

Speaker 1 26:35
Okay

Speaker 2 26:35
...style of improvising in front of audiences.So if I'm improvising in front of audiences, it's more likely to be in a collaborative group.

Speaker 1 26:40
Okay.

Speaker 2 26:41
So I don't really do solo improvisation. And it's funny, it's really interesting timing because not even thinking about this interview, this morning I was listening back, watching back an improvisation.

Speaker 1 26:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:53

And that was, I really enjoyed it.

Speaker 1 26:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:55
You know, I, I don't find myself cringing at the bits where it's gone off.

Speaker 1 26:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:59
I'm just like, "Oh, okay," because it usually leads into the next thing.And I was just thinking, do you know what?I might just put them all up on YouTube.

Speaker 1 27:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:05
Like every single one without even cutting them.

Speaker 1 27:07
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 27:07
Because I'm quite interested at this moment about starting to believe or, like, believe more in the, the, what I've ...Just practicing what I preach.

Speaker 1 27:16
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 27:17
Like at the moment it's still quite hidden.

Speaker 1 27:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:18
But actually listening back I'm like, "This is, this is probably quite interesting-

Speaker 1 27:22
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:22
...for me and other people to see." So I'd like to move into that a bit more.

Speaker 1 27:27
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:27
And I was thinking earlier about whether I would be comfortable improvising like that on stage.

Speaker 1 27:31
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:31
I'd absolutely love to.

Speaker 1 27:32
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:33
It just would be a bit ...Maybe I'll do that at the next one solo.

Speaker 1 27:36
Yeah.It's not bad, is it?

Speaker 2 27:37
Just be like, "Fuck it."

Speaker 1 27:39
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 27:39
Often I do quite simple stuff with my left hand.

Speaker 1 27:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:42
So I'll be do- b- holding something, so there'll be a pattern there, and it's the right hand that's moving along.

Speaker 1 27:46
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 27:47
Yeah.

Speaker 1 27:47
Um, how about vocally?Is that something?I mean, I guess you used to improvise quite a lot in front of an audience vocally.

Speaker 2 27:53
Yeah.

Speaker 1 27:53
Is there any, are there parallels between that experience there of being on your piano on your own and kind of like improvising in terms of the feelings that you create in, in that moment to the feelings of, like, improvising on stage with your band?

Speaker 2 28:10
So different.It's so different.It feels like, it feels completely different.When I'm at the piano improvising like that, I literally feel like I'm ageless, timeless.

Speaker 1 28:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:18
I could be back when I was four years old, five years old first playing the piano.

Speaker 1 28:22
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 28:23
But when I'm performing on stage or when I have been performing on stage, it's, it's so different. I feel like I can feel my peers around me. I feel like I'm in The Room. Uh, The Room, capital D, capital R-

Speaker 1 28:34
Yeah

Speaker 2 28:34
...is something that's a big working theory in my mind.

Speaker 1 28:37
Okay.

Speaker 2 28:37
The Room is, like, massive.

Speaker 1 28:39
Okay.

Speaker 2 28:40
It's a, it's a big thing, like, to be perceived.

Speaker 1 28:42
Okay.

Speaker 2 28:42
So yeah, so much of performance in The Room is, is there when I'm on stage.

Speaker 1 28:47
Okay.

Speaker 2 28:47
And that definitely, you know, when it comes to performance, heightens your abilities in some ways, but also there'll be a lot more safety measures that I put in place -

Speaker 1 28:58
Yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 28:58
...to risk myself flopping in front of The Room.

Speaker 1 29:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:01
But I think with vocals, like, yeah, it's so different.I think also 'cause I'm collaborating with people who are also thinking about what they're doing.

Speaker 1 29:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:10
There's a conscientiousness that we're achieving together.

Speaker 1 29:12

Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:12
I mean, if someone said, "[Darcy], solo", it's, it's, it's sometimes it's really hard.

Speaker 1 29:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:19
I don't do a lot of it anymore.

Speaker 1 29:20
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:20
I think I, I think, uh, I think I got quite bored.

Speaker 1 29:23
Okay.

Speaker 2 29:23
I have to say I got quite bored.

Speaker 1 29:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:25
Even when I was doing the best jazz-

Speaker 1 29:27
Yeah

Speaker 2 29:27
...that I've ever done.It was weird.It was around the time I started watching the clock a little bit.

Speaker 1 29:32
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 29:32
And that's kind of when I stopped doing it.

Speaker 1 29:34

Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:34
It's like I hit a wall with the, the sound.

Speaker 1 29:38
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:38
The, the shapes that-

Speaker 1 29:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 29:40
...um, the, the shapes that are the celebrated shapes.

Speaker 1 29:42
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 29:43
They're not, they're not proggy enough for me.

Speaker 1 29:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:46
I'm more of an indie person I think underneath it all.

Speaker 1 29:48
'Cause it's interesting just hearing you say, "Oh, I don't do that much." I feel like whenever I watch you perform it feels improvised. Like when you're performing your songs-

Speaker 2 29:58
Yeah

Speaker 1 29:59
... it feels there's like that freedom that ... Is that not the case? Is when you're performing your own songs, your own music, does it, is it more planned? And I don't, I'm not saying improvising that like it feels chaotic. It just, there's a, the freedom-

Speaker 2 30:15
Yeah

Speaker 1 30:15
...that improvisation gives, you know?

Speaker 2 30:16
Yeah.

Speaker 1 30:17
You nev- it never sounds like you're singing the m- melody like you've sung it every single time.

Speaker 2 30:20
Oh, that's interesting.I think that I am singing the melodies quite often, like, in a way that is set.

Speaker 1 30:26
Okay.

Speaker 2 30:26
I do think that there's an, a, there's a, there's a way that I write where I probably bring in elements of improvisation in.

Speaker 1 30:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:33
So sometimes I write in a way where- The improvisation becomes the song.

Speaker 1 30:38
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:39
So sometimes that-

Speaker 1 30:40
Yeah

Speaker 2 30:40
...that's where maybe you'll be hearing that it sounds like-

Speaker 1 30:42

Yeah

Speaker 2 30:42
...it's moving away quite a lot, and it goes to interesting places.

Speaker 1 30:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:45
But I think this is where eidetic memory is interesting because I think sometimes I listen back, and I'm like, "Yeah, I like that," and that'll be it. I'll kind of set it there. There are some sections of songs that I leave for a little bit of improvisation. But I think with my own material, I think I'm focusing on different stuff when I'm performing it.

Speaker 1 31:07
Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:07
And I am trying to actually reduce im- improv- improvisational elements.

Speaker 1 31:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 31:14
But it's not...I'm, I'm really cautious about turning into recital.

Speaker 1 31:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:18
Basically, recital is so different emotionally and mentally.

Speaker 1 31:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:22
I think as a solo artist, recital for me creates a lot of safety and grounding and potentially secure, like, gig income-

Speaker 1 31:29
Yeah

Speaker 2 31:29
…in a way.With a band, recital can become really problematic really quickly.

Speaker 1 31:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:35
And I think working with a group, it's really good to have aspects of improvisation, but you have to work it out per person-

Speaker 1 31:40
Yeah

Speaker 2 31:40
…or work or per ensemble.

Speaker 1 31:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:43
You almost need to create like a framework .

Speaker 1 31:45
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 31:46
And, like, checking in with what people want.

Speaker 1 31:48
Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:48
'Cause finding the play, like the play in playing-

Speaker 1 31:53
Yeah

Speaker 2 31:53
… feels important. Like, how does it stay… How is it sustainable to work together? Like, do we need to have elements of improvisation so we feel like we're present, or do some people get too freaked out by that and they want rep- repetition?

Speaker 1 32:08

Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:09
Or do we have an interplay?And that's where, like, when I was doing my own studies, I was looking at that ratio of structure and non-structure.

Speaker 1 32:15
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:15
And seeing how for different projects it's really different.

Speaker 1 32:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:18
Some people want a leader.Some people want democracy.Some people want you to listen to their ideas.So it's like-

Speaker 1 32:25
Okay

Speaker 2 32:25
...so different per-

Speaker 1 32:27
Yeah

Speaker 2 32:27
...per, per project.

Speaker 1 32:28
Interesting.So in terms of your performance at the moment, improvisation the form is different, but it features a lot in your own personal or in personal practice.

Speaker 2 32:42
Yeah.

Speaker 1 32:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:44
Yeah.

Speaker 1 32:44
It's really quite interesting.

Speaker 2 32:45
It, it does in other contexts.So basically, there are projects that I specifically partake in that are improvisation projects.

Speaker 1 32:51
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 32:52
And I really believe we need more of them.

Speaker 1 32:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:55
So I n- I think I distinctly benefit, and I think other musicians do-

Speaker 1 33:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 33:00
...benefit from having high quality-

Speaker 1 33:02
Yeah

Speaker 2 33:02
...improvisation, like, group ensemble-

Speaker 1 33:06
Yeah

Speaker 2 33:06
...opportunities.But no, they don't come into my own, like, uh, set structures.

Speaker 1 33:12
Okay.

Speaker 2 33:12
I have other things that I'm doing.

Speaker 1 33:14
Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:14
So for instance, I, I'm doing a lot of transposition across instrumentation.

Speaker 1 33:17
Okay.

Speaker 2 33:18
So that is...There's an element there that keeps me right on the cuff.So I've got like a spreadsheet, like a master list of all my songs.

Speaker 1 33:24
Okay.

Speaker 2 33:25
And then there's six columns of instruments.

Speaker 1 33:27
Okay.

Speaker 2 33:27
I was just writing about this the other day actually for something I'm writing, and it's like trying to describe this process where I'm realizing that, like, being able to transfer a song onto different instrumentation does open up new vocal opportunities-

Speaker 1 33:39
Yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 33:40
...and genre possibilities.So there are moments.So I don't feel like my songs have a set house.

Speaker 1 33:46
Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:47
Like, they're a bit nomadic in that way.

Speaker 1 33:48

Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:48
So they do still move and change, but they kind of sit somewhere for a bit.

Speaker 1 33:53
Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:53
And then I like it.I like pushing them in different areas myself.

Speaker 1 33:57
Yeah.Interesting.It'd be great to...Oh, one more thing.Talking about the mistakes when you're listening back at that moment.

Speaker 2 34:04
Yeah.

Speaker 1 34:05
What...How do you think you've developed that resilience to not make different mistakes?

Speaker 2 34:09
I think, well, doing jazz, I mean, like, you've probably heard it like someone said, someone says famously-

Speaker 1 34:15
Someone

Speaker 2 34:15
...make a mistake, uh, it's a mistake, make it three times and it's jazz.

Speaker 1 34:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:19
So I think, like, that-

Speaker 1 34:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 34:21
...that phrase, that, that mantra-

Speaker 1 34:23
Yeah

Speaker 2 34:23
...is something I believe in.

Speaker 1 34:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:25
So basically, if there's a bum note, I just bum it out even more.

Speaker 1 34:28
Keep going, okay.

Speaker 2 34:28
And suddenly we're like, "Whoa."

Speaker 1 34:30
Yeah, yeah .

Speaker 2 34:30
"What we got here?" So I think that's something.And then I think I followed that rule enough that I heard enough how much it opens up, like, really creative sound making.

Speaker 1 34:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:41
And I thought that was...And now I kind of stick to that.

Speaker 1 34:44
Great.

Speaker 2 34:44
Yeah.

Speaker 1 34:45
Is that...How do you pass that on when you're, um, working with students?How do you pass that philosophy on to them?

Speaker 2 34:54
When I'm working with students-

Speaker 1 34:58
Or is it, does it kind of come naturally?

Speaker 2 35:00
I don't really teach in that way.

Speaker 1 35:02
Okay.How do you-

Speaker 2 35:02
So yeah, I don't really teach like...But I wouldn't...I've never...Mm, it's very rare that I've taught anyone that mantra.

Speaker 1 35:08
Okay.

Speaker 2 35:09
Because, uh, I guess the improvisation, the way I'm working with teaching is like...There's two, two things that I use to identify the way I teach.One is that it's person led.

Speaker 1 35:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:22
And the second one is that it's expansive.

Speaker 1 35:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:24
It's using an expansive teaching method.So I can move pretty fast with people depending on how fast they move.

Speaker 1 35:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:30
And I usually go where they wanna go.

Speaker 1 35:32
Okay.

Speaker 2 35:32
So I don't really have a set format for teaching.

Speaker 1 35:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:34
And I don't suit people who want, like, worksheets and-

Speaker 1 35:38
Okay.

Speaker 2 35:38
I, I, I don't do anything like that.

Speaker 1 35:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:40
I basically just, it's me and you, and I'm curious about what...I'm curious about someone's musicality-

Speaker 1 35:47
Yeah

Speaker 2 35:47
...and the layers of it.And I, and yeah.

Speaker 1 35:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:50
So te- So, so I suppose, like, helping people become resilient or, like, helping them learn about getting over...I think I see it in singing.

Speaker 1 35:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:59

So, like, I see this thing where someone makes a sound they don't like, they turn their head, or they stop, or they have a glottal stop.

Speaker 1 36:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:06
And so I just observe that with them and ask them what's happening.I think that before I even learned about embodied wellness and embodiment and somatic wellness-

Speaker 1 36:16
Yeah

Speaker 2 36:17
...I think as a singer from a very young age, you're already working with somatic awareness.

Speaker 1 36:21
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:22
So, so much of the practice around teaching singing is literally a somatic embodiment and embodied awareness of your own physical anatomy to then try and achieve some sort of control.

Speaker 1 36:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:35
And so a lot of it is like exercises in awareness. So yeah, I guess if someone makes a, inverted commas, mistake- I think what I do is just get them to slow down and try and recognize, like, what it felt like and what was happening.

Speaker 1 36:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:51
And if they don't wanna do it, then that's something they have to kind of work out.

Speaker 1 36:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:55
Sometimes I'll point people out that there's something going on.But I'm very rarely trying to train someone's voice into something I think it should be.

Speaker 1 37:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:02
I'm often trying to help them access areas of their resonatory system that-

Speaker 1 37:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 37:08
...they might not be accessing and that's, like, technical-

Speaker 1 37:12
Yeah

Speaker 2 37:12
...rather than...I don't know.I often think of them as, like...I try and say to people, "Think of yourself like a clarinet."

Speaker 1 37:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:19
Or I say, "Think of your inner choir person."

Speaker 1 37:21
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:21
We're gonna give them a name.

Speaker 1 37:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:22
And we're gonna make sounds that are, like, really not like your creative voice.We're gonna make sounds that are just like wind instruments.

Speaker 1 37:29

Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:30
We're gonna try and just get really good pitch-

Speaker 1 37:32
Yeah

Speaker 2 37:32
...and stuff like that.

Speaker 1 37:33
Yeah, yeah.How do you incorporate, like, how...Is improvisation, is improvisation something that you incorporate into a lesson from sort of the start?

Speaker 2 37:42
Yeah.

Speaker 1 37:43
Or is it kind of always like an aim?

Speaker 2 37:45
It is, yeah.And I think, I think actually there's a diff- very different types of lessons I do.So we've got, we've got adults paying for lessons.

Speaker 1 37:53
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:54
And then we've got some stuff that's, like, working with young people who are going through quite a lot of stuff. And, you know, that's really different. I, I would work very differently with a young person who's going through quite a lot of stuff in their life. Not, in some ways, not entirely differently. Same aim. Want them to feel like they're accessing their voice.

Speaker 1 38:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 38:18
Want them to feel like they've got vocal freedom.

Speaker 1 38:20
Yeah.

Speaker 2 38:20
And I want them to feel creative joy.

Speaker 1 38:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 38:23
But I think my approach might be a lot less anatomical when I'm working with people who are, like, potentially have got a lot less capacity for that-

Speaker 1 38:32
Yeah

Speaker 2 38:32
...in terms of focus and interest.

Speaker 1 38:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 38:34
So sometimes if someone, if it seems like it would benefit someone to access, like, narrative work, like lyricism-

Speaker 1 38:42
Mm-hmm.Yeah

Speaker 2 38:44
...and songwriting, I'll just go into that loads more.But you have to improvise to do that anyway.

Speaker 1 38:51
Yeah. Do you have any experiences of teaching that stuff, or, like, where, where you've had to... Had to is maybe the wrong word. But where you've incorporated improvisation into a lesson with a young person? Is that something that you've experienced or something that's happened?

Speaker 2 39:10
What's that?Where they-

Speaker 1 39:11
Just, like, as a concept, you know-

Speaker 2 39:13
Yeah

Speaker 1 39:13
...you've introduced...Is that, introducing improvisation into a lesson with a young person?

Speaker 2 39:17
Yeah, I do it all the time.

Speaker 1 39:18
How?

Speaker 2 39:18
I mean, okay, so I do that in a way where when we're learning, like, very early on I do call and response with people.

Speaker 1 39:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:26
So I'll play...It's really different.So say if someone's got an interest in touching the keyboard-

Speaker 1 39:32
Yeah

Speaker 2 39:32
...I'll usually get them to play keys next to me.

Speaker 1 39:34
Okay.

Speaker 2 39:35
And I'll usually get them to use whatever motor function skill they have, so it might be one finger on one hand and the other.

Speaker 1 39:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:40
And play, probably play, play, like, a small rhythmic bom, bom, bom.

Speaker 1 39:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:44
You know.And then I'll, I might play something on the top.

Speaker 1 39:48
Okay.

Speaker 2 39:48
So I think that's quite grounding.

Speaker 1 39:50
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 39:51
Focus, and that usually brings in a little feeling of achievement.

Speaker 1 39:54
Okay.

Speaker 2 39:54
And then I'll do something like, "Right. You sing and I'm gonna copy." So they, they start making sounds and I copy. And I think when I copy them it validates their eidetic expression. So p- I think people are developing confidence in what they see. And I think that's the thing with improvisation is I don't think a lot of people who've not been trained, if you've not been trained in music, I don't think you realize how much music you have inside of you.

Speaker 1 40:26
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 40:27
So the first step is helping people realize that they've got this innate ability to understand notes.

Speaker 1 40:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:33
So I might get them to sing a pattern over a very simple rhythm or, uh, instrumentation.And then I'll sing it back.

Speaker 1 40:43
Okay.

Speaker 2 40:43
And then I'll do it the other way.But I don't always do it that it's me first.

Speaker 1 40:46
Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:47
So I often either do it that it's them first as well, because actually I find the validation.You can see that they kind of go, "Oh."

Speaker 1 40:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:55
Even if they wobbled, even if they did a glissando that was a complete, like, uncertain-

Speaker 1 41:00
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 41:01
I will probably straighten that up when I repeat it back. And I might even take some, like, liberty of slightly accenting what they did in a way that I feel is, like, gesturing back to them that it was very musical.

Speaker 1 41:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:14
So it's a really quick thing, but I do that very fast with people.

Speaker 1 41:17
So even, so in that moment of asking them to sing something for you to copy, um, would you find students normally quite willing to do that?

Speaker 2 41:25
Yeah.I usually frame it as a warmup.

Speaker 1 41:27
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:28
I don't even, like, position it as an improvisation exercise.I consider that, like, us getting into using our voices.

Speaker 1 41:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:34
And I think it is.

Speaker 1 41:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:36
I think that actually warming up, you know, when we do set scales, we are... It- it, again, it's like fast-tracking to the thing I really believe in. It's like when your voice is moving across certain patterns that you know really well-

Speaker 1 41:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 41:49
...I think it's really good for building strength.

Speaker 1 41:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:51
I need to do more of it myself.

Speaker 1 41:53
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:53
But I also feel like I probably focus much more on the other kind of strength, which is the ability to quickly unlock new patterns.

Speaker 1 42:01
Yeah.No, that's really-

Speaker 2 42:02
Mm.

Speaker 1 42:03
That's really nice.Do you think, I'd love to talk a bit about the validation.How important do you think that is in teaching that improvisation as a skill?

Speaker 2 42:15
Um, I think it's really important.

Speaker 1 42:17
Mm.

Speaker 2 42:17
Yeah.Just like when I was doing jazz and I needed people to applaud.I needed the trumpet player to be like, "Whoa, that was banging."

Speaker 1 42:24
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 42:24
Or, "Whoa," you know?And I needed that because it, it lets you know that you did something good.

Speaker 1 42:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:31
Like yeah, I do that a lot.

Speaker 1 42:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:33
I'm just working with someone at the moment who very quickly is, um, just completely musical.

Speaker 1 42:42
Oh.

Speaker 2 42:43
But I think the way I'm working now is so fast.I'm getting pe- I'm basically looking at someone and I'm working out- How quickly they can pick up an instrument-

Speaker 1 42:52

Yeah

Speaker 2 42:52
...and how quickly they can own this.

Speaker 1 42:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:54
And that was fast.In our second session, I had a strong feeling to give them an instrument, and they, and it's an instrument that has a drone-

Speaker 1 43:02
Okay

Speaker 2 43:02
...aspect.

Speaker 1 43:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 43:03
So it's easy, easy to play.And I taught...They've never played a guitar or anything before.It's a dulcimer.

Speaker 1 43:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 43:09
And then I got them to improvise over the top.

Speaker 1 43:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 43:11
And they just, they...And then I sent them away with a small guitalele-

Speaker 1 43:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 43:15

... because they literally were just obsessed with playing in that session. They couldn't stop playing. It was like, "Take an instrument home." They've booked in, like, a, an extra session because they've written a song. So it's like-

Speaker 1 43:25
Yeah

Speaker 2 43:25
...it can be really fast.

Speaker 1 43:26
So do you, when you're teaching improvisation, you don't actually think necessarily about, say, like, if a singer came to you and was like, "I want singing lessons, and I..." And then you start with improvisation, would you actually think about expanding onto other instruments as part of that lesson?

Speaker 2 43:42
Yeah.Yeah, yeah.I n- I, I mean, I nearly always try and get every single person I work with to play an instrument.

Speaker 1 43:48
Okay.

Speaker 2 43:49
I get people to play the instruments with me-

Speaker 1 43:51
Yeah

Speaker 2 43:51
...in our sessions.

Speaker 1 43:53
Yeah.

Speaker 2 43:53
When I was studying music at degree level, I was shocked at how the lack of theory-

Speaker 1 43:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 43:59

...the lack of musical musicianship theory that there was inside my vocal private lesson lessons.

Speaker 1 44:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:07
I did the, some studying, like, I did some research into it, and I moved over to guitar and piano in my second or third year because I realized that I was basically being taught affect, tone, breath control, which, as a woman, is very fucking gendered.

Speaker 1 44:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:23
Like, that is literally, you could literally almost take the descriptors of how you're taught singing and apply them to how you're told to be as a woman. It's like emotional technique, emotional feeling in pop, in pop singing.

Speaker 1 44:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:36
And I just thought it was really interesting, and I started analyzing that in other sessions.I, I was asking around.And in other instrumentations lessons-

Speaker 1 44:45
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 44:45
...people were being taught harmony-

Speaker 1 44:47
Yeah

Speaker 2 44:47
...and chordal structures.And I was like, "This is ridiculous." I did a sight singing test in my, as part of my private lesson studies.

Speaker 1 44:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:55

I have to do a, a, a series of tests.And I sort of flew through them, but I didn't think I would, 'cause they were really building it up.

Speaker 1 45:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:01
My singing teacher was female, in her 60s, and she was like, "Oh, the singing test is really hard." And I'd moved house, and she thought I was gonna fail.

Speaker 1 45:08
Wow, okay.

Speaker 2 45:08
But I just turned up and did the test, and I flew...I, I went through.And she was like, "Oh, you did really well.You can sight sing."

Speaker 1 45:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:14
And I was like, "I don't think I can sight sing that well. I'd love to learn more." And she went, "Oh, I can't teach you.I can't really read." And I just found that this, this was across the board, that there were, like, lots of people teaching singing who didn't have confidence in musicianship.

Speaker 1 45:28
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:28
And yeah, so now I, it's a massive part of how I teach singing.

Speaker 1 45:32
Do you think that the lack of theoretical knowledge within a singing teacher, is that structural things, like gendered structures?

Speaker 2 45:43
Yeah. I think there's loads going on with that. I think that, uh, uh, I think that on my degree I did an analysis that 90% of entrants for vocal as first instrument, voice as first instrument, were women.

Speaker 1 45:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:55
And 90% of, this was in the year that I was in, instrumental players were male.

Speaker 1 46:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:01
And, like, it's something that we see a lot.

Speaker 1 46:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:04
And my, my, my poor female weeping heart is, like, constantly observing that there's...It's really accessible for girls to start singing.

Speaker 1 46:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:13
I think because there's so much performance of gender in singing.

Speaker 1 46:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:18
And also genuinely think that what you see in singing matches quite a lot of gender descriptors in the West that women are allowed to access, but men aren't.

Speaker 1 46:28
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:29
Emotionality. So it's not actually just... It, it's, it's a pretty shitty situation for everyone actually, because I know that, like, with my piano practice, me stimming out and doing butterfly patterns and-

Speaker 1 46:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 46:41
...it, it gives me such an amazing feeling-

Speaker 1 46:44
Yeah

Speaker 2 46:44
...rather than just being a front woman in a band and having all those eyes on me.

Speaker 1 46:47
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:48
And vice versa.Like, there's probably a lot of people who would love to express their, their voice and they might be male.

Speaker 1 46:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:54
But they're more technical.I don't know what it's like from the other side.I know that I had to work hard to recognize that I was being slightly conditioned and pigeonholed.

Speaker 1 47:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:04
Not by anyone specific, anyone specific, but, like, a bigger culture-

Speaker 1 47:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 47:09
...of gender and singing.

Speaker 1 47:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:10
Yeah.

Speaker 1 47:11
It's partly why I'm focusing on teenage girls.

Speaker 2 47:15

Mm.

Speaker 1 47:15
Because I think a lot of the time you're, especially out focused-

Speaker 2 47:22
Yeah

Speaker 1 47:22
...teenage girls who are really into singing and want to learn singing.

Speaker 2 47:25
Yeah.

Speaker 1 47:26
When you go into, like, that more conservatoire or further education, the improvisation teaching is really lacking, and it's-

Speaker 2 47:34
That's interesting

Speaker 1 47:34
...it doesn't, it doesn't, in terms of singing, a lot of the time you're taught the same way as instrumentalists and-

Speaker 2 47:41
So interesting

Speaker 1 47:42
...it's really hard to sing-

Speaker 2 47:43
Oh

Speaker 1 47:43
...an altered scale over

Speaker 2 47:45
Maybe I should, maybe I should become, like, an improvisation teacher or something.'Cause, like, I, it, for me, it's massive.So one of the things I do is I sit down with someone-

Speaker 1 47:54

Yeah

Speaker 2 47:54
...who's never played piano.

Speaker 1 47:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:56
But we're doing voice, and I just sit with them at the piano, so we'll be next to each other, and I'll usually go-

Speaker 1 48:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 48:01
...on the lower end and put them on the higher end.And I'll say, "Okay, we're just gonna play, like, pentatonic, chromatic pentatonic."

Speaker 1 48:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:08
Because they don't have to think.

Speaker 1 48:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:09
All the black notes.

Speaker 1 48:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:10
So I'll be like, I'll, I'll hold a fifth.

Speaker 1 48:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:14
And then I'll ask them in time to just tinkle.

Speaker 1 48:16
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 48:16
And I'll ask them to sing back.Because, I don't know, I think when your hands and your body are busy, your brain is a bit more...We know that.

Speaker 1 48:26
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:26
We know that about, um, am- the amygdala.We know that about, like, when you're doing something with your body, your brain is thinking less.

Speaker 1 48:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:35
Or your nervousness can be reduced.

Speaker 1 48:38
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:38
I, I see it happen. I see people literally, like- Their body language changes and they kind of become more interested in the piano. And I actually very ... I don't focus on breathwork loads in their singing.

Speaker 1 48:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:50
So I move into breathwork in a later phase when I start looking at dynamic control-

Speaker 1 48:55
Yeah

Speaker 2 48:56
...and runs and ...But someone has to get a bit further along to get to that point.I think the first thing I'm interested in is unlocking-

Speaker 1 49:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:03
...basically the quickest access point to them feeling like a musician.And the music in their body, if they're coming to me for singing-

Speaker 1 49:12
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:12
...that is music.So I'm trying to, like, create a framework that they are a musician-

Speaker 1 49:18
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:18
...and their voice is their instrument-

Speaker 1 49:20
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:20
...rather than-

Speaker 1 49:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:21
...we just sing songs with lyrics-

Speaker 1 49:23
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:23
...that have emotional meaning.

Speaker 1 49:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:25
I'm much more interested in getting people to understand intervals and, like, modes and play with patterns and, and try and get people to think about the melodies as having as much narrative as the lyrics.

Speaker 1 49:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:37
So sometimes I'll take a lot ...often just take all the lyrics out of-

Speaker 1 49:40
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:40
...um, all the lyrics out of a song, get them to do vow sounds.

Speaker 1 49:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:46
And then, like, slow things down and get them to look at the shapes that are being created.

Speaker 1 49:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:50
Yeah.

Speaker 1 49:51
Interesting.Um, I'm aware you have to go at 1:00.Is there anything really quickly that you think I have to ask or should have asked or anything that you feel is ...?

Speaker 2 50:01
My, my meeting got canceled, so-

Speaker 1 50:03
Oh, did it?

Speaker 2 50:03
...if there's anything y- else you need to ask, but ...

Speaker 1 50:06
I think, I think I've covered it. I mean, I think that gender bit at the end is really ... I'm deliberately not bringing that up because I wanna see if it comes up from people. So I'm going on the basis that it won't.

Speaker 2 50:17
Yeah.

Speaker 1 50:18
But, um-

Speaker 2 50:18
I think there's something I would add-

Speaker 1 50:20
Yeah

Speaker 2 50:20
...which is, like, working with young women who've experienced, like, a lot of trauma.

Speaker 1 50:26
Yeah.

Speaker 2 50:27
I think some of the times that I've felt ... Like, sometimes working with people and you're looking at improvisation feels like ... Actually, I don't think it's just those young women. I think most people, but I can really see it in those incidents, in those occasions more. Helping someone actually get to the point where they feel like they're creating something for themselves, not just reciting someone else's material. I think the transformation that I can see in terms of them going away with, like, even a small recording or a look on their face, I can think of in my head-

Speaker 1 51:07
Yeah

Speaker 2 51:07
...and I can see, like, scenes where I've basically found myself, like, very close to tears.

Speaker 1 51:14
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:15
Really emotional because I can kind of see, like, if someone's scared, that, you know, we're creating an environment where it's like that they'll feel safe.And I laugh and I-

Speaker 1 51:26

Yeah

Speaker 2 51:26
...I say this is ...And I reassure that this is safe.So it's like if you get to that point where someone can do it, I feel like it's a massive achievement.

Speaker 1 51:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:34
Always feels ...I always feel very proud of myself and them.

Speaker 1 51:37
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:38
There's a bond that's created.

Speaker 1 51:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:40
I think that's a thing that improvisation can do in teaching.It's-

Speaker 1 51:44
Mm.

Speaker 2 51:44
When we're looking at recital, it's quite moral.Like, a lot of the Western scale stuff is moral.It's like it's right or it's wrong.

Speaker 1 51:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:52
It's you, you did it correctly, you emulated correct, correctly, or you didn't.

Speaker 1 51:57
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:57
Does it sound like that?Was it correct?

Speaker 1 51:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:59
So I think the very different thing with improvisation is the only person who's judging it in a way is them.

Speaker 1 52:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 52:08
And then it's like building a framework where they feel like they can be satisfied with something that they came up with totally, like, without any, without anyone saying that that was what you needed to do.

Speaker 1 52:22
Mm.

Speaker 2 52:22
And I think for people who've been through a hard time, I think improvisation is way more, like, healing. I think everyone goes through a hard time. So I just think the, the potential for improvisation to be very healing is massive.

Speaker 1 52:37
So I ... One of the reasons that I suddenly that I wanted to do this as my research topic was because I had a lot of kids for the first time this year come to me and say, "I really wanna do a grade exam. I really wanna get a grade." And I think they wanted ...And I think that come, came from a good place for them because it came from a place of confidence.Like, "I'm ready to do something," and, you know.

Speaker 2 53:03
Mm.

Speaker 1 53:03
Um, and part of the syllabus for the, the kind of contemporary rock and pop exam stuff I was looking at was improvisation. And so I was like, "Oh, this is great." Like, it could really help. It will really encourage a lot of them who I wanted them to improvise, but for whatever reason they felt, like, a block to it. They've not enjoyed the experience. It will kind of create that framework for them in a way of like, this is something now that you kind of have to do. I hate that term have to, but, like-

Speaker 2 53:34
Yeah

Speaker 1 53:35
... it gives a kind of ... There's a goal sort of thing. Um, you know, almost giving them that meant they had to do it, which meant they kind of got over the initial thing. They were like, if I ... A lot of the time when I brought improvisation previous, they just refused to do it. They would just sit in silence or they would just like engage. They would just laugh. They would-

Speaker 2 53:59
Really?

Speaker 1 53:59
It was something that really, like-

Speaker 2 54:01
Is it because it's quite different from the other stuff you're teaching?

Speaker 1 54:04
Um, I mean, I always, as you say, I always start my lessons with call and response, and I always get them to-

Speaker 2 54:10
Oh, that's interesting

Speaker 1 54:11
...I'd always say, "Look, if you can change one note in this," like explore with the response.

Speaker 2 54:15
Mm.

Speaker 1 54:15
I'm not looking for accuracy. I'm looking for your creative idea and that kind of thing. And it was always something that felt like a real block to them. And creating this invi- When it became part of the syllabus, there was something in them that was like, "I just have to do it." You know, you removed the choice.

Speaker 2 54:31
Yeah.

Speaker 1 54:32
Um, but in the interviews that I found with the young people- Because of that and because it's in an exam setting, there's this focus on getting it right. Getting, getting

a grade. So, uh, I'm ... I, I just ... And that's one of the things that I'm interested in, is like improvisation in a kind of outcome-focused setting where there is that sense of perception around you. And then the improvisation on your own. Like a lot of the kids... One of the people I improvised, uh, interviewed, so specifically, a really, really talented singer. She was not improvising at all. Like flat out refused. She's beginning, she's turning, she's 17. I taught her for four years. She's beginning to let her guard down a little bit with it. But one of the things she said in the interview was like, "Oh, when I'm at home, I improvise all the time. I love it. But I just, as soon as I'm in front of someone," she's like, "I trust you with this," she said, but as soon as I'm in front of someone, I can't do it. I just physically can't do it."

Speaker 2 55:34
It's interesting.I wonder if it's like the word.

Speaker 1 55:37
Yeah.

Speaker 2 55:38
I wonder if it's the word is like-

Speaker 1 55:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 55:39
...carrying something.'Cause I don't know.I don't present improvisation as a topic-

Speaker 1 55:45
Yeah

Speaker 2 55:45
...so much to the people I work with.

Speaker 1 55:46
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 55:47
I think it's a way that I work so innately that literally like, probably people haven't come back to work with me again because it's too like that.

Speaker 1 55:56
Okay.

Speaker 2 55:57

So it might be, I don't know.I'm just curious about that because I think ...I, I, I, I taught this, I've taught some really young girls.

Speaker 1 56:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 56:06
It's just made me think, I'd love to play you some of the stuff-

Speaker 1 56:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 56:09
...I did with them.Because there was this young girl whose dad is a conservatoire-trained musician.

Speaker 1 56:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 56:14
Incredibly successful, and she's three years old.

Speaker 1 56:17
Okay.

Speaker 2 56:17
And he said, "I'd really like her to have some lessons. Do you do stuff with children?" And I was like, "I do, yeah. I, sure, come along." So she came along. She's three. It was our little sample session. 20-minute session. She comes into the room. She's three years old. She's dysregulated.

Speaker 1 56:38
Yeah.

Speaker 2 56:38
She's in a stranger's room.

Speaker 1 56:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 56:40
It's a musician room.

Speaker 1 56:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 56:41
It's my studio.So it's interesting.And I didn't...I was like, basically, I'm there with her.

Speaker 1 56:47
Yeah.

Speaker 2 56:47
That's, that's my moment with her.And I get out some toys and some instrument toys, like some-

Speaker 1 56:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 56:52
...glockenspiel and things, and she's playing a bit.Then she goes, "I'm hungry.I'm hungry." And she's looking at her dad.

Speaker 1 56:59
Mm.

Speaker 2 56:59
And I'm just like, "Hmm." So I pick up a bass and I go, "Bum, bum, I'm hungry.Bum, bum, I'm hungry."

Speaker 1 57:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 57:04
"Bum, bum." And I go, "What do you want?" She goes, "A banana." And I'd be like, "Dum, dum, a banana."

Speaker 1 57:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 57:08
And then she like sings along with me, and we start making a song.

Speaker 1 57:12
Yeah.

Speaker 2 57:12
And it's really fun.And she's having a great time, and suddenly she's engaging in the instruments.

Speaker 1 57:16
Yeah.

Speaker 2 57:16
And we have a great session.And I'm like, "That was brilliant.How fun."

Speaker 1 57:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 57:20
"Oh, great." And then afterwards, at the end, the dad has been observing the whole time.

Speaker 1 57:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 57:25
And he goes, "Thank you.You know, that was great.Um, yeah, I'm not sure we'll do any more.Do you teach songs?" And I was like, "No.Not-

Speaker 1 57:34
Yeah

Speaker 2 57:34
...not to three-year-olds."

Speaker 1 57:35
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 57:36
Like-

Speaker 1 57:36
Yeah

Speaker 2 57:37
...just absolutely not.Like if the-

Speaker 1 57:39

Yeah.

Speaker 2 57:39
...if the three-year-olds come in the room and they basically don't know what's going on-

Speaker 1 57:43
Yeah

Speaker 2 57:43
...I feel like my literal only incentive right now is to locate them in anything that feels engaging.

Speaker 1 57:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 57:50
And that, I don't even understand, 'cause I, my own education around music was very informal and was a-

Speaker 1 57:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 57:59
... it was like I couldn't even imagine someone trying to teach me, I don't know. Yeah. So other children I've worked with from a young age, like very quickly started doing improvisation. There was a, a little girl I worked with who was six, and we did loads of stuff using Garage Band-

Speaker 1 58:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 58:16
...and using like little sounds that we looped-

Speaker 1 58:18
Yeah

Speaker 2 58:18
...and she's singing over the top, and it's brilliant.And we'd use like Bananagram letters, like Scrabble letters.

Speaker 1 58:23

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 58:24
And we'd pull them out of a bowl, and she'd write words, and then we'd put them together.So I've done loads of stuff like that with children.

Speaker 1 58:30
Okay.

Speaker 2 58:30
And it's great.So I don't know.I think like, just curious about what you said because I wonder if the way I work is just like completely that.

Speaker 1 58:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 58:40
It's maybe completely improvised.

Speaker 1 58:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 58:43
I've never really-

Speaker 1 58:45
Yeah

Speaker 2 58:45
...thought about like s- presenting a section of it.

Speaker 1 58:49
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 58:49
But I wonder if maybe I'm doing more songwriting work-

Speaker 1 58:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 58:52
...in the way I teach.

Speaker 1 58:53
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 58:54
It's kind of confusing me.

Speaker 1 58:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 58:55
Actually even thinking about it, I'm like-

Speaker 1 58:56
Yeah

Speaker 2 58:57
...oh, yeah, I don't teach like that.It's just like-

Speaker 1 58:59
That's the new-

Speaker 2 58:59
I don't do gra- I don't do grades with people.

Speaker 1 59:01
Yeah.I mean, I ...This is actually kind of one of the first times I have.It's only because they came-

Speaker 2 59:06
Yeah

Speaker 1 59:06
...asking for that, you know?That I was like-

Speaker 2 59:08
Do you, do you like doing that?

Speaker 1 59:10
I mean, I've, I've seen the benefit of it with them.

Speaker 2 59:13
Yeah.

Speaker 1 59:14
Especially the ones who are, especially the kids who are quite, like, more ambitious potentially. I think it creates, it creates a structure. It creates that sense of progression for them. There are some kids who love just ... I never, I would never force a kid to do it. There are some who come and they love just singing songs and-

Speaker 2 59:38
Yes

Speaker 1 59:39
...some of them love songwriting, and some of them will bring a guitar in.It, it kind of very much depends on the-

Speaker 2 59:46
Yeah

Speaker 1 59:46
...student.I think for me as a kid, I loved doing exams because-

Speaker 2 59:50
Yeah

Speaker 1 59:50
...I loved that feeling of progression, and I'm someone that enjoys structure.

Speaker 2 59:54
Yeah.

Speaker 1 59:55
Um, so I can see, and I can see the benefit.And I really love ...This syllabus is great because you have to sing intervals as part of it.

Speaker 2 01:00:04
Parking, sorry.

Speaker 1 01:00:05
Oh, sorry.

Speaker 2 01:00:06
You have to sing intervals as part of the syllabus?

Speaker 1 01:00:08

Yeah.Yeah, so you have to sing like, for the grade five, you have to sing minor six, minor seven.You have to do-

Speaker 2 01:00:13
That's really cool

Speaker 1 01:00:14
...like sing scales and sing ...And that's why I like it because it draws on that musicianship stuff that the other singing grades don't ask you to do.You know?

Speaker 2 01:00:23
I, I definitely think I'm not the right teacher for loads of people because-

Speaker 1 01:00:27
Yeah

Speaker 2 01:00:27
...I know in my own experience that for me, I've needed a certain type of teacher and other ones don't work.

Speaker 1 01:00:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:00:35
And I've needed a certain type of therapist and other ones don't work.

Speaker 1 01:00:38
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 01:00:38
It's like you kind of ...Certain people have got the key to your box.

Speaker 1 01:00:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:00:43
And it's really, it's really nice that there's- The sort of like hare-brained mad teacher like me-

Speaker 1 01:00:49
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 01:00:50

...who sounds like, "I can totally understand why that dad was like that.I don't know if this is right."

Speaker 1 01:00:54
I think with a three-year-old, that's exactly how you've gotta operate.

Speaker 2 01:00:57
Yeah.But I've also been, um ...I was, um, trained, I suppose-

Speaker 1 01:01:01
Mm

Speaker 2 01:01:01
...at various points by people in improvisation during my degree, and I guess like the theory around it for me is really strong.

Speaker 1 01:01:10
Mm.

Speaker 2 01:01:10
So I might take for granted how much it's integrated into my practice.

Speaker 1 01:01:13
Mm.

Speaker 2 01:01:14
Like, it's interesting talking about it, 'cause I think ...Yeah, I guess like it's a much bigger part of my work-

Speaker 1 01:01:20
Mm

Speaker 2 01:01:20
...than I might have previously thought.

Speaker 1 01:01:21
Mm.

Speaker 2 01:01:22
Or, or maybe it's integral to even the way I teach.

Speaker 1 01:01:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:01:26
And yeah, definitely like I might just think about that more, about when I'm ...I don't ...I've stopped actually trying to procure students.

Speaker 1 01:01:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:01:33
Because I've started finding I'm, I'm really bored.I don't really wanna work with people who are doing just learning songs.

Speaker 1 01:01:40
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 01:01:40
So I don't really work with loads of kids anymore.

Speaker 1 01:01:42
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 01:01:43
I stayed with certain kids whose parents are really up for doing kind of writing and improvisational work.

Speaker 1 01:01:47
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:01:48
And I started playing around with the wording around ...And it's interesting, 'cause I wanna relaunch my work-

Speaker 1 01:01:54
Okay

Speaker 2 01:01:54
...as a teacher.

Speaker 1 01:01:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:01:56
But I think I need to focus more on this.This is really helpful.

Speaker 1 01:01:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:01:59
I might ask if I can have a copy of the interview.

Speaker 1 01:02:02
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 01:02:02
'Cause I might try and pull out like the themes.

Speaker 1 01:02:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:02:05
Because it's like trying to communicate that's really tricky.

Speaker 1 01:02:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:02:09
That that's what I like doing.

Speaker 1 01:02:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:02:11
And I think the ...as a teacher.

Speaker 1 01:02:12
I would describe that as musicianship almost.

Speaker 2 01:02:14
Yeah, that's what I was thinking.It's like teaching musicianship and vocals.

Speaker 1 01:02:17
Yeah. 'Cause I think ... And I think that's one of the things that I've taken from this conversation as much as anything, is that sense of like there's some- a musicianship in singing that I think often gets left out-

Speaker 2 01:02:33

Yeah

Speaker 1 01:02:33
...in terms of that one-to-one peripatetic structured learning thing.

Speaker 2 01:02:37
Mm.

Speaker 1 01:02:37
You can't learn piano without learning to read music.

Speaker 2 01:02:40
Mm.

Speaker 1 01:02:40
But everyone teaches singing without teaching you music.

Speaker 2 01:02:43
It's so interesting, isn't it?And people often say head voice, throat voice, chest voice.

Speaker 1 01:02:47
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:02:47
And I'm just like, "Listen, if you go and do a siren from the top of your head to the bottom of your sternum, you've got like all the notes of the rainbow are like splodges of paint-

Speaker 1 01:02:59
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 01:02:59
...and you just run your thumb through it."

Speaker 1 01:03:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:01
So I say to people, "Imagine a keyboard turned vertical-

Speaker 1 01:03:05
Yeah

Speaker 2 01:03:05
…on your body."

Speaker 1 01:03:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:07
You don't have three sections.

Speaker 1 01:03:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:08
You've got cheekbone.You've got eyebrow.

Speaker 1 01:03:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:11
You've got forehead.You've got crown.

Speaker 1 01:03:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:13
You've got above crown.

Speaker 1 01:03:14
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:14
You've got like …And s- trying to get people to …And then you've got choice.

Speaker 1 01:03:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:18
Because you could even pull a note down-

Speaker 1 01:03:20
Yeah

Speaker 2 01:03:21

...and, and, and, and make it more throaty or like jaw-based.

Speaker 1 01:03:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:25
So it's like even when it comes to loads of stuff around the way frameworks are teach, uh, singing are taught, I, I try and like digress away from them.

Speaker 1 01:03:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:35
Because they're very, what's the word, categorizing.

Speaker 1 01:03:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:39
And they're not musical enough.

Speaker 1 01:03:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:41
And I'm like, really, the best feeling that you could get, the one that I've had, is that your voice is like a bird.

Speaker 1 01:03:47
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:47
And it can come on the ground, and it can fly up.

Speaker 1 01:03:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:49
And it can go wherever it wants.It's like that is the best feeling, and that doesn't usually happen-

Speaker 1 01:03:53
Yeah

Speaker 2 01:03:53
...when you think about your voice in three sections.

Speaker 1 01:03:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:03:55
It's, it's when you think about your voice as like a, a kind of a, a real massive spectrum of sound.

Speaker 1 01:04:03
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 01:04:04
So yeah, I think getting that ...That's why I sit at the piano.

Speaker 1 01:04:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:04:07
And do a lot of work at piano.

Speaker 1 01:04:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:04:10
Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:04:10
Interesting.

Speaker 2 01:04:10
Mm.

Speaker 1 01:04:11
Thank you so much.I got loads-

Speaker 2 01:04:13
My pleasure

Alice – 1b

Speaker 1 00:00 (Meg)
Um, so, my God, I've got so many tabs open. All right. Um, before we start, I just need to check a few things with you. You know I'm doing some research for my master's degree, and that today I'd like to ask you some questions about your experiences of singing and improvisation. There are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in what you think and how you feel about it. You don't have to answer any question you don't want to, and you can stop at any time. Just say so, and we'll stop straight away. It's completely fine and won't affect anything for me or for you. I'll be recording our conversation so I can listen back to it later, but no one else will hear it, and your name won't be used in anywhere in my research. Research.

Speaker 2 00:37 (Alice)
Okay.

Speaker 1 00:37
Um, are you happy to take part?

Speaker 2 00:40
Of course, yes.

Speaker 1 00:41
Great. Um, okay, so before we start… Oh my God, I've got so many tabs open. Before we start, um, it would be great to hear a little bit about your background as a vocalist, like separate from improvisation, just like what you, where you s- when you started singing, how you came to be a singer, what singing is for you now professionally, a mini trajectory, if that makes sense.

Speaker 2 01:10
Great. I think, I think I can keep on track with this one. Um, not, not go into different stories. So I generally think it started from, well, as actually context before, my parents were like amateur musicians, so-

Speaker 1 01:22
Okay

Speaker 2 01:22
…they always surrounded me within music.They had this kind of like really middle class salsa, uh, band.

Speaker 1 01:28
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:29
Um, they'd play in, in orchestras and things like that, and they weren't singers though. Um, but I think to be honest, the earliest memory was just, uh, my, my grandma would sing these like 1940s songs, which is really sweet-

Speaker 1 01:42
Mm

Speaker 2 01:42
...and we'd watch a lot of, and it actually really circles back with a lot of the things that I've been exposed to, as it always does-

Speaker 1 01:49
Mm

Speaker 2 01:49
... of like, um, Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire films, um, and Guys and Dolls, and things like that we'd just watch. I just, it was very nostalgic and I loved and so I was always exposed to music and performance and like drama, and my mum did a lot of drama. So when High School Musical came out-

Speaker 1 02:06
Yeah

Speaker 2 02:07
...um, I realized that I wanted to sing, and all my friends, I didn't re- yeah, I just sang in the playground like an idiot, but all my friends just said to my mum, "She's good at singing."

Speaker 1 02:16
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:16
And then it was actually, I'm not very good at sticking with things, but it's one of the only things that I kind of, yeah, I did stick with. And when I was 18, I was getting pushed down, I don't know if you know this anyway, but I was getting pushed down doing acting and, and musical theater and like the actor musicianship courses.

Speaker 1 02:35
Mm.

Speaker 2 02:35

But what I found when I did all the auditions, and I did all right, I did actually okay to get through recalls and stuff, but they never took the best singer, and they never took the best musician and that, not, I'm not saying that I was at all, but they didn't care about the musicianship or-

Speaker 1 02:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 02:52
...like how people actually sung, would sing a song.

Speaker 1 02:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 02:57
Kind of they didn't really care about anything like, you know, not even tuning, but just stuff like that. They were just looking for egos. So I met a lady called [jazz, voice teacher] at this jazz course, and that's where I met [fellow jazz student], my f- one of my best friends on like a summer jazz course. Uh, and there I realized I think I might be able to sing.

Speaker 1 03:17
Mm.

Speaker 2 03:18
But I'd never really, I'd only done a tiny bit of jazz.I never had any lessons.No one had ever said, "This is this chord."

Speaker 1 03:26
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 03:26
"This is that." It was all, I mean, I was a bit weird 'cause when I was 17, like I was obsessively listening to like Ella Fitzgerald.

Speaker 1 03:33
Okay.

Speaker 2 03:34
Um, no one told me to do that.So that's like the thing that was kind of weird that I did that as like a teenager living in Essex.

Speaker 1 03:44

Mm.

Speaker 2 03:44
'Cause, 'cause I think like in Essex you really, women particularly stick to the trend or-

Speaker 1 03:50
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 03:51
... so then I was li- secretly listening to like jazz, um, and then realized I might be able to do it and got, got into [UK conservatoire] but had never really had any lessons. I hope I'm not rambling too much...

Speaker 1 04:03
No. No, it's really interesting.

Speaker 2 04:04
Um, yeah, had n- had never had any lessons of like improvisation.It had just been weirdly, I didn't even know the word transcription, but I was just kind of-

Speaker 1 04:14
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:14
... copy it back 'cause it was fun, and my like slight competitiveness of saying, "Can I, can I do this?" And I think I owe all my... And then got into people like Anita O'Day, if we're talking about particularly jazz, but it also even roots back to like that initial watching those, um, old, um, like old theatre shows-

Speaker 1 04:34
Mm

Speaker 2 04:34
...that, that were kind of in- into the films and are lovely and of all the dancing.

Speaker 1 04:37
Mm.

Speaker 2 04:38
Um, and it was just songs like that and kind of songs that my grandma was singing at me.So there's always been something that has been kind of like wa- warming, warming, that's not the word.

Speaker 1 04:47
Yeah.Comforting maybe?

Speaker 2 04:48
War- com- warming.Yeah, comforting.

Speaker 1 04:50
Warming. Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:50
A radiator. Um, yeah, it's just comforting, but then the improvisation was, um, something outside of that, and t- once I learnt bits of theory, which I was at, you'll find that I feel still imposter syndrome-y to this day-

Speaker 1 05:04
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 05:04
…which we'll probably dig into.

Speaker 1 05:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 05:06
Um, it's, it squished it a bit, and only recently now since I've - leaving school, I can actually enjoy that I am, I am a good improviser.Um, yeah.

Speaker 1 05:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 05:18
But I can, I can see that now, whereas I couldn't before. Does that-

Speaker 1 05:22
Yeah, yeah, yeah.Totally

Speaker 2 05:23
…does that make sense?Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:24
It would be good to hear a bit more about improvising, how that manifests in your work now.

Speaker 2 05:31
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:31
You know?

Speaker 2 05:31
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:32
What is it that you...Do you improvise a lot? And if so, how does that, you know, in what form?

Speaker 2 05:39
Yeah. I think, um, one thing that I didn't realize, and I think as well a part of ADHD, but just I've, I'm like this anyway, I'm very quick with new ideas.

Speaker 1 05:50
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 05:50
Um, at the start when I was improvising, it was kind of, it was just way too much. But when I need to, to kind of switch on, I'm, it's really good for writing.

Speaker 1 05:59
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:59
It's really good for coming out of new things.I feel, um- Yeah. Improvisation within writing new songs is great because there's always something new.

Speaker 1 06:08
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 06:09
Um, and if I don't like that, I have got that ability to-

Speaker 1 06:13
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 06:13

... quickly change it within that moment. Even, like, if we're talking about improvising, like, stupid lyrics or things, in gigs, like I've, um... It's just, just... We, we sometimes with the band that I, I write with, um, we sometimes mimic what we've done when it's just... I, I write with a pianist. When we kind of write at home or somewhere in a room-

Speaker 1 06:33
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 06:33
... we kind of mimic that at a gig 'cause we're like, we're running out of songs. But actually improvising a song on the spot has become, like, quite a funny thing, and also good for the audience to see that it kind of happens in real time. But just, yeah, I think improvising, if we're talking purely about singing, um, just it's like a toolkit, isn't it?

Speaker 1 06:55
Mm.

Speaker 2 06:55
It's like a toolkit of how to adjust. Um, and even when you're singing songs that you've been given really, really last minute, it's how to bridge it. Uh, and the... not that I'm saying that I f- Well, I d- I kind of do. If you're kind of feeling wobbly on something-

Speaker 1 07:10
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:10
...that improvisation can just help you.Your ears are aware, and you can kind of recover it or, like, plaster it up, you know?

Speaker 1 07:18
Yeah, yeah, yeah.You can get through something-

Speaker 2 07:19
Um-

Speaker 1 07:19
...that you don't know as well because, yeah.

Speaker 2 07:21
Yeah, you can.

Speaker 1 07:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:22
And, like, if you're singing at a wedding or something and somebody say, oh, or requests like...Oh my God, it turns out I don't know any Harry Styles songs.I found that out the other week.

Speaker 1 07:29
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:31
So it was like an improvisation over as it was.It was awful, but-

Speaker 1 07:35
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:35
...um, that quick...I think having that quick awareness of what's going on around you, um, and it, it, it just...I don't know.

Speaker 1 07:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:43
It shows a result.I think also the other thing of the...Sorry, one last thing, um, of that when people can see that your brain is kind of open to improvisation, musicians do treat me differently.

Speaker 1 07:56
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 07:56
They can see that you're, like, aware of what's going on. They can see that, because also the improvisation you're giving isn't just like a... I don't even know what to call it. Like jazz. I don't know. I'm trying to think of a word that is like, maybe like, oh, I don't know. You hear of some singers, they're kind of trying to recreate some sounds that they think is jazzy, but it's just like a boo, boo, boo, boo, boo, boo [sings stilted jazz sounds].

Speaker 1 08:22
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 08:23
Just like that.I'm, I'm trying to think of a funny metaphor of it, but I can't, um, because I'm-

Speaker 1 08:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:28
...focusing too much. Do you know what I mean?

Speaker 1 08:29
Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:29
It's like buffer. I don't know. It's like a filler.

Speaker 1 08:32
Almost like a simulation of an AI rendition of a jazz...

Speaker 2 08:36
Meg, I was literally gonna say AI-

Speaker 1 08:38
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:38
...but I didn't wanna be harsh.

Speaker 1 08:39
No.

Speaker 2 08:39
Yeah.

Speaker 1 08:40
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 08:40
I was... It's, it's kinda like that, and, and then the musicians are like, well, they, they're not really... So I'm not saying that I do know how to improvise, but I think as soon as you show that you can un- or you're hearing what the other musicians are

doing and that understanding improvising, they kind of treat you differently on all other aspects-

Speaker 1 08:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:59
...of music, if that makes sense.

Speaker 1 09:01
Yeah, definitely.

Speaker 2 09:01
That you're kind of switched on, and that, and that's what's been interesting. Um, yeah.

Speaker 1 09:07
Is that a shift? Okay, so I'd like to circle back to that.

Speaker 2 09:11
Yeah.

Speaker 1 09:11
Before we do, it would be great to hear a bit about your learning experience of improvisation.So do you-

Speaker 2 09:18
Oh, here we go.Yeah.

Speaker 1 09:18
Do you remember, like, the first time you were asked to improvise publicly or you improvised publicly? Is there like a...

Speaker 2 09:28
So actually I didn't even, I didn't even bring this up. This is actually quite, probably this is more relevant. Um, I, because my dad played trumpet, I basically only learnt the trumpet to get into this Catholic school-

Speaker 1 09:41
Okay

Speaker 2 09:41
...that was good at music.

Speaker 1 09:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:43
Um, so I played trumpet till, like, I was 18.

Speaker 1 09:46
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:46
From, like, 10 to 18.I then was told to do this, like, little jazz club.Um, and it was mixed of boys and girls. I did not understand improvisation.

Speaker 1 09:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:58
I didn't get it. I had a good sound. I didn't get it at all.I didn't understand-

Speaker 1 10:01
This is on the trumpet?

Speaker 2 10:03
This is with trumpet.

Speaker 1 10:04
Okay, okay.

Speaker 2 10:04
Didn't get it. No one had really sat down the theory. I think my brain was just still a bit overwhelmed.

Speaker 1 10:10
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 10:10
Um, so when I switched when I was about 16, I then tried singing. I mean, first of all, they wouldn't let me sing 'cause they didn't think I could. But then when I tried singing somewhere else, um, they did ask me to improvise, and it was easier. It was just easier I think.

Speaker 1 10:26

Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 10:26
I could hear it better. Um, but also it was also humiliating because you don't really understand it. But also at that course that I did when I was 16, with adults as well, um, before any safeguarding things were happening- … um, the, the singers didn't really teach improvising. They didn't teach improvisation.

Speaker 1 10:45
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 10:45
They just taught us the standards that we had to learn.

Speaker 1 10:49
Okay.

Speaker 2 10:49
So, and swing fill, I felt like they didn't even wanna touch it. But I felt that those singing, those singing tutors or the singers, they didn't know how to explain it, um, because they probably hadn't… It's, it's like there's this whole… I don't know.

Speaker 1 11:03
Did they improvise?

Speaker 2 11:04
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:04
Were they, were they improvisers themselves though?

Speaker 2 11:08
Kind of.

Speaker 1 11:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:09
No, I wouldn't, I wouldn't say that was their strength.

Speaker 1 11:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 11:13
I think they were just also treating improvisation as something that they're kind of, like, paddling through-

Speaker 1 11:17
Uh-huh

Speaker 2 11:18
...and that they're just kind of floating.So when it came to teaching improvisation, I think because obviously may- no one's probably told them what to do.

Speaker 1 11:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:25
So, but when somebody even... Oh, when someone first said it, I didn't... I honestly, I can't, I don't have many memories of doing it. I'm not even sure I really properly did it until I met this lady, [jazz vocal coach].

Speaker 1 11:38
Okay.

Speaker 2 11:39
But I'd already done...I'd, I'd been listening to Ella.

Speaker 1 11:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:44
So a lot of Ella phrases were coming out, which-

Speaker 1 11:47
Okay

Speaker 2 11:47
... which... But also that was, that was the first time where that was kind of praised and this teacher said to the, to everyone in the room, "This is a result of the work that she's done of listening to Ella." And then-

Speaker 1 12:00
Okay.So that was a public...So publicly you were improvising, um-

Speaker 2 12:04

Yes, that's a pub- Yeah.

Speaker 1 12:05
And it was-

Speaker 2 12:05
Sorry, I'm really going into these stories.

Speaker 1 12:07
No, no, no, no. It's great. It's good to... It's just good for me to clarify. So you were publicly improvising, you hadn't prepared anything. Like, had... Did you know that this was gonna happen, or was it like a, a spur of the moment thing?

Speaker 2 12:20
Yeah, it was so...Oh, I f- I, sorry, I've switched round to stories.So the 16-year-old one was like with the teachers who didn't really know how to teach improvisation.

Speaker 1 12:30
Okay, yeah.

Speaker 2 12:30
It was that kind of adult course.And then I tried an adult course when I was about 18.

Speaker 1 12:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 12:35
And that's where I met [jazz teacher].Um, and the exercise that we were doing, and it was...Yeah, it, it was, it was, it wasn't in Essex as well.I think it was in Chichester, but not that matters.

Speaker 1 12:45
Mm.

Speaker 2 12:45
But there were lots of different people, and I think they were also a bit better, the students there. We were doing that improvisation thing where you take an idea, you take the end of someone's idea, and then you, that's your beginning.

Speaker 1 12:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 12:56
And then you... And I think my brain, without even realizing, it was kind of, I mean, it was already a bit crazy of like thinking of so many different things, probably too much, but the things that I was repeating that was coming out of my mouth was a result of how high the moon-

Speaker 1 13:13
Listening

Speaker 2 13:13
...of Ella Fitzgerald.

Speaker 1 13:14
And had you learnt that, like, off...Had you d- Had you learnt-

Speaker 2 13:17
Yeah

Speaker 1 13:17
...you'd learnt that?

Speaker 2 13:18
Yeah. Didn't even know, I didn't even know what I was doing.I didn't even know that was transcription, though.

Speaker 1 13:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:23
Um, I just learnt it 'cause I was just obsessed with it and-

Speaker 1 13:27
Yeah

Speaker 2 13:27
... it was so warm, all the, all her music, and it was fun. Um, yeah, and, and I mean, that was even well before. I didn't even think, I didn't even know what a jazz singer was. I didn't even think I could do singing.

Speaker 1 13:39
Mm.

Speaker 2 13:39

So yeah, that was probably the first public thing where I was really challenged to improvise properly-

Speaker 1 13:45
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 13:45
...um, with the right guidance.

Speaker 1 13:47
Okay.

Speaker 2 13:47
But we still weren't explained anything about 2-5-1s or, or chords or I-

Speaker 1 13:53
So it was all kind of done by ear as opposed to-

Speaker 2 13:56
Yeah, every-

Speaker 1 13:56
...theoretical knowledge

Speaker 2 13:57
...everything I did up to [conservatoire] was done by ear.

Speaker 1 14:00
Okay.

Speaker 2 14:00
I think that's probably the best way to d- explain it.

Speaker 1 14:03
Could we talk a bit about then your learning at [conservatoire] and what that was like, like learning improvisation, how that process, what that process was?

Speaker 2 14:14
So-

Speaker 1 14:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:19
First word that, I don't wanna be too confusing 'cause I feel like there's so many, you know, we haven't even thought about it for a while-

Speaker 1 14:24
Yeah

Speaker 2 14:24
... so I don't wanna confuse you. But I don't think this will be confusing 'cause it's, I guess, four years ago. Oh my God, when did I join? 2019. Ugh. Um, it was terrifying. It was absolutely terrifying. Um, I felt like one of the stronger improvisers because my brain, I mean, my brain is still like this anyway.

Speaker 1 14:47
Mm.

Speaker 2 14:47
It's just something that just keeps churning out new ideas, but I've never had any training theory, and you were treated so much as an instrument at [conservatoire], like your voice as an instrument. You're not really treated as a singer. So I honestly think most of the course was learning about improvisation.

Speaker 1 15:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:05
Um, I also think, and this, I guess to do really comes with anxiety, but all the things going on when you're from like 19 to 24, 23, it's, it's, it's just adjusting to that and then living in London. I feel like the mental space you have to really-

Speaker 1 15:22
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:23
...open yourself up and be, be vulnerable when I think you're already going through quite a vulnerable time as well, meeting new people-

Speaker 1 15:29
Mm

Speaker 2 15:29
... and, and that kind of old early 20s, there's just so much to deal with that to really open yourself up to improvisation and st- and, and challenge yourself. No, I

definitely didn't wanna do that because I already felt... So I wasn't gonna get the best out of it 'cause I already felt like I was really behind. When we had Zoom calls in harmony lessons over COVID, I would pretend that the Wi-Fi had gone down, and because they'd be asking questions for person by person, then you'd have to answer this question in front of everyone, and I had no freaking clue. Like, it was-

Speaker 1 16:05
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:06
...such imposter syndrome, and I felt like I was this...I don't know.I felt so ashamed of it, but I-

Speaker 1 16:12
Mm

Speaker 2 16:12
... didn't wanna think about it, that I just didn't understand the harmony that went in with improvising. But I think also because my ears, um, I, uh... I, I'm gonna be nice to myself, but because I have got-

Speaker 1 16:22
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:22
... such good ears, um, I've gotten away, I've got... Not, I don't wanna say got away. I feel like people have never really... I've just got, I've just gotten away of improvising or, or it's been something-

Speaker 1 16:35
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:35
... that's been easy for me, but I've never really understood the theory underneath. I do know a lot more, but, um, we can, we can, we can maybe... I don't know if you wanna get onto that now, but it's something that-

Speaker 1 16:44
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:44

...actually distracts me more.Um, so my, yeah, my relationship w- with when we started, when I started learning about the theory and understanding how to put the theory into-

Speaker 1 16:55
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 16:56
... improvising, it, it just... I don't know. It didn't feel free. It, it didn't feel good. It was really difficult. Um, I was constantly trying to be impressive because you're surrounded by a lot of musicians who are trying to be impressive, but it was actually really shit.

Speaker 1 17:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:14
Rubbish.

Speaker 1 17:14
No, you're...It's all right.

Speaker 2 17:15
Bad transport joke.

Speaker 1 17:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:17
It was really it was just like, yeah, you could...And it just sounded like somebody who's trying so much.Um-

Speaker 1 17:24
Yeah

Speaker 2 17:24
...and probably in comparison to that 18-year-old who was just maybe coming up with too many ideas, but I was much freer from listening to Ella-

Speaker 1 17:32
Yeah.Yeah

Speaker 2 17:33

... and surrounding myself in jazz than when I was at school. But then maybe, you know, but where I am now of improvising, I don't know. I don't think about theory as much now, but it's there. It's there that grounds me and roots me.

Speaker 1 17:46
I was gonna say, do you use... Do you feel that you're, even though you're not thinking about the theory, the knowledge of the theory, the kind of subconscious knowledge of it, does that impact how you improvise now?

Speaker 2 17:58
Yeah. I, I mean, 100% it does. It's really... I'm really glad and lucky actually, and I feel very privileged because when you look at other singers who were put through the ring of fire of having to improvise in front of other people that haven't, that haven't had that kind of training, it's kind of like exposure, isn't it?

Speaker 1 18:15
Mm.

Speaker 2 18:15
And I feel that I've had exposure to...I w- I wouldn't say I necessarily...I mean, if I was teaching a student, we'd go through the theory.Um-

Speaker 1 18:24
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:24
...I would wanna give them that.But for me, I feel that my brain or my ear's been exposed to it.I just kind of see it as just like similar patterns that happen.

Speaker 1 18:32
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:33
Sorry, and, and I can hear it before it's about to happen, so, so even though I wouldn't actually know what to call it, if it's going from a, a two to a, to six or whatever, or it's going to the minor or something, I'm really bad at that. I can hear and because it's familiar, so I can just kind of... I feel like I float over it.

Speaker 1 18:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:51
Um-

Speaker 1 18:52
So even-

Speaker 2 18:52
I get away with it.That's how it feels.

Speaker 1 18:54
So even though you can't fully n- you don't feel like you can necessarily fully name it, the experience of your ears are able to hear it.

Speaker 2 19:05
Yeah.Yeah.Through being...Yeah, exactly.

Speaker 1 19:07
You have like an innate understanding of what's happening even though you can't necessarily label it.

Speaker 2 19:11
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:12
Is that right?

Speaker 2 19:12
Yeah, I could sing around it, and that precision's got much better as well. So I mean, but that is thanks to obviously [conservatoire] for, you know, getting me to sing over because I was challenged and, oh, which... Oh, it was, um, [jazz aural teacher], right? That's his name, isn't it?

Speaker 1 19:29
Mm-hmm.That is a person, yeah.

Speaker 2 19:31
Yeah. Yeah. He was, uh, not... I don't think... I think... I don't know. People always assume so, kind of so little of singers that when you show that you can hear something and sing something back or your tuning's good or that you're awake-

Speaker 1 19:48
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:48

...I feel like you honestly just have to be awake as a singer, and they're like, "Wow." Um, you know, it's ridiculous.

Speaker 1 19:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:54
But [jazz aural teacher] was one of the first people who, who was like, "Oh, shit, your ears are very, very good." And even if I didn't, I had no idea what was going on. I mean, obviously I read, I read music, and I completely understand the theory within that, but it's just maybe... It's all the modal stuff that I just, I tapped out of.

Speaker 1 20:12
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 20:12
'Cause I feel like it was such a weakness.

Speaker 1 20:14
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 20:15
I didn't even wanna go there.Um, and my focus is so bad.I know I have ADHD, so-

Speaker 1 20:19
Yeah

Speaker 2 20:19
...if it's something I'm not interested in, which is terrible 'cause I did a degree on it.

Speaker 1 20:23
Yeah, but also f- fine, I would say.

Speaker 2 20:27
Right?So actually listening to so many different things and, like, even with [jazz teacher] and all those kind of people, and being exposed to that, when it, it's repeated and I hear it again-

Speaker 1 20:36
Yeah

Speaker 2 20:37

...somewhere else in, like, work, if it's for work or if it's over, like, I don't know, situations-

Speaker 1 20:43
Yeah

Speaker 2 20:44
...uh, I d- don't know, when singing.As I said, it's like an alarm bell goes in my head.It's like, "Great, you've heard this before." Dooby-do-do-do-do.

Speaker 1 20:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:51
You sing over it.It sounds like I know what I'm t- I...Yeah.

Speaker 1 20:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:55
Does that make sense?

Speaker 1 20:55
Totally.Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 20:56
Hope that made sense.

Speaker 1 20:57
Is there-

Speaker 2 20:58
Yeah

Speaker 1 20:58
...can you think of, like, a specific experience or a general recollection of anxiety or apprehension around improvisation?And can you-

Speaker 2 21:12
100%, yeah.

Speaker 1 21:14

Are there any specific examples of that?It's fine if not.I have some other questions that I can help...We can dig through it.

Speaker 2 21:23
Can I come back to it?

Speaker 1 21:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:25
'Cause it's just, it's just tricky. Are you okay as well?

Speaker 1 21:27
Yeah, sorry. Just my dog's walking around the room, so I was just looking at him.

Speaker 2 21:32
Oh, it's okay.

Speaker 1 21:34
Sorry.

Speaker 2 21:35
What breed of dog have you got?Sorry, that's, like, me getting distracted.

Speaker 1 21:38
I'll show you him after the...

Speaker 2 21:39
Yeah. I love dogs. They're the best ones. Um, yeah, Meg, 100%. I feel like there's so many that you... I have, I have a, a traumatizing story from... What's his bloody name? Oh my God. He looks like Elton John. What's his name? He's like... Oh, shit. He's that jazz singer...

Speaker 1 22:02
[tried to recall name]

Speaker 2 22:08
[identifying feature].

Speaker 1 22:09
Yeah, yeah, I know the one.He is [singer's name], but I can't remember his surname.

...

Speaker 2 22:23
...yeah, okay.I will, we will circle back to, 'cause Meg, there is 100% some, I think, exams, to be honest.

Speaker 1 22:30
Okay.Really?

Speaker 2 22:31
Um, like this feeling like nothing can come out of my head, and I think when things are... things just come out of my head so quickly, um, it was understanding to kind of put a filter on that and make it more detailed because they wanted to hear these exact notes. They wanted to hear this exact outlining, and I think nobody really sat me down, but I still didn't get it. Um-

Speaker 1 22:53
Can you, can-

Speaker 2 22:53
...and it never felt like a free thing

Speaker 1 22:55
...in those mo- in those exam moments, were-- Can you remember any, like, specific things that happened?Was there any, like, physical-

Speaker 2 23:02
Yeah

Speaker 1 23:03
...sensations or any kind of mental blocks or things that happened?

Speaker 2 23:07
100%. 100%. Um, if I go... I don't... I feel like exams is obviously it's gonna be like that. It's gonna be a nerve-wracking thing, but just my general singing improvisation around [conservatoire], it was, it was learning, I don't know, like, you know guide tones and everything-

Speaker 1 23:26
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 23:26

... that, you know, you have to sing. It'd been so drilled into our heads to do it like that, that I'd lost all creativity and that I was just sticking to these guide tones because that was a thing to do.

Speaker 1 23:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 23:37
Um, but my head completely blocked. I couldn't think of anything, which is unusual for me because normally, as I say, with improvisation, like, my head's just like bing, bing, bing, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang.

Speaker 1 23:48
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 23:48
I know that's really hard to-

Speaker 1 23:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:49
...write down what I just said there, but-

Speaker 1 23:51
No, it's all right

Speaker 2 23:51
...it's sh- I churn out, I churn out so much that when you've been told such a specific thing to do-

Speaker 1 23:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:57
...I was like-

Speaker 1 23:58
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:59
...absolutely not.

Speaker 1 24:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:00
Uh, my brain, it is kind of…It, it just shuts down.Yeah, totally breathing goes.Um, you try and shut your eyes for dear life.You can't hear as well.

Speaker 1 24:11
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 24:12
Um, you know, so, so you're closing your eyes. But I feel… I mean, that's another thing anyway of, like, [conservatoire] and what they want out of singers. I feel like they want you to look like you're focusing when you're singing.

Speaker 1 24:25
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 24:25
So a lot of how the singers have learned, and you see - like singers who have-- trying to do jazz because they just shut their eyes and-

Speaker 1 24:33
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 24:33
…sing like a really, really…'Cause we're concentrating, but it's like we're trying to look like we're doing something really difficult.

Speaker 1 24:39
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 24:40
Um, but- It, it immediately shuts off the audience for that as a whole.

Speaker 1 24:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:45
Do you know what I mean?It's like-

Speaker 1 24:47
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 24:48
Yeah, so but that improvising that is so detailed and dedicated, um, it just, for me it sounded absolutely rubbish.It didn't sound free.

Speaker 1 24:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:58
It wasn't fun as well.

Speaker 1 25:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:00
And so much of my joy actually does come from improvising.Not, sorry, not of my joy.From improvising-

Speaker 1 25:07
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:07
...I do get a lot of joy.

Speaker 1 25:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:09
Yeah.Um, if that makes sense, and it should be fun, and that was totally with that narrow kind of expectation of what it should be through theory and what we need to show.

Speaker 1 25:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:19
My brain just couldn't handle it.Sorry, Meg, I'm late for that.I'm so sorry about that

Speaker 1 25:22
No, oh my God.

Speaker 2 25:23
But

Speaker 1 25:23
This is good.This is great.I...This is all good stuff.In terms-

Speaker 2 25:26
Okay

Speaker 1 25:26
...in terms of the...I would, I would love to dig into a little bit the...You said at one point that you were kind of treated as an instrumentalist.

Speaker 2 25:36
Yeah.

Speaker 1 25:36
That singers were taught...What do you think the impact of that was?

Speaker 2 25:42
Right. It's very... Good, great question. Um, you felt as if... I feel like this some... I felt like this at school anyway, um, because my focus was so bad, but I didn't realize. But as a singer, you felt like everybody was on a little step up or on the third l- step of the ladder.

Speaker 1 26:03
Mm.

Speaker 2 26:04
And that you were constantly...You weren't even on the ladder.

Speaker 1 26:07
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 26:07
You were so far below, um, that as soon as you would try to take a step up, somebody would shake it, and you'd fall off. Um, I felt like it was fighting an... Uh, what is it? Fighting a ending. What's the battle? I can't remember the metaphor.

Speaker 1 26:22
Losing, losing battle.

Speaker 2 26:22
Never end...Huh?

Speaker 1 26:23
A losing battle.

Speaker 2 26:24
Thanks.

Speaker 1 26:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:28
Fighting a wi- fighting a winning battle? Yeah, fighting a losing battle that it was just never on our side. Um, I was really challenged, so that was really cool, but I liked that I was treated... Well, did I? No, I didn't, 'cause I never got to really sing songs, and I love singing. Um, and after doing that improvisation for such a long time, you're sat, and you're kind of like made to like compete in a way with these other instrumentalists around you. Like, can you hold your own?

Speaker 1 26:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:59
Can you show you know what you're doing?But then also people always expect that you can't.And then-

Speaker 1 27:04
Why do you think-

Speaker 2 27:04
I mean-

Speaker 1 27:05
Why do you think that is that people expect that you can't?

Speaker 2 27:08
Because you're immediately a s- a singer, and it's like... But they know though that we haven't got the buttons that we can press, that we can easily get that. But they kind of know that you're not gonna know anything about theory. Um-

Speaker 1 27:21
Mm

Speaker 2 27:21

...and also I think at school, if you listen to any other bits of music which you'd go in and s- you'd go insane if you just listened to jazz, which a lot of people did.

Speaker 1 27:28
Mm.

Speaker 2 27:29
You'd kind of be credited less, um, if you sounded like anything else, if you didn't sound like this ridiculous London jazz singer.Like [renowned jazz singer]...Not, sorry, not saying [jazz singer] is ridiculous.

Speaker 1 27:39
Mm.

Speaker 2 27:39
She's great.

Speaker 1 27:40
Mm.

Speaker 2 27:40
But a lot of people try and reciprocate, or what is it? Like mimic that sound. If you're not sounding like that, um, y- yeah, p- people kind of discredit you and think, "She's not really... Why is she here for this jazz course if she listens to disco?" Um-

Speaker 1 27:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:58
... and but it's, it's all to do with each other. Sorry, talking about instrumentalists of... The things we were told was just sometimes they'd get, they'd get us to do it knowing you can't do this, and they'd say, "You can't do this."

Speaker 1 28:10
Right.

Speaker 2 28:11
But do it. And if I had a pound for every time they said, "Yeah, you probably won't be able to do this, but..." Which is fine, and then also not, because like sometimes we couldn't. But then it's like we're giving something what-

Speaker 1 28:20
I mean, asking, asking people...Yeah

Speaker 2 28:23
...sometimes-

Speaker 1 28:23
Asking people, asking people to do something you know they can't do in front of other people is...Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:28
Right?

Speaker 1 28:29
And how would that...In those moments, like, what would happen for you?

Speaker 2 28:35
I just, honestly, I'd just be constantly pissed off, and I felt like I constantly had this wall up-

Speaker 1 28:41
Mm

Speaker 2 28:41
...and this to, to show that I, that I do, I should be here, and that I do know what I'm talking about, and I'm not like the stereotypes that they're kind of thinking about singers.

Speaker 1 28:51
Mm.

Speaker 2 28:51
That you can't improvise and i- you know, I felt, I f- at some point, I felt like I d- I did all right throughout [conservatoire], but then also I felt that there was such a low expectation-

Speaker 1 29:06
Okay

Speaker 2 29:06
...of singers.But then they'd ask us to do ridiculously hard things, so-

Speaker 1 29:12
Yeah

Speaker 2 29:12
...it, it was weird.Um, yeah.

Speaker 1 29:15
Do you think there is a gendered element to that?

Speaker 2 29:23
Yeah, yeah.I, I actually complained a few times, um, just of the treatment of women-

Speaker 1 29:31
Mm

Speaker 2 29:32
... and of singers. And we were told, advised, "Oh, it's a separate complaint. It's a separate thing. It's... That's a sexism thing. That's a singer thing." Like, it's not linked, but the male vocalist that we'd see, I was scatting in exactly the same way or improvising in exactly the same way, but they just had a lot more clout. Um, and I feel like if you showed any slight emotion... So, so I think as well, because all the singers, maybe if they were like female sing- w- um, singers who were my friends and women, if they've... Oh, I just heard my cat meow. Got kittens. Um, if they acted slightly more masculine in the way that the other, the boys did of like, "Oh yeah, jazz, I'm showing that I really..." And they just had... And I say masculine, but actually they just had more, just a lot more confidence and, um, I'm thinking of... I'm, uh... You can cut the names out, but just for your reference-

Speaker 1 30:28
Mm

Speaker 2 30:28
...I'm thinking of like [jazz student].

Speaker 1 30:29
Okay, yeah.

Speaker 2 30:30
People like that. [jazz student] is really... She knows, she knows that she's good. Even though that she does doubt herself, but she wouldn't let anybody see that, and that is the same way that the other musicians, the boy- the boys in our class and her class above would be.

Speaker 1 30:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:45
So I feel like as soon as you'd show vulnerability as like a woman or that you doubt yourself- It's like just another reason for other people to doubt you.Um-

Speaker 1 30:54
Yeah

Speaker 2 30:54
...or that you're a bit ditzy.So I'd sometimes play the ditzy card as well, um, which I hate, but I felt-

Speaker 1 31:00
Mm

Speaker 2 31:00
...if, if I can act like I don't know what's going on and then surprise them-

Speaker 1 31:06
Mm

Speaker 2 31:06
...that's fine.But I just...You do feel like you're fighting a never-ending battle, that's the-

Speaker 1 31:11
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 31:11
Um, I...Sorry, what was also about instruments.F- Meg, I'm so aware that I do go off on such a tangent.Um-

Speaker 1 31:18
It's good.I love the tangents 'cause then it's like all organic from you, so that's, that's good, yeah.

Speaker 2 31:22
Good.Okay.

Speaker 1 31:23
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 31:23
Just RIP to you listening back to the podcast.

Speaker 1 31:25
No, it's all right.It's good.

Speaker 2 31:28
Um, I just feel like, you know you haven't thought about it for a bit and you're like, "Oh, my God." Um, it's also depending on who was in your group and the teachers you had, if they actually liked singers, which is such a ridiculous thing to say, but singers are such a burden.

Speaker 1 31:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:46
Like little bunny ears. They're such a... They think that singers are such a burden on, on music and jazz, and if you were doing a difficult improvisation exercise, if you had a pianist who didn't like singers or was just trying to do the coolest thing for them-

Speaker 1 32:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 32:03
... you'd be stuck. You'd be like stuck in the mud that you're like, "I can't, I can't hear anything," because they try and make it so free or, or jazzy or impressive that it's just a completely selfish act. Um-

Speaker 1 32:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 32:15
...and but playing with people who, like pianists or, or harmony instrumentalists who just, just do, just do a job that should be done of just supporting everybody in the band-

Speaker 1 32:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 32:28
...they're not selfish.It was a w- it was a world of a difference playing with them.

Speaker 1 32:31
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:32
So when you get teachers who are like, "Let's do, um, chordless bands, and then you're gonna improvise over that," and things.It, it's fine.It happens.Uh-

Speaker 1 32:43
Yeah

Speaker 2 32:43
...and you have to do it, but it's really freaking hard.

Speaker 1 32:47
Yeah.Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 32:49
Um, and as I said as well, they ask you to do things like that. [Jazz teacher], who I did like, but would ask you to do ridiculous things that we'd be like, "We can't do that," and he would joke, as I said, like, "Yeah, all right, I know that you can't, but just have a go." And as you said, it is, it's a kind of humiliation that you're being set up.I just...I did feel at [conservatoire] I was constantly being set up.

Speaker 1 33:11
Yeah.That's crazy.

Speaker 2 33:12
Um-

Speaker 1 33:12
I mean, that's a crazy experience, you know, to have.Um-

Speaker 2 33:16
Yeah

Speaker 1 33:17
... I'd love, I'd love to... We can come... If any of the... Like, I'd love to hear, again, if you do think of any of, like, specific experiences that were really negative, that would be great to hear, but there's no pressure to. I'd love to talk a bit about-

Speaker 2 33:28
I will.I will

Speaker 1 33:29
... about, like, any positive experiences that you had, or, like, if there was a turning point for you where it kind of flipped into being more consistently something that

was a positive. It sounds to me like improvisation is a positive thing for you now. It brings you joy. You can-

Speaker 2 33:46
Yeah.

Speaker 1 33:47
Uh, when…What was the turning point for that?

Speaker 2 33:51
Wow.It was in there.There were, like there were, like, um, shimmers of it.I don't know what the right word is.

Speaker 1 33:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:59
Sprinkles.There were sprinkles of positivity, and I, as I say, as I said, I feel like the bar was so low that I was really lucky that I had respect throughout [conservatoire].

Speaker 1 34:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:10
Um, and I still do, fingers crossed, I say that, but when I go to jazz jams, 'cause it's just good to wake my brain up or I seem to like to put myself in horrible situations-

Speaker 1 34:22
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 34:23
… um, why do I wanna do that? But, um, I, I manage to have, have respect from it, that people kind of know what I'm doing. So a really, a really positive experience, well, I actually, honestly, I feel like 'cause it's one of the first things I really learned to sing over, I just loved singing over a blues.

Speaker 1 34:43
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 34:43
'Cause the sound was so familiar, and that has informed me now, though, that the sounds just have to be familiar, and then I know what I'm doing.

Speaker 1 34:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:51
You know? It's like, so, so it's like, it's the difference, isn't it, of when they kind of... somebody gives you a chord chart, and it's like, what is it? I can't even... At this sofa I can't even remember the, like, the terminology, but Like, um, the music, and they give you the different chords. I wouldn't just be able to sing over it like that. Um, I know that was encouraged for us to do, that we could just sing it.

Speaker 1 35:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:13
But as soon as that sound becomes familiar, then I'm improvising over it. Uh, well, there was a choir concert, and I think I was crazy, but somebody was ill, so they needed somebody to sing over a bit of the blues. Over a bit of the blues.

Speaker 1 35:31
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:31
Um, and I did it, and I don't think my teacher knew that I was actually good at improvisation, which is so funny-

Speaker 1 35:40
Mm

Speaker 2 35:40
... because she was the head of vocals. But she was so shocked, and I mean, the thing is, though, I didn't, I wasn't even trying to, I wasn't even trying to impress everyone, I think. I was just having fun, and it just felt something that was so natural. Um, and I felt really comfortable singing it, and then turns out it was, it was fine. It was good. But the teacher's reaction was hilarious because they were like, "I didn't... You... The sounds you make, though, like, they're really... They're... That's a good... They're good syllables, you know? It sounds really natural." Um-

Speaker 1 36:11
Mm.

Speaker 2 36:12
And it, it was like, yeah, funny they were surprised.Another s- another teacher actually, um, I don't know if this is good or bad.

Speaker 1 36:20
Hmm.

Speaker 2 36:20
They always said that I had really weird, um, the letters that I used and the syllables that I used were really weird.

Speaker 1 36:27
Okay.

Speaker 2 36:27
But I have absolutely no idea where that came from. Like, I'd use Zs or different syllables, and I think the teacher was, like, intrigued by it, of where did you get that from? But I had absolutely no idea 'cause I think I'm quite lucky that- And I, I think this is to do with, I know you're not going in- into this anyway of, like, neurodivergence, but, um, when I was, like, assessed on my ADHD, my verbal reasoning was very good. So if I think of something, I can immediately express that emotion-

Speaker 1 36:57
Okay, yeah

Speaker 2 36:57
...or how I'm feeling or can describe to people.So I'm very good at communicating with other people, even though I speak-

Speaker 1 37:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 37:03
... 500 words a second. Um, but it's the same with that link-up with improvisation. I don't really... I- I've never thought, and I think actually this is probably a good thing to say in this interview, I've never actually thought about what letters or the syllables I use.

Speaker 1 37:18
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 37:19
You know, when, as we said, like, that kind of...'cause it is true-

Speaker 1 37:22

Yeah

Speaker 2 37:22
...like that AI.

Speaker 1 37:23
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 37:23
Jazz.It's shoobadoobadooba-

Speaker 1 37:25
Yeah

Speaker 2 37:25
...shoobo shooboop.

Speaker 1 37:26
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 37:27
So I see, I hear so many people sing it, sing like that, and then people would come up to me and say, "How did you, uh, what, how did you know what, like, letters or, or syllables to use?" I actually have no idea.

Speaker 1 37:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:41
So it sounds ridiculous, but I, I literally don't know why that, how they come out.

Speaker 1 37:46
So if you were to be, you know, you, you said that you do work with improvisation, you do teach it to younger students. When... That's one of the things, the conversations I have a lot is about the syllables and what-

Speaker 2 37:59
Yeah

Speaker 1 37:59
...sounds to use.If, if that's not something that you've actually ever thought about, how do you teach that?Like, what do you do?

Speaker 2 38:09
Yeah. Thank, no, absolutely. 'Cause I, I'm like, how do I describe this? I mean, we'll listen to, or we'll make sure we listen to things. I think listening is so important. Um, I actually sometimes i- introduce improvisation through, like, R&B vibe, just two chords in a straight way, 'cause I feel like the swing is sometimes too much, that they get freaked out, and I don't have too many students that wanna do jazz.

Speaker 1 38:34
Mm.

Speaker 2 38:34
So I'm, like, so happy when they do because-

Speaker 1 38:37
Yeah

Speaker 2 38:37
...they can be a little weirdo like me or like I was.But, um, I actually really like im- like, introducing it through the R&B.

Speaker 1 38:44
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 38:45
And what we'll do is, we'll, yeah, I'll start playing some chords. I'll just show them of different ideas they could possibly do. I mean, first of all, ask them can they sing anything. Um, if they can't think of any syllables, if it's like, I'll use a hey.

Speaker 1 39:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:01
Like, hey.

Speaker 1 39:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:03
Hey. And, and get them kind of riffing because they're familiar with those sounds. They hear riffs all the time, and then we'll take it apart and maybe use words like of, um... there's, like, Alicia Keys song I was teaching somebody the other day. Um, and it's like taking that phrase with, with lyrics.

Speaker 1 39:21
Mm.

Speaker 2 39:21
I will keep, and then changing, I will keep.Um, just-

Speaker 1 39:26
Yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 39:26
...obviously I don't know the whole two stanzas to it-

Speaker 1 39:28
Yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 39:29
...but changing it through the lyrics.

Speaker 1 39:31
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:31
And then I'll say, "Should we just, just choose any, choose like an R, choose an A or an O or something," and then introducing that to them like that.

Speaker 1 39:40
Mm.

Speaker 2 39:41
Um, I sadly haven't had anybody who's, like, a young teenager to, that wants to do, um, like, improvisation like jazz.

Speaker 1 39:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:50
But they do enjoy it. They're terrified of it, I think. I forget, though, it is like this literal, Meg, it's like, it's crazy from what I've seen it in the kids, bless them, and, and a lot of them are women-

Speaker 1 40:02
Mm

Speaker 2 40:03
...and g- the teenage girls.They have, they have this kind of, like, slate of metal in front of their brain that-

Speaker 1 40:11
Yeah

Speaker 2 40:11
...will not let them say, sing anything.They're just so afraid to sing one note.

Speaker 1 40:17
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 40:17
And I'm thinking, "Give me something." I'm like, uh, and saying- ..."You can sing one note.What can you hear?"

Speaker 1 40:22
Mm-hmm.Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:22
"What can you..." And they're just like, "I can't do it.I can't do it.I can't do it."

Speaker 1 40:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:25
And, and they're so still, and they're so terrified.Um-

Speaker 1 40:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 40:28
...and so I do feel like I have to, like, we'll just do back and forths, and as soon as they hear something, and then sometimes they fly to it like an absolute bird-

Speaker 1 40:38
Yeah

Speaker 2 40:38
...or something, and that's definitely not...Is that a metaphor?Well-

Speaker 1 40:41

Yeah

Speaker 2 40:41
...just, that's not a phrase.That's not a phrase.Fly like, fly like, fly like a...I don't know.

Speaker 1 40:45
Fly like a bird.Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:46
Fly like a bird.Yeah, yeah.Um, so that's really interesting, or it...Yeah.Some, some people's ears are better though than others.Some people's ears-

Speaker 1 40:55
Mm

Speaker 2 40:55
... are better than others, but I totally think that everybody can be taught it. Um, and it needs, it needs to be something that's fun and freeing, and I think it's just to control that your voice can reach different notes.

Speaker 1 41:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:06
And they just don't know. I feel like they, they feel like there ha- has to be a word or it has to be something, and it's kind of, as singers, though, it's like just thin air, and you do have to grab something from it.

Speaker 1 41:16
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 41:16
Um, so I'm trying to make it as...I, I link it into songwriting, but I'm secretly getting them to improvise, and they don't know.

Speaker 1 41:24
Yeah.That's really...Yeah, I like that.

Speaker 2 41:26
See, that word freaks them out.

Speaker 1 41:28
Mm.

Speaker 2 41:28
It freaks them out, and they wouldn't know how they'd use it, but as you asked earlier, it's like having that skill, it's like, my God, it can, it can really, like, save you.

Speaker 1 41:40
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 41:42
You know?From…And, and, and help you in different things.

Speaker 1 41:45
Yeah, totally.

Speaker 2 41:46
Yeah.I hope that answers the, a bit of the question.I know that I-

Speaker 1 41:48
Yeah, to- it really…No, it really-

Speaker 2 41:50
…went on

Speaker 1 41:50
… it really does. Um, is there anything in, in when you're working with the g-… Hang on, let me think about this. Do you think the way that you're teaching improvisation is how you were taught improvisation, or are you f- do you feel you have to find other strategies and other techniques because the way you were taught actually at times wasn't helpful? If that's an accurate representation of what you sort of said.

Speaker 2 42:31
Yeah. To, so to be completely honest, I mean, I, I don't think I'm offending… Well, I'm not offending you. I'm not offending anyone. I was never taught, I was never even introduced to improvisation like that. I feel- It was because I had a classical teacher.

Speaker 1 42:50
Okay.

Speaker 2 42:50
Um-

Speaker 1 42:51
Yeah

Speaker 2 42:51
...and we did musical theater, so I...It just had to be what the notes.I just had to sing the notes on a page.

Speaker 1 43:00
So you started improvising really only on, on your own volition, sort of through those courses that you did when you were teenagers?But-

Speaker 2 43:06
Yeah, where the teachers didn't even know how to-

Speaker 1 43:10
That's kind of-

Speaker 2 43:10
...how to teach it.

Speaker 1 43:11
That's kind of what I mean.So I feel-

Speaker 2 43:12
Yeah

Speaker 1 43:12
...often with teaching, m- singing teaching, for example, like when you think about-

Speaker 2 43:17
Yeah

Speaker 1 43:17
...the technique, singing teachers, we rely on the way that we were taught to teach technique.Does that make sense?

Speaker 2 43:25
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 1 43:25
Whereas with improvisation, I think I can talk a bit about my experience here, I don't feel like I was taught improvisation particularly well. Um, so my teaching strategies for improvisation, I'm like, well, I don't feel like I was taught it well. I know how that made me feel, so I want to teach it differently-

Speaker 2 43:46
Yeah

Speaker 1 43:46
...in a way that-

Speaker 2 43:47
Yeah

Speaker 1 43:47
...doesn't make students-

Speaker 2 43:48
Yeah

Speaker 1 43:48
...feel that same way.So-

Speaker 2 43:50
And I think it's a spiral.It's like-

Speaker 1 43:51
So where are you find...What techniques are you fi...But maybe that's not the case for you.

Speaker 2 43:57
Yeah.

Speaker 1 43:57
You know?

Speaker 2 43:58
It's... You know what's funny? You just made me think, and I think the reason why, this is to let you know as well, the reason why I've been so jumbled trying to explain this is because if you s- if we had a chat about singing technique and breathing-

Speaker 1 44:10
Yeah

Speaker 2 44:10
...I'd be like, this would be a easy conversa- Like, it would be-

Speaker 1 44:13

Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:14
Ooh, sorry.

Speaker 1 44:14
It's all right.

Speaker 2 44:15
It would be an absolutely easy conversation of just, "Yeah, this happened."

Speaker 1 44:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:19
And I'd be so clear.But I think the fact I'm so jumbled thinking and talking about this is because I can't even...I think I had to teach myself so much.

Speaker 1 44:28
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:29
And that even I'm teaching myself now the relationship that it should be, and I'm trying to re-correct, um, and go back over, and, like, re-cement-

Speaker 1 44:37
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 44:38
... what should have been introduced and what I'm teaching with the kids, 'cause I do love teaching. Um, it's just trying to give them this positive relationship that... A- and I'm, I'm doing it with primary school kids actually as well. I forget I'm doing primary school kids, of we're making up things over the piano, and they love it. They actually love it, but even with piano lessons, when I was doing a tiny bit, nobody's even getting them to just play any old notes. It doesn't matter-

Speaker 1 45:02
Mm

Speaker 2 45:02
...if they're rubbish.Like, there's such a narrow kind of, I don't know, of expectation of-

Speaker 1 45:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 45:08
...of what it should sound like.And for singers that isn't even, that doesn't even begin because how, how do you teach improvisation?I mean, 'cause it comes from someone's brain, doesn't it?

Speaker 1 45:16
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:17
And if they don't even think that they can just grab one note from out of thin air. Uh, so I think, uh, you... No, none of us are obviously trained in psychology, but I think you really have to make them feel so comfortable, uh, and that just it's more accessible. It's easier than they think. They can get there.

Speaker 1 45:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:36
They can do it. But from bringing things that they already know because I think... I don't know. It's, it's daunting though when you think of the voice and how you can just grab a note from thin air. But, so I've been actually working on... This has probably been good to say before, but I've got here now.

Speaker 1 45:50
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 45:50
I've, I've been working on the, I can't even remember what it's called, but it's the...Or it's kind of, it's, it's thinking of the notes before you sing it.Um-

Speaker 1 45:58
Oh, um, like do re mi?

Speaker 2 46:02
Kind of.Kind of.Sim- simpler.Oh, what's it?It's basically...[jazz teacher] called it a great word.I can't remember.It's just where you can hear the note inside your head.

Speaker 1 46:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 46:14
You're not humming it, and then you can sing it.

Speaker 1 46:16
Okay.

Speaker 2 46:17
Um, and I think so many kids...And also, I wasn't ever introduced to that till [conservatoire], that you can, we can hear things, we can hear it inside our heads.

Speaker 1 46:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:26
And once we do, then it's kind of good tuning, and it's like no one's exercising these kids' brains to hear it, and that's all imagination, but there's a lot less imagination anyway.

Speaker 1 46:37
Mm.

Speaker 2 46:37
Because people... I mean, oh, Meg, I don't know if you're getting this, but all the songs are from TikTok. They're like, "Yeah, I only know five seconds of this song." "What's it called?" "I've no idea, but it's just five seconds in."

Speaker 1 46:48
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:49
You know?So they're like, they're not really sitting in music the same way, not really listening to music the same way.

Speaker 1 46:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:56
It's m- just catchy things that they wanna try and do, but yeah. I, I really hope that's made sense. I think the, the thing I'm trying to change for the kids is just the attitude towards singing and that-

Speaker 1 47:07
Mm

Speaker 2 47:07
...and improvisation comes in different ways.

Speaker 1 47:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:10
But not, maybe not telling them it's improvisation, but then-

Speaker 1 47:13
Yeah

Speaker 2 47:14
...later saying.

Speaker 1 47:15
I like that.

Speaker 2 47:16
But, but also getting them to use their head and use their brain and hear it before they actually sing out loud.

Speaker 1 47:21
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:21
Because a lot of people just sing, and it's not...But that is something that...I don't know.I, I just, I do feel like I have been let down i- is in-

Speaker 1 47:30
Okay

Speaker 2 47:30
...education for learning it because, yeah, you're...People expect so kind of you not to be able to do anything.

Speaker 1 47:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:39
Um, but then it was, it was just so confusing, and yeah.I think I was probably at fault for not teaching-

Speaker 1 47:47
Yeah

Speaker 2 47:47
...myself the theory, but then I didn't, I didn't even kn- I didn't even know how to.It felt so overwhelming.

Speaker 1 47:53
It's hard to teach-

Speaker 2 47:54
I didn't even know how to get there.

Speaker 1 47:55
It's hard to teach-

Speaker 2 47:56
Yeah

Speaker 1 47:56
...yourself something that you don't know you need to know, you know?It's-

Speaker 2 47:59
You know, you know.

Speaker 1 48:00
You know, you know.

Speaker 2 48:00
Yeah, I totally know.

Speaker 1 48:01
Um-

Speaker 2 48:01
Um, it felt like this big... I don't know. It felt like the Titanic of, like, we'd hit this little rock, and it was like little did I know there'd be this, like... Oh, man, the Titanic is even, not even the right thing. It's like the mountain you've gotta climb, isn't it?

Speaker 1 48:14
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 48:15
You've started a few steps, and I didn't even wanna know how much further I had to climb because... And I, and I still feel, and, and that's why I was quite hesit- not hesitant, but I was like... And it was interesting you asked me 'cause I still feel a lot of shame with-

Speaker 1 48:30
Mm

Speaker 2 48:30
...improvising.Um, and I still feel like a bit of an imposter.

Speaker 1 48:35
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 48:35
I think imposter syndrome is 100%, but because I know that so many singers do not improvise anymore-

Speaker 1 48:43
Mm

Speaker 2 48:44
...do not improvise at all, that I feel like what I give And if I make it more rhythmically interesting, and Meg, I'm sorry how long I've been talking for right now.Um-

Speaker 1 48:55
Don't worry, it's good

Speaker 2 48:56
...I feel how, how much I vary it in that different way or I just try and make it fun, I make it silly.I kind of don't really care.

Speaker 1 49:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:02
I actually don't care anymore about the harmony.Um, and that people appreciate that, and, and musicians kind of do the, "Oh, yeah," like-

Speaker 1 49:11
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:11
...those little mm-hmm's, which I don't really, I don't really care about 'cause it's...I'm just being silly.But I feel like so many singers do not even do it.

Speaker 1 49:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:19
That I'm like, yeah, I sh- I should have that confidence within myself, but I do.It's this little shadow that's like-

Speaker 1 49:26
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:27
..."You don't know anything.You don't really know what the theory is." But yeah.

Speaker 1 49:33
Doesn't-

Speaker 2 49:33
I'm sorry, Meg.That was so long-

Speaker 1 49:34
No, it's, it's really, really good. No, it's good. I think I've got loads of stuff. Just before we finish, is there anything about your experience of improvisation that you feel we haven't discussed or that we should discuss, or do you think?

Speaker 2 49:47
Um, well, I do really like doing it.I think I like...I hate to admit it, because it was such a-

Speaker 1 49:57
Why do you hate, why do you hate to admit it?

Speaker 2 50:02
I don't know.I really don't know.I don't know if it's because it's like, oh, she's...Maybe I feel like I'm...there's a part that's showing off, that I like doing it.

Speaker 1 50:12
Mm.

Speaker 2 50:12

I feel like because everybody struggled so much with it, they did like they did in my, in my like the people in my class and below and above, they struggled so much with it, and I felt it was something that was easy to me. Um, when, you know, I didn't have to overthink about the right notes, that that, that is kind of it. But yeah, 'cause my ears were good and, and I... it felt something that was easy. I don't know. I think, I think it was... I didn't, I didn't wanna say I enjoyed it, because everybody was having such a tough time with it, and I was still having a really tough time with it, but as I said, I felt, yeah, y- you always... I don't know, it was like you always had to kind of prove everybody wrong-

Speaker 1 50:54
Mm.Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 50:54
...that you can do jazz.

Speaker 1 50:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 50:57
But then at the same time, I actually really don't know the theory.So I felt like my heart was in.

Speaker 1 51:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:04
I had more, probably more musicality than a lot of the musicians, like instrumentalists I was with, and I felt it more.

Speaker 1 51:10
Mm.

Speaker 2 51:11
But if you show me the chords and said, "What mode do you need to sing over that?" I'd say, "Fuck knows."

Speaker 1 51:17
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 51:17
I'd say, "I have no idea." Um-

Speaker 1 51:19
Yeah

Speaker 2 51:20
... but, but a lot of, a lot of the instrumentalists were so unmusical. I think actually that is another thing I haven't said. People who were deemed to be good at improvisation, they were just spitting out loads of notes, and it wasn't enjoyable.

Speaker 1 51:33
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 51:34
It wasn't enjoyable at all.And if I sang like that, I don't know, that's not enjoyable.

Speaker 1 51:38
Mm.

Speaker 2 51:39
I don't think that's something I want. That's not something I wanna listen to. I want... I think improvisation now, I see it as a way to like have fun. Um, and the audience is like from, if I have to do jazz gigs, like they enjoy it from a nostalgic way.

Speaker 1 51:54
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 51:54
Of like it's a bit cheeky.

Speaker 1 51:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:56
Um, it's...They like that communication within the band, and they enjoy that interaction 'cause you don't see that with singers as much anymore.

Speaker 1 52:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 52:06
I mean, they're kind of... I mean, singers like have always been sadly like that sometimes where they treat the band like a backing track. But I think the improvisation shows to the musicians and also the audience that it's a whole group thing going on.

Speaker 1 52:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 52:19
And I've just now taken it onwards as like a, a personality thing and to show my personality.

Speaker 1 52:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 52:24
And it's not that deep.And I, I should probably say that in a more, uh, kind of, I don't know-

Speaker 1 52:30
No

Speaker 2 52:30
...intelligent way.

Speaker 1 52:31
No, not at all.

Speaker 2 52:32
But it's not.

Speaker 1 52:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 52:34
It's not. Like it's not a big deal, and that's why with the kids, I just, I just want them to sing something that they can hear in their heads.

Speaker 1 52:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 52:42
Because they can get something out that will...and I don't care about the notes, you know-

Speaker 1 52:46
Yeah

Speaker 2 52:47
…or how clever it is. I just…There, there is…Like the gentleman said the other day, people are obsessed with being so clever. I think it's so boring and rubbish, and it's, it's not musical.

Speaker 1 52:57
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 52:59
Pfft.I could, yeah, I could go on about this.

Speaker 1 53:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 53:02
I hope that makes sense.

Speaker 1 53:03
Yeah, definitely.

Speaker 2 53:04
I hope so. Yeah.

Speaker 1 53:04
No, definitely. All right, well, thanks so much, and like if you think of anything else you can just send it over in an email. I'm gonna pause the recording if that's okay?

Speaker 2 53:11
Yeah.

Speaker 1 53:12
Great

Freya – 1c

Speaker 1 00:00
Uh, before we start, I just need to check a few things with you.

Speaker 2 00:03
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 00:03
Um, I'm running some research for my master's degree, and today I'd like to ask you some questions about your experiences of singing and improvisation.

Speaker 2 00:12
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 00:12
There are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in what you think and how you feel about it. You don't have to answer any question you don't want to, and you can stop at any time. Just say so, and we'll stop straightaway. That's completely fine, and it won't affect anything. I'll be recording our conversation so I can listen back to it later, but no one else will hear it, and your name won't be pa- won't be used anywhere in my research. Are you happy to take part?

Speaker 2 00:34
Yes.

Speaker 1 00:35
Great.Um, before we begin, I'd love to hear a little bit about your relationship with improvisation now.So how it manifests in your practice and your performance.

Speaker 2 00:51
Mm-hmm.Okay.Um, well, it's very fundamental to my practice.Um, it wasn't when I was growing up though-

Speaker 1 01:02
Okay

Speaker 2 01:02
...'cause I grew up playing classical music.

Speaker 1 01:04
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:04
But I would have liked it if ...I didn't know it existed, you know?

Speaker 1 01:07
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:07
I would've liked it, but I didn't know about it.

Speaker 1 01:09
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:10
But there was always something missing.

Speaker 1 01:12
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:12
Like a big thing.

Speaker 1 01:13
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:14
Lots-

Speaker 1 01:15
Okay

Speaker 2 01:15
... missing. But I was always musical, so it made sense me doing the music. But I was also just like, "Oh, okay, I'll play this thing." And classical music, like phrasing, me ne- like the phrasing and the ... I think c- the culture didn't really make any sense to me, but it's, I didn't know anything else.

Speaker 1 01:29
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:30
Um, and I ...Yeah, so, um, and then when I did encounter it, sort of by accident-

Speaker 1 01:38
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 01:39
...um, for the first time, it was quite life-changing, and that was when I was, I think, t-21.

Speaker 1 01:45
Okay.How-

Speaker 2 01:47
Yeah

Speaker 1 01:47
...what was that mom- what, how did you encounter it?

Speaker 2 01:49
Um, I had a fri- I'd, I'd already discovered Klezmer-

Speaker 1 01:52
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 01:53
...from, um, which has improvisation in it-

Speaker 1 01:55
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 01:55
...in its own way.

Speaker 1 01:56
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:56
Um, at a, like an anarchist Jewish event that was at-

Speaker 1 02:02
Okay

Speaker 2 02:03
... which was happening at the time. And, uh, there was this bit of a Klezmer scene happening at that time, like a new, list of new projects and bands and things. And,

um, I was like, "Yeah." And then I went to a course where you can study it in London. I was like, "I should learn it. How do you learn it? Oh, you can go on a course. Okay, I'm gonna go on a course."

Speaker 1 02:18
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 02:19
I went on a course, and I met someone there who I'm not in touch with anymore specifically, but, um, who was very interested in improvisation.

Speaker 1 02:26
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 02:27
And he said, "Come and improvise with me." I was like, "But I don't even know what it is." And he was like, "Doesn't matter. You just play some music." And we, we had to improvise about 20 minutes, and it was a long time ago, so 20 years ago.

Speaker 1 02:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 02:40
I was like, "Whoa." Almost exactly 20 years ago.

Speaker 1 02:42
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:42
Um, yeah. But, uh, and I was like, "Don't know what that was, but that was cool," you know? And at the time, I was a student, and I was doing anthropology, but I was really hippie, and I ... Doing like experimenting about life and-

Speaker 1 02:54
Okay

Speaker 2 02:54
...kind of defying norms, whatever norms were-

Speaker 1 02:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 02:58

...out of the time. Different now.

Speaker 1 03:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:00
But, um, norms like whatever was expected from me and classical music and behaving a certain way and dressing a certain way.

Speaker 1 03:07
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 03:08
And I was like, you know, against all of that.

Speaker 1 03:10
Okay.

Speaker 2 03:11
And then, but then in the end, it didn't ma- what I realized was it didn't matter if I was against all of that because there was something missing from my life, and what was missing from my life at the time was music.

Speaker 1 03:19
Okay.

Speaker 2 03:19
I was going to a lot of gigs. I wasn't studying music, I was studying, um, social anthropology at Sussex University.

Speaker 1 03:25
Mm.

Speaker 2 03:25
Didn't know what to do with myself.I ...It was very interesting, absolutely loved it.

Speaker 1 03:29
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 03:29
Really glad now after all these years that ...I've always been glad I did it, but-

Speaker 1 03:32

Mm

Speaker 2 03:32
...I was, something missing. And I did this improvisation. I did the Klezmer, I did the improvisation.I remember, like, closing my eyes.

Speaker 1 03:38
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 03:39
And at the time, um, there was a few older folks around who, they weren't necessarily pros on the course. They were like other participants or, like, enthusiasts who were like old friend. And I was kind of, "Wow, I think I've just done something new for the first time," you know, when you're-

Speaker 1 03:52
Mm

Speaker 2 03:52
...like, young and there's all these new things to try that you're ...It's different when you're, like, my age now because you're, um, got so much that's happened.But then-

Speaker 1 04:01
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 04:01
...it's just like *a whole new world* (sung) .And then, um, I, I can't remember his name.He's a South African, but I'm sure it was him or someone else, middle-aged man-

Speaker 1 04:09
Mm

Speaker 2 04:10
...white hair, said something to me about h- how to access one's inner musical self through closing their eyes.

Speaker 1 04:18
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 04:18
And at the time, I'd not been allowed to do that in classical, unless you're playing off by heart, of course.

Speaker 1 04:25
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 04:26
But they, I feel like the way they coach you, it's so strange when you're-

Speaker 1 04:29
Mm

Speaker 2 04:29
...a teenager.Anyway, so I was like, "Wow, so all I have to do is close my eyes, and I'll access my inner self." And so I did that for a while, and I also went off sheet music for two years-

Speaker 1 04:38
Okay

Speaker 2 04:38
...maybe three, which seems like a long time at that point.Um, uh, just started learning, um, already-

Speaker 1 04:45
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:45
...like, uh, Klezmer.I had, had a good ear.I did Kodály method when I was a kid, so I had a really good ear.It was easy to pick up tunes, start learning tunes-

Speaker 1 04:51
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:51
...going to a million jams.Started doing all that.

Speaker 1 04:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:54
And I didn't think much about improvisation.I did a few more courses, picked up methods, different methodologies, let's say, for using it.I wasn't singing back then.

Speaker 1 05:04

Mm.

Speaker 2 05:04
I was just playing and trying to-

Speaker 1 05:06
Mm

Speaker 2 05:06
...find my way with my instrument, which is not that different to singing really.

Speaker 1 05:10
Mm.

Speaker 2 05:10
It's just really personal, and I was doing different improvisation courses at the time, trying out things, trying out methods, trying to learn about connecting my brain to my fingers, to my ideas, all that stuff.

Speaker 1 05:23
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 05:23
But it all felt so abstract, and I found it quite stressful to think of it as something I could ever actually do myself. I was like, "This is a very existential practice."

Speaker 1 05:34
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:34
But I knew I loved ...I knew that improvisation was part of my practice.

Speaker 1 05:37
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 05:38
But it was more straightforward and important in a way for me to learn, like, Klezmer and learn the tunes and understand. You can't understand it all at once, so it was like-

Speaker 1 05:48
No

Speaker 2 05:48
...so I spent ages.I was like, "All right.I'm just gonna understand what that is, how it works-

Speaker 1 05:51
Yeah

Speaker 2 05:51
... how to do it, what traditional music is, learn as much as I can." So I, I really mostly did that, and then after that I did more, um-

Speaker 1
So was your improv kind of through the klezmer genre?

Speajer 2
Yes and no. A lot of, there's a lot of players in the klezmer scene who are really solid improvisers as well. Mm-hmm. Particularly in New York.. You'll find that with any tradition though, that it's like- Yeah ... the hybrid, it's like the hybrid of these traditions will fuse together. There's more conversation around that and practice of it in the States.
Speaker 1
Yeah.

Speajer 2
So I've always mostly gone over there to learn.

Speaker 1
Okay.

Speajer 2
Or worked with those kinds of peeps. There's a course in Germany where it was an improvisation course, but set up by a klezmer musician, and he would get not only klezmer people to come, but it... That was a, that was a vessel through which you can explore.

Speaker 1
Mm.

Speaker 2
But one of the reasons you can is because there's a lot of space for it in the genre. And there are elements of it that are improvised.. Once you know the rules, bit like Bach.. And also because it's a genre that kind of stopped for a while, and then was

revived, 'cause of the Holocaust, basically. Not that we wanna dwell on it. But because of that, literally factually-

Speaker 1
Yeah

Speaker 2
... um, not only were like a lot of musicians killed who played that music- Yeah ... but also people didn't want to play it afterwards because they were like, "Oh, it's too sad. Feels like, oh, my God. Oh." Or they just wanted to move on.. And they, or they didn't have access to the knowledge about-... the music. So, um, but because of that, when f- musicians in around the '70s were like, "Hey, I'd actually quite like to know what our great-grandparents used to listen to back in the day-" ... whatever. Um, there's artistic license with that, because there's not really a, this is how it should be.

Speaker 1
Mm.

Speaker 2
And, and those people, the people who started asking the questions, how do you play it? And they came from all different musical backgrounds. Classical, jazz-

Speaker 1
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2
... other folk, Balkan. Bluegrass, um, free improv, avant-garde. They- ... a lot of them were in the avant-garde scene in New York. You know, it's like all this melting pot. Um, and that, those people were my teachers.. 'Cause I luckily started at an age where they was, they were in their 50s, not, in their 70s. Now they're in their 70s and 80s. Some of them have died. So I was mentored by all these crazy nut jobs, basically.

Speaker 1
Okay.

Speaker 2
Um, which was great.. So I got all this amazing education... from these, like, incredible musicians. Crazy musicians of different types. It was really, it's not just like, "Oh, I play..." It was just different, like, level of life experience-... and connection. What you have now in the tradition is a lot more access to archives and actual information.. So, because we're online, digitization. So same with any

tradition. Any, jazz, anything, whatever. So, um, there's a lot more historian types who are just like, "Well, I don't know." But, um, I've always done my own thing with it- ... 'cause I was given that permission by my teachers.
But also I waited, or I waited till a time when I had done so much study of the genre that I was like, "I can do what the fuck I want now because-

Speaker 1
Yeah ...

Speaker 2
I've learned this shit."

Speaker 1
Yeah.

Speaker 2
And that's, so I, it actually was quite a slow journey, basically. But yeah, and then improvisation after that, I was like, I'm gonna focus more, leave the klezmer stuff a bit.

Speaker 1
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2
It's there, it's not going anywhere.. And focus on developing my improv and my other stuff.

Speaker 1
Okay, cool.
Speaker 2
Later. Yeah.

Speaker 1
So as a separate kind of almost like-

Speaker 2
It's not, it's never separate.

Speaker 1
Yeah.

Speaker 2
Nothing's separate, you know?

Speaker 1
Yeah.

Speaker 2
But, um, as, uh, 'cause when I went to, um, went to [university], did pop music there.

Speaker 1
Okay.

Speaker 2
And I had did sonic arts, which is very-

Speaker 1
Okay

Speaker 2
... improvisation based.

Speaker 1
Yeah.

Speaker 2
There's not really much form to it.

Speaker 1
Okay.

Speaker 2
So much more about, like, techniques and processes than-

Meg
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2... end point.

M
Yeah.

Speaker 2
Do you know what I mean?

M

Yeah.

Speaker 2
And then, um, there was a really good teacher there for, to do improvisation-

M
Okay ...

Speaker 2
...who had gone to the school that I ended up going to in States. Done the Masters, nailed the shit out of it Was touring with, like, really cool avant-garde people, but then met a, like, nice English guy, and fell in love, and ended up moving to London. But her style, it's just slightly different approach here, and I think anyway, it was hard for her to really establish. She did do stuff, but she didn't get as established as she should have for her-

M
Okay

Speaker 2
... like, what she can do. What she- But she had some teaching work at [university] at that time.

M
Okay.

Speaker 2
And I knew that the klezmer musicians I knew who'd been to that school, even if they went more into klezmer and not into the other weird shit or whatever-

M
Mm

Speaker 2
... they'd had the same training. So I knew that she'd had that training, and I, I knew I wanted that training, so I-

M
Mm

Speaker 2

... got, had some, you know, you can have, like, lessons there. You can have a few lessons. Yeah. Um, it's not the same as at [conservatoire]. You get so many lessons at [conservatoire]. Mm. You get, like, 30 lessons-

M
Four-

Speaker 2
... a year in my department. We got, I think, seven or something.

M
Really? Is that at [university]?

Speaker 2
Yeah. Yeah. No, no, it was 15 or something like that. Yeah. But you had to split it up into- Oh, yeah ... sort of five with one, five with another. So nothing compared, you know?

M

Yeah.

Speaker 2
So, um, I think I had five or six lessons with her, and it was banging. And we, we weren't, I wasn't doing voice at all. It was all cello. Okay. And improv on the cello. Different exercises. And she was like, "There are things you can, there are places you can get to with this, but you can't really do it in five sessions. It's a whole world you need to enter."

M
Yeah.

Speaker 2: And I was already had thought I wanna go to the States and do this study. And doing it with her, I kn- I finished [university], loved it, did loads of cool shit, learned loads of ideas. And I was like, "I, I don't know how, but I'm gonna go to this school in America.". That's, like, my plan.. Ooh. Ooh. So, and then I did do it. Yeah. Yeah. So that was the real... I, when I went there, um, I came with que- like, uh, questions.

M
Mm.

Speaker 2 11:38

That's- Done quite a lot of improv by the time.

M
Yeah.

Speaker 2
Studied loads of musical genres. Been playing by ear for 15 years already. Mm. Already worked with all the best klez musicians in the world. Done lots of things.. Been on tour-... lots. Done all of that. But I just, just, like, wanted specific things, and it's a school where the teachers have answers for stuff. Don't have to like the answers, but they have answers.. And they all have different answers.. So- ... you can s- you can be like, "Yeah, but why did that guy do that there and not here, and-

Speaker 1 12:10
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 12:10
...what does it mean?" And so I kind of went with those questions-

Speaker 1 12:14
Mm

Speaker 2 12:14
...very confident to ask them, 'cause I was older and-

Speaker 1 12:17
Mm.

Speaker 2 12:18
It was a weird experience.

Speaker 1 12:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 12:19
I was like, as opposed to my beginnings, I was like-

Speaker 1 12:22
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:22
..."Whoa, whoa, I'm gonna access this deep spiritual tree and connecting into the earth-

Speaker 1 12:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:28
...and the core of the expression of my inner being," to being like, "I don't wanna keep winging it.I want material to draw from.I want ideas."

Speaker 1 12:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 12:40
"I want to feel in control.I wanna feel confident to get up on a stage with, like world-class improvisers and do it."

Speaker 1 12:49
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 12:49
Um, and it was really cool-

Speaker 1 12:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:52
...to be there.It was hard and it was boring, basically.It was dry as fuck.It's like you're in this, like music s- college, like [conservatoire].

Speaker 1 12:58
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 12:59
I was like, "Oh, so like..."

Speaker 1 13:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:01
"Drab."

Speaker 1 13:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:03
Terrible air.

Speaker 1 13:04
In a basement.

Speaker 2 13:05
Boring, obsessive people.Yeah, lots of basements.

Speaker 1 13:07
Lots of basements, yeah.

Speaker 2 13:08
Um, and like, in the winter it was, like really, really warm, and in the summer it was, like really air-conditioned.

Speaker 1 13:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 13:14
'Cause it's, uh, very different climates.

Speaker 1 13:15
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:15
So it's like, it's so cold and so hot, so they...It, you-

Speaker 1 13:18
Okay

Speaker 2 13:18
...you can't wear too many layers 'cause you get excited to be in a T-shirt in the winter.

Speaker 1 13:23
Okay.

Speaker 2 13:23
'Cause, like the heating is on.

Speaker 1 13:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:25
It's, like dry and you have to, like moisturize your whole face, like double moisturizer.

Speaker 1 13:31
Mm.

Speaker 2 13:31
And go into this room with a load of dweebs-

Speaker 1 13:32
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 13:33
...and try all these ideas out.But it was, it, it was a safe place to do that.

Speaker 1 13:37
To do that.

Speaker 2 13:38
Yeah.So that was, that was really great.So that's what I did.

Speaker 1 13:41
Do you-

Speaker 2 13:42
Long story short.

Speaker 1 13:43
No, that's great.Can you, um, remember what it f- that your...Like the first time you were asked to improvise in a kind of performative setting?

Speaker 2 13:58
Mm.

Speaker 1 13:59
So be that, like even if it was just one-to-one or, you know, or in actually, like a gig at a jam or something.

Speaker 2 14:06
I, I mean, I can actually, and it was bad.

Speaker 1 14:10

Really?

Speaker 2 14:10
Yeah, because it was before I had made the choice to do it.

Speaker 1 14:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:13
So what you're talking about with that, being younger and the gender of the not-

Speaker 1 14:17
Mm.

Speaker 2 14:17
'Cause women aren't c- encouraged to try things.

Speaker 1 14:20
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 14:20
We're supposed to be, look nice-

Speaker 1 14:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 14:22
...be polite, smile.I didn't even know, right?

Speaker 1 14:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:24
You don't know that's happening to you.

Speaker 1 14:26
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:27
You just live and you exist, and you-

Speaker 1 14:29
Yeah

Speaker 2 14:29
...don't question.Most people don't even think about it, right?

Speaker 1 14:31
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:31
They don't question it.And, um, I remember I had this boyfriend.

Speaker 1 14:37
Mm.

Speaker 2 14:37
We're still sort of in touch.Um, at the time, it was my first big relationship.We were together for a long time and we're going to be.But he was on a really cool course at Huddersfield University-

Speaker 1 14:47
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 14:48
...doing sound engineering and production.

Speaker 1 14:50
Okay.

Speaker 2 14:50
At the time it was quite cutting edge, and it's before it was more normal to study that kind of thing.

Speaker 1 14:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:55
Really good course.And I was always admired his creativity and his sort of drive to go into that direction.It was pretty rad.Like, it's not something-

Speaker 1 15:07
Mm

Speaker 2 15:07

...that you would do.It's not an average thing to, to go and do.But he was encouraged.He discovered that he wanted to learn about Indian classical music and electronic music-

Speaker 1 15:15
Mm

Speaker 2 15:15
...and spirituality when he was q- 12 or something.

Speaker 1 15:18
Great.

Speaker 2 15:18
His mom was hip, kinda hippy, and she was like, "Yeah."

Speaker 1 15:21
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:21
"I'm gonna find you a teacher.I'm gonna find you mentors," and she did.So for him, it was normal.

Speaker 1 15:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:26
He was a freak in our school, really, but I was, like very drawn to that.

Speaker 1 15:29
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:29
I was like, "Wow, this is so cool." So I used to go and visit him at uni-

Speaker 1 15:34
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 15:34
...when we were at uni, and they would just be doing...They'd just walk around, you know, recording things and doing what you do when you're studying-

Speaker 1 15:40

Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 15:40
... proper music and being weird and stuff. And I was like, "Wow, I don't even understand this, but it looks way funner than what I'm doing." And I remember there was a jam, you know, and it's no big deal.It's just a fucking jam ses-

Speaker 1 15:50
Mm

Speaker 2 15:50
...with, like stoner uni mates.

Speaker 1 15:52
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:53
And I haven't thought about this for a while, but it's in my memory.

Speaker 1 15:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:56
That I wanted to join in.

Speaker 1 15:58
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 15:58
And I was like, "Technically, I'm better than all these guys, but I don't know how to do it." And he was, he was encouraging me-

Speaker 1 16:03
Mm

Speaker 2 16:03
...but I was like, "I can't.I'm just too scared of making a mistake."

Speaker 1 16:07
Mm.

Speaker 2 16:07
"I don't know what to do." And I didn't, I don't think I joined in, and I felt really poo.

Speaker 1 16:12
Mm.

Speaker 2 16:12
And he, he's actually a nice guy.We had a terrible time in the end.

Speaker 1 16:15
Okay.

Speaker 2 16:16
But it was like I had to go on my own journey.

Speaker 1 16:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:17
I had to just find the truth within myself-

Speaker 1 16:22
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:23
...and empower myself.

Speaker 1 16:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:24
'Cause you have to do it.And I've always found that, like no one's ever really done it for me.Like, no one's ever kind of done it.

Speaker 1 16:31
Mm.

Speaker 2 16:31
Like, even, like I was doing a session with [teacher].We're doing coaching on my solo stuff 'cause it's good for me to do it.

Speaker 1 16:36
Mm.

Speaker 2 16:37

And, um, I've got a bit of funding, so I thought, yeah. And I was like, "What? I'm, like 41. Why am I paying someone to, like watch me try stuff out?" 'Cause it's really weird.And they were like, "This is actually normal.This is what you're supposed to do if you're trying to do something."

Speaker 1 16:52
Develop, yeah.

Speaker 2 16:53
Yeah.And obviously, like when I was in s- the school studying-

Speaker 1 16:56
Mm

Speaker 2 16:57
...you're in the school, so it's sort of, you know, an institutional space to do it.

Speaker 1 17:01
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 17:01
But doing it outside of an institutional space is really scary, 'cause it feels more real.

Speaker 1 17:07
Mm.

Speaker 2 17:07
But I sort of, it's taken me all these...I'm just really slow-

Speaker 1 17:10
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 17:10
...most the time.So I, I don't mind going into a space at all and not have a clue what I'm doing, winging it.Love that.

Speaker 1 17:19
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 17:19
But I got tired of it.Once I figured out that that was a way to access myself, I was like dive in, sort of headfirst into loads of scenarios.

Speaker 1 17:27
Mm.

Speaker 2 17:27
So at once, after that, we broke up.Then we got back together, but I, um, would go to a lot of stuff.I, I went to, like groove jams-

Speaker 1 17:36
Okay

Speaker 2 17:36
...'cause I wanted to understand.I didn't understand that, like free improvisation is very different to, like improvisation within a genre, like-

Speaker 1 17:43
Mm

Speaker 2 17:43
...funk or-

Speaker 1 17:44
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 17:44
...reggae.So I used to go to these Passing Clouds, um-

Speaker 1 17:48
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 17:49
...in like 2007.

Speaker 1 17:50
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 17:50
And, like a friend, my friend...Do you know [musician]?He, like does trad jazz now.

Speaker 1 17:55
No.Okay.

Speaker 2 17:55

But he, at the time he was just...He's a really natural, well-rounded, genius musician.

Speaker 1 18:00
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 18:00
And he would always be in the brass and wind section doing the licks, and like-

Speaker 1 18:04
Okay.Yeah

Speaker 2 18:04
...and he would s- they would invite me up.I'd play on cello.I just, I was, I was like, "I just wanna just play along with you guys and learn how it fits with the music."

Speaker 1 18:12
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:12
...classical is all written.I was like, "I just need to know what's a lick, and how do you figure one out, and how does it slot in?"

Speaker 1 18:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:17
So I used to go there and do that-

Speaker 1 18:20
Okay, okay

Speaker 2 18:20
...Sunday night, like 1:00 in the morning or something.

Speaker 1 18:22
Okay, nice.

Speaker 2 18:22
And then, so that's one thing, and then I'd go to all these different jams, African jams, klezmer jams, whatever jams-

Speaker 1 18:31

Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 18:31
...and just learn shit, try shit.

Speaker 1 18:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:34
And then it took a while before I could incorporate improvisation because it's hard.

Speaker 1 18:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:40
Like, it's actually, that's the other thing.Yes, anyone can get up and improvise, but there's a point where actually you do need to have some things under your belt-

Speaker 1 18:48
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:48
...as well.Do you know what I mean?

Speaker 1 18:49
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 18:50
So...

Speaker 1 18:53
Yeah.Did you-

Speaker 2 18:55
Yeah

Speaker 1 18:55
...in terms of that learning process, obviously it, it sounds like you came to that process a little later than the people I'm teaching.So one of the reasons-

Speaker 2 19:05
Yeah

Speaker 1 19:06
...this has come up is part of one of the, like, curriculums that I'm working with.It's a pop syllabus.

Speaker 2 19:14
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:15
And it's a really good one, but one of the elements of it is improvisation.

Speaker 2 19:18
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 19:18
So you have to incorporate improvisation into some of your pieces, and also then do, like, improvise over eight bars.

Speaker 2 19:26
Wow.

Speaker 1 19:26
Um-

Speaker 2 19:26
Okay.That's really great

Speaker 1 19:28
...from, like, grade two.

Speaker 2 19:29
Is that new?

Speaker 1 19:31
It's fairly new.I think in the sort of last-

Speaker 2 19:33
That's so rad for vocals, but not for other instruments?

Speaker 1 19:35
No, and for instruments as well.

Speaker 2 19:37
Whoa.In classical?No, jazz?

Speaker 1 19:38
No, it's, it's pop.So it's called-

Speaker 2 19:40
Oh, it's pop

Speaker 1 19:40
...the syllabus is, like, rock and pop.It's horrible, and it's Rock School, I think it's called.It's a re-

Speaker 2 19:45
Wow

Speaker 1 19:45
...and it's a really s- I really like it as a syllabus, but-

Speaker 2 19:48
That's so interesting

Speaker 1 19:49
...so for the first time as a teacher, I was...I had to bring improvisation to students.So in a way-

Speaker 2 19:56
Do you improvise?

Speaker 1 19:57
I improvise, yeah.

Speaker 2 19:58
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:58
So I was, I was having to ask students to improvise, whereas before I'd always let students come to me if it was something they wanted to do.

Speaker 2 20:07
Yeah.

Speaker 1 20:08
It was never something that I was like, "We're gonna improvise now."

Speaker 2 20:10
Yeah.

Speaker 1 20:11
I would always sort of, I would always tell them that it existed so that they knew it was something they could explore maybe, but it was never something I forced students into doing because I could see that, how it would sometimes make them feel.

Speaker 2 20:22
Wow.

Speaker 1 20:23
Um, but yeah, so I'm sort of working sometimes with, like, 13-year-olds and getting them to improvise over Dream A Little Dream Of Me for example. It's, like, one of the songs on one of the things. Um, and I'm curious to know if in your learning process there was ever, like, associations with feelings of anxiety or apprehension-

Speaker 2 20:50
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 20:50
...as part of that learning process-

Speaker 2 20:52
100%

Speaker 1 20:52
...and how that manifested.

Speaker 2 20:54
Yeah.Well, 'cause I was, classical music didn't really have anxiety, I just was bored.

Speaker 1 21:00
Oh.

Speaker 2 21:00
That's the thing, and that's what I did when I was a teenager.I'd go in, I'd be like, I loved it-

Speaker 1 21:05
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 21:05
...but it was also, like, missing, there's something missing.

Speaker 1 21:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:09
Um, and there wasn't any syllabus like that back then.

Speaker 1 21:12
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:12
Instrument...That's w- amazing that that's a thing.

Speaker 1 21:14
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:14
So th- also, like, because there wasn't, it means if you wanted to do something like that, you were, like, an off-piste rad human.It's funny that that's, like, mainstream to-

Speaker 1 21:21
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 21:21
...have to do that now.Um, that wasn't available to me.

Speaker 1 21:25
Mm.

Speaker 2 21:25
But the, I had some cool teachers, weirdo teachers by kind of accident.There was a guy who was an aural trainer, like, did Kodai and stuff-

Speaker 1 21:33
Okay

Speaker 2 21:34
...who has died now, I think.He was a bit of a legend in the sort of what we used to call, like, the kooky alternative music scene of the time.

Speaker 1 21:41

Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 21:42
Um, 'cause I was talking about someone at [conservatoire].

Speaker 1 21:45
Mm.

Speaker 2 21:45
Um, one of the heads of [conservatoire] I met in Liverdin, and he was like, "Oh, I studied with [teacher] back in the day." He was like-

Speaker 1 21:50
Mm.

Speaker 2 21:50
He did teach at [conservatoire].Uh, he used to teach at-

Speaker 1 21:52
I've heard of him, yeah

Speaker 2 21:52
...[junior conservatoire] actually.

Speaker 1 21:53
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:54
Incredible teacher.He was, had rad ideas before they were cool.

Speaker 1 21:58
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 21:58
You know, he was a gentle older man, probably gay-

Speaker 1 22:01
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 22:02
...when that wasn't a thing.

Speaker 1 22:03

Mm.

Speaker 2 22:03
And he would make us listen to really cool, interesting, diverse music, and an- and analyze it.

Speaker 1 22:10
Mm.

Speaker 2 22:10
And he would do lots of aural training skills with us.No one else was doing that shit, and it was amazing.

Speaker 1 22:15
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:16
I loved that class, and I was really good at it.

Speaker 1 22:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:19
And he was like, he could see.He was like, "[Freya] gets this shit."

Speaker 1 22:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:23
I was, like, his top student, but it wasn't the same as being in orchestra and doing concertos-

Speaker 1 22:29
Yeah

Speaker 2 22:29
...and then me-

Speaker 1 22:30
Yeah

Speaker 2 22:31
...choir, all that stuff.

Speaker 1 22:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:33
That, so it was that creative interesting...I would s- call that, I don't know, c- creative music making.

Speaker 1 22:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:39
It's not jazz, it's not pop, it's not classical.

Speaker 1 22:42
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 22:42
It's understanding-

Speaker 1 22:44
Yeah

Speaker 2 22:44
...the inner workings of music.

Speaker 1 22:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:45
It, and he was onto that shit.So because of people like him, I knew it was real.

Speaker 1 22:50
Mm.

Speaker 2 22:50
But I'd never been, no one was ever like, "We should just train [Freya] up into being one of these people."

Speaker 1 22:56
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 22:57

I ha- did it myself, figured it out-

Speaker 1 22:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:00
...and made it happen.

Speaker 1 23:01
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 23:02
Um, if I was a guy, if, if me as th- the human I am was a guy-

Speaker 1 23:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:08
... I think I still would've come across as a bit weird, but, like, I'm sure people might've been like, "Oh, they're a bit special, aren't they? Maybe we should check." But because I was a girl, I think people were just like, "Why is she so weird?" Basically.

Speaker 1 23:23
Okay.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 23:23
You know?And they were always trying to get me to do the normal stuff, everyone, my parents, school.

Speaker 1 23:27
Okay.

Speaker 2 23:28
They were never like, "We should nurture that weirdness-

Speaker 1 23:33
That, yeah

Speaker 2 23:33
...and do it." And I wasn't in the right school anyway.

Speaker 1 23:35

Okay.

Speaker 2 23:36
So, um, but, like, yeah, this, 'cause I was at [youth music centre]-

Speaker 1 23:39
Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 23:40
...which was great.So had [teacher], um, and I had him right through till 18.So I came out with these great aural skills.

Speaker 1 23:47
Okay.

Speaker 2 23:47
That is literally why I could learn klezmer quite quickly.

Speaker 1 23:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 23:50
It's like-

Speaker 1 23:51
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:52
...it wasn't hard.It wasn't hard.

Speaker 1 23:54
Well, and those skill, that aur-

Speaker 2 23:55
Yeah

Speaker 1 23:55
...those aural skills really help with that improvisational thing as well.Do you know what I mean?You need-

Speaker 2 24:00
It's essential

Speaker 1 24:00
...it's, like-

Speaker 2 24:01
Yeah

Speaker 1 24:01
...fundamental.

Speaker 2 24:02
Yeah.

Speaker 1 24:02
So in terms of that, like, those feelings of apprehension and anxiety in that learning process, can you, uh, like, think of any specific experiences you had where that came to a head?

Speaker 2 24:14
Mm.

Speaker 1 24:15
Or was it just, like, a general-

Speaker 2 24:17
I still have them.

Speaker 1 24:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:18
I, I think, like, that's why I don't jam so much anymore.

Speaker 1 24:20
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 24:23
It's not the only reason, but like-

Speaker 1 24:24
Yeah

Speaker 2 24:25
...I think any jam situation I would get anxiety.

Speaker 1 24:28
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:28
Even a klezmer jam, there has to be something.I have to hear a tune that I really like and then I'll go and play it.

Speaker 1 24:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:33
Although I've organized one tomorrow night in London, 'cause I, uh, but it's mostly string players, so-

Speaker 1 24:38
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 24:38
... I think that'll be cool. But I g- I don't, uh, because there's something in a jam where there's like these unspoken of kind of rules or like so much about reading each other, and you kinda do have to be confident, it's like how do you be confident? What is that, you know?

Speaker 1 24:53
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:53
And I have to sometimes, um, prep myself up-

Speaker 1 24:58
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 24:58
...or like fake it till I make it, and-

Speaker 1 25:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:00
...I'm not always in that mode.

Speaker 1 25:02

Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 25:03
I have to, um, sometimes once my, the engine really gets going and I d- dive into the deep end many times.

Speaker 1 25:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:09
Or if I've been on tour for ages, or if I, like these coaching sessions with [teacher], it's kind of igniting that bit of me again.

Speaker 1 25:16
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:16
Maybe I get the fire back and then I don't give a shit, and I'll go and I'll play-

Speaker 1 25:19
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:19
...wherever I want, anytime.But most of the time I'm constantly surrounded by social norms which put us in boxes-

Speaker 1 25:27
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 25:27
...and expected to conform to that.And-

Speaker 1 25:30
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 25:31
...um, it's tricky.And yeah, so-

Speaker 1 25:34
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:34
...I do get anxiety because it's, it's sort of like stepping through a threshold.

Speaker 1 25:37
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:38
You know what I mean?Once you step through-

Speaker 1 25:40
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 25:40
...it doesn't matter, but stepping in is hard.

Speaker 1 25:42
And is there something about the improvisation that triggers those anx- like triggers that feeling more than other things might, than like going to an orchestra rehearsal and playing a piece through?

Speaker 2 25:55
Well, I never j- I just never gave a shit about any of that.

Speaker 1 25:57
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:57
That's the thing.But that's why I can't do that music now.I w- no one offers me anyway, but, um- ...uh, I was just bored.It's so boring.

Speaker 1 26:06
Mm.

Speaker 2 26:07
It's not what I wanna do.

Speaker 1 26:08
So-

Speaker 2 26:08
So it's never what I wanted to do.

Speaker 1 26:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:09
Yeah.

Speaker 1 26:10
So in terms of the, so does the, that kind of feeling of anxiety or apprehension come from the fact that it's something, improvisation is something you care about, or is it from the fact that improvisation is like an act in itself?

Speaker 2 26:22
It's an act.

Speaker 1 26:23
It's-

Speaker 2 26:24
It's, it's an act of, of like, um, many things.

Speaker 1 26:30
Mm.

Speaker 2 26:30
It's not one thing.

Speaker 1 26:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:31
It's first of all you being yourself.

Speaker 1 26:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:33
Second of all, it's making music people might not like.It's taking risks.

Speaker 1 26:36
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:37
It's being uncomfortable.

Speaker 1 26:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:39
Um, it's being brave.

Speaker 1 26:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:42
It's being skilled.All those things are not feminine traits.

Speaker 1 26:47
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:47
Brave and skilled.

Speaker 1 26:48
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:49
Skilled.

Speaker 1 26:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:50
A skilled woman is like not something I ever heard-

Speaker 1 26:54
Yeah

Speaker 2 26:54
...growing up, you know?

Speaker 1 26:55
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 26:56
Obviously I knew some cool people, but like, um, you know, I don't know.I was just like, I was supposed to achieve highly at school or whatever, but it was like skills, man.

Speaker 1 27:07

It's different to-

Speaker 2 27:07
Having skills

Speaker 1 27:08
...acade- academic achievement is expected in a way that I f- you're right, that skill-

Speaker 2 27:13
Yeah

Speaker 1 27:13
...a skill is slightly different I feel.

Speaker 2 27:15
An actual skill.

Speaker 1 27:16
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:17
And being good at that and being like, "Yeah, I'm good at that."

Speaker 1 27:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:19
That I don't, I don't think I've...Honestly, it's only now that I-

Speaker 1 27:25
Mm

Speaker 2 27:25
...can actually c- be on board with that shit-

Speaker 1 27:29
Mm

Speaker 2 27:29
...for myself.

Speaker 1 27:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:31
Um, because it manifests on lots of, like, on very deep personal levels like, you know, relationship with your mother, relationship-

Speaker 1 27:36
Mm

Speaker 2 27:36
...with your dad, relationship to school-

Speaker 1 27:39
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 27:39
...friends, how they see you.

Speaker 1 27:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:42
Um, and I think I, I basically underplay my skills a lo- often.

Speaker 1 27:47
Mm.

Speaker 2 27:47
Not like musically necessarily, but it's, it's ha- to be, put my, I have to put myself in scenarios where I'm actually able to show off.

Speaker 1 27:55
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 27:55
Otherwise, most of the work I get hired for I, I'm not showing off, I'm, I'm just doing what my instrument's perceived to do or what a woman playing the instrument is perceived to do-

Speaker 1 28:04
Yeah

Speaker 2 28:04
...and it's, it's just bloody boring.Fine if it pays the bills sometimes-

Speaker 1 28:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 28:08
...I'll do it.But, um, I can do whatever.I'm, I can technically do whatever I want.

Speaker 1 28:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:13
And I don't because I stop myself because of, often to do with past experiences-

Speaker 1 28:20
Yeah

Speaker 2 28:20
...socialization, I have to get help.And it's almost like at the moment instead of getting like talk therapy I'm having more like coaching.

Speaker 1 28:27
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 28:28
Performance coaching.

Speaker 1 28:29
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 28:29
Stuff like that.

Speaker 1 28:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:30
Because I just need to get the fuck on with it, basically.

Speaker 1 28:34
Get the-

Speaker 2 28:34
So-

Speaker 1 28:34
...the yeah yeah yeah going.

Speaker 2 28:35
Yeah.Um, yeah.But I haven't been practicing improvisation for a while, like I haven't.Maybe I will tonight, 'cause like what I like to do is-

Speaker 1 28:45
Mm

Speaker 2 28:45
...um, have a jam, like a free improv jam-

Speaker 1 28:47
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 28:48
...just like .And then I work on my harmonies.I'll do singing and playing and interval training.

Speaker 1 28:55
Okay.

Speaker 2 28:55
And that's my warm-up.

Speaker 1 28:57
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:57
That's when my...And I do technical cello stuff, but my vocal thing, I do warm-up and then I do intervals.

Speaker 1 29:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:02
And then sometimes I do arpeggios-

Speaker 1 29:05
Mm-hmm.Yeah, nice

Speaker 2 29:06
...with, with different intervals.It takes obviously hours.

Speaker 1 29:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:09
Yeah.

Speaker 1 29:10
Do y- how much do you improvise with your voice?

Speaker 2 29:11
That's my main-

Speaker 1 29:12
So you would-

Speaker 2 29:13
It's easier

Speaker 1 29:13
...improvise more with your voice than the cello?

Speaker 2 29:15
Yeah.Yeah.It's actually, um, more natural to me.I can improvise a jazz solo on my voice.

Speaker 1 29:21
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 29:22
It's much harder on cello, technically, and also it's like, you know, when we're playing, where there's so much going on. The best improvisations I do is where I would actually... It's easier for me to do free improv on the cello where it's not tonal, actually.

Speaker 1 29:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:36
Um, I'll do them with my voice-

Speaker 1 29:38
Mm

Speaker 2 29:39
...transcribe them, and play them on the cello.

Speaker 1 29:41
Interesting.

Speaker 2 29:41
Yeah.Because I'll come up with more, um, natural-

Speaker 1 29:46
Yeah

Speaker 2 29:46
...musical ideas that way.

Speaker 1 29:48
Do you think that's because of the nature of the cello as an instrument in itself, that it's like harder, I mean, I have no idea, I don't play the cello, so, but harder to... I, I've always wondered if like, you know, it's so rare to have like string instruments in like a dra- in a jazz context in those improvised solos. Is that because the nature of the instrument and how you have to move through it-

Speaker 2 30:13
Yeah

Speaker 1 30:13
...it's harder to play-

Speaker 2 30:15
It is harder

Speaker 1 30:15
...those like-

Speaker 2 30:15
Yeah

Speaker 1 30:16
...those improvised like Charlie Parker solos style things, like straight off the cuff, just because of the nature of the instrument and its shape and how it works or-

Speaker 2 30:27
Yeah, but, um, it does also depend how your brain works.

Speaker 1 30:31
Okay.

Speaker 2 30:31
If you, if you think in structural form-

Speaker 1 30:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 30:33
...then you, you learn shapes.It's all shapes.

Speaker 1 30:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:36
Um, it's, it's not...It's doable.It's, it's probably a bit easier on violin 'cause things are closer.

Speaker 1 30:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:42
There's loads of exercises.There's people who teach this shit.I've had lessons in it as well.

Speaker 1 30:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:45
Loads.It's not my natural brain-

Speaker 1 30:47
Yeah

Speaker 2 30:47
...to do it.My natural brain is to make weird improv s-sounds.But, um-

Speaker 1 30:51

Sounds, yeah.

Speaker 2 30:52
But I can play chords and stuff, it's no problem.Um, I've...It w- again, wasn't natural, but I've got a thousand exercises for that now.

Speaker 1 30:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:59
Um, but what, um, one of the, uh, things you could argue it's 'cause I, I'm trained in many different ways on the cello, I'm not really trained in my voice.Like-

Speaker 1 31:09
Yeah

Speaker 2 31:09
...had some lessons, um, different lessons, and I, I have warmups that I do, and I haven't been-

Speaker 1 31:14
Mm

Speaker 2 31:14
...doing them actually for ages, which-

Speaker 1 31:15
Mm

Speaker 2 31:16
...um, I actually have a three octave range.

Speaker 1 31:19
Okay.

Speaker 2 31:19
And I didn't know that because I didn't sing.

Speaker 1 31:23
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 31:23

I knew in the sense that I used to play my orchestral parts on the piano and sing the other parts.

Speaker 1 31:30
Okay.

Speaker 2 31:31
Q- and just learn them, but I never thought of it as anything.

Speaker 1 31:34
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 31:34
No one ever f- I didn't know that was a thing.

Speaker 1 31:36
That's a crazy...Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:37
Yeah.I used to do that when I was a kid.

Speaker 1 31:38
Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:38
Then I stopped, and now I do it now.So, um, I'm about to, tonight I'm gonna practice for, me and [band mate], we've got some gigs next week.

Speaker 1 31:47
Mm.

Speaker 2 31:47
I'm gonna practice, and we do quite a lot of singing playing.

Speaker 1 31:49
Mm.

Speaker 2 31:49
So I will be singing all parts and playing all parts.

Speaker 1 31:52
Mm.

Speaker 2 31:52
And just getting inside the music.

Speaker 1 31:54
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 31:54
And I've got this, an exercise which I haven't done in a while, which is where you...So you s- when I'm improvising, um, it's different bits of, bits of the brain-

Speaker 1 32:08
Mm

Speaker 2 32:08
... kind of do different bits of improvising style, and if I'm singing, it's sort of like my mind is completely clear. If I'm doing im- cello improv, it's clear, but in, like, I'm gonna do cello-y things. If I want to do something that sounds jazzy, I have to think of it in my brain and then tell my fingers what to do.

Speaker 1 32:26
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:27
If I'm gonna go natural on the cello, it's gonna be a more vibey-

Speaker 1 32:32
Yeah

Speaker 2 32:32
...maybe tonal even, but more vibes.So I have to catch myself in the moment, stop my fingers putting the note down until my brain's told them what note to play.

Speaker 1 32:43
What to play.

Speaker 2 32:43
So that's a whole, um, thing where I go, "No, no," then up, and then back out again.

Speaker 1 32:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:52
So that's quite fun 'cause it's a mechanical practice of changing the flow.

Speaker 1 32:57
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:57
So that's one of the things I started doing at NEC in Boston because-

Speaker 1 33:00
Okay

Speaker 2 33:01
...they, they, they know what's going on there, and they-

Speaker 1 33:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 33:03
...they're just like, "You did it again. Do it." "Change.Don't do that."

Speaker 1 33:07
Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:07
"Do this." And you just have to say, "Yeah, if you can't take it, you're in the wrong place."

Speaker 1 33:12
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 33:12
You, you can't have a me- you have meltdowns there. I had loads.

Speaker 1 33:15
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 33:15
But you, you can't...If you can't do it or you won't do it, or you're not, if you don't want to-

Speaker 1 33:22
Mm

Speaker 2 33:23

...you're in the wrong place, because they all fucking train you up there.

Speaker 1 33:28
Mm.

Speaker 2 33:28
But you have to be like, "Oh, that's hard, but I wanna do it, and I'm gonna sit in a fucking practice room and do that boring exercise for ages."

Speaker 1 33:35
The desire, so the desire has to be there-

Speaker 2 33:38
Yes

Speaker 1 33:39
...to achieve.

Speaker 2 33:40
Yeah, and you have to feel a bit confident, and for su- for certain, if I went to a school like that at 20, I'd have had a nervous breakdown probably.

Speaker 1 33:50
Really?

Speaker 2 33:50
Yeah, because you, like, students are so confident there.

Speaker 1 33:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:55
And they're so good.

Speaker 1 33:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:56
They're all such high achievers.To get, even to get in, you have to be-

Speaker 1 34:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 34:00
...top of your game. So for me, coming in as, like, this scuzzy hippie from Hackney, but just, I just figured out it's what I wanted.

Speaker 1 34:07
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:08
I made it, I made it happen.I was like, wow, I've kind of finally realized that this whole discipline thing is actually quite handy-

Speaker 1 34:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 34:15
...if you wanna get really good.

Speaker 1 34:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:17
And everyone else here is like a child, but they, they've been taught to be that way through their-

Speaker 1 34:23
Yeah

Speaker 2 34:24
...education system, and they've been taught to succeed in it.

Speaker 1 34:28
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:28
And they're kinda like on that thing, and if it's not for you-

Speaker 1 34:32
Yeah

Speaker 2 34:33
...it's not the right place.

Speaker 1 34:34

Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:34
It's not an easy...It's a horrible place to be in many ways.

Speaker 1 34:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:37
You know? So anyway. So yeah.And the singing thing, I started doing it with [band].

Speaker 1 34:41
Okay.

Speaker 2 34:42
That, that was when I started doing it.

Speaker 1 34:43
So all the tuition you've had in improvisation, was that all on the cello, and, but the vo-

Speaker 2 34:48
I s- I did some vocals at [university].

Speaker 1 34:49
Okay.

Speaker 2 34:50
But it was the beginnings.I wasn't very good.

Speaker 1 34:52
Okay.

Speaker 2 34:53
I'm still not that good, but it's, um, um, I did it more, uh...Well, I thought like, "Oh, I can learn some folk songs," so we started doing it for our albums.

Speaker 1 35:04
Mm.Okay.

Speaker 2 35:05
Never felt like my voice was very nice singing.

Speaker 1 35:07
Mm.

Speaker 2 35:07
It doesn't have to be nice, but like...

Speaker 1 35:09
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 35:10
Um, but at [US conservatoire], because it's so much more normal to sing and play as part of your practice, whether you're good or not-

Speaker 1 35:18
Yeah

Speaker 2 35:18
... um, I did, there's this woman, um, there who's a vocal coach, what's her name? Can't remember her name, but she's, like, one of the top darn vocal coaches in the country. I did have a couple of sessions with her-

Speaker 1 35:29
Amazing

Speaker 2 35:30
...through some collab stuff, and I thought, and I had, uh, lessons with this woman who plays violin and sings.

Speaker 1 35:36
Okay.

Speaker 2 35:36
She self-taught the singing as well.

Speaker 1 35:37
Okay.

Speaker 2 35:37
She's an incredible violinist.She, she sings really creative.

Speaker 1 35:40
Mm.

Speaker 2 35:41
It just normalizes it.

Speaker 1 35:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:43
Just, just be yourself.

Speaker 1 35:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:45
And do whatever, whatever you want, but whatever it is you wanna do, do it properly.

Speaker 1 35:49
Yeah.Okay.How, in terms of the pedagogical aspects, so like the teaching and slash learning, whichever.

Speaker 2 35:58
Mm.

Speaker 1 35:58
I don't know if, do you teach much? Yeah, you teach at [London conservatoire].So in terms of the, like, teaching of improvisation, how do you do it properly?

Speaker 2 36:07
Oh, God.Well, the thing is, at that school, there's 10 teachers, and they all teach it different.

Speaker 1 36:12
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:13
They all have a method.

Speaker 1 36:14
Yeah.What would yours be?

Speaker 2 36:16
I don't have, I don't think I've got, like, the [“participant name”] method yet.But I'll do exercises.

Speaker 1 36:21
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:22
Um-

Speaker 1 36:23
What would they be?What kind of thing is that?

Speaker 2 36:24
Depends, 'cause I do think I'm really into this thing of, like, improvisation and composition being the same thing, two sides of a different coin.

Speaker 1 36:32
Yeah

Speaker 2 36:33
That was a big question for me going up to NEC.I was like, "What's the difference?"

Speaker 1 36:36
Mm.

Speaker 2 36:36
What is one and what's the other? And it, and I started to realize if you're an improviser, you can also compose.

Speaker 1 36:43
And the other way around.

Speaker 2 36:44
And the other way around.Um-

Speaker 1 36:46
Yeah

Speaker 2 36:48
...so it depends on like what the person likes doing-

Speaker 1 36:51
Mm

Speaker 2 36:52

…what likes making.But I mean, I like, when I'm studying, I like someone to just give me exercises and say-

Speaker 1 36:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 36:59
…"Go and do those," even if they're boring.

Speaker 1 37:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:02
If I'm not the kind of person who, um, tries out loads of stuff and brings it to a teacher, I never do that.

Speaker 1 37:12
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:12
I wish. I'm so, my [conservatoire] students are such keen beans. And they're like, "I've made five pieces this week." And yeah, but most of them are shit. But like- … um, they play these, I've been like, "Wow, why are you even playing me? This is so boring."

Speaker 1 37:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:24
But like, they're just like confident.

Speaker 1 37:27
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:27
I think it's confidence partially.

Speaker 1 37:29
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:29
But, um-

Speaker 1 37:30
Is that something you think you can teach as a teacher?

Speaker 2 37:34
Teach what?

Speaker 1 37:34
Confidence. Is that something that you feel like it's a responsibility as a teacher to build in a student?

Speaker 2 37:39
Yeah, I do.I do think that's-

Speaker 1 37:41
How would you do that?

Speaker 2 37:43
Um, I do, I like to challenge the students, so even if they're really confident.So there are some at [conservatoire] who are very confident.

Speaker 1 37:51
Mm.

Speaker 2 37:52
I had one in particular this year who was just like so annoying, 'cause her music's okay.But she kind of makes stuff that's really average.

Speaker 1 37:58
Mm.

Speaker 2 37:59
She really improved over the year, very good.

Speaker 1 38:01
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 38:01
First year.

Speaker 1 38:02
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 38:02

'Cause she's from like a wealthy background, been spoiled by her parents, given everything, been told she's amazing her whole life. And sometimes I'd just be like, "Yeah, but why did you do that? Because your confidence is based on a sense of confidence, but not based on an actual understanding of what you're making." So I would, I think building confidence sometimes with people like that is like they're naturally confident, but like build an inner sense of understanding of what one's doing, and then you can-

Speaker 1 38:30
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 38:30
...um, cont- have agency over your choices.

Speaker 1 38:33
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 38:34
Musically, in life, whatever.

Speaker 1 38:35
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 38:35
If someone's really unconfident, like the extreme opposite was this girl. I hope, well, unless she, she might pick someone else for next year, but I had her this year. She was quite flaky, stressed, anxious all the time, working loads of jobs, not got any money, make really cool drone experimental music, and she felt like she should be at [London uni], not [conservatoire], and everyone at [conservatoire] is too preppy and-

Speaker 1 38:56
Okay

Speaker 2 38:56
...musically trained, and she should be at the art school or LCC.And I was like, "Well, you could," but for some reason she's sticking with [conservatoire].

Speaker 1 39:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:05

Um, part of me is like, I'm not quite sure why.She should probably go to an art school.

Speaker 1 39:10
Okay.

Speaker 2 39:10
But it, it doesn't really matter.

Speaker 1 39:13
Mm.

Speaker 2 39:13
Like, get the same kind of opportunities, to be honest.

Speaker 1 39:16
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:17
Um, she's so unconfident.She said, her music's so great when she plays it.It's like my favorite actually.She makes really vibey-

Speaker 1 39:24
Mm

Speaker 2 39:24
... fucked up drones. And she said she did a performance amongst her peers at like a [conservatoire] thing, and she froze, didn't know what to do. I think she made it through, and she was talking to me how it felt, and I felt so bad for her.

Speaker 1 39:40
Mm.

Speaker 2 39:40
And that I totally understand.

Speaker 1 39:42
Mm.

Speaker 2 39:43
And so I said we'd do some breathing exercises, so we did it.I'm not sure how much of it she took in, but-

Speaker 1 39:48
Mm

Speaker 2 39:48
...we did some breathing exercises.You know, talked about posture, body language-

Speaker 1 39:57
Mm

Speaker 2 39:57
...um, getting control over her instrument, which she doesn't have.You know, not just practicing the instrument, but breathing with the practice.

Speaker 1 40:06
Mm.

Speaker 2 40:06
Slow steps.Boring shit that's really deep, basically.

Speaker 1 40:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:11
And I really hope that she took some of that on board.

Speaker 1 40:14
Mm. That more holistic or holistic idea, I think, in teaching is something I'm interested in because it's, like, interesting to know where those boundaries are in terms of helping the student develop confidence, where there's, like, um, traits that are needed. You know, how far do we as teachers try and help develop almost like personality and character traits that are needed-

Speaker 2 40:40
Mm

Speaker 1 40:40
...to do something successfully?Like-

Speaker 2 40:42
Yeah

Speaker 1 40:42

...if you need confidence to teach improv...If, if you need confidence to improvise well, how...Do you know?What is it?What-

Speaker 2 40:52
I think there's an, I think there's a con- I think that, that you can bring improvisation into your teaching-

Speaker 1 40:56
Mm

Speaker 2 40:56
...'cause you have to...Like, I don't know, like, it's, I'm, it's, I think it's amazing when people come with, like, a list of things they wanna get through and stuff.

Speaker 1 41:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:04
Methods, and this is my course. And maybe one day I'll be like, "You know, I think I've got enough of a clear idea of what, like, [my] course would look like."

Speaker 1 41:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:12
But now even just having a teaching job like what I have is a huge step in a sort of direction of, like, owning one's j- where I'm at.

Speaker 1 41:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:20
And, um, I never wanted to do it, anything like that before going to [US conservatoires], and then having such incredible teachers, I was like, "Oh, this is, these people have such knowledge."

Speaker 1 41:29
Mm.

Speaker 2 41:30
And they're never flapped.

Speaker 1 41:32

Mm.

Speaker 2 41:32
Like, they seem to know about everything, and they, they've done so much with their lives.

Speaker 1 41:36
Mm.

Speaker 2 41:36
And, like, the lessons were so different.E- each teacher was such a different experience.

Speaker 1 41:42
Mm.

Speaker 2 41:42
But they, they were never, none of them were like, "That was shit."

Speaker 1 41:46
Mm.

Speaker 2 41:47
They were just like, "Okay, let's make it better."

Speaker 1 41:51
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:51
You know?

Speaker 1 41:52
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:52
It was just so great.

Speaker 1 41:53
And did that help build confidence in you?

Speaker 2 41:55
Yeah.

Speaker 1 41:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:56
Because rather than be like, "You're not very good..." I mean, maybe also I was older, and I wasn't so affected by the, like, interpersonal dynamics-

Speaker 1 42:04
Yeah

Speaker 2 42:04
...of the teacher-student, meh.Also, I couldn't figure out who the cool kids were, like, at school-

Speaker 1 42:09
Okay

Speaker 2 42:09
...'cause I was like, "I'm not sure what cool is anymore."

Speaker 1 42:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:11
So, I kept sitting at random tables at lunch.

Speaker 1 42:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:13
I was like, "Are these the jazz bros? Are these, like, the misogynists? Are these, like-
...the, the hipster trans Jew adjacent, uh-

Speaker 1 42:23
Yeah

Speaker 2 42:24
...jazz people?"

Speaker 1 42:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:25

Like, the Korean classical students.

Speaker 1 42:28
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:28
Like, the, the pianist virtuoso that's won all the awards that you're not supposed to talk to 'cause he's too s- famous.

Speaker 1 42:34
Too...Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:34
But I didn't know.You know?

Speaker 1 42:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:36
It's really funny. Like, um- Could not read the room.

Speaker 1 42:40
Okay.

Speaker 2 42:41
No room reading.

Speaker 1 42:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:42
But, um, they...Yeah, I dunno.I think it's, you can, you have to be able to go with the, the, the flow-

Speaker 1 42:49
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 42:49
...as a teacher, so even if you have a plan.

Speaker 1 42:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:55
Y- everyone's different.

Speaker 1 42:56
Everyone's different.

Speaker 2 42:56
And I think seeing other people as human beings is very empowering.

Speaker 1 43:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 43:00
And that's certainly not what I had growing up.

Speaker 1 43:02
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 43:02
I dunno if you had that, you're just like, "Just do, just do what I tell you."

Speaker 1 43:07
Yeah, I had a mix.

Speaker 2 43:07
Let's be...

Speaker 1 43:08
I had a mix.

Speaker 2 43:08
Really?

Speaker 1 43:08
Yeah, I had one teacher who really saw me as, my singing teacher, and I dunno if that's just 'cause singing is kind of my natural affinity, but she really saw what I wanted to do and what I needed. You know, she was a classical singing teacher, but she was like, "Oh, there's no point with me." She could see that. Whereas my piano teacher was very much like, "Grade 8, and then you can do jazz." Was-

Speaker 2 43:34
Yes, that's the-

Speaker 1 43:35
...the kind of-

Speaker 2 43:36
...that's kind of what I was told

Speaker 1 43:36
...energy.It was like-

Speaker 2 43:37
You have to do your grade 8 first

Speaker 1 43:38
...unless you've got grade 8, you won't be able to do the jazz thing properly, which was just-

Speaker 2 43:42
I do know why they say that, 'cause it, jazz is hard, and you need-

Speaker 1 43:45
Yeah, but I think you can learn ja-

Speaker 2 43:47
Alongside

Speaker 1 43:47
...you can be really good at jazz without having done classical.

Speaker 2 43:50
You can.

Speaker 1 43:51
You know?

Speaker 2 43:51
I think the best is when you've done both, 'cause you've got the chops.

Speaker 1 43:54
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 43:54
Like, you've got that rigor and the chops.

Speaker 1 43:56
I dunno, some of the best jazz pianists I've know have never done the classical stuff.

Speaker 2 43:59
Really? That's cool.

Speaker 1 44:00
Yeah.There's like an intuitiveness to it that I think-

Speaker 2 44:03
Who's y- who's your favorite?

Speaker 1 44:04
My per- my per- my favorite to play with is my friend [London pianist], who is just-

Speaker 2 44:08
Oh, Jay, yeah.

Speaker 1 44:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:09
He's really, like-

Speaker 1 44:11
Yeah

Speaker 2 44:11
...successful now.

Speaker 1 44:12
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 44:12
I've seen him. He's playing with [London aartist]n.

Speaker 1 44:14
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:15
He's really good.

Speaker 1 44:16

Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:16
Yeah, really natural sound.

Speaker 1 44:17
So, like, he never studied classically.

Speaker 2 44:19
Mm.

Speaker 1 44:20
Um-

Speaker 2 44:20
Yeah, people like that, I'm like, "That's a good example of someone who's really in touch with themselves."

Speaker 1 44:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:25
Just naturally, and I don't know if I ever...Maybe I seem that way on stage, but-

Speaker 1 44:28
Mm

Speaker 2 44:29
...I don't feel I ever had a natural flow into, like, a here's me, me, me, just doing me.

Speaker 1 44:35
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 44:35
Like, I still struggle with it-

Speaker 1 44:37
Yeah

Speaker 2 44:37
...to date, and I'm really working on it this summer.I'm just fed up of feeling like that now.

Speaker 1 44:41
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:41
'Cause I've got enough to share.

Speaker 1 44:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:43
But he just seems so confident, actually.

Speaker 1 44:47
Mm. I think confidence, yeah, the word of the day.

Speaker 2 44:49
Right? But you see it more in guys.

Speaker 1 44:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:52
You do.

Speaker 1 44:52
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:52
For sure.

Speaker 1 44:53
Yeah.

Speaker 2 44:54
And there's so much to say about that. I, I kinda try not to dwell on it, 'cause I get depressed, basically.

Speaker 1 44:59
Mm.

Speaker 2 45:00
Um-

Speaker 1 45:01
Mm.

Speaker 2 45:01
But I mean, I did that gig, it was a string gig, but I did [musician] album launch.

Speaker 1 45:05
Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 45:05
That was awesome.I was the only woman-

Speaker 1 45:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 45:08
...on the stage.That would have really pranged me out years ago.

Speaker 1 45:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:13
Um, but I rose to the occasion.What I do is, I dunno if it's the right thing or the wrong thing, or it's fine.I sort of-

Speaker 1 45:19
Mm

Speaker 2 45:19
...mirror them with the dress code. I don't go in, like, full femme, like-

Speaker 1 45:23
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 45:24
...because I'll draw all the attention, and I think that's not my role in that ensemble.

Speaker 1 45:28
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:28
I want to look like them, so I dress a bit like them.

Speaker 1 45:30
Mm.

Speaker 2 45:31
You know, slightly, maybe a slightly more-

Speaker 1 45:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 45:33
...feminine version.

Speaker 1 45:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:35
And, um, talk, you know, we talk similar, and we keep the conversation topics to, like, certain topics-

Speaker 1 45:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 45:41
...and all that. Just because that, those are all hetero dudes.

Speaker 1 45:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 45:46
And they're nice, but they're also not Gen Z-ers.

Speaker 1 45:48
Mm.

Speaker 2 45:48
They're, like, alphas mostly. Alpha and millennials.

Speaker 1 45:50
Mm.

Speaker 2 45:52

There are, there are topics we can talk about as, like, cool alternative people, and there are topics that, you know, feelings, mm-mm {shakes head}. Um, insecurities, mm-mm.

Speaker 1 46:02
Mm. But that's so hard going into in a musical-

Speaker 2 46:05
Yes

Speaker 1 46:05
...you know?

Speaker 2 46:05
It's hard.

Speaker 1 46:06
For, and that was something I always struggled with, d'you know?

Speaker 2 46:08
Yeah.

Speaker 1 46:08
Going into, I think as a singer, I'm mostly on stage on my own as a woman.Do you know?A lot of the time, it's really hard to find people, women to play in a band or whatever.

Speaker 2 46:21
It's hard.

Speaker 1 46:21
So a lot of the time, most of the gigs I've ever done, I've always had all male bands.And-

Speaker 2 46:27
Yeah, it, yeah

Speaker 1 46:29
...it's, you know, learning to kinda how to lead that and stuff.It's-

Speaker 2 46:31
Really hard, and for them-

Speaker 1 46:32
...terrifying

Speaker 2 46:33
...to trust you, and do you trust them?

Speaker 1 46:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:35
With women, it's women can be a bit flappy, so I, I don't always love an all-female band.

Speaker 1 46:39
Mm.

Speaker 2 46:40
I work in a few. I'm doing, next week's gonna be, like, all...Next week's gonna be, like, ladies McLadies, 'cause it's ladies from-

Speaker 1 46:45
Yeah

Speaker 2 46:45
...celebration of ladies and Yiddish music. It's so boring. Everyone's like, "Oh." 'Cause a lot of them aren't like me.

Speaker 1 46:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 46:56
Like, I'm more man in my-

Speaker 1 46:58
Yeah

Speaker 2 46:58
...traditional style.But it, I also struggle with that-

Speaker 1 47:01
Yeah

Speaker 2 47:02

...with tho- with them. And no, doing the gig with [musician] was amazing for me, because I was like-

Speaker 1 47:06
Yeah

Speaker 2 47:06
..."This is music I wanna play."

Speaker 1 47:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:08
I'm so happy to be hired.I hope I've just been hired 'cause I'm the right person for the job.I hope they didn't be like, "Oh, shit. We'd have a girl in the fucking-"

Speaker 1 47:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 47:16
..."group." I don't think [musician] knows any other cello players, so it's- ...great me and Kareem, but it's like s- absolute honor-

Speaker 1 47:23
Yeah

Speaker 2 47:23
...to be in that band and to play that music.

Speaker 1 47:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:26
Trust me, I would, before NEC, I wouldn't have had the confidence.

Speaker 1 47:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:30
I would've done the job. Probably, actually, my playing was probably good, it's probably better now, but-

Speaker 1 47:34

Yeah

Speaker 2 47:35
...I would've been good enough, but I would've just been riddled with insecurity.And instead I was like, "I know I'm good enough.I don't think I'm ever gonna be seen t-fully equally subconsciously."

Speaker 1 47:46
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:47
"But I'm there. I'm gonna play like a motherfucker."

Speaker 1 47:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 47:50
"I'm gonna blend in, but stand out when it's the right time. I'm gonna enjoy it."

Speaker 1 47:55
Mm.

Speaker 2 47:56
"And I'm gonna be grateful." 'Cause that's-

Speaker 1 47:58
Right.

Speaker 2 47:58
And, and going to the States did that for me.

Speaker 1 48:00
Yeah. Interesting.

Speaker 2 48:02
It really did, because that's how they, that's how they treat you out there.They're like, "Play the fucking music."

Speaker 1 48:07
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:08
"If you don't wanna play it, go away."

Speaker 1 48:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:11
So that was really helpful for me.

Speaker 1 48:13
That kind of border, I think that's the important balance, isn't it? That striking of, like, not being too, um, gentle in a way, because that doesn't acurately prepare people for the actual experience of the world.

Speaker 2 48:28
Mm.

Speaker 1 48:29
But also not being too harsh that you just shut people down. It's like-

Speaker 2 48:32
It's really difficult

Speaker 1 48:33
...it's a really fine line.

Speaker 2 48:35
As a teacher, you must struggle with that.

Speaker 1 48:37
Mm.

Speaker 2 48:37
I do. I think it's different culturally here, obviously.

Speaker 1 48:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 48:41
You don't have to shut people down, but you do...I think it's okay to, I always found it refreshing when I found someone over here who would just say

Speaker 1 48:48
Yeah

Speaker 2 48:48
…it how it is.

Speaker 1 48:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 48:50
But it can come across as rude, and I've been told by friends who are more “Britishy” than me-

Speaker 1 48:56
Mm

Speaker 2 48:56
…and have had more of a British education that I'm, I'm kind of a f- all or nothing, full on force, and not everyone likes that. And I just sort of feel like, well, that's fine.

Speaker 1 49:08
Mm.

Speaker 2 49:09
But people need that here.

Speaker 1 49:11
Mm.

Speaker 2 49:12
And I don't have to…Like, I can be nicey-nicey, of course.

Speaker 1 49:17
Mm.

Speaker 2 49:18
But I also, like, I need to be myself-

Speaker 1 49:22
Mm

Speaker 2 49:22
…here.

Speaker 1 49:23
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:23
And it's hard.

Speaker 1 49:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:25
Really hard.And then sometimes I'm like, I don't have to live here.I can live in a place where how I am is normal/mild.I'm mild over there.

Speaker 1 49:32
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:32
I'm, like, chill-

Speaker 1 49:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:34
...compared to everyone else.

Speaker 1 49:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:35
Especially in New York.

Speaker 1 49:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 49:37
I've met Americans who've been burned by the system as well.

Speaker 1 49:39
Mm.

Speaker 2 49:40
Who've been like, "Oh, it was too strong for me.I felt like I was never gonna be good enough," and all of that.

Speaker 1 49:44

Mm.

Speaker 2 49:44
But I think 'cause I went in later, I was like, I'm never...I'm not even trying to be the best here.I'm just-

Speaker 1 49:48
Yeah

Speaker 2 49:48
...just wanna l- I'm really glad I did it-

Speaker 1 49:51
Later

Speaker 2 49:51
...like, upside down, basically.

Speaker 1 49:53
Mm.

Speaker 2 49:54
But yeah, still get massively anxious.I don't really know how to solution for that.

Speaker 1 49:59
I don't think there is one.

Speaker 2 50:00
It's not very nice.

Speaker 1 50:01
I think the a- and that, that, that's part of what I'm kind of exploring is, like, the act of improvisation in itself, because of how you have to do it and what it requires of you as a person, is quite exposing. And so the anxiety comes hand in hand with that, and you have to be... There are certain conditions that will trigger that, and there are certain conditions where it'll be a freeing thing. Do you know what I mean? And-

Speaker 2 50:25
I think overall, I think it's a...Whatever you go on to do in your life-

Speaker 1 50:29
Mm

Speaker 2 50:29
...you learn improvisation with a good teacher, like I'm sure you're very good-

Speaker 1 50:31
Mm

Speaker 2 50:32
...and thoughtful and careful.Um, those are skills that you can apply to anything-

Speaker 1 50:37
Mm

Speaker 2 50:37
...any situation. And, um, because it makes your brain work in so many ways all at once.

Speaker 1 50:43
Mm.

Speaker 2 50:43
Like, all the things are pinging off. So like let's say you're in a board meeting, you need to come up with an idea. It's like you can sit there thinking about that whilst you're in the meeting, and then breathe and be like, "Guys, I know."

Speaker 1 50:54
Mm.

Speaker 2 50:54
"I know what needs to happen here." I think it's been helpful for me like that.

Speaker 1 50:57
Yeah.

Speaker 2 50:58
That it's given me, like, a confidence.

Speaker 1 51:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:01
Im- I think improvisation has given me confidence.

Speaker 1 51:03

Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:04
I don't think playing in ensemble gives you the same confidence-

Speaker 1 51:06
Yeah

Speaker 2 51:06
...'cause you're just in...It's safety in numbers-

Speaker 1 51:09
Yeah

Speaker 2 51:09
...you know?

Speaker 1 51:09
You can make mistakes without anyone knowing, whereas-

Speaker 2 51:12
Yeah.It's so exposing.

Speaker 1 51:14
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:14
So the...Yeah, but it's not for everyone's character.

Speaker 1 51:16
Mm.

Speaker 2 51:17
You can't make everyone do it.

Speaker 1 51:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:19
Do you know what I mean?

Speaker 1 51:20
Totally.

Speaker 2 51:21
But, um, I'd love to watch you teach.

Speaker 1 51:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 51:25
That'd be cool.

Speaker 1 51:26
One day.

Speaker 2 51:26
So you're doing it...How much do you teach then?

Speaker 1 51:28
I teach quite a lot.

Speaker 2 51:29
Is that your main income now?

Speaker 1 51:30
It's my main money, yeah. My main income.I mean, I'd like to...I'm gonna stop this, I think, where I'm, I'm happy with the in-

Edith – 1d

Speaker 1 = Meg, Speaker 2 = Edith

Speaker 1 00:00
Where is it? Um, hello. Thank you so much for doing this today.

Speaker 2 00:06
Thank you, Meg. What a joy.

Speaker 1 00:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:09
Can't wait to speak to you.

Speaker 1 00:12
Um, before we start, I just need to check a few things with you. Um, you know that I'm doing some research for my master's degree, and that today I'd like to ask some questions about your experiences of singing and improvisation. There's no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in what you think and how you feel about it. You don't have to answer any question that you don't want to, and we can stop at any time. Just say, and we'll stop straight away. It's totally fine. It won't affect anything for me or for you, obviously. Um, I'll be recording our conversation on my phone, so then I'll listen back to it later, but no one else will hear, and your name won't be used in anywhere in the research, so I'll take your name out. You can choose your own pseudonym if you like. Um, and yeah.

Speaker 2 00:56
Wow.

Speaker 1 00:56
That's, that's basically it.Do you have any questions?

Speaker 2 00:59
No, all good.

Speaker 1 01:01
Okay, good.

Speaker 2 01:01
How long, how long is this going to be?

Speaker 1 01:03
About f- half an hour, 45 minutes between-

Speaker 2 01:06
Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:06
It depends on how we go.Um-

Speaker 2 01:09
Lovely

Speaker 1 01:09
... and, like, if you need to go at any point, that's totally fine. We can... You can go. Um, so before we start, like, delving into the, the nitty-gritty, it would be great to just hear a bit about your background as a vocalist and how improvisation is part of your practice as a-

Speaker 2 01:32
Mm

Speaker 1 01:33
...singer.

Speaker 2 01:35
Yes. Um, background as a vocalist, um, I kind of got into singing through church. Um, I grew up in a Baptist church, um, here in London, and yeah, was just sing- was just singing ve- you know, just communal singing and sort of giving thanks without sort of really knowing much about, um, organized religion or singing as a child. But just knowing that that's where we go to sing so that, you know, really singing amongst people was really what sort of gave me joy and sort of an in into sort of discovering my voice, and then just became fascinated slowly as a teenager with how sort of quickly my muscles were kind of adapting and changing and growing-

Speaker 1 02:22
Mm

Speaker 2 02:22
... and just became really fascinated with how the voice can kind of grow and adapt, like kind of across genre. I was sort of singing, um, a lot of musical theater, um, a lot of pop. I was singing cla- I was actually singing classically in school-

Speaker 1 02:43
Mm

Speaker 2 02:43
... doing sort of growing, sort of in one-to-one training in school. And, um, yeah, sort of across different styles, I just became really sort of glued to this understanding of, um, the voice as an instrument-

Speaker 1 02:56
Mm

Speaker 2 02:56
...and how it can sort of technically grow to just... as a way of expression. I was just-

Speaker 1 03:04
Yeah

Speaker 2 03:04
...loving kind of how it was, like, moving and-

Speaker 1 03:06
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 03:07
...um, and as a way to kind of really express what was kind of happening for me in my brain melodically or what I was really-

Speaker 1 03:15
Mm

Speaker 2 03:15
... drawn to in music. Um, and then from there, I, um, decided to study jazz at [Conservatorie], and that wasn't... I wasn't, to be honest, wasn't super glued to even identifying f- maybe as a jazz musician or wanting to be a jazz singer.

Speaker 1 03:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:33
It was actually really wanting to learn to improvise and learn to, um, better, um, understand my voice in-

Speaker 1 03:43

Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 03:44
...sort of one-to-one practices with a lot of different teachers and kind of really wanting to go to a conservatoire and-

Speaker 1 03:49
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 03:50
...um, and so that was sort of, yeah, that background. And now I'm, um, still across a lot of different genres-

Speaker 1 03:59
Mm

Speaker 2 03:59
...and just working as an artist, as a, as a, as a vocal improviser-

Speaker 1 04:04
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 04:04
...and also, um, a session musician. I sing in a, a medieval ensemble called {Name}, and then I work with a lot of different artists in a lot of different genres in, yeah, in vocal vocaling.

Speaker 1 04:18
Vocal vocaling.Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:19
Yeah, singing the singing.So that's like, yeah, kind of an overview of, like, yeah, where I sort of started off.

Speaker 1 04:26
Amazing.Do you remember at what point you first started to improvise?Was that pre studying jazz?Was that post?Had you done it much before?

Speaker 2 04:39
Honestly, I really felt that I've... Even though I was studying jazz, and therefore of course studying improvisation, I felt, I feel like I've just been improvising, like, in the last three years, like, properly.

Speaker 1 04:57
Okay.

Speaker 2 04:57
Um, and my way in, I was singing a lot of musical theater and was always drawn to the jazz standards in musical theater-

Speaker 1 05:05
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 05:06
...like is p- in all of the older musicals.

Speaker 1 05:08
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 05:08
I was loving sort of the show tunes and, like, American songbook, and then really found Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan and-

Speaker 1 05:14
Mm

Speaker 2 05:14
...and Billie Holiday, like, through that, these singers and, and was just re- p- Ella particularly loving scatting-

Speaker 1 05:21
Mm

Speaker 2 05:21
...and loving the pace of it, loving the expression of it, l- just being so, um, enchanted by it.

Speaker 1 05:29
Mm.

Speaker 2 05:29
And so was starting to scat, was starting to... When I was then singing standards, I was starting to, like, find it and, um, just sort of, yeah, build on it through that. So I, I was, I was definitely trying before [conservatoire], and I was definitely trying really hard at [conservatoire]. Um, but it was, you know, I think studying jazz, and especially when it's a degree, when it's a conservatoire-

Speaker 1 05:54
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 05:54
...you have a template behind you because you're trying to meet certain, um, uh, grades.

Speaker 1 06:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 06:02
You're being examined, your b- so there's, there was a sort of a mechanical way in of, of, um- Learning how to do it within that genre, which I greatly respect-

Speaker 1 06:13
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 06:13
...and really appreciated, and it gave me a lot of, a lot of tools and education.I think in terms of improvising for myself and with, uh, with musicians now, I think that definitely grew after-

Speaker 1 06:23
Mm

Speaker 2 06:23
...after [conservatoire], for sure.

Speaker 1 06:25
Interesting. So, okay, I guess you've kind of answered this, but it might be good to explore a bit further. So how would you describe your relationship with improvisation now and your experience of improvisation compared to when you first started to improvise?

Speaker 2 06:44
Could you repeat that?

Speaker 1 06:46
Yes. Do you know what? I think maybe that's... it's too long a question. Let's split it up a bit. So can you remember a time where, like, the f- kind of the first time you were actively asked to improvise in a, um, assessed context? Not specifically, like, an exam, but where there was an audience, be it any size.

Speaker 2 07:11
Yeah.That was definitely at [conservatoire]-

Speaker 1 07:12
Okay

Speaker 2 07:12
...in, um, in exams.Um, I, in terms of singing outside of [conservatoire], I was singing pop and soul.

Speaker 1 07:20
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:21
Singing a lot at functions.

Speaker 1 07:22
Okay.

Speaker 2 07:23
Um, and, and again, still, like, musical theater, so definitely that practice was definitely whilst I was studying.

Speaker 1 07:28
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 07:29
Um, and then also on, on my own, like in my room, and yeah, just practicing. But yeah, it was definitely within that context of a study or-

Speaker 1 07:37
Okay

Speaker 2 07:38
...an a- an assessment that was, yeah, those early findings-

Speaker 1 07:43
Okay

Speaker 2 07:44
...I would say.Yeah.

Speaker 1 07:45
Do you, do you have any recollection or any experience of improvising causing apprehension or anxiety during the-

Speaker 2 07:57
[definitively] Yes.

Speaker 1 07:58
Okay.

Speaker 2 07:59
Yes.And *still*, still, like-

Speaker 1 08:01
Okay

Speaker 2 08:01
...sometimes real apprehension because there's always, like, a bit of a risk involved.

Speaker 1 08:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:05
Um, but I just, yeah, definitely remember just, yeah, anxiety and apprehension because I think I was mainly listening to myself rather than listening to the room or the response.

Speaker 1 08:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:19
And I was trying to get it right. And I was, I was also wanting to sound good. I was wanting to sound pretty-

Speaker 1 08:25
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:25
... in my voice. There wasn't... I wasn't, um... You know, my voice was still really forming, as it always continuously is. But it's very interesting, I think, being a female and sort of learning this at sort of 18, 21 when your voice had... like, the cords haven't, you know-

Speaker 1 08:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:41
...grown in ways.Like, you're really just-

Speaker 1 08:44
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 08:45
...such a, such a, such a baby.So I was very, um, naturally self-conscious a bit anyway as a musician-

Speaker 1 08:51
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 08:51
...at that age-

Speaker 1 08:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:53
...um, let alone sort of improvising where you are, are under a bit of a risk and you are being assessed or, um...And just live performance anyway.It's just-

Speaker 1 09:02
Yeah

Speaker 2 09:02
... it's really on the spot, and there's just so much trust involved in yourself and other musicians around you. So I think it all sort of coincided with just a real point of growing and learning, which I hadn't even... I feel like I hadn't even hit ground level yet.

Speaker 1 09:15
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:16
I was like, oh, you know, maybe that's a bit self-critical, but I just, yeah, was, um, really still very early in it all. Definitely.

Speaker 1 09:25

Yes.

Speaker 2 09:25
But yeah, those were my first memories. It would've been, would've been studying still and just finding my feet.

Speaker 1 09:32
What was it... What did that... How did that, like, apprehension and anxiety manifest for you? Is... Was it a physical experience, an emotional experience, or was it something that you were able to control easily?

Speaker 2 09:46
Hmm.Yeah, I think definitely both.

Speaker 1 09:49
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:49
Um, I remember having moments, like, coming off stage of doing, like, a jam, even at, whilst at [conservatoire]-

Speaker 1 09:56
Yeah

Speaker 2 09:56
...sort of off, off the course element of it-

Speaker 1 09:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:00
...and, um, feeling really anxious, feeling really self-conscious-

Speaker 1 10:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:03
...and 'cause people are listening to you.And also I think, well, how it manifested was actually in jam settings, which I think don't serve improvisation always in the right way.I think-

Speaker 1 10:15
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 10:15
...I've been to some beautiful jams where the, just magic happens, and I've been to a lot of ones where it's just a real pressure cooker.

Speaker 1 10:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:22
And I think especially as a vocalist and, you know, finding your voice and that being a really, really vulnerable personal thing anyway, but also maybe some of the practical things of, like, you've got a rubbish mic and it's like-

Speaker 1 10:34
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 10:34
...you're s- trying to shout over kind of speakers and-

Speaker 1 10:36
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:37
...people in the room, and it kind of manifested in me just trying to technically show off in a space of, like, two minutes, and I was just like-

Speaker 1 10:47
Okay

Speaker 2 10:47
..."Okay, I'm just gonna sing really high," or, "I'm just gonna-

Speaker 1 10:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:49
...try and impress them in this and sell, you know, myself-

Speaker 1 10:52
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 10:52

...and convince people that I'm talented or whatever" in, like, this very short space of time, which just does not serve the music.It doesn't serve-

Speaker 1 10:58
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:59
...ourselves.It doesn't-

Speaker 1 11:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:00
You know, it's not a conversation at all. And, but, you know, I think, you know, a lot, a lot, that that can happen, and, and that can happen in ways where it is not at all, um, indulgent and it's genuine expression.

Speaker 1 11:13
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 11:13
So if it's genuinely high and it's...or high notes or you're really belting or you're really soft or kind of-

Speaker 1 11:18
Mm

Speaker 2 11:18
...technically moving around, that can so serve a purpose.

Speaker 1 11:21
Mm.

Speaker 2 11:22
But I remember it being kind of I was trying to hide behind it because I was just...I don't know.It's just a really, it can be a really pressured environment and-

Speaker 1 11:32
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:33
Yeah, and sometimes very male-dominated, so you're really just trying to-

Speaker 1 11:38
Yeah

Speaker 2 11:38
...get your thing out there in a, you know, two-minute slot.

Speaker 1 11:42
Yeah.There's, there's loads in there that would be good to explore further.

Speaker 2 11:48
Mm.

Speaker 1 11:48
Firstly, let... I'll just rewind a tiny bit to one of the things you said, which was, um, it's, it's a very personal thing with singers, and there's something about the relationship with your voice. Do you think that's different in terms of improvisation? But also if you wanna talk more openly about your own relationship with your voice, is there a difference between a vocalist and an instrumentalist in that way?

Speaker 2 12:17
Definitely. Um, definitely because the voice is also, um, you know, can really just so be dependent on your mind and your nervous system.

Speaker 1 12:29
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 12:32
And, um, yeah, your just, your body on the day.Obviously over time you build up a real s- technical strength-

Speaker 1 12:38
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 12:38
...and muscle memory that you can really lean on.I didn't have that then yet-

Speaker 1 12:44
Mm

Speaker 2 12:44
...in, at [conservatoire] when I was studying.

Speaker 1 12:46

Mm.

Speaker 2 12:46
I have that now, but I didn't have that then, so it's, it's, um... Yeah, whilst being amongst instrumentalists and I remember at [conservatoire] sort of really, I had a bit of psychosomatic stress going on where I-

Speaker 1 13:00
Mm

Speaker 2 13:00
...but I was genuinely getting quite ill, like, uh, you know-

Speaker 1 13:03
Mm.

Speaker 2 13:04
Just throat things.

Speaker 1 13:05
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 13:05
And it was definitely stress.

Speaker 1 13:09
Mm.

Speaker 2 13:09
And I, I was walking in, and the piano would still sound like the piano, and obviously those individual players bring their beautiful identity and-

Speaker 1 13:16
Yeah

Speaker 2 13:17
...a unique identity to that piano-

Speaker 1 13:18
Yeah

Speaker 2 13:19

…to that instrument, but the timbre sounds the same, whereas, you know, for the voice, I was really fluctuating daily in confidence based on how my voice was feeling and adapting-

Speaker 1 13:30
Yeah

Speaker 2 13:30
… um, at that age. So I think, yeah, definitely a different, definitely a different feel and approach, and, um, it's really vulnerable to be using your body in that way, but also it being, you know, your voice is yours.

Speaker 1 13:47
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 13:47
And so even with that sort of psychosomatic stress that I was experiencing, that was a reflection on my state of mind and how-

Speaker 1 13:57
Right

Speaker 2 13:57
…I was feeling in that environment.So yeah, very, very personal and personal.

Speaker 1 14:01
And do you think, do you think in improvisation as a task, you know, I, you know, I was at [conservatoire], we were at [conservatoire] together at the same time, and there was a focus on improvisation. Did that feel like there was that element of the course was one of the sources of that stress, or was it a broader picture?

Speaker 2 14:23
I think it was a broader picture.

Speaker 1 14:25
Okay.

Speaker 2 14:26
I kind of remember at [conservatoire], you know, I put it like really, you know, um, wonderful teachers, wonderful tools, wonderful people.

Speaker 1 14:38
Mm.

Speaker 2 14:38
But I remember being in it and it not feeling right for me.

Speaker 1 14:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:42
I definitely remember being like, "Okay, I'm just, I'm gonna…I'm really grateful to be here, grateful for my one-to-ones-

Speaker 1 14:48
Yeah

Speaker 2 14:48
…and I'm, I'm, I'm learning so much, but this genre or this style of improvisation is not what I'm trying to do."

Speaker 1 14:55
Okay.Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:56
And so I-

Speaker 1 14:57
Mm

Speaker 2 14:57
…I was kind of riding out some of it.

Speaker 1 15:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:01
And that was just for me.

Speaker 1 15:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:03
So I think I wasn't like, "Oh, I'm really committed to this genre and this way of, um, expressing mu- music."

Speaker 1 15:12
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 15:13
Um, not committed to the genre, sorry, not as in the genre of jazz, but I just mean the w- the mechanical way that we were doing things.

Speaker 1 15:21
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:21
I was like, "This isn't making my heart, my musical heart sing really."

Speaker 1 15:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:24
But that's just, but based on the context, we were being, uh, exams, that's not s- necessarily down to, you know-

Speaker 1 15:30
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:30
...being a conservatoire.It's just you, you're, you're trying to meet a degree, you know?So-

Speaker 1 15:34
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 15:34
...I remember the context of it, I was like, I was kind of making peace with.

Speaker 1 15:38
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:38
Um, but yeah, I think it did, did definitely have a, have an effect, but I think it was just a broader-

Speaker 1 15:45
Just a broader...Okay.

Speaker 2 15:46
Yeah.Learn-

Speaker 1 15:47
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:47
...like learning, and just that time of life when you're really, really young, and-

Speaker 1 15:51
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:52
...yeah.So a, a combination I would say for sure.

Speaker 1 15:55
When you, in, you said there about how the gen- that style of improvisation, that like genre of improvisation didn't feel as natural to you.Is that maybe the w- it's not natural-

Speaker 2 16:08
Mm

Speaker 1 16:08
...but like are there genres or are there experiences that you've had or that you were having at that time outside of your [conservatoire] context-

Speaker 2 16:17
Mm

Speaker 1 16:17
...that felt more natural to you? And I don't mean like, when I say natural, I don't mean skill. I mean ex-

Speaker 2 16:23
Yeah

Speaker 1 16:23
...experience kind of thing.

Speaker 2 16:26
Yeah.I think, well, then when I say st- yeah, when I say style, I'm actually kind of more referring to the style in which we were taught.

Speaker 1 16:34
Okay.Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:35
Um, it's, I love standards.

Speaker 1 16:37
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:37
I love singing jazz.

Speaker 1 16:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:40
Um, I don't do, I don't really, um, improvise on standards now or sort of classically scat in that way now.

Speaker 1 16:48
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 16:48
It's not where I've found myself.

Speaker 1 16:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:50
Um, but still absolutely love it.I more so mean, yeah, at, at [conservatoire] doing a lot of transcriptions and then weaving that into what you were also wanting to say.

Speaker 1 17:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:02
And I felt that style of sort of transcription, harmonic transcription, melodic transcription wasn't quite meeting what I was m- what was coming naturally-

Speaker 1 17:11
Yeah

Speaker 2 17:11
...out of me.So it just felt a bit kind of disconjointed.

Speaker 1 17:14
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:14
I think what I've found now is, um, and sort of through some of the, the artists that I've worked with and projects that I'm in, I've really found myself in a lovely spot of improvisation where I finally sort of found my taste, and actually some of that taste is really rooted in more folk Americana and kind of-

Speaker 1 17:34
Mm

Speaker 2 17:34
...country and gospel.

Speaker 1 17:37
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 17:37
Um, again, sort of growing up in church. Um, so I've, I've found that my, my tastes and my, my musical memory and sense of nostalgia and how I was raised on music and what I'm drawn to is now coming out.

Speaker 1 17:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:56
And I'm, and I'm not finding that really relate to what I w- the way I was doing it at [conservatoire].

Speaker 1 18:02
Yes.Exactly.

Speaker 2 18:03
So I think that's what I would, how I would frame it.

Speaker 1 18:07
Um, would you be happy to explore a bit about that style of teaching in terms of how improvisation is taught?I will, I'll remove that it was [conservatoire] that we went to, so it won't-

Speaker 2 18:19
Cool.

Speaker 1 18:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:19
Yeah.

Speaker 1 18:20
Um, but I'm just curious to know- If you think that more technical har- mon- knowled- harmony approach served you as a singer in terms of that transcription, in terms of-

Speaker 2 18:38
Hmm

Speaker 1 18:39
…you know, going through the harmony in that way.Is that something that served you or do you think you would've been better served by different teaching strategies?

Speaker 2 18:50
I think it did serve me to a level. Um, and there's probably no question that what I'm doing now, even though it's not in that genre-

Speaker 1 19:01
Mm

Speaker 2 19:01
…you know, quote unquote, a lot of that learning is still internalized.

Speaker 1 19:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:06
It's still within me, so it still would, would come, it still comes out.

Speaker 1 19:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:10

Um, particularly whether it be sort of more modal stuff or different modes, and I'm like, "Oh yeah, you know."

Speaker 1 19:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:17
Um, that was a lot of practice that went in.

Speaker 1 19:21
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:21
Um, I think it's just for me to, you know, um, transcription is super useful.Um, weaving it into what you're doing can also be useful as a practice.

Speaker 1 19:34
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 19:34
I think for me, and it kind of also comes with me doing a lot of, like, session work, um, I...It can be very easy to then just be drawn into a particular way of processing it, and-

Speaker 1 19:48
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 19:49
...one format or one template of it. And I think the learning of the way that *you* wanna do it really comes on your own-

Speaker 1 19:58
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:58
...and comes later just with growth.

Speaker 1 20:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:03
Um, so I don't even consider...I, I honestly, I don't, I wasn't improvising at [conservatoire].

Speaker 1 20:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:08
It's just not how I think about it.

Speaker 1 20:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:11
Um, so, hmm [pause], yeah, I, I appreciate the tools, and it can absolutely serve a purpose.I think it's sticking to that, it's thinking that that is the way just doesn't relate to me at all.

Speaker 1 20:26
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:26
I think it's been such a, yeah, such a journey of a lot, now a lot of different things.

Speaker 1 20:32
Was there, um, were you, did you often find yourself in a room... Sorry, there's a bird having a fight in the tree. Um, do you find yourself, did you find yourself in that learning stage of your experience in a room being taught in the same way as instrumentalists, or were you taught differently?

Speaker 2 20:57
No, I feel like we were taught the same.

Speaker 1 20:59
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 21:00
We were all sort of in there together and sort of expected to do it all, yeah, together.

Speaker 1 21:08
And did, did that work for you?

Speaker 2 21:12
Um, yes and no.

Speaker 1 21:14

Okay.

Speaker 2 21:15
I think, and again, it maybe sort of comes back with my relationship to the whole thing-

Speaker 1 21:19
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 21:20
...of being like, "Okay, yeah, maybe this isn't gonna be for me." But, um, no, I think it really depends how you internalize music, whether it's by ear-

Speaker 1 21:30
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 21:30
...or much more theory based, and so I noticed that with different musicians.Even some instrumentalists that were much more inclined by ear, um, but they're physically pressing the notes-

Speaker 1 21:40
Yeah

Speaker 2 21:40
...from where they're, where they are. Whereas the voice, it, you know, it's all in your mind.

Speaker 1 21:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:45
Um, so that took a lot of kind of resilience and pushing through on the-

Speaker 1 21:49
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 21:49
...in pressured moments. Um-

Speaker 1 21:52
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 21:52
...but that served a real purpose. That was really helpful. Um-

Speaker 1 21:56
Yeah

Speaker 2 21:56
...but yeah.Um, it was helpful, and it wasn't helpful maybe.

Speaker 1 22:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:03
Yeah. Combination.

Speaker 1 22:04
Did you feel that there was a, a disparity? Were singers able to pick up the material as quickly as the instrumentalists, or was there a disparity?

Speaker 2 22:18
Um, yeah, sometimes there was a disparity. Um, sometimes not.

Speaker 1 22:27
Hmm.

Speaker 2 22:27
Kind of re- well, kind of really depended.

Speaker 1 22:29
Depended.

Speaker 2 22:29
Really depended what we were doing because I think sometimes, sometimes we were doing stuff by ear.

Speaker 1 22:33
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 22:34
Um, and yes, yeah, re- I think it was really dependent on, on the class itself, what we were learning.

Speaker 1 22:45

Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 22:46
Um, and yeah.I think-

Speaker 1 22:50
Did you have, did you have any, like, singing specific instruction that was like, "You're a singer, and I, we're gonna work on improvisation, and we're gonna work on it in a way that is specific to you as a singer"? Was that something you ever had as an experience?

Speaker 2 23:06
No.

Speaker 1 23:07
Yeah. And do you think that was something you would have valued? Now, could you maybe-

Speaker 2 23:14
Yeah

Speaker 1 23:14
...maybe actually the way to say it is, if you were to have a young singer approach you and say, "I really wanna learn how to improvise"-

Speaker 2 23:25
Hmm

Speaker 1 23:25
...what, how would you, what...Now that you've found your way of doing it, you've found your style-

Speaker 2 23:32
Hmm

Speaker 1 23:32
...you've found your...How would you explain that to them, or what would you give them any, what advice would you give? What tools would you give?

Speaker 2 23:40
Yeah. Gosh.

Speaker 1 23:43

I'm not, I, in a way, that's a really mean question-

Speaker 2 23:45
Yeah

Speaker 1 23:45
...because I'm effectively asking you to answer my master's for me.

Speaker 2 23:49
No, no, sure. It, so well, I think I'm still really figuring it out, and fig- figuring out, um, like I don't think I've necessarily, I don't think we ever f- really find our thing, find our way.

Speaker 1 24:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:02
With, think there's a, you know, sometimes I'm like, "Oh yeah, I've really arrived here."

Speaker 1 24:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:07
"Oh, re- that really feels good." But then something else will change, and I'll discover something new or-

Speaker 1 24:13
Hmm

Speaker 2 24:13
... or be in a room with different musicians, and be like, "Oh, no, no, no, that, that's something I've not come across before." And I think that's the main thing about improvisation, whether you're by yourself with your own, uh, with maybe a piano or guitar that you're playing, or it's a drone-

Speaker 1 24:31
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 24:33
If you're doing it by yourself or doing it with a group of other musicians- ...or collaborators, it really is just to listen and to not just only, only sing when you hear it in your head.

Speaker 1 24:48
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 24:49
Um, not just for the sake of making noise.

Speaker 1 24:53
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:53
But really just building a conversation, first of all, with yourself based upon your tastes and your, what you're drawn to.

Speaker 1 25:00
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 25:00
Um, melodically, harmonically. It, it, I mean, it really just boils down to emotion.

Speaker 1 25:05
Mm.

Speaker 2 25:06
That emotional spark, and that's why we make music.

Speaker 1 25:09
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 25:09
That's why we sing. It's that, that is a foundation of really just connection to the self and connection to... Connection to self, but then also not connection to the self. Like, don't think about yourself.

Speaker 1 25:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:20
It's, it's, it, it's such a, it's been such a journey to-

Speaker 1 25:23
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:23
...to find out kind of what, what you give and take, what the balance is-

Speaker 1 25:28
Mm

Speaker 2 25:28
...what the regulation is.

Speaker 1 25:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:30
Uh, uh, physically in your nervous system while you're doing it. Say, if it's to an audience.

Speaker 1 25:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:34
Um, but also just your thought processes in, in the moment. I think it's really... But I would say just start in, like, real stillness. Start in real stillness. Starting with drones, starting with, um, singular notes, and getting really familiar with how your muscles are responding.

Speaker 1 25:54
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 25:54
Technically, how, how your...physically, how you're feeling in your, the whole vocal mechanism.

Speaker 1 26:01
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 26:01
That's the foundations of that instrument.

Speaker 1 26:04
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 26:04
And then what you're drawn to.

Speaker 1 26:07
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 26:07
Really what you…Just get really familiar with it.From there, build upon those maybe harmonic elements of trying different modes or trying-

Speaker 1 26:16
Mm

Speaker 2 26:16
…from a, a major motif, a minor motif, da, da, da. And then it's just you're, you're painting a tapestry of sound-

Speaker 1 26:25
Mm

Speaker 2 26:26
…and meaning-

Speaker 1 26:28
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 26:28
…that is, uh, ultimately just a musical conversation with your reality.

Speaker 1 26:32
Yeah.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 26:33
And so whether that's with a collaborator or by yourself-

Speaker 1 26:36
Mm

Speaker 2 26:36
…just get really comfortable and take your time. It's not, it's life's work. It's not…Sorry, I'm getting really deep now.

Speaker 1 26:42
No, it's good.This is good.This is really good.

Speaker 2 26:44
I, it's not, it's not something to have figured out-

Speaker 1 26:50
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 26:50
... by the time you've maybe finish a course, if you're studying a course, or to have figured out b- by the time you're 30 or before you have your first child. It's music, and the pursuit of musical meaning is just a li- it's life's work.

Speaker 1 27:02
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 27:03
And so it's really leaning into time, really leaning into marination, particularly with...Marination, is that a word? Marinading.

Speaker 1 27:10
Marinating? Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:11
Marinating. Yeah.

Speaker 1 27:12
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:12
Marinading, you're nourishing and, and you're in service-

Speaker 1 27:17
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:18
...to an audience, to a listener, to yourself, to God, to whatever.

Speaker 1 27:22
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 27:22
You know, that's how I really see it.It's an offering, and it's not about getting it right or, or, "Ooh, I did that lick of that Charlie Parker line in my solo, so tick." You know, it's just not-

Speaker 1 27:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:34
...I don't, it's not, don't relate to, relate to it like that anymore at all.

Speaker 1 27:39
Yeah.I mean, I think that-

Speaker 2 27:40
Doing the Charlie Parker.

Speaker 1 27:42
But that's-

Speaker 2 27:42
Love all of that. It's, it was great.It was a great, like-

Speaker 1 27:44
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:44
...education.But it's, um, just finding what it means to yourself.

Speaker 1 27:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:49
Uh.

Speaker 1 27:50
That is... I think that's a very, um, nuanced way of understanding improvisation, which I think one of the things that I am coming across a lot, so the people I'm working with and trying to teach improvisation to, like, the syllabus that I teach, for example, is they have to improvise as part of their grade exam.

Speaker 2 28:20
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 28:20
So they're 13, 14, 15, 16-year-olds, and mostly girls, who are im-

Speaker 2 28:27
Wow

Speaker 1 28:27
...who are having to improvise as part of a grade exam.

Speaker 2 28:30
God, I could ne- I couldn't have done that at that age.I could not have done that.

Speaker 1 28:35
And when you-

Speaker 2 28:38
It's amazing

Speaker 1 28:38
... introduce that to them, even in the most simplest form, they shut down, uh, largely, will shut down completely, and it will take a long time to even get them to explore it. And yeah, it's a, it's a very interesting process.

Speaker 2 29:00
Mm.

Speaker 1 29:00
And it's interesting to hear you say that at that age you couldn't have, have done that.

Speaker 2 29:05
No way. No way.

Speaker 1 29:07
What?

Speaker 2 29:07
It's like improvisation is like life experience-

Speaker 1 29:11
Yeah

Speaker 2 29:11
...I think as well.

Speaker 1 29:12

Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:14
You know?

Speaker 1 29:15
But do you th- th- do you think that i- if you'd have arrived at [conservatoire] with more experience of improvisation and a greater understanding of it, would you have enjoyed your experience more?

Speaker 2 29:32
Hmm. Yeah. Yeah. But I would've been more comfortable, more confident.

Speaker 1 29:38
Yeah.So it's a-

Speaker 2 29:40
More, uh, for sure

Speaker 1 29:40
...it's a really, it's a really tricky...I, I, this is the thing I find tricky about it is-

Speaker 2 29:45
Yeah

Speaker 1 29:45
...you wanna help them, because if they wanna go f- if they wanna go take it to the next step, you want them to be as prepared as possible, but you also don't want to-

Speaker 2 29:52
Mm

Speaker 1 29:52
...push them into a thing that becomes-

Speaker 2 29:55
Yeah

Speaker 1 29:55
...this, like, really uncomfortable experience for them.

Speaker 2 30:00
Yeah.

Speaker 1 30:00
You know?

Speaker 2 30:01
That's so interesting. That's an amazing...Yeah. What a, but also what a treat to be doing at that age.Like, I think I wasn't trying to do it at that age, so who knows?Like, that-

Speaker 1 30:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:13
But I...Yeah.

Speaker 1 30:15
And-

Speaker 2 30:16
It's, that's really cool to, to be lear- to be beginning at that age, even though scary.I can so imagine.

Speaker 1 30:21
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:21
But really useful.

Speaker 1 30:22
When you were that age, even, you know, 16, 17-

Speaker 2 30:26
Mm

Speaker 1 30:26
...you know, the late teenage years, were you improvising at all, like even on your own and playing around with it?

Speaker 2 30:33
Yeah! Yeah I was playing around

Speaker 1 30:34
And how was that?

Speaker 2 30:35
I was kind of li...I was, like, singing along to the Ella scats.

Speaker 1 30:39
Okay, nice.

Speaker 2 30:39
That's really how I think I was try- I was transcribing.

Speaker 1 30:42
Okay.

Speaker 2 30:43
And then, um, would then pause it and try and continue on my own.

Speaker 1 30:47
Okay, nice.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 30:50
We had a lot of crutches.

Speaker 1 30:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:51
We had a lot of powering through just-

Speaker 1 30:53
Ah

Speaker 2 30:53
...on that s- swung quaver, like

Speaker 1 30:57
Yeah.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 30:59
But yeah, it, yeah, I, I... It would've been interesting if I had d- maybe at 13, 14, or 12, like, started trying to do that earlier. But, um, yeah, wasn't, wasn't drawn to it just then, but, uh, that's really interesting.

Speaker 1 31:11

Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:11
It's so cool, though.

Speaker 1 31:12
I- I'd love to talk a bit about what improvising now…I mean, we've talked about it a bit, but-

Speaker 2 31:18
Mm

Speaker 1 31:19
… specific maybe experiences or examples that you can think of where you, as a professional musician, have had a really positive experience of improvising. And I'd also, if you're willing, I'd love to talk if you have had any, like, more negative experiences around it, and what the context-

Speaker 2 31:40
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 31:42
…of that was.

Speaker 2 31:44
Mm.

Speaker 1 31:44
Um, so yeah, do you wanna start with-

Speaker 2 31:45
Yeah

Speaker 1 31:45
…positive or negative?

Speaker 2 31:47
[Enthusiastically] Positive.

Speaker 1 31:47
Positive. Okay, cool.Yeah.

Speaker 2 31:50

Positive.I, um, yeah, I- I've been working with an artist for a few years now called [artist name]

Speaker 1 31:57
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 31:58
And he sort of was really... When we'd first met, I was talking to him about the medieval ensemble that I'm in, and I was also talking about improvisation and, and how I was doing that in a lot of my shows-

Speaker 1 32:15
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 32:15
...um, for my own artist project, which at the time was kind of really in pop, soul, kinda, you know?

Speaker 1 32:22
Mm.

Speaker 2 32:22
Um, but was, it was still part of the shows-

Speaker 1 32:25
Mm

Speaker 2 32:25
...that I would have moments of so- of soloing or, you know-

Speaker 1 32:27
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 32:27
...improvising. And, um, he wanted to, um, kind of bring that to his show. Like, we, you know, there was a few songs where people, the, the band would have, um, solos.

Speaker 1 32:41
Mm.

Speaker 2 32:41

And then there was a moment at the end of one of his songs called [song name] where he kind of wanted a, like, a vocal interlude-

Speaker 1 32:47
Okay

Speaker 2 32:47
...kind of a vocal from, from me.

Speaker 1 32:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:49
And in that context, I was, uh, I was doing background keys and vocals.

Speaker 1 32:54
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 32:55
And that was, uh, that's sort of where I've really discovered more about what improvisation means to me now because even though we were playing, um, some, yeah, we, we, we were touring kinda internationally. It was the first time I was touring to, like, you know, larger audiences-

Speaker 1 33:14
Mm

Speaker 2 33:14
...with, um, with a lot of exposure.

Speaker 1 33:18
Mm.

Speaker 2 33:18
But I really... And sometimes it worked, sometimes it really didn't work. But I really p- like said to myself, "I am going to improvise it every single time."

Speaker 1 33:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 33:30
I'm gonna really ch- you know, obviously from, from moments like that you maybe would come up with, you know, a nice little thing. But I-

Speaker 1 33:36
Like a scaffold or something

Speaker 2 33:38
... I really, yeah, I really approached it live and improvised every single time. Obviously, there was then, you know, as it, as you're doing shows back to back to back, there were, there were a lot of melodic content that I would go back to and lean back on-

Speaker 1 33:55
Yeah

Speaker 2 33:55
...and jump off of into the, you know-

Speaker 1 33:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 33:57
...kind of naturally. It was the same chords. It was the same progression-

Speaker 1 33:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 33:59
...every night. Um, and yeah, so, so, so I listened back to a few of them. I'm like, "Ooh, yeah, I did that before. I did that before."

Speaker 1 34:06
Mm.

Speaker 2 34:06
But generally, it was really, yeah. I, I wanted to honor the trust that he gave me, and also it was a really just turning m- moment for me as a musician to be like, "No, no, I'm gonna trust myself. I'm gonna try and trust myself."

Speaker 1 34:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:20
Um, and that was really scary.

Speaker 1 34:24
Okay.

Speaker 2 34:25
And I had a few stumbly solos in front of-

Speaker 1 34:28
Okay

Speaker 2 34:28
... a lot of people, but it really built, um, really built confidence and really just helped. I think particularly with sort of the style that it was, I wanted to really exercise that, that technicality-

Speaker 1 34:46
Mm

Speaker 2 34:46
...that I've really been working on.

Speaker 1 34:48
Yeah.

Speaker 2 34:48
Um, and that's within different rooms of the voice, kind of a real-

Speaker 1 34:53
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 34:53
...my mixed voice, my real belt voice, my higher register.

Speaker 1 34:57
Mm.

Speaker 2 34:57
Um, a lot of ornamentation, a lot of, uh, different, yeah, mel- melisma kind of-

Speaker 1 35:03
Yeah

Speaker 2 35:03

...I really wanted to exercise it as a way of expression. Um, and it felt so different from kind of the earlier jams that I was doing-

Speaker 1 35:12
Mm

Speaker 2 35:12
...where it felt like I was trying to show it off and trying to-

Speaker 1 35:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 35:15
...like, pro- prove myself. It really just, I wanted to just express the voice-

Speaker 1 35:20
Yeah

Speaker 2 35:20
...and what the voice can do, and that's really my mission, I think.

Speaker 1 35:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 35:26
And where you find, yeah, ex- just musical expression. So that was, the, this, these have been really positive, incredible moments that I'm very grateful for from [artist] to, to giving me that space, but for also grateful to myself for just trusting that-

Speaker 1 35:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 35:41
...and just sort of rolling, rolling with it-

Speaker 1 35:43
Yeah

Speaker 2 35:43
... every night. And, um, I think we had a show at the Fillmore in San Francisco, and the solo, it was like, what, it was a really uniquely newer moment of genuinely not caring or listening to what was coming out of my mouth and solo.

Speaker 1 36:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:07
I really...And I wasn't high.

Speaker 1 36:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:08
I was like I was really like-

Speaker 1 36:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:11
But I felt really high.I felt it was a genuine flow state.

Speaker 1 36:15
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:15
And I, it was really exciting when that happened. I, because I just...Not, not care in a reckless way or a lazy way, I really was just very free.

Speaker 1 36:27
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:28
And that was a really positive experience.

Speaker 1 36:31
Yeah, I can imagine.

Speaker 2 36:31
And a really fun one.

Speaker 1 36:32
When you came-

Speaker 2 36:33
There were-

Speaker 1 36:33
Sorry, carry on.

Speaker 2 36:34
No, no, no, no, you go.I'm sorry.

Speaker 1 36:35
When you came away from that, did, was that something that other people had noticed? Did you get, was there feedback around that, or did you-

Speaker 2 36:41
Yeah

Speaker 1 36:42
...have that in your own self? Had you noticed, like, "Oh, that was actually..." When you listen back and you're like, "That was a good one." Do you know what I mean? Was there-

Speaker 2 36:47
Yeah, totally, 'cause I wasn't really listening in, in the moment.

Speaker 1 36:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:51
So when I did actually listen, it was Um, interesting, and some of the band gave good feedback.

Speaker 1 36:57
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:57
And yeah, that was, that was a great one.

Speaker 1 36:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 36:58
And I, I even spoke to, like, the, the, someone at the venue itself 'cause it's the Fillmore, it's a really iconic venue.

Speaker 1 37:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:05
And he was like, "Man, it's something in the walls here," you know?

Speaker 1 37:08
That's good.

Speaker 2 37:10
I was...Yeah, I felt, yeah.

Speaker 1 37:12
Interesting.

Speaker 2 37:13
Just a really spiritual experience maybe.

Speaker 1 37:16
Do you have any less positive or, um, yeah, more negative experiences of that-

Speaker 2 37:22
Um-

Speaker 1 37:22
...that you can remember or that stand out to you?

Speaker 2 37:25
Yeah. Yeah, I mean, there were a few moments on that tour where I felt a bit rubbish about myself-

Speaker 1 37:29
Yeah

Speaker 2 37:29
...or felt like, oh, whatever, you know. I-

Speaker 1 37:32
Yeah

Speaker 2 37:32
...felt a little self-conscious or silly.

Speaker 1 37:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 37:37
Um, not, not, nothing kind of specific comes to mind.

Speaker 1 37:42
Okay.

Speaker 2 37:43
But, but, yeah-

Speaker 1 37:43
That's nice

Speaker 2 37:44
...definitely resonated with those, with feelings of, "Oh, that didn't go well." And then I'm like, "Well, what does it mean for something to go well? It's improvisation."

Speaker 1 37:54
Yeah.That's-

Speaker 2 37:54
Like-

Speaker 1 37:55
Yeah

Speaker 2 37:55
...you know.It's interesting.

Speaker 1 37:56
That's a very, a very good point. Um, okay, I think this will probably be our last question. Have I closed my questions? No. Um, would you um... I just wanna check I've not missed anything important. O- one thing you did mention was working in a, in a kind of male dominant spaces.

Speaker 2 38:26
Mm.

Speaker 1 38:26
Does that... Especially at jams and stuff, does that impact, did that impact your relationship with improvisation? Do you... I- is there anything in that dynamic, in the kind of gendered dynamic that you've noticed or thought or ex- or experienced?

Speaker 2 38:46
Yeah.Yeah, for sure.I...Yeah, there were times I was part of a jam, ar- arrived at a jam a- as...and I'd been booked to, to be part of the house band.

Speaker 1 39:02
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 39:02
Like, the main improvise, one of the main improv-

Speaker 1 39:06
Yeah

Speaker 2 39:06
...i- improvisers to kind of-

Speaker 1 39:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 39:08
...host the jam.And I got there, and I, we were doing a soundcheck, and the drummer said to me, he was like, "Oh, and so do you, do you improvise?" And I was like, "That's what I'm here to do."

Speaker 1 39:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:23
Um, that's what I've been booked for.

Speaker 1 39:25
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 39:25
You know, just-

Speaker 1 39:26
Yeah

Speaker 2 39:27
...y- you know.A- and I think, but I think maybe I'm not sure if that was more as a singer-

Speaker 1 39:32
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 39:33
...or for being a woman, not really sure, you know.

Speaker 1 39:35
Do you think those things-

Speaker 2 39:36
But like if-

Speaker 1 39:36
...are sometimes inter- inter...Is there ever a feeling that those things are intertwined?

Speaker 2 39:41
Totally.Yeah, definitely.

Speaker 1 39:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:43
For sure.

Speaker 1 39:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 39:45
Um, or getting up to, like, like, be in a jam and wanting to call a tune, they're like, "Oh, do you know, maybe if you, maybe you know 'Autumn Leaves'?Do you wanna do 'Autumn Leaves'?"

Speaker 1 39:55
Mm.

Speaker 2 39:55
Or, you know, uh, you know?

Speaker 1 39:59
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:00

Just really being...Just, yeah.And, um, and again, I think being a singer and a female, it probably c- probably links.

Speaker 1 40:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 40:09
But, um, also kind of just how I was dressing.

Speaker 1 40:14
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 40:15
I always felt if I was maybe wearing something a bit tighter, tighter fitted or, like, I, I...Yeah, no, or, or if I wore something baggier, more masculine-

Speaker 1 40:28
Mm

Speaker 2 40:28
...I was then taken more to, "Oh, yeah, yeah, get up." You know, I, you know.

Speaker 1 40:32
Okay.

Speaker 2 40:32
Kind of very interesting just, just, yeah.

Speaker 1 40:36
Different dynamics.

Speaker 2 40:37
Assumptions and stereotypes that I'm just maybe a-

Speaker 1 40:40
Yeah

Speaker 2 40:40
...maybe I'm a musician's girlfriend that wants to get up and sing-

Speaker 1 40:43
Yeah

Speaker 2 40:43
...you know-

Speaker 1 40:44
Yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 40:44
...Mary Poppins or something.

Speaker 1 40:46
I mean...

Speaker 2 40:49
Love Mary Poppins, but, you know. So, yeah, I think those things do sort of coincide, but I, but just really that it kind of gave me fuel to, like, be like, "Oh, okay, I'm gonna, like, really need this."

Speaker 1 40:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:00
And I wanna-

Speaker 1 41:01
Interesting

Speaker 2 41:02
...wanna, wanna prove and better the craft, for sure.

Speaker 1 41:04
Okay. And do you think... I think that, I feel like that maybe sums up your whole kind of ex- I don't know. Uh, totally correct me if I'm wrong. Like, your whole experience of improvisation, it actually generally sounds quite positive. Like, you've never... It's, it... Your overarching relationship with it is something that is positive even when you first started, you know, as much as you had-

Speaker 2 41:29
Mm

Speaker 1 41:29
...like, anxious moments. Is that, does that feel like a, a- an accurate reflection?

Speaker 2 41:34

Definitely. It's like, yeah, it, there ha- Yeah, there's been stumbly moments, but that is what it, being a musician is.

Speaker 1 41:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:44
Like, that is what being an artist is.

Speaker 1 41:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:45
You're gonna fail.You're gonna slip up.

Speaker 1 41:48
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:48
And it's, it's the resilience to continue the pursuit of-

Speaker 1 41:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 41:53
...of, yeah, bettering the craft 'cause it's all, it's, it's about you, but it's not about you.

Speaker 1 41:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:58
You know?

Speaker 1 41:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 41:59
It's, yeah, going back to just it's, it's an offering, and kind of, yeah, it overall now feels really positive, and I look forward to it.It's just part of my practice sort of nearly every day.

Speaker 1 42:11
Yeah.Love that.

Speaker 2 42:11
Just sitting and improvising.

Speaker 1 42:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:13
And so it's cr- nourishing that in yourself, and, and I think maybe, you know, to, to young women that are doing it at 13, 14, when you get to 26, 27, like, looking after that 13-year-old self that fe- it felt so-

Speaker 1 42:27
Yeah

Speaker 2 42:28
...tough, it's like, no, no, no, you will so find your melodies. You will so find-

Speaker 1 42:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 42:33
...the conversation within yourself, you know.

Speaker 1 42:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 42:35
If you, if you continue showing up-

Speaker 1 42:37
Yeah

Speaker 2 42:38
...and, and committing to trusting yourself-

Speaker 1 42:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 42:41
...I think.Yeah.

Speaker 1 42:42

That's really nice. Um, let's just last question, and the answer can be no. Is there anything about your experience of improvisation that you feel isn't talked about or understood by people?

Speaker 2 42:57
Um-

Speaker 1 42:59
That you haven't kind of covered already.

Speaker 2 43:01
In the way that I improvise or other?

Speaker 1 43:04
Either. You. It's, it can be personal to you. It can be personal to other...It c- can't be personal to other people.It can be personal to you, or it can be about improvisation in general.

Speaker 2 43:16
Um, no, I think it is really kind of up to, up to the individual...I, no, okay, I would say it's up to sort of the individual-

Speaker 1 43:30
Mm

Speaker 2 43:31
...musician to find your, find the education yourself.

Speaker 1 43:39
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 43:40
No one's gonna give it to you completely-

Speaker 1 43:43
Mm

Speaker 2 43:43
...in its full form.It's really for yourself, and...But, or, but go and find your teachers.You may not have found what...I don't feel like I found my teachers at [conservatoire].

Speaker 1 43:56

Yeah.

Speaker 2 43:57
I found my teachers in my peers-

Speaker 1 44:01
Yeah

Speaker 2 44:01
...and in, in older generations that were, that were, you know, I just-

Speaker 1 44:05
Yeah

Speaker 2 44:06
...and a- across different styles.I think that is really what it is.

Speaker 1 44:10
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 44:10
Um, for me.For me anyway.Could to-

Speaker 1 44:14
Yeah

Speaker 2 44:14
...can totally vary, but for me, I just think it's up...You, you, it's for you.You design-

Speaker 1 44:20
Yeah

Speaker 2 44:20
...the narrative.

Speaker 1 44:21
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 44:21
You design it.

Speaker 1 44:22
Okay, cool.

Speaker 2 44:23
Yeah.

Speaker 1 44:24
Thanks so much. Is there anything, anything else you wanna say?

Speaker 2 44:28
No.

Speaker 1 44:29
Great. I'll, uh, stop recording. Thank you.

Susannah – 1e

Speaker 1 = Meg, Speaker 2 = Susannah

Speaker 1 00:01
Hello.

Speaker 2 00:01
Hi.

Speaker 1 00:03
Um, before we begin, I just need to read a little statement, and you just need to let me know if you agree, and then we'll get started. Um, as you know, I'm doing some research about singing and improvisation, and I'd love to hear about your experiences and what you think about it. There's no right or wrong answers, I can't stress that enough, and whatever you think and however you feel is exactly what I want to know. Um, you don't have to answer anything you don't want to. If a question feels uncomfortable or you'd rather skip it, that's completely fine. Just say so, and we can move on. You can stop the interview at any time for any reason, and that won't affect anything at all, including our lessons together. Um, I'm gonna record our conversation so y- I can listen back to it later, but the recording is just for me. I won't use your real name anywhere. You'll be given a different name, and nobody reading my work will be able to identify who you are. Um, do you have any questions?

Speaker 2 01:00
No.

Speaker 1 01:01
Great.And are you happy to go ahead?

Speaker 2 01:03
Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:03
Lovely. Okay. So before we t- talk about improvisation and what that's like for you, um, I'd love to just talk about singing and your relationship with singing. Um, so how long have you been singing, and what first got you into singing?

Speaker 2 01:20
I don't know.I mean, I've had singing lessons since I was, like, 12.12.

Speaker 1 01:27
12, okay.

Speaker 2 01:27
Since I was 12 'cause it was, like, year seven.

Speaker 1 01:29
Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:30
Um, and I started singing...I don't know.There was nothing really that was like...I just kind of wanted to.

Speaker 1 01:38
You just wanted-

Speaker 2 01:38
Like, I just asked my parents, like, "Can I have singing lessons?" And they said yes.

Speaker 1 01:40
Did you sing before you had singing lessons?

Speaker 2 01:42
Oh, yeah.

Speaker 1 01:43
Yeah?

Speaker 2 01:43
Like, I've always really liked to sing.

Speaker 1 01:45
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:45
I just wasn't good.

Speaker 1 01:47
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:47
And then I started having singing lesson- lessons, and then I was good-

Speaker 1 01:49
Okay

Speaker 2 01:49
...after that.

Speaker 1 01:50
So even before you had singing lessons, you knew it was something that you wanted-

Speaker 2 01:53
Yeah

Speaker 1 01:53
...to do?Okay.That's nice.Um, and what has made you keep going with it since that point?

Speaker 2 02:02
Um, 'cause it's fun.It's like, it's, like, something I enjoy doing.

Speaker 1 02:09
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:11
And I get to hang out with you.

Speaker 1 02:12
Aw, that's nice. You flatterer. Okay. Um, so let's move into the improvisation round now. Do you remember or have any kind of specific memories of the first time you thought about improvisation or were asked to im- Let's do thought about improvisation first.

Speaker 2 02:37
When I was doing my grades, when-

Speaker 1 02:39
Okay

Speaker 2 02:39
...I did one grade and then quit.

Speaker 1 02:41

Okay.And was your quitting an improvi- Was quitting partly due to the improvisation element of it?

Speaker 2 02:49
A little bit, yeah, but also just 'cause, like, I'd rather just sing something that I enjoy-

Speaker 1 02:53
Yeah

Speaker 2 02:53
...instead of doing grades 'cause it's like...

Speaker 1 02:55
Yeah.I get you.The pressure of it.

Speaker 2 02:57
Yeah.

Speaker 1 02:58
Um, so y- was the first time you were asked to improvise in the exam?

Speaker 2 03:02
Yeah.

Speaker 1 03:02
So you hadn't practiced before?

Speaker 2 03:05
No.

Speaker 1 03:05
Okay.And what were you asked to do in your exam?

Speaker 2 03:08
They just gave me, like, a chord progression, and it was, like, really easy.It was four chords.

Speaker 1 03:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 03:13
And they just asked me to, like, hum or just sing a random melody that I make up.

Speaker 1 03:19
Okay.And you'd not done that in lessons-

Speaker 2 03:21
No

Speaker 1 03:21
...before.Right.Um, what happened?

Speaker 2 03:25
I mean, I did it, but I just hated it-

Speaker 1 03:28
Okay

Speaker 2 03:28
...so much.

Speaker 1 03:30
Okay.All right.And what was going through your mind as you were doing that, do you remember?

Speaker 2 03:36
I was just, like, really embarrassed.

Speaker 1 03:38
Okay.

Speaker 2 03:38
'Cause, I mean, I already find it embarrassing.And then I was doing it, and then I started laughing.'Cause I was so embarrassed, I started laughing.

Speaker 1 03:46
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 03:47
And it was just kind of, like, humiliating. It was fine. Like, I did it.

Speaker 1 03:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:51
And I still, like, I, like, got, like, a good, like, thing.

Speaker 1 03:54
You got a good mark in it?

Speaker 2 03:55
Yeah.

Speaker 1 03:55
Okay.

Speaker 2 03:57
But I just didn't like it. It was, like, awkward.

Speaker 1 03:59
Yeah. Okay. How did you feel after?

Speaker 2 04:03
I don't know. I was just laughing about it 'cause-

Speaker 1 04:05
Okay

Speaker 2 04:05
...it was, it was embarrassing, and I was laughing. It was, like, funny.

Speaker 1 04:07
Okay. I get ya. Um, okay, so I guess that kinda leads into the next question, which is about... Actually, before we do that, since that experience, have you ever thought about exploring improvisation again or trying to reframe it?

Speaker 2 04:24
No.

Speaker 1 04:25
No?

Speaker 2 04:27
No.

Speaker 1 04:28
Why not?

Speaker 2 04:29

Um, because, like, I just don't like improvising in anything, like, at all. Like, in singing, when I do other stuff, like-

Speaker 1 04:37
Okay

Speaker 2 04:38
...'cause I do, like, drama and dance, like-

Speaker 1 04:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:40
...all of them, no.

Speaker 1 04:41
Nothing.

Speaker 2 04:42
It's just 'cause, like, I'd rather do something that's set and, like, just be told, like, 'cause it's easier, and then I don't have to think about it. And then if I mess up-

Speaker 1 04:49
Mm

Speaker 2 04:49
...then it's like, I just messed up 'cause I didn't know enough. Not I messed up because I just messed up.

Speaker 1 04:53
Yeah. Okay. So there's something about assessing your... Not assessing, but, like, when something's set you can mark yourself and how you've prepared for it or how you delivered it because you knew what the standard was.

Speaker 2 05:08
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:08
Yeah. When you improvise, you don't feel like you have that standard.

Speaker 2 05:11
Yeah. And it's, like, awkward. It's like I feel a bit exposed.

Speaker 1 05:14
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:14
'Cause then everyone knows, like, what I'm thinking.

Speaker 1 05:16
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:16
And so I don't want that.

Speaker 1 05:18
Yes. I get you. So I guess then, my next question, have you ever had an, a moment or an experience where improvisation felt good or exciting?

Speaker 2 05:32
When I'm by myself.

Speaker 1 05:34
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:34
I'll happily do it by myself.

Speaker 1 05:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 05:36
But by myself is a whole different thing.

Speaker 1 05:38
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:38
So I'm by myself no one, no one, obviously no one is gonna judge me either way, but, like-

Speaker 1 05:42
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 05:42

... only I'm gonna judge myself, so it's fine. So if I'm in my room, like, if I'll listen to, like, something, I'll just, like, probably sing to it. And then I'll just, like, make something up, and that's fine, and I like doing that.

Speaker 1 05:52
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:52
I would never do it in front of someone though.

Speaker 1 05:54
So it's the as soon as the barrier is when there's someone else-

Speaker 2 05:58
Yeah

Speaker 1 05:58
...in front of you.

Speaker 2 05:59
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:59
Why do you think that's the barrier? If it's something you enjoy when you're on your own

Speaker 2 06:04
'Cause it's, like, awkward, and it's like, that's like, I feel like it's like should be just for me.

Speaker 1 06:08
It's just for you?

Speaker 2 06:09
Yeah.

Speaker 1 06:09
Okay. I like that. Um, oh my God, where's my questions gone? So there's never been a positive experience that's occurred when you're in front of someone or with someone?

Speaker 2 06:23
No.

Speaker 1 06:23
No?

Speaker 2 06:24
Never.

Speaker 1 06:24
Never.

Speaker 2 06:24
No.

Speaker 1 06:24
Obviously, we've explored improvisation in our lessons. Or tried to.

Speaker 2 06:30
Tried.

Speaker 1 06:32
What does that, does that feel closer to...And whatever you answer to this, I won't take your answer-

Speaker 2 06:40
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 06:40
...personally. Does that feel closer to the experience of the exam or closer to the experience of being on your own?

Speaker 2 06:47
Oh, definitely by myself, like, 'cause it's not as bad as when I was doing the exam.

Speaker 1 06:51
Okay.

Speaker 2 06:52
But it's just, like, the exam doesn't really, it doesn't, it didn't, like, m- start my-

Speaker 1 06:58
It wasn't the trigger

Speaker 2 06:59

...it wasn't, like, that's not why I don't like doing it.

Speaker 1 07:02
Okay.

Speaker 2 07:04
That was just a bad time that it happened. But, like, when I do it, like, in here, it's not that bad, but I'd still prefer not to.

Speaker 1 07:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:11
Like, it's fine.

Speaker 1 07:15
Are you sure?You-

Speaker 2 07:17
Yeah, no, it's not fine, but like-

Speaker 1 07:19
Okay

Speaker 2 07:19
...it doesn't like, it doesn't make me, like, nervous. Like-

Speaker 1 07:21
Okay

Speaker 2 07:22
...I don't know, it's, yeah

Speaker 1 07:22
So when, when you are improvising in the lessons, what does that, in here, so let's say let's call our lessons, like, the mid space-

Speaker 2 07:30
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 07:30

…between exams and being on your own. When you're in the mid space, what does that feel like? Is there a physical feeling, or is there an emotional feeling? Are there, is there both?

Speaker 2 07:42
It's kind of like I know exactly what I wanna do. Like, if you're, say, like you start playing some chords.

Speaker 1 07:47
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 07:47
I know what I'll do 'cause I know, like, like-

Speaker 1 07:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:50
…what notes will work and what don't.

Speaker 1 07:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:52
But I just, I just, it doesn't, it doesn't come out.

Speaker 1 07:53
Okay.

Speaker 2 07:54
'Cause I just can't. Like, it stop, I g- (holds throat) it stops here.

Speaker 1 07:56
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 07:58
I get stuck in my throat, and I can't get it out.

Speaker 1 08:00
Okay.

Speaker 2 08:01
Just 'cause, like, it's, like, exposing.

Speaker 1 08:02
Yeah, I get that. Does it feel, do you th- do you feel... There's two parts to this question, so the first part is do you feel that when you improvise at home and on your own, does it sound like you want it to? Like, does it sound good?

Speaker 2 08:20
Yeah.

Speaker 1 08:20
In your opinion?

Speaker 2 08:21
In my opinion, yeah.

Speaker 1 08:22
Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you have belief in what you can do as an improviser in a way?

Speaker 2 08:28
Yeah.

Speaker 1 08:29
Yeah. But then the block is being in a room with someone else

Speaker 2 08:32
Yeah

Speaker 1 08:33
...and then you physically can't get it out.

Speaker 2 08:34
It's like, what if I think it sounds good and then you're like, "Oh my God, she's so bad," like, "What's she doing?" 'Cause I know you wouldn't, but like-

Speaker 1 08:40
Yeah. I know. Yeah, I know that feeling. Do you think that the... Is there a f- is there a frustration in that feeling of I want to h- maybe the question's better framed, how do, how does it feel when you're like, "I know what I would do. I can hear what I would do, and then I go to do it, and then there's the block"? What does that feel like?

Speaker 2 09:04

Um, I wouldn't say it's, like, irritating because, like, I'm not doing it because I don't wanna do it. It's just, like, I just feel awkward. Like, I feel so awkward about it that I can't do it.

Speaker 1 09:15
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:15
That's, like, what I feel.It's just, like, like, un- like, uncomfortable.

Speaker 1 09:20
Okay. Okay, I get you. Do you think the exposing element of it, are you happy to explore that? Like, why that might feel exposing?

Speaker 2 09:32
Yeah. Um, it's like, because, like, if I'm doing something, like, if someone was listening to me they'd be like, "Oh, I know what you're thinking. Like, that's why you're doing that. You're thinking-

Speaker 1 09:42
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 09:42
...this way, so you're doing it this way."

Speaker 1 09:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:44
And it's just I don't like, if, if someone's, like, trying to analyze me, be like, "Oh, she's doing this because of this", why do you need to know that?

Speaker 1 09:51
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:51
You don't need to know that.

Speaker 1 09:52
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 09:52

So, like, I just keep it to myself because, like, if it's something that's set, it's easy because you, there's no thought process behind it. It's just like you're singing the song.

Speaker 1 10:00
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 10:00
But if it's like you're improvising, it's like you've thought this through, and you're doing something that comes to your mind as it's happening. So, like, my whole thought process is, like, I'm thinking out loud. That's what improvising is. You just think out loud. And I don't like that.

Speaker 1 10:13
Okay.It's revealing.

Speaker 2 10:15
Yeah.

Speaker 1 10:16
I get that. Okay. That's really, really interesting. And so the physic- the sensation of doing that on your own, is there, what does that feel like when you're on your own improvising? Is there a physical sensation or a mental or emotional sensation?

Speaker 2 10:37
Not really.It just feels like it's like I'm just, like, doing it.

Speaker 1 10:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:40
Like, there's no, like, thought behind it.

Speaker 1 10:42
Okay.

Speaker 2 10:42
It's kind of just, like, I'll just sit there, and, like, sometimes I won't notice that I'm doing it until I'm already doing it.

Speaker 1 10:48
I get you.

Speaker 2 10:48
There's a, it's just like a autopilot.

Speaker 1 10:50
Okay. Okay, that's good. That's really, that's interesting. Um, when you're... Okay, yeah. If, is there a difference, do you feel a difference in your mood or your, when you're at home on your own doing it before and after?

Speaker 2 11:11
Honestly, not really.

Speaker 1 11:12
No.

Speaker 2 11:12
I kind of just feel the same-

Speaker 1 11:14
Yeah

Speaker 2 11:14
...both the time 'cause it's like, I'm so used to doing it at home. Like, I do it all the time. So it's like, it's like if I'm, like, brushing my teeth.

Speaker 1 11:23
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:23
Like, I feel neutral-

Speaker 1 11:24
Okay

Speaker 2 11:24
...before and after I do that. Well, maybe I feel cleaner after I brush my teeth, but I just feel normal after I sing.

Speaker 1 11:31
Okay. Yeah, that makes, that makes sense. Um, does improvisation feel like a natural part of being a singer to you, or does it feel separate to your identity as a singer?

Speaker 2 11:48

I think it's definitely separate.

Speaker 1 11:50
Really?

Speaker 2 11:50
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:51
Okay. Why? Can you explore that?

Speaker 2 11:53
Because, like, I would never improvise in front of any- anyone.

Speaker 1 11:56
Okay.

Speaker 2 11:56
Like, maybe it's something natural that I'll do by myself, but I'll never do it in front of anyone.

Speaker 1 12:00
Okay.

Speaker 2 12:01
But, like, I'll sing in front of people, so I feel like there's, like, it's like this is, like, one part, and then actually singing something is, like, a whole nother thing.

Speaker 1 12:09
Okay.Do you have- do you know why you improvise at home?

Speaker 2 12:15
'Cause it's fun.

Speaker 1 12:16
So you do ...There is an element-

Speaker 2 12:17
Yeah, it is fun

Speaker 1 12:18
...it, you do enjoy it?

Speaker 2 12:19
Yeah.

Speaker 1 12:20
Okay.And is there ...If you take the embarra- if you, if you could take the embarrassment away and the awkwardness away, would it be something you'd want to do in public?

Speaker 2 12:33
Still probably, no.

Speaker 1 12:34
Okay.

Speaker 2 12:35
Just because it is still, like, the thought process thing.

Speaker 1 12:38
It is just the revealing, the exposing-

Speaker 2 12:40
Yeah. Even if I didn't feel any awkwardness about it, I would s- it's still, like, I feel like you know me too well if you start hearing my thoughts out loud.

Speaker 1 12:48
Okay. So there's a real interconnected link for you between improvising and your inner being?

Speaker 2 12:57
Yes. Yeah. Yeah. My, like, mantra.

Speaker 1 12:59
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. That's really interesting. So you, it's almost ...Is it something you think you would ever stop doing, improvising on your own?

Speaker 2 13:12
Probably not, just because, like, if I'm listening to a song, I wanna join in, 'cause, like, otherwise I have FOMO- ...if I if I don't join in.

Speaker 1 13:23
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:23

Maybe that wasn't the best way to say that, but, like, that's like-

Speaker 1 13:25
Yeah

Speaker 2 13:26
...you get it.

Speaker 1 13:26
Yeah, yeah, yeah.I get it.

Speaker 2 13:27
So, like, I don't know.And it's, like, nice to do by myself 'cause, like, no one can hear me. I can just hear myself.

Speaker 1 13:35
So you, the, it is an in- an, is it an integral part then to you?

Speaker 2 13:44
I guess.I guess, yeah.

Speaker 1 13:46
Interesting. I think that's quite nice, you know? That's really nice. Um, do you think when ... Have you had an experience where improvisation hasn't gone well for you? Like, where you found it difficult to hear what you want to sing or-

Speaker 2 14:09
Mm

Speaker 1 14:10
...f- fumbled or f-

Speaker 2 14:12
Oh, yeah. Definitely. 'Cause, like, if I'm doing it and then, like, sometimes I'll just, like, hit a note that's, like, low-key not in the chord progression.

Speaker 1 14:20
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:22
But, like, it's fine 'cause if I'm by myself I don't care, I'll just, like, move on.

Speaker 1 14:25

Okay.

Speaker 2 14:25
I'll, like, laugh and then I'll move on.

Speaker 1 14:27
How-

Speaker 2 14:27
Which sounds a little bit weird 'cause I'm by myself.But I-

Speaker 1 14:29
No, I get it. Like-

Speaker 2 14:29
I'll just laugh at myself.

Speaker 1 14:30
Yeah. I do that. How does that feeling change if you're in front of other people?

Speaker 2 14:36
I'd probably die. Like, my heart would, like, stop. I'd just look around and I ...

Speaker 1 14:41
Okay, really? So that would have quite a physical-

Speaker 2 14:45
Yeah

Speaker 1 14:46
...impact.

Speaker 2 14:47
But that's just because I'm really easily embarrassed.

Speaker 1 14:49
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 14:50
Yeah.That-

Speaker 1 14:51

Would you say that's something that's ... Is that ... Would you say, and you can look, think about your peers here and your experience of being around teenage girls as a teenage girl, would you say that is something that is unique to you? Are you an outlier in that way? Or is that something that you have sensed is quite common amongst your peer group?

Speaker 2 15:19
I think it depends. It depends really, like, where I am. Because if I'm with my friends, like, say, like, I don't ...None of my friends, like, in house sing. Like, none of them sing so-

Speaker 1 15:30
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 15:31
...I don't improvise in front of them.But if I were to and I were to make a mistake, I don't think I would care.

Speaker 1 15:35
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:36
But if ...It just depends on, like, where I am.Like, if I was in here and I made a mistake, I would probably be a bit embarrassed but not too much.

Speaker 1 15:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:43
I think it just depends on whether I know-

Speaker 1 15:45
Where-

Speaker 2 15:45
...where I am, whether I know the people that I'm, that are, like, watching.

Speaker 1 15:49
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:49
'Cause, like, I don't know, like, if it was, like, people in [choir]-

Speaker 1 15:54
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 15:54
...specifically too, I feel like, yeah, you know, like-

Speaker 1 15:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:58
...I wouldn't really care 'cause-

Speaker 1 15:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:59
...they're not gonna- They're not gonna judge me.

Speaker 1 16:02
Yeah.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 16:02
But if it's like, if I'm, like, doing a performance, I would die.

Speaker 1 16:06
You would?

Speaker 2 16:06
I would actually die.

Speaker 1 16:08
Do you think that is something that will ... Is that, and that's kind of my question, is do you think that is a common thing? Do you think that's something that is you as a, separate to you, you as a person, that's just who you are? Or is there a contextual side to that?

Speaker 2 16:29
I feel like that's-

Speaker 1 16:29
Like, your age maybe, you being a girl or maybe is that part of it?

Speaker 2 16:34

Yeah.I f- I feel like, like, if you ...I feel like if you ask someone else the same question, I feel like they'd say probably the same thing.

Speaker 1 16:40
The same thing?

Speaker 2 16:41
Because, like, it's like, you know, like, everyone at school and they're gonna be like, "Oh, my God, did you hear? Like, she messed up." Like, everyone is, like, gonna be embarrassed if they do something in front of-

Speaker 1 16:50
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 16:50
...other people.If they do it in front of their friends they'll probably be like, "It's fine."

Speaker 1 16:53
It's fine.

Speaker 2 16:54
But I feel like pa- like, at this age especially, like, everyone will probably feel the same way.

Speaker 1 16:59
Okay.So you do think there is an element of your age that makes it feel worse-

Speaker 2 17:05
Yeah

Speaker 1 17:06
...than it would otherwise?

Speaker 2 17:08
Mm-hmm. 'Cause, like, people at, I don't know, but, like, at this age people are so judgey. So it's like, if you do something wrong, you know that they're gonna, like, notice it-

Speaker 1 17:17
Yeah

Speaker 2 17:18
...more than, I don't know.

Speaker 1 17:21
Others.

Speaker 2 17:22
Yeah.Others.

Speaker 1 17:24
Others.

Speaker 2 17:24
Just say that.

Speaker 1 17:25
Okay. Do you think there's an ...Would an instrumentalist feel the same way as a singer would?

Speaker 2 17:34
Mm, I guess it depends on, like, the context.If they were having, like, a solo, probably.

Speaker 1 17:39
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:39
Yeah. But, like, maybe if it was, like, in an ensemble it would still be embarrassing but maybe not as much.

Speaker 1 17:45
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 17:45
But that's the same as singing.Like, if you make a mistake in an ensemble it's not that bad-

Speaker 1 17:49
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 17:49
...if you're by yourself.

Speaker 1 17:50

So as in if they were doing a solo, let's say at the jazz concert on Thursday the saxophone player is doing a solo, and they make a mistake, would, would they be as hard on themselves as a singer might be? Would it have the same impact?

Speaker 2 18:12
Probably

Speaker 1 18:13
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:13
'cause it's kind of the same, like, underlying, like, situation.

Speaker 1 18:17
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:17
I feel like, obviously it depends on the person, but, like, I think it, the situation is the same.

Speaker 1 18:22
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 18:23
'Cause it's, like, either way.

Speaker 1 18:25
Yeah, so it's not so different, the s- the singing element of improvisation isn't necessarily the part of it that-

Speaker 2 18:32
No.Yeah, I think it's just, like, other stuff

Speaker 1 18:35
...it's the external forces.

Speaker 2 18:38
Yeah.Yeah, exactly.

Speaker 1 18:40
Okay, so there's two elements I feel like to what we've, to the, let's, let's call it the block for you of, like, improvising outwardly. You've got the one half that is the it would feel too revealing, you're giving away too much of yourself. Let's say the

performance goes perfectly, even that is too mu- too revealing. And then on the other side you've got the slight embarrassment or fear of if you do make a mistake in it.

Speaker 2 19:13
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:13
The, like, external judgment of your s- from yourself and other people-

Speaker 2 19:18
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 19:18
...is, is a lot.

Speaker 2 19:19
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:20
Do you think that's specific to improvisation, or is that just singing in front of people in general?

Speaker 2 19:25
That's just doing anything in front of people.

Speaker 1 19:27
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:29
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:30
So actually the, when it comes to improvisation the, the judgment and the fear of that isn't the part of it that is stopping you from improvisation.

Speaker 2 19:42
No.

Speaker 1 19:42
If you feel confident in your improvisation.

Speaker 2 19:45

Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:45
But does improvisation feel a more high-risk task?

Speaker 2 19:49
Oh, yeah, definitely.

Speaker 1 19:50
Okay. Yeah. Okay, that makes sense. I, I get that. So I wanna talk a bit about learning improvisation and how we learn improvisation. If you think about all the different... Uh, if you ever come across improvisation outside of our lessons, have you ever been asked to do it anywhere else within singing?

Speaker 2 20:22
No.

Speaker 1 20:23
No? Like in bands or anything?

Speaker 2 20:24
I'm not in bands.

Speaker 1 20:25
No. So, no, okay. But, okay, so I can still ask this question though. Although I don't know if that would... Has there been anything that we've done in lessons that has helped you, when you're improvising at home, that you feel has helped develop your skills in improvising?

Speaker 2 20:50
Um.

Speaker 1 20:51
It's okay if the answer is no, by the way.

Speaker 2 20:53
I'm just trying to think. I don't know. Maybe, like, sometimes you just harmonize with me, and it's like, it's like I can hear then a different, like, way of doing something.

Speaker 1 21:09
Yeah.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 21:11

Yeah.

Speaker 1 21:11
Would you ever, interesting, would you ever wanna try and flip it and do it the other way, where you harmonize with me? Would that feel as intimidating as improvising?

Speaker 2 21:21
No.'Cause there's still, like, there's still a structure to it, so it's not really, like, random.

Speaker 1 21:26
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 21:26
Like, you still have to follow a certain structure.

Speaker 1 21:28
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 21:29
It's like-

Speaker 1 21:29
Okay

Speaker 2 21:30
...yeah.

Speaker 1 21:31
So structure is something that would help in terms of that, developing those skills, even if we don't then take the structure away completely. Because for me as a teacher, I want you to feel like you can improvise with, you know, and wherever you want to. Does that make sense? Like, even if it's just at home, if I've given you skills to do that, that's all that matters for me. If that's where you wanna do it. Does that make sense? So it's helpful for me to know or hear if you have any ideas as to what that might look like, you know? So adding structure and the things that encourage you to use your ears without actually removing-

Speaker 2 22:17
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 22:18

...the thi- the blanket, would that be something that you'd be open to trying?I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna make you, just open.

Speaker 2 22:27
Oh, then, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1 22:28
Yeah?

Speaker 2 22:28
'Cause it's not as intimidating and it's like there's something that I can work off of.

Speaker 1 22:32
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 22:32
It's like you can use this to do this.

Speaker 1 22:35
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 22:35
And obviously, like, when you improvise there is, like, a chord progression that you can go off of, but that's not enough.

Speaker 1 22:40
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 22:41
That's just like giving me a piece of paper and telling me to write something. But if it's like, if it's like there's already a structure, there's already a melody there, it's like giving me a coloring book and I just color it in. So it's kind of like that.

Speaker 1 22:52
As opposed to drawing the whole picture.

Speaker 2 22:53
Yeah.

Speaker 1 22:54
That's a really good analogy.

Speaker 2 22:56

Thanks. Just thought of it now.

Speaker 1 22:59
Ah. That's a really, a really good analogy. Um, is there anything that has potentially made it feel... Have you ever felt, in any context, like, thrown in at the deep end of, like, I don't know what I'm doing?

Speaker 2 23:30
No, not really.

Speaker 1 23:30
No. Okay, that's good.

Speaker 2 23:32
There's, there's always, like, something at least there.

Speaker 1 23:33
Something to cling onto.

Speaker 2 23:34
Yeah.

Speaker 1 23:35
Okay.That's what that is.That's good.If, okay, if you could change one thing about how improvisation is introduced to singers, and singers your age specifically, what would that be?

Speaker 2 23:54
I don't know, 'cause I just hate it either way.I don't know.

Speaker 1 24:02
Is there a world where you could see it as a game or something fun within the lessons?

Speaker 2 24:09
For me?

Speaker 1 24:10
Yeah.That, that's all I care about.

Speaker 2 24:12
For me, no. For me, no.

Speaker 1 24:15
Okay.

Speaker 2 24:16
Probably for someone else.

Speaker 1 24:17
Okay

Speaker 2 24:18
Yeah, it could be made into a game, and someone else could find it fun, but I don't think I would ever find it fun.

Speaker 1 24:23
Okay. Okay, fair enough. Would you have, um... Is there anything about what improvisation feels like for you that you feel maybe adults, or teachers, or other people don't understand? Is that... And, and, and you can think about your context in this as well, like your context as a girl, as a teenager, someone in school, all of that.

Speaker 2 25:06
I don't know.I feel like it's just like, it's like I can do it, but I just don't want to.

Speaker 1 25:12
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 25:12
And like it c- probably could be perceived as like, "Oh, she can't do it, so she doesn't."

Speaker 1 25:17
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 25:17
But it's like, I can do it, I just don't like to.

Speaker 1 25:21
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 25:21
That...I mean, that's kind of the only thing 'cause like no one ever sees me improvise, so.

Speaker 1 25:25
Yeah.So it's that thing of like, "I can do it, I just don't wanna do it."

Speaker 2 25:28
Yeah. Like, I could probably do a backflip right now if I tried, but I don't want to.

Speaker 1 25:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:35
I probably still couldn't do a backflip.

Speaker 1 25:39
Okay. Do you think there's... How do you feel then, for example, knowing that, let's say, next year you turned around and said, "I wanna do grade eight," that the syllabuses include improvisation as part of that. Do you think that's fair?

Speaker 2 26:03
I think it's fair.

Speaker 1 26:04
Okay.

Speaker 2 26:04
Because it's like a skill that you should probably have.

Speaker 1 26:06
Okay.

Speaker 2 26:07
But I wouldn't do it because of that.

Speaker 1 26:10
You...But it would be the thing to stop you from doing it?

Speaker 2 26:14
Probably, yeah.

Speaker 1 26:17
Okay.And, okay, and that goes back to the reveal- it, it feels too revealing, too exposing-

Speaker 2 26:26

Yeah

Speaker 1 26:26
...part.Interesting.Is there anything else you feel like we haven't spoken about, or something that you feel like I've missed, I should have asked you?

Speaker 2 26:41
I don't know.You're the, you're the teacher, so.

Speaker 1 26:45
Or something that you wanted to say about improvisation and your f- your experience of it.

Speaker 2 26:50
I don't know.I feel like I said everything that I-

Speaker 1 26:56
Yeah

Speaker 2 26:57
...think about it.

Speaker 1 26:57
That you think?

Speaker 2 26:58
Yeah.

Speaker 1 26:58
Okay, cool. All right.Thanks so much. We will leave it there. Great work.

Delilah – 1F

Speaker 1 = Meg, Speaker 2 = Delilah

Speaker 1 00:00
Hello.

Speaker 2 00:02
Hello.

Speaker 1 00:04
Um, okay.So before we get started, I just need to read something to you just to make sure you know what's going on, and that you're happy to go ahead.

Speaker 2 00:13
Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:13
And then we'll go from there.

Speaker 2 00:14
Okay.
Speaker 1 00:15
So, um, as you know, I'm doing some research about singing and improvisation, and I'd love to hear about your experience and what you think about it. There are no right or wrong answers, and honestly, whatever you think and what you feel is exactly what I'm interested in. A few important things I want you to know, you don't have to answer anything you don't want to. So if a question makes you feel uncomfortable, you'd rather skip it, that's completely fine. Just say, "I'm all right," or shake your head- ... um, and we can move on. You can stop the interview at any time for any reason, and that won't affect anything at all, including our lessons together. Like nothing you say is gonna impact our lessons. I'm gonna record our conversation so I can listen back to it later, but the recording is just for me. I won't use your real name anywhere in my research. You'll be given a different name, which you can choose. And nobody reading my work will be able to identify you. Do you have any questions before we start?

Speaker 2 01:13
No.

Speaker 1 01:14
Lovely.Are you happy to go ahead?

Speaker 2 01:16
Yes.

Speaker 1 01:16
Yeah?And at any point, if you want to ask me a question, you can, okay?If you want something clarified or you don't understand.

Speaker 2 01:22
Okay.

Speaker 1 01:24
So before we start talking about, um, improvisation specifically, I'd love to know a bit about you as a singer and, like, your relationship with being a singer. So how long have you been singing, and what do you like about singing?

Speaker 2 01:41
I've been, like, doing grades since I was, like, maybe year five.

Speaker 1 01:47
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:47
But I've, like, sung when I was, like, little but, like, I kind of got, like, serious about it, like, and doing grades when I was, like, around 10 or so.

Speaker 1 01:55
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:55
And I find it really fun-

Speaker 1 01:57
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 01:57
...and really, like, interesting. And I really like singing.

Speaker 1 02:01
Yeah? Do you feel like you're a singer, or are you someone who likes singing?

Speaker 2 02:08
I'm, like, someone who, like, likes singing.

Speaker 1 02:10
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:10
No, I'm like in the middle.

Speaker 1 02:12
In the middle?

Speaker 2 02:13
Yeah.

Speaker 1 02:13
Yeah? So it's an important part of who you are, being a singer? Is it?

Speaker 2 02:17
Yeah. Like, yeah.

Speaker 1 02:19
Yeah?

Speaker 2 02:20
Yeah.

Speaker 1 02:20
A bit or not really?

Speaker 2 02:21
It's like, it's like I don't think of it as, like, a key thing about me-

Speaker 1 02:26
Okay

Speaker 2 02:26
...but, like, it's, like, a good thing to, like, add to my repertoire.

Speaker 1 02:30
Okay. To your, to your bow. But you enjoyed it?

Speaker 2 02:32
What?

Speaker 1 02:33
To your bow, like a string to your bow.

Speaker 2 02:35
Oh, yeah. Okay.

Speaker 1 02:36
But you enjoy doing it?

Speaker 2 02:37
Yes, I do.

Speaker 1 02:38
Yeah? Okay, cool. And what kind of singer do you think you are?

Speaker 2 02:44
Like, what does that mean?

Speaker 1 02:45
I don't know. Maybe, like, genre-

Speaker 2 02:48
Oh

Speaker 1 02:48
...or-

Speaker 2 02:48
I-

Speaker 1 02:49
Or it might even be, are you a, do you think of yourself as a good singer, do you think?

Speaker 2 02:54
No.

Speaker 1 02:56
Let's, let's do that. Do you think you're a good singer? You can say yes.

Speaker 2 03:01

I think I'm a quite good singer. Like, I obviously, like, when I listen to other people I'm like, like, obviously they're, like, better. But, like, I'm not, I'm like... I guess in, like, in my year, I'm, like, quite good.

Speaker 1 03:14
Yeah. Okay. That's good. Um, and then are there genres that you enjoy singing?

Speaker 2 03:19
I like musical theater and pop.

Speaker 1 03:21
Okay.What do you like about those genres?

Speaker 2 03:24
Musical theater is, like, really fun-

Speaker 1 03:25
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 03:25
...and, like, 'cause I also do drama and stuff-

Speaker 1 03:27
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 03:27
...and it's just, like, it's, like, comes in hand in hand and it's just, like, interesting-

Speaker 1 03:32
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 03:32
...and you can, like, it's, like, emotive.

Speaker 1 03:34
Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:34
And pop is just, like, y- I hear it everywhere, so I'm kind of, like, into it already, and then I just, like, it's, like, good tunes.

Speaker 1 03:41

Some good tunes.There are some good tunes. Um, is there anything about the genre pop, and musical theater to an extent, that...'Cause have you ever sung classical music before?

Speaker 2 03:54
I've, like, I do it, like, I've done choirs before but, like-

Speaker 1 03:57
Okay

Speaker 2 03:57
...not, like, strictly. Actually, maybe I did one or two grades in it, I think-

Speaker 1 04:00
Okay

Speaker 2 04:00
...when I first started

Speaker 1 04:01
... when you started doing it. Is there something in singing pop, what is, what do you, is there a difference between the two? Like, what's the thing that you enjoy about pop and musical in comparison to classical music?

Speaker 2 04:11
Classical's, like, boring.

Speaker 1 04:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 04:13
And it's just, like, like, slow and, like, just not interesting.

Speaker 1 04:17
Okay. Pop and musical theater's a bit more?

Speaker 2 04:20
It's more, like, upbeat and, like, fun and fast and, like...

Speaker 1 04:23
Okay. Nice. Um, so let's talk a bit about improvisation. Have you ever tried improvising? I know I know the answer to this-

Speaker 2 04:35
Yes, I have

Speaker 1 04:35
…because I'm your teacher. But just for the research.

Speaker 2 04:37
Yes.

Speaker 1 04:38
You have? Yeah. Um, can you tell me about what that feels like for you when you do it?

Speaker 2 04:43
It, like, depends. Like, for, like, if I'm, like, alone, it's, like, fun 'cause I just, like, listen to something and I just, like, go, and I find it, like, like, fun and, like-

Speaker 1 04:52
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 04:53
…like-

Speaker 1 04:54
Enjoyable?

Speaker 2 04:55
Enjoyable. But, like, it kinda depends who I'm with. Like, if I'm in front of, like, loads of other people my age or, like, older or maybe even younger, that's, like, kinda stressful.

Speaker 1 05:05
Okay.

Speaker 2 05:05
And, like, I feel like I'm gonna mess up.But it's, like, fun when there's no stress onto it, like, no people watching and stuff.

Speaker 1 05:11
So when no one's watching it, when you're at home, is it something you do?

Speaker 2 05:15
Yes.

Speaker 1 05:16
Really?

Speaker 2 05:16
Yes.

Speaker 1 05:18
Interesting.I didn't know that.

Speaker 2 05:20
No, I just, like, like, when I'm, like, l- you know when, like, there's music and there's, like, a bit of, like, music, like, when people aren't singing-

Speaker 1 05:27
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 05:27
...I always, like, hum to it, like, and, like-

Speaker 1 05:29
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 05:29
...make my own little thing.

Speaker 1 05:30
Okay. Very interesting. Um, when you hear the word improvisation, what is the first thing that you think about? It can be positive or negative.

Speaker 2 05:43
Like-

Speaker 1 05:43
Have you got any, like, words?

Speaker 2 05:44
Like, like, an emotion or, like?

Speaker 1 05:46
E- anything.

Speaker 2 05:48

That's, like, I, I think of singing.

Speaker 1 05:50
You think of singing?

Speaker 2 05:52
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:52
Okay. Okay, cool. Um, okay, if you were to be, before, in the moment before you're improvising or you know it's coming up, so for example, in your exam or in our lessons when I'm gonna, when you know we might do it-

Speaker 2 06:08
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 06:09
How, how do you feel?

Speaker 2 06:13
Like, in an exam I'd obviously feel, like, stressed.

Speaker 1 06:16
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 06:16
And, like, I wouldn't, like, wanna do it 'cause, like, there's a chance that I can mess up and just, like, like, ruin it all.

Speaker 1 06:23
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 06:23
But I guess in lessons, like, I don't really, it doesn't really matter to me, 'cause it's like-

Speaker 1 06:26
Okay.So you feel more comfortable in lessons doing-

Speaker 2 06:29
Yes

Speaker 1 06:29

... improvising? Okay, that's good. Um, when you're actually improvising, can we talk about what that feels like? So maybe in your body, does it f- do you feel anything or emotionally in your mind, do you feel anything? Like, as you're actually improvising. And let's split that into two. What does it feel like when you're at home?

Speaker 2 06:49
When I'm at home, it's just, like, I feel, like, like, easygoing-

Speaker 1 06:56
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 06:56
...and it's just, like, fun, and I feel like, like, I have a groove.A- And it's just, like, like, easy.

Speaker 1 07:04
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 07:05
And, like, I just, I don't feel stressed at all. I just feel, like-

Speaker 1 07:07
Do you f-

Speaker 2 07:08
...chill

Speaker 1 07:09
...ac- a- actively feel anything? Like, do you feel calm? Do you feel excited? Do you feel peaceful? Do any of those-

Speaker 2 07:18
I feel like a mixture of both.

Speaker 1 07:19
Okay.

Speaker 2 07:19
I feel like awakened and-

Speaker 1 07:23
Okay

Speaker 2 07:23
…like, yeah.

Speaker 1 07:25
Okay.

Speaker 2 07:25
But, like, it's not like …Yeah, I guess I feel calm but, like, happy at the same time.

Speaker 1 07:29
Yeah. Okay, that's nice. So let's say you were gonna do this now in front of an audience, how would that make you feel?

Speaker 2 07:38
Really scared. Like, definitely no.

Speaker 1 07:42
A hard no, is it?

Speaker 2 07:44
Yeah.

Speaker 1 07:44
Okay, interesting. And what would …Do you know, have you ever improvised in front of an audience before?

Speaker 2 07:53
I think in [choir] once we did it.

Speaker 1 07:56
You did.

Speaker 2 07:57
But-

Speaker 1 07:57
In front of each other, you …I got you to-

Speaker 2 07:58
Yeah, but I, I can't do that. Like, I, like, can't do that.

Speaker 1 08:01

So what happened? When we were doing [CHOIR] that time and I asked you all to improvise together, what happened to you?

Speaker 2 08:12
I get, like, really quiet, and I so, like, I can't sing loudly, and I just get, like, really scared and, like-

Speaker 1 08:17
Okay

Speaker 2 08:17
...I just, like ...

Speaker 1 08:18
Is there anything physical that happens?

Speaker 2 08:20
I start, like, sweating.

Speaker 1 08:21
Really?

Speaker 2 08:23
Yes. Like, I can't.

Speaker 1 08:24
Okay. And then is there anything ...And then to the feeling, the emotion is fear?

Speaker 2 08:29
Yeah.

Speaker 1 08:30
Okay.

Speaker 2 08:31
And, like, nervousness.

Speaker 1 08:32
Okay. In ...You know how sometimes there's good nervousness when you're, like, gonna do a show and you're a bit nervous but you're, like, excited? Is it that kind of nervousness-

Speaker 2 08:44

Mm-mm

Speaker 1 08:44
...or is it, like, "I don't know"?

Speaker 2 08:47
No. But it's, like, worse when there's, like, people, like, slightly older than me, like teenagers but, like, in the year above or something.

Speaker 1 08:53
Okay.

Speaker 2 08:53
That's, like, like, that's, like, the worst. So then I feel like-

Speaker 1 08:58
Okay

Speaker 2 08:58
...really scared. Like, it's not a happy scared, it's, like, a bad scared.

Speaker 1 09:01
Yeah, okay. Do you think the fact that you're a teenager impacts your relationship with improvisation? Like, and that feeling of doing it in front of other people?

Speaker 2 09:14
I mean, I guess so, because teenagers are more, like, like, like, scared of, like, embarrassing yourself and stuff.

Speaker 1 09:21
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:21
And, like, when you're younger you're kind of just, like, not aware, and you're just like, "Okay," like, "whatever.L- let's, let's do this."

Speaker 1 09:27
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:27
I did that.

Speaker 1 09:28

As in, like, when you're s- a kid?

Speaker 2 09:30
Yeah, when you're, like ...Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1 09:31
Okay.

Speaker 2 09:31
And then when you're an adult, like, I can't really judge on it, but I guess it's, like-

Speaker 1 09:36
I guess you've never been an adult

Speaker 2 09:37
...yeah. But, like, you have more, like, like, confidence-

Speaker 1 09:41
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 09:41
...like, that you've built up over the years.

Speaker 1 09:42
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:43
And, like, I think when you, when you're a teenager that, like, takes, like, a big hit.

Speaker 1 09:47
Okay. So you think as you become a teenager, you feel maybe less confident or less-

Speaker 2 09:53
Like, more self-conscious.

Speaker 1 09:55
More self-conscious?

Speaker 2 09:56
Yeah.

Speaker 1 09:57

Okay, that makes sense.When you're improvising at home, do you think, and I'm sorry if this question makes you feel uncomfortable. Is ...No, but are you-

Speaker 2 10:08
Scared.

Speaker 1 10:08
No, no, no, but be honest with me, okay? I want you to own it. Do you think you're good at improvising? Like, do you listen to yourself and think, "This sounds all right"?

Speaker 2 10:17
Yeah.

Speaker 1 10:18
Yeah?

Speaker 2 10:18
I feel like sometimes I'm like, "Oh, that s- that kinda goes."

Speaker 1 10:20
Okay.

Speaker 2 10:21
But, like, I obviously, like, I, like, mess it up sometimes, but, like, normally I'm like, "Oh, yeah, that sounds quite good."

Speaker 1 10:26
Okay.

Speaker 2 10:26
But then when I'm doing it in front of people, I'm like, "Whoa, that sounds really bad." Like-

Speaker 1 10:31
Do you think when you're, when you go from singing at home to singing in front of people, do you think it's that when you're at home you're able to sing really well, and when you're in front of people suddenly your ability, you can't? Or is it that you perceive it differently?

Speaker 2 10:48
I think it's, like, both.

Speaker 1 10:49

Okay.

Speaker 2 10:50
Because I can, like, f- like, obviously if I'm in front of people, I'm, like, thinking about it more, and, like, I'm more like, "Oh, like, that doesn't sound that good." But also, like, I'm scared and I, like, can't, like, get the notes out and stuff.

Speaker 1 11:02
So is that something that happens when you're in front of people and you improvise?

Speaker 2 11:05
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:06
You feel like you can't get-

Speaker 2 11:06
Or, like, I can, like, get it out, but I'm more, like, hesitant and, like, really, like, like, I'm, like, thinking it over a lot.

Speaker 1 11:14
Okay.So you're in your, in your head?

Speaker 2 11:15
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 11:16
That makes a lot of sense. Um, has there ever been a time or an experience that you've had where improvising ma- I guess we've spoken about that, so let's move on from that. And we've spoken about that. Okay. So does it feel, does improvisation feel like a natural part of being a singer? Like, is it something when you're singing you feel, you kinda feel a pull to do? Or is it, like, a separate thing entirely?

Speaker 2 11:45
Like, I feel like it's, like, y- it comes with the job.

Speaker 1 11:49
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 11:49
Like, you, like, kinda have to do it.Like, at some point you're gonna have to, like, figure it out and stuff, because it's, like, good and it, like, enhances your music-

Speaker 1 11:56
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 11:56
...and, like, it just makes it sound better.I don't think it's, like, compulsory.Like, I think you can, like, get through being a singer without doing it.It's just a really good skill to have-

Speaker 1 12:04
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 12:05
...and, like, to, like, be confident in.

Speaker 1 12:06
Yeah. Do you think there's something to be gained ... Do you, can you see that it might be something that is- Do you have any things? Um, how do you think it would feel to be confident and good at improvising?

Speaker 2 12:25
I would feel empowered.

Speaker 1 12:27
Really?

Speaker 2 12:27
And like, like, just like more confident-

Speaker 1 12:30
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:30
...and that I've got like another like skill there.

Speaker 1 12:33
Another, yeah.I get that.Um, do you think improvisation might be something that comes more naturally to other types of musicians, like a saxophonist or a piano player?

Speaker 2 12:52
Mm.Like, I play the guitar.

Speaker 1 12:55

Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 12:56
And like I feel like in singing it's like easier.

Speaker 1 12:58
You find it easier?

Speaker 2 12:59
Like, I'm not as good as the guitar, but like I just feel like you need to know your instrument much better to like know-

Speaker 1 13:08
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 13:08
...like where to go and what sound.You need to know like perfectly what sounds good.With singing you can like play with it more.

Speaker 1 13:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 13:13
And you can like, it's just like I find it like easier to like-

Speaker 1 13:17
To find, okay.

Speaker 2 13:18
Yeah.Like, there's less risk I think.

Speaker 1 13:20
Mm-hmm.Okay.That's good.Um, sorry I just wanna get my...Is there a time when you felt really confident as a singer?

Speaker 2 13:44
Like, confident as in like, like you think you sound good or like you're like confident performing in front of someone?

Speaker 1 13:53
Both.

Speaker 2 13:54

'Cause, 'cause like at my old school like there was a singing festival.

Speaker 1 13:56
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 13:57
And I, I did it like I think maybe three or four years.And like I would think, "Okay, it sounds good," like I'm like singing it well.

Speaker 1 14:04
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 14:04
Like I'm not making mistakes, but I'm also like scared.Like-

Speaker 1 14:07
Okay.Yeah

Speaker 2 14:07
...but I'm not thinking like, like-

Speaker 1 14:09
Yeah

Speaker 2 14:09
...I'm gonna die.

Speaker 1 14:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 14:11
Like.

Speaker 1 14:11
Okay.So that was like the positive nervousness-

Speaker 2 14:14
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 14:14
...kind of thing?

Speaker 2 14:15

Yeah.

Speaker 1 14:15
Yeah.Has there ever been a time where you felt really confident when you were improvising?

Speaker 2 14:22
Like, not in front of people.

Speaker 1 14:26
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 14:26
Like if I'm just like sitting there like doing something and I'm listening to music and I just like sing like I just feel like confident in it.

Speaker 1 14:35
Yeah.And okay.

Speaker 2 14:36
'Cause like no one's watching, I have nothing to lose.

Speaker 1 14:38
So what do you think the difference is about sing- improvising in front of other people?What is it that feel, what, what, what does that feel like?

Speaker 2 14:51
Like-

Speaker 1 14:52
Just the thought of it even

Speaker 2 14:53
...like worry.Like, or like anxiousness I guess is the right, is the best word.

Speaker 1 14:58
Okay.

Speaker 2 14:58
Like you feel like anxious 'cause like if you mess up like, obviously I think, like if I'm listening to someone improvise and they mess up like I don't really think about it.

Speaker 1 15:07

Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 15:07
But if I, if I'm thinking, "Oh," like if I mess up and someone listens like I'm scared they're gonna like judge me and stuff.

Speaker 1 15:13
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 15:13
So I think I make it like bigger in my head than it like is, but yeah.

Speaker 1 15:19
What does the, what would the impact of judgment have on you?What would that feel like?

Speaker 2 15:25
It'd make me more like closed up.Like I wouldn't like sing-

Speaker 1 15:29
Mm

Speaker 2 15:29
...I would sing like quieter and like not as outspoken and stuff.

Speaker 1 15:33
Okay. So it's almost like in not improvise, in the f- sorry, in the, with the fear of improvisation comes from a thing of like, "I know if I make a mistake and I get judged I will feel like I shut down," kind of thing.

Speaker 2 15:47
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 15:47
Does that feel a good reflection of what you said?

Speaker 2 15:50
Yes, it does.

Speaker 1 15:51
Do you have any more that you could expand on that?It's okay if not.

Speaker 2 15:55

Um.

Speaker 1 16:00
No?

Speaker 2 16:00
Like it's just like really like stressful to think like, 'cause it's not even if I make a mistake, it's just if it like doesn't sound as good as the others. Like I can, I can like not make mistakes but then like everyone else just like sounds better than me. Or I think everyone else sounds better than me, and then I just get like, like quiet.

Speaker 1 16:18
Okay.

Speaker 2 16:18
And like, like I wouldn't wanna do it.I'm gonna be really hesitant.

Speaker 1 16:22
So it's a comparison, a comparison thing as well.

Speaker 2 16:25
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 16:26
You compare yourself.Interesting.Do you think there's, is like the fear of comparison something that you've developed recently?Is that something you've always had?

Speaker 2 16:41
Well, I think it comes, again, like with being a teenager, no?

Speaker 1 16:44
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 16:44
Like it like, like develops more I think.

Speaker 1 16:47
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 16:48
And then like eventually you like stop caring when you're like old.

Speaker 1 16:51

Maybe.Maybe you care less.

Speaker 2 16:54
Yeah.

Speaker 1 16:55
Yeah.Is there anything in the world that you think sparks that fear more?

Speaker 2 17:03
What do you mean?

Speaker 1 17:03
Like what do you th- is it, is it just that you're a teenager that makes you feel that kind of comparison thing, that you're comparing yourself? Are there other elements around within like the school, within school or within your like, you know, the context of the world I guess?

Speaker 2 17:20
Well if I like improvise like with people that I like know like quite well and I'm like, like, like if like if I improvise in front of my dorm-

Speaker 1 17:27
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 17:27
...like I like know them, I spend all my time with them and stuff, like, like it's like less.Like obviously I'll still be a bit nervous but like, like it's like fine.Like-

Speaker 1 17:36
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 17:37
...we like talk to each other every day.Like I'm really close with them.But if it's like people in like, like different years that I like don't know very well-

Speaker 1 17:44
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 17:44
...then that like makes it worse I think.

Speaker 1 17:47
Okay.So improvising in front of people you know is easier-

Speaker 2 17:53
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 17:54
...than in front of people you don't know?

Speaker 2 17:55
Yes.

Speaker 1 17:56
Okay.Interesting.That's good.Um, I wanna talk a bit about how you learn improvisation.Is there anything that you've ever done or ever thought of that has helped you understand how it, you might do it?

Speaker 2 18:12
Well, a lot of thing with improvisation is like in some ways it just like it comes over time and like you become a better singer and it like just comes to you. And like you kind of just like, you kind of just like learn it.

Speaker 1 18:24
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 18:25
Obviously I've had like exams that like help it, and I've had like, like drills that help it, but like it's just something that you, that comes over time.

Speaker 1 18:33
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 18:34
And like, yeah.And like you just like listen to the music, and you like try to find a couple notes that fit, and like it just like goes into it.And like-

Speaker 1 18:42
Does it feel natural to you?

Speaker 2 18:44
Sometimes.Like sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn't.It's like a hit or a miss.

Speaker 1 18:48
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:49
And it also depends on like the song.Like, it could be like a really, like, like it ...Also, like if I know the song a bit better, that will help.

Speaker 1 18:57
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 18:58
But like it could be a song that like it's like I'm quite familiar with and like it's like, like a good song with like a tune that I really like. And I think if I like the song, I'll like think more like optimistically about it.

Speaker 1 19:10
Okay.So knowing the song and enjoying the song encourages you to be braver with your-

Speaker 2 19:17
Yeah

Speaker 1 19:17
...improvisation.Yeah?Okay.That's good.That's helpful for me.Um, if you could, if you could ...Okay.If you had to teach improvisation-

Speaker 2 19:35
Okay

Speaker 1 19:36
...to someone your age, like you, what would you do?Or what would you want, what would you want for yourself, I guess?

Speaker 2 19:48
It's like a har- I feel like it's a hard thing to teach.

Speaker 1 19:51
Mm-hmm.Hi.Hi.So again, I'm just around now so if you want like me.Okay, cool.I'll come find you.Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:57
It's like a hard thing to like teach.I feel like, I don't know, for me, like, like at my old school, like I wasn't really taught it.It just kind of like you just like do it.

Speaker 1 20:05

Okay.

Speaker 2 20:06
But I can't really like ...Wait, what was the question?

Speaker 1 20:10
If you had to teach improvisation to someone-

Speaker 2 20:13
Oh

Speaker 1 20:13
...your age, what would you do?

Speaker 2 20:14
I think I would like-

Speaker 1 20:16
Or ...Yeah, sorry.

Speaker 2 20:16
I would give them like a little sequence, like a really like simple like couple of notes.

Speaker 1 20:21
Okay.

Speaker 2 20:22
And I'd like, I'd like go bit by bit.

Speaker 1 20:25
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:25
And like give them like the notes that like think I would fit, and I would like I would tell them like what you would do. And then make ... And then like they would sing it back to me, and then we would like do loads of practices of it.

Speaker 1 20:36
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 20:36

And then like eventually it would just like grow, and it would just like ... Like even if they, I just give them like a note and they find ... Like, I like go like ... Okay, I'm not gonna do it. But like-

Speaker 1 20:45
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 20:45
...I find a note.

Speaker 1 20:46
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:47
And then, like they repeat back to me like something else that would like sound good with it.

Speaker 1 20:54
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 20:54
And then eventually like those notes will like grow.

Speaker 1 20:57
Grow.

Speaker 2 20:57
And like they just get like the thing.And I would like tell them about rhythm and how she'd like mix it up.And I'd also like, I'd like play a little sequence, and then I'd give a scale.

Speaker 1 21:08
Okay.

Speaker 2 21:08
And then I'd like say like, "Oh, you can like go up and down in the scale, and like, like mix it up a bit."

Speaker 1 21:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 21:13
And then they're like, "Yeah."

Speaker 1 21:15
Is that stuff that you've done in lessons-

Speaker 2 21:17
Yeah

Speaker 1 21:18
...before?

Speaker 2 21:18
Yeah.

Speaker 1 21:18
You've done a bit of that sort of stuff?

Speaker 2 21:19
Yeah, the scale thing.

Speaker 1 21:20
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:21
Yeah.

Speaker 1 21:21
And was that helpful for you?

Speaker 2 21:23
Yeah.

Speaker 1 21:23
Yeah?Knowing, knowing what notes are available to you-

Speaker 2 21:28
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 21:29
...is helpful.Um, if you could change one thing about how improvisation is ...'Cause is it, you know, in terms of improvisation, was the first time you ever did it in public in our lessons?

Speaker 2 21:48

In public?

Speaker 1 21:48
Or like in a lesson.

Speaker 2 21:50
In public, I feel like [choir] was like the first time I've done it, like, like openly.

Speaker 1 21:57
Okay.Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:59
And that was not okay.That was really scary.

Speaker 1 22:01
Okay. So that was too, that was a negative experience of improvisation, was doing it in front-

Speaker 2 22:07
Yes

Speaker 1 22:07
…of that group of people.Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 22:10
Especially my first ever lesson.

Speaker 1 22:12
Yes, it was early on, wasn't it? That was-

Speaker 2 22:14
It was the first lesson.

Speaker 1 22:15
That was mean, wasn't it?

Speaker 2 22:16
I know.

Speaker 1 22:17
Okay.And then what about your …In your lessons before, did you study improvisation?

Speaker 2 22:24
Not really, 'cause I did like ABRSM beforehand, and I like-

Speaker 1 22:28
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 22:28
...didn't need it for that, so I just didn't do anything.

Speaker 1 22:31
Okay. And you were doing mostly musical theater at that point?

Speaker 2 22:35
Mm-hmm.I think my first two or three grade, maybe my first two grades were like classical, and I switched to musical theater.

Speaker 1 22:40
Okay. Interesting. Um, okay, so if you could change, then, one thing about ... And it's okay if it's not me not making you perform in front of [CHOIR] that time. If you could change one thing about how you were introduced to improvisation, what would that be? And that can be taking something away or that can be adding something to it. Or if that's, and if you don't like that question, we can move on.

Speaker 2 23:13
I don't know.I would like, I would wanna like work my way up to it, and like, like not do it in front of like loads of people, like straight into it.Like-

Speaker 1 23:26
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:26
...I would wanna like really practice it and then be confident into it-

Speaker 1 23:29
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:29
...until I like, like-

Speaker 1 23:31
Before going out and doing it.

Speaker 2 23:32

Yeah.

Speaker 1 23:33
Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.Is, is improvisation something ...I guess we've sort of covered this, but is that, is it something that you'd like to get better at?

Speaker 2 23:43
Yeah.

Speaker 1 23:44
Yeah?

Speaker 2 23:44
Like, yeah.

Speaker 1 23:45
What do you think would help you feel more confident with it?What would make you feel more confident taking it out into the world?

Speaker 2 23:54
I guess like practice.Just like-

Speaker 1 23:55
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 23:55
...if I just keep on like practicing-

Speaker 1 23:57
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 23:58
...then like, yeah.

Speaker 1 24:01
Is that, do you think you would know within yourself the point where you're like, "I'm ready to take this out"?

Speaker 2 24:06
Yeah.I feel like, like once I get more secure in it, like I also feel-

Speaker 1 24:09
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 24:10
...more secure, and like, like over time I'll like, I'll like, like I'll like hit more than I miss.

Speaker 1 24:19
Okay.That's good.

Speaker 2 24:20
My metaphor.

Speaker 1 24:21
Okay.

Speaker 2 24:21
And like it would just like, like progressively, like I won't like making as much mistakes.And when I like get most, almost all of them like good, I'll be like, "Okay, yeah."

Speaker 1 24:30
So is the fear...Is, is making a mistake...Is it the point that when you stop making mistakes, the part where you're like, "I think I could improvise in front of people"?

Speaker 2 24:40
Like, I guess, yeah.

Speaker 1 24:46
What if I might challenge a tiny bit?

Speaker 2 24:49
What?

Speaker 1 24:51
What if I said, "Actually, you will always make mistakes"?

Speaker 2 24:55
Yeah. No, but that's like, that's true, but like once I get to the point where like, I f- like, I've done it so many times that like I'll make some mistakes, but like it's like every once in a while and it's not like-

Speaker 1 25:09
It's not a regular thing.

Speaker 2 25:10

Yeah.

Speaker 1 25:11
When you're at home improvising, do you feel like you make mistakes?

Speaker 2 25:16
A lot of it is I'm like not like paying attention that much.No, but that's like helpful 'cause like-

Speaker 1 25:22
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 25:22
...I'm not overthinking it and stuff.

Speaker 1 25:24
Okay.

Speaker 2 25:24
But like-

Speaker 1 25:25
So when you're... Okay, that's interesting. So when you're not thinking about it and there's no one in front of you, you're able to do well because you're, you're not trying to figure out what you're gonna do.

Speaker 2 25:38
Yes.

Speaker 1 25:39
I'm trying to say.

Speaker 2 25:39
It just like flows.

Speaker 1 25:40
It just flows.So then when you do try and think about it, it becomes harder to do?

Speaker 2 25:48
Yes.

Speaker 1 25:50
Yeah?

Speaker 2 25:50
Yeah, but that's like with everything I think.It's like-

Speaker 1 25:52
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 25:52
...like that's not just like improvisation, that's like a common thing.

Speaker 1 25:56
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 25:56
For me at least.

Speaker 1 25:58
Okay.When you don't think about it-

Speaker 2 25:59
Yeah

Speaker 1 25:59
...you can do it.

Speaker 2 26:00
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 26:01
Okay.Um, is there anything about your experience of improvisation that you don't think adults or teachers or...Let's start with adults, teachers understand coming from your perspective?

Speaker 2 26:21
Well, I think teachers like kn- wait, is this about like improvisation specifically?

Speaker 1 26:27
I think about improvis- Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:28
Okay.

Speaker 1 26:29

Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:29
I think teachers like, like they, they have to know that like improvisa- improvising in front of people is like, like singing like a song that you know well alone is still stressful. And like making something up on the spot that you've like never heard before like-

Speaker 1 26:43
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 26:43
...is obviously worse.And like teachers and like adults like have to know that-

Speaker 1 26:47
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 26:47
...'cause they were once like a teenager.

Speaker 1 26:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:49
And like it's just like common sense. Like everyone would feel a bit of nervousness and stuff. So I feel like they like, they know what they're doing, but they like don't understand like how maybe... They don't understand how like stressful it is to do so.

Speaker 1 27:06
To do it.

Speaker 2 27:07
Yeah.

Speaker 1 27:08
Yeah.Yeah, I hear that.Is...What was your...What...When I asked you the question you said more, more generally, what would that be?What would you like teachers to know more generally?

Speaker 2 27:24
Um-

Speaker 1 27:25

Or had you not got a thought for that question?

Speaker 2 27:28
I was gonna say like boarding teachers like, like they're like too strict on like bedtimes and stuff.

Speaker 1 27:33
Okay.Okay.

Speaker 2 27:33
Which has nothing to do with this.

Speaker 1 27:34
Nothing to do with it.I just wasn't sure if it was gonna be something-

Speaker 2 27:39
No, it's not-

Speaker 1 27:39
...definitely that insightful

Speaker 2 27:40
...it's not useful.

Speaker 1 27:42
Okay, cool. Um, okay. Is there anything else? Is, is there something that you think we don't understand? Not that what we should, but is there something that you feel like people, we don't understand or that you've not felt understood by?

Speaker 2 28:05
In improvisation?

Speaker 1 28:06
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 28:10
I don't...No.No.

Speaker 1 28:12
No?Okay, that's fine.

Speaker 2 28:13
I don't think so.

Speaker 1 28:13
That's okay.Um, is there anything else about your experiences of improvisation that you'd like to tell me or anything that feels important to talk about?It's okay if it's none.

Speaker 2 28:26
I think I've covered most of my bases.

Speaker 1 28:28
You've covered it.

Speaker 2 28:29
I have.

Speaker 1 28:29
Covered it.Okay, great.All right.Thank you so much.

Speaker 2 28:35
You're welcome.

Speaker 1 28:35
I'll speak to you soon.

Speaker 2 28:37
Yes.

Juliet – 1G

Speaker 1 = Meg, Speaker 2 = Juliet

Speaker 1 00:01
Okay. Hello.

Speaker 2 00:02
Hey.

Speaker 1 00:04
Um, thanks so much for doing this. Before we get started, I just wanted to have a quick chat about what we're doing. As you know, I'm doing a research about singing and improvisation, and I'd love to hear about your experiences and what you think about it. There are no right or wrong answers, and whatever you think and feel is exactly what I want to know. A few important things. You don't have to answer anything you don't want to. If a question feels uncomfortable or you'd rather just skip it, that's completely fine. You can just say and we'll move on. And you can stop the interview at any time for any reason, and that won't affect anything at all, including our lessons together. I'm gonna record our conversation so I can listen back to it later, but the recording is just for me. I won't use your real name anywhere. You'll be given a different name, which you're welcome to choose if you want to choose your own pseudonym. And nobody reading my work will be able to identify who you are. So if you wanna talk about school at all, I'll edit out what school it is or anything like that. Um, do you have any questions before we start?

Speaker 2 01:03
Nope.

Speaker 1 01:04
Are you happy to go ahead?

Speaker 2 01:05
Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:06
Great.Okay.So before we start talking about improvisation, I wanna know a bit about you as a singer-

Speaker 2 01:13
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 01:13
...and your relationship with singing.So how long have you been singing?What, and what do you, what do you love about it?

Speaker 2 01:21
Trying to think.I probably ...I started singing when I ...I joined, like, theater after my mom said I could either do horse riding or the- or, like- ...my theater school.

Speaker 1 01:30
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:30
And I chose theater school, which was, I was probably around, like, I don't know, I wanna say, like, 10-ish, but I was singing before that in, like, school productions. But I think when I was younger I wasn't, like, a very good singer. I just kinda, like, loved it. And I, I probably, what made me stick out from, like, the other kids was just, like, I would do it.

Speaker 1 01:48
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:48
And I think everyone else would just be like, not, you know?

Speaker 1 01:51
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:51
I think, I, I think singing comes from, at a young age it's, like, the confidence and then that grows into, like, actually being able to sing when you're older. I think some people are born with, like, actual talent, but I think that's what for me it was, like, more I just could do it. I just was, like, confident and, like, loved performing.

Speaker 1 02:06
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 02:06
And that kind of moved into, like, singing.

Speaker 1 02:09
Okay. Nice. So would you, would you describe ... How would you say your relationship? How would you describe your relationship with singing? Is it something

you do for fun? Is it something you need to do? Is it something that is, like, more intrinsically part of you?

Speaker 2 02:26
I think now I do it for fun. I think we've had conversations like this in our lessons before, how singing's been, for me, very much like I haven't done it before as me. Like, I've only ever been a character singing-

Speaker 1 02:38
Yeah

Speaker 2 02:38
... in, like, theater. And I think this year I've really grown away from that and I've, like, really enjoyed that and, like, finding my own voice and, like, singing. Mainly not an American accent. Haven't really done that before. Still, still working on that. Um, but yeah, I think now I just, like, really enjoy it.

Speaker 1 02:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:00
Yeah.And more than, like, I enjoy people praising me for it, I guess.

Speaker 1 03:04
Yeah.Okay.Is it something you could see yourself continuing to do?Obviously you're leaving school next year.

Speaker 2 03:12
Yeah.

Speaker 1 03:12
So is it something you can see yourself continuing to do after?

Speaker 2 03:17
I think so, yes, as more of, like, a hobby.

Speaker 1 03:19
A hobby, yeah.

Speaker 2 03:19
Not as, like, a career, but-

Speaker 1 03:20

Yeah

Speaker 2 03:21
...I obviously want to go into acting, and I can see myself, like, working them in together, you know?

Speaker 1 03:26
Yeah, yeah, yeah.Totally.Okay, cool.So let's move a little bit towards improvisation now.

Speaker 2 03:34
Cool.

Speaker 1 03:34
Have you, have you ever tried ...Obviously, I know the ans- answers a lot- to a lot of these questions-

Speaker 2 03:41
Yeah

Speaker 1 03:41
...but it's good to have for, like, the wider context for other people.So have you ever tried improvising?That thing of just, like, making something up as you go along.

Speaker 2 03:52
Um, I'd say, like, not much, but since joining [choir] I ...Now when I'm, like, alone and I listen to music, I try, like, add a harmony-

Speaker 1 04:02
Okay

Speaker 2 04:02
...and stuff.Like, I'll just, like, see if I can kind of figure it out in my head.'Cause I feel like that's a good skill to have 'cause, like, my friends are very good.Like, [fellow student]-

Speaker 1 04:10
Mm

Speaker 2 04:10
...really good at that.

Speaker 1 04:11

Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 04:11
And she'll just, like, start singing a harmony and I'm, like, very jealous.I'd, like, try to start doing it- ...myself so I can, like-

Speaker 1 04:18
Mm

Speaker 2 04:18
...learn.

Speaker 1 04:18
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 04:18
So I think in that sense, yes, but I think and probably in any other way, no.

Speaker 1 04:23
Could think about jazz.

Speaker 2 04:25
Yeah.True.

Speaker 1 04:26
Yeah?

Speaker 2 04:28
But I think in that sense, like, I've been trying really hard to, like, know the scat.

Speaker 1 04:33
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:33
Like, 'cause I was talking to [fellow student 2] and he was like, "Yeah, I'm just making up my scat." And I was like, "Oh, no.I can't do that.That, that's terrifying."

Speaker 1 04:40
Okay.Why is that terrifying?

Speaker 2 04:44
'Cause, like, it is quite easy to go wrong and get, like, a sharp note or make it just sound, like, wrong, and I don't want that to, like, affect people's view on me, I guess.

Speaker 1 04:55
Okay.So do you feel like those things are making the mistake, making the mistake will have a correlation in terms of, like, what people think of you?

Speaker 2 05:05
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:06
In what way?Can you explain that a bit more?

Speaker 2 05:09
Like, I know I'm not very, like, musically inclined, I suppose. Like, I, I enjoy music, but I've not, like, learnt the piano and, like, done, like, instruments and stuff, so I don't really know how music works, like, technically. Like, where notes and stuff should go.

Speaker 1 05:24
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 05:24
And I want people to think I'm more smart in that area than I am- ...I suppose.

Speaker 1 05:28
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 05:28
Like, I want ...Yeah.I think I want it to be more like, "Oh, yeah, she's so musical."

Speaker 1 05:36
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 05:36
But I'm not.So if you can just, like, fool them.

Speaker 1 05:41
Okay, cool.So if you, if you hear that word improvisation as a, kind of as a concept, what do you think of?What comes to mind?And that can be anything, in any, any way, any angle.

Speaker 2 05:56
Um, just improvisation in general is what-

Speaker 1 05:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 05:59
...I think about. Drama.

Speaker 1 06:01
Okay.

Speaker 2 06:01
You know, we do a lot of, like-

Speaker 1 06:03
Okay

Speaker 2 06:03
...now improv this scene.

Speaker 1 06:04
Okay.

Speaker 2 06:05
Which is fun, to be fair. 'Cause-

Speaker 1 06:07
So do you enjoy it in drama?

Speaker 2 06:08
Yeah, I do actually.

Speaker 1 06:10
What's different about it in music and singing?

Speaker 2 06:15
I think 'cause in drama it's harder to get wrong. Like, improv is so, like, free. It's like you just, you are in your character, you change your personality, whatever, and then you just, like, kind of think about their life. You've got all this backstory, and you can just, like, do whatever you want and you can't really be wrong. But for music it's like if the note's wrong you can, you can hear it.

Speaker 1 06:38
Yeah.

Speaker 2 06:39
It's, like, quite obvious when it's incorrect.

Speaker 1 06:41
Okay, yeah.That makes a lot of sense.And I guess it- it's ...Do you find having the character in drama helps with the improvisational-

Speaker 2 06:50
Yeah

Speaker 1 06:50
...aspect?

Speaker 2 06:51
Yeah.I don't think I could do it myself.Like, yeah, I think you can kinda just, like, hide behind it and be like, "Oh, but my character would do that."

Speaker 1 07:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:00
If you kind of make a ...If you, like, look stupid-

Speaker 1 07:02
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:02
...it's like it's not you.

Speaker 1 07:04
That kinda goes back to what you were saying at the start about learning to sing as yourself and-

Speaker 2 07:09
Mm

Speaker 1 07:09
...within your own voice.

Speaker 2 07:10
Yeah.

Speaker 1 07:10

And that being ...How did that feel when you first started doing that?

Speaker 2 07:14
I cried.Remember?

Speaker 1 07:16
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:16
I did cry.I just, it just felt really, like, foreign-

Speaker 1 07:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:21
...and, like, wrong 'cause it ...I think it was more, like, this is really, like, cringe, but it was, like, kind of finding-

Speaker 1 07:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:28
... what style I was and, like, where ... 'Cause I mean, people have such different styles. And, like, obviously you have your voice, but then, like, like, there are different singers, like, like, that have their-

Speaker 1 07:42
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:42
...kind of niches.

Speaker 1 07:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:43
And, like, like Layza's gone into a bit more jazz pop and, like-

Speaker 1 07:47
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:47
...others have gone, like, more rock.

Speaker 1 07:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:49
And I didn't really know how I was meant to know, like, where my voice sat and what was me.

Speaker 1 07:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:56
Yeah.

Speaker 1 07:56
Do you see improvi- Is there ... So when you're s- in this kinda new way that we've found in your lessons, does that feel like an express- an expression thing for you? Is there, like, an ex- are you able to express part of yourself-

Speaker 2 08:11
Mm

Speaker 1 08:12
...in that?

Speaker 2 08:12
Yeah, I think so.I think I definitely, like, like, become more of myself, like- ...you know?

Speaker 1 08:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:19
And, like, I think, yeah, it's also definitely gained my confidence as, like, a, as a singer and-

Speaker 1 08:25
Mm

Speaker 2 08:26
...as a person.Like, we went ...Really random sidetrack.When we went on holiday there was, like, karaoke, and I sang a song but it was, like, just me singing.I wasn't, like-

Speaker 1 08:34
Okay, nice

Speaker 2 08:35
...my parents, you know?And my parents were like, "Wow, we really, we really, like, Meg is so brilliant.We just love Meg." Which is like ...But yeah, I think it was just like-

Speaker 1 08:43
No

Speaker 2 08:43
...things like that it's like not-

Speaker 1 08:46
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:46
...being scared to, like, just sing as me and, like, yeah.

Speaker 1 08:49
Do you think ... Do you f- so how you felt in that process, that beginning process of finding your voice, is there a s- is there any similarities to how it feels, like, the thought of maybe learning improvisation or doing improvisation?

Speaker 2 09:05
Mm.Probably.Like, just, like, the nerves of, like, knowing what's you're used to compared to what-

Speaker 1 09:13
Yeah

Speaker 2 09:14
...is new.Like, and what's kind of fear, I guess.Yeah.

Speaker 1 09:20
What the f- the scary things.

Speaker 2 09:21
Yeah.

Speaker 1 09:22

Yeah.I get ya.Um, okay.So has, has there ever been a time ...Were you there that time at the start of year in [choir] where I did that, like, improvisation exercise?

Speaker 2 09:36
Yes.

Speaker 1 09:38
How did that, how did doing that make you feel?So just for the record, that was like-

Speaker 2 09:42
Mm

Speaker 1 09:42
...I got ...We were all in a group, and I got everyone to kind of improvise at the same time.So no one was-

Speaker 2 09:48
Mm.

Speaker 1 09:48
The spotlight wasn't on anyone.How did that make you feel?

Speaker 2 09:52
You were on the piano that morning.

Speaker 1 09:53
I was playing, I think.

Speaker 2 09:54
Yes.Yeah.That was probably harder 'cause then, I don't know if I can say names, but, like, like [student 2] and [student 3] had already been there for a while and, like-

Speaker 1 10:03
Mm

Speaker 2 10:03
...were very good at that.I think, like, [student 2] is obviously very-

Speaker 1 10:06
Mm

Speaker 2 10:06
...like, musical.

Speaker 1 10:07
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:07
Um, which I guess is in some way good that you've got people that are, like, confident and you're like, "Okay, fine," like, they're like, you know, no one's ... not all of us, like, all terrified. But then it's like also you don't wanna embarrass yourf- self in front of them being-

Speaker 1 10:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:22
...all, "I'm not as good," you know?

Speaker 1 10:25
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 10:26
But I think it was, like, it was good.It was just, it was, it was sc-

Speaker 1 10:30
Scary.

Speaker 2 10:30
I remember being like, "Oh, I'm just gonna go dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum." And, like, stay on the same note.I'm not gonna, like-

Speaker 1 10:36
Okay

Speaker 2 10:37
...go crazy.

Speaker 1 10:38
That's good though.

Speaker 2 10:39
Yeah.

Speaker 1 10:39

That's where you start.When you're at home and you're exploring improvisation or exploring-

Speaker 2 10:43
Mm

Speaker 1 10:43
...harmonies, how does that feel?D- is there-

Speaker 2 10:47
Mm

Speaker 1 10:47
...emotion attached to that?

Speaker 2 10:48
I think when you get it right, like, when you make a harmony that's, like, actually right I'm like, "I'm an angel."

Speaker 1 10:52
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:54
But when you're, like, really wrong you go, "Oh, cringe."

Speaker 1 10:57
Okay.

Speaker 2 10:57
But it's, like, you plan on to it so it's fine.But when you, when you do find the actual harmony you're like, "I love that." I'm like, "Wow, I'm so smart."

Speaker 1 11:05
So it feels, it feels good.

Speaker 2 11:06
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:07
Do you think having a knowledge of music and music theory would help you more in terms of the improv- u- understanding improvisation and-

Speaker 2 11:20

Yeah, I think so

Speaker 1 11:21
...understanding how that works?

Speaker 2 11:21
I think so, yeah.

Speaker 1 11:23
Okay.

Speaker 2 11:23
I think ... And, like, again, like, in choir I've definitely gotten a lot better at, like, sight-reading this year. 'Cause I used to kind of just sing along with people around me, but now I've, like, actually started, like, actively looking-

Speaker 1 11:33
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 11:34
...at the notes.And I think that's also helpful.You can kind of see-

Speaker 1 11:37
See how it moves

Speaker 2 11:38
...how it moves.

Speaker 1 11:39
Okay, nice.In terms of the jazz performance that you're doing-

Speaker 2 11:43
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 11:43
...so obviously there's a scat solo in that.That's written.We've kind of written that together.

Speaker 2 11:51
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 11:51
How do you feel about, how do you feel about performing that?

Speaker 2 11:58
Yeah.I'm, I'm really scared.Because, yes, we've written the, like, note bit, but when ...With a song that you learn, you've got the notes and the words-

Speaker 1 12:07
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:07
...and you move your mouth like that.

Speaker 1 12:09
Yeah.

Speaker 2 12:09
But I think I'm, I'm a bit, I am still a bit worried. Like, I haven't learned the, where the dums and the vas and ba-bums, like, are. So it's like, I'm kind of thinking of the notes, and I kind of, like, slur them a bit, and I'm worried that that... Also scatting in general, everyone, everyone knows, like, scatting's a bit silly. Everyone's like, "Ugh, what, what is this?" But-

Speaker 1 12:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:30
... so I'm just a bit worried about that. But, like, I think the thing i- that is kind of like, you know, making me feel a bit better is that, like, that everyone there is, like, paid to see it, and they wanna be there, and if it's-

Speaker 1 12:42
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:42
...terrible, terrible.

Speaker 1 12:42
That's true.

Speaker 2 12:43
And they can do it, so.

Speaker 1 12:44
Okay, good.That's a-

Speaker 2 12:45
You know?

Speaker 1 12:45
...very, that's a smart thing.The logical brain.

Speaker 2 12:48
Yeah.

Speaker 1 12:49
Um, okay.So-

Speaker 2 12:53
And that's school.

Speaker 1 12:54
And-

Speaker 2 12:54
It's not that deep.

Speaker 1 12:55
Yes.

Speaker 2 12:56
It is just school.Yeah.

Speaker 1 12:58
That is, that is a really-

Speaker 2 12:59
That's cool

Speaker 1 13:00
...a great point.A really good point.Um, in terms of that making a mistake thing, let's talk about that a bit.

Speaker 2 13:09
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 13:10

How...Do you think that is...Do you think that is something that you attach to singing more than other areas of your life?Or is that something that you do across, across other things?

Speaker 2 13:33
I think it just comes out in, like, a different way.Like, making a mistake in singing's so, like, like embarrassing.

Speaker 1 13:39
Okay.

Speaker 2 13:39
Like, it feels embarrassing.But if you make a mistake in, like, I don't know, another thing, like I do art, I guess.

Speaker 1 13:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:46
You can, like, fix it.It's annoying, but you can fix it.But with singing it's like, it's like a fleeting moment.

Speaker 1 13:51
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 13:51
You know?It's like you can't pull it back.

Speaker 1 13:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:54
You kind of... It's just, like, done, and what's done is done. But then I guess, like, yeah, it is... I was gonna say theater, but then it's, I guess if you, like, mess up a line, it's similar. But you can kind of, again, like, move it back to where it needs to be. Like, 'cause you can improv that and t- But once you've, like, done a note wrong, you've done a note wrong.

Speaker 1 14:12
There's no going back.

Speaker 2 14:13

You can't... There's no going back. Yeah. But, like, I remember in the last show I did, I just sang the wrong lyrics in this song. I just completely sang it wrong, and I was like, "Oh my God," but no one noticed.

Speaker 1 14:26
Mm.

Speaker 2 14:27
So it was fine, but it's just, like, annoying.

Speaker 1 14:31
Yeah.And I think singing the, singing the wrong, it kinda links to the lyric-less singing thing in a way.

Speaker 2 14:38
Yeah.

Speaker 1 14:40
Does it feel exposing not singing with lyrics?

Speaker 2 14:44
Yeah, 'cause it's about your voice and not about the meaning of the song.

Speaker 1 14:49
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 14:49
I think that also links back to theater, 'cause a lot of theater songs, like, if you're in a different character, like, it's not really about your voice.Like, you can have songs where you're being-

Speaker 1 14:56
Yeah

Speaker 2 14:56
...like, a witch, and you'll be like ...

Speaker 1 14:58
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 14:58
So, like, it's about, like, the song-

Speaker 1 15:01
Yeah

Speaker 2 15:01
...and the meaning.And I think when it's just about the sound of your voice, that's scary, 'cause I don't rely on that.Like, I don't personally think I have, like, a great voice.

Speaker 1 15:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:13
I think it's just, like, like I can hold a note, but I don't think I have, like, a pretty voice, you know?

Speaker 1 15:22
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:23
But, like, I don't know.Like, I think that's also, like, comparing to other people who's also singing so, like, subject...Like, it's so, like, different.

Speaker 1 15:31
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 15:31
Everyone's voices are different. You can't change your voice to sound exactly like someone else's voice. Like, and I'll listen to one person's voice and be like, "I want that voice." But then someone else whose, it can be a different voice, I'll be like, "I want that voice."

Speaker 1 15:41
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 15:41
And I think it's just like being, "No, this is my voice."

Speaker 1 15:43
Do you think comparing...I- is comparing yourself a thing, a kind of a common theme, would you say, amongst your peers?

Speaker 2 15:53
Yeah.

Speaker 1 15:54
Is that a big thing?

Speaker 2 15:55
Yeah.I think that's, that's hard.I mean, like, even doing, like, [choir], like, when I'm doing Persimmon (*small ensemble song with 2 other singers)*-

Speaker 1 16:01
Mm

Speaker 2 16:01
…like, these two girls are, like, insane.

Speaker 1 16:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:05
They're like angels, and I feel like I'm just, like, I'm just holding the note to keep the harmony-

Speaker 1 16:09
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:09
…together, but it's not like…It's, like, these beautiful voices.I'm just, like, holding the note.That's how I feel sometimes.

Speaker 1 16:15
Do you think everyone feels like that in things?

Speaker 2 16:19
Mm.

Speaker 1 16:20
Or do you think that's unique-

Speaker 2 16:23
Yeah

Speaker 1 16:24
…to you?

Speaker 2 16:24
I think everyone feels it in different ways.

Speaker 1 16:26
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:27
Like, I do think everyone's, everyone's got their nerves in different ways, I gue- I do think singing's very mind over matter. Like the other day when we were singing, what was it? How Deep Is Your Love [head of music] came in. I, I said to [student 3], I was like, "I'm gon- I'm gonna mess up the riff. I'm gonna, I'm gonna mess it up," and then I did. And I was like, "That's 'cause I said that."

Speaker 1 16:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:45
Like, I...It was fully, like, in my head.I was like, "I'm gonna mess it up."

Speaker 1 16:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:50
And then I did, so it's like, I think it is very...Like, if I didn't say that, I probably wouldn't have.

Speaker 1 16:55
Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:55
I just need to chill.But yeah, I think everyone has their own, like, nerves.

Speaker 1 16:59
What do you...And, sorry, I'm going back to improvisation.This just came to me.

Speaker 2 17:04
It's okay.

Speaker 1 17:04
What do you see as improvisation-

Speaker 2 17:06
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 17:07
...in singing?What does that sound like to you?

Speaker 2 17:12
In what way?Like...

Speaker 1 17:15
Like, when at the start I said, "Do you, do you f- improvise?"

Speaker 2 17:20
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 17:20
And you said no, but -

Speaker 2 17:23
Yeah.

Speaker 1 17:23
But I hear you improvise all the time.

Speaker 2 17:27
Okay.

Speaker 1 17:27
In what you do, yeah, and how you sing, and I am intrigued as to what...Because of our different of, like, the viewpoints-

Speaker 2 17:39
Mm

Speaker 1 17:39
...I'm intrigued to know what you think of as improvising.Would you think improvisation is just a scat solo?

Speaker 2 17:46
Yeah, or, like, going off on a riff or, like, singing different notes and-

Speaker 1 17:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 17:50

...like, taking a verse and changing it to-

Speaker 1 17:54
Yeah

Speaker 2 17:54
...fit you better, I guess.But, like, in the mo- I feel like improv is, like, in the moment.

Speaker 1 17:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 17:58
It's not going back and, like, making something yourself.It's like in the moment, I'm gonna go do a huge riff and-

Speaker 1 18:06
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 18:07
...yeah.

Speaker 1 18:07
But even in the scat solo that you're doing for-

Speaker 2 18:10
Mm

Speaker 1 18:10
...thing and you're saying, "Oh, I don't know where the syllables are," and stuff, that would be you're improvising it.

Speaker 2 18:15
Yeah.True.

Speaker 1 18:17
You know?

Speaker 2 18:18
That is very true.

Speaker 1 18:18
There's...You're, and in the riffs and stuff, sometimes you'll do...You'll change the riff-

Speaker 2 18:23
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 18:23
...or you'll adapt the riff Um, that we think we use as like a launchpad.Is that so- are you aware you're doing that or are you ...Is it-

Speaker 2 18:33
Yeah, I think sometimes when we're like ... Yeah. I think sometimes if a, if I get to riff that I can't do, but I can do it, same amount of notes but just in a different way, I'll just do that and if it sounds good.

Speaker 1 18:45
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:45
I think that has definitely only been like since joining [choir].

Speaker 1 18:50
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 18:51
Like, that has changed-

Speaker 1 18:53
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:53
...like my view on things like that so much.

Speaker 1 18:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:57
And that like I can do it.

Speaker 1 18:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:59
Yeah.

Speaker 1 18:59

And is that something that you enjoy?

Speaker 2 19:02
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:02
And would want to develop within your singing?

Speaker 2 19:05
Yeah, I think so.

Speaker 1 19:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:06
I think it's like a good skill to have.

Speaker 1 19:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:08
I think it is a skill that you learn.

Speaker 1 19:11
Yes.

Speaker 2 19:11
It's not just like natural.Which like then makes me think, yeah, you do just need to develop it and it's not like, I don't know.I just said random words there-

Speaker 1 19:21
No

Speaker 2 19:21
...that didn't form into a sentence.

Speaker 1 19:23
No, not at all.Do you think improvising is harder for singers than for instrumentalists?

Speaker 2 19:30
Mm.No.

Speaker 1 19:33
Okay.

Speaker 2 19:33
I mean, I don't play an instrument-

Speaker 1 19:34
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 19:34
...but I can imagine an instrument it's like, it's like another, it's like another step of-

Speaker 1 19:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:39
...like thinking, okay, I, I use my finger to press that and then that makes that note.

Speaker 1 19:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:44
But with voice it's just like you kind of just do it.You know?

Speaker 1 19:48
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 19:48
You adjust your chords to like sing that note.But I think, yeah, and I think you have to really know your instrument, I guess.

Speaker 1 19:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:56
Like you have to know like where everything is.'Cause I guess if you're on, on like a trumpet to like ...There's, isn't it three boppers?

Speaker 1 20:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 20:07
Or like buttons?

Speaker 1 20:08
Buttons, yeah.

Speaker 2 20:08
Yeah.

Speaker 1 20:08
Valves.

Speaker 2 20:09
Valves.So you can-

Speaker 1 20:10
Three valves

Speaker 2 20:11
...you have to like know what's going on.You can't just like chicken to jing around.

Speaker 1 20:15
Yes.

Speaker 2 20:17
But I guess you can't do that-

Speaker 1 20:18
But so-

Speaker 2 20:18
...with like singing-

Speaker 1 20:19
If y-

Speaker 2 20:19
...with a trombone.

Speaker 1 20:20
'Cause you're saying, oh, it would be good to have like the musical knowledge-

Speaker 2 20:23
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 20:23
...of like how to move through stuff.

Speaker 2 20:25
Yeah.

Speaker 1 20:26
But that's the hard I find with singing in improvising, the hard thing is you have to know ...You have the knowledge but like if I were to say, "Sing me a major sca- major scale over this chord."

Speaker 2 20:40
Oh.

Speaker 1 20:40
To be able, to be able to do that off the cuff-

Speaker 2 20:43
Yeah, that's true

Speaker 1 20:44
...is quite hard.Whereas for a trumpet player, if they know the major scale-

Speaker 2 20:48
Yeah

Speaker 1 20:49
...they can just pr- I think it's-

Speaker 2 20:51
Easier to n- it's easier to like, like if you tell a musician, "Play a C."

Speaker 1 20:56
Yes.Exactly.

Speaker 2 20:57
Yeah.Def- yeah.

Speaker 1 20:58
You know?

Speaker 2 20:59
That's definitely easier.

Speaker 1 21:00
For singers-

Speaker 2 21:01
It's like, right.

Speaker 1 21:02
Yes.

Speaker 2 21:02
Yeah.

Speaker 1 21:02
That's kind of what I'm getting at.That like-

Speaker 2 21:04
Yeah

Speaker 1 21:05
...getting it right thing that I think feels like it matters.

Speaker 2 21:09
Yeah.

Speaker 1 21:10
Um, how do you feel about starting off more simply in terms of improvisation?Like playing around with improvising on one note or improvising with a-

Speaker 2 21:27
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 21:27
...selection of three notes.How would that make you feel?

Speaker 2 21:30
I think it's definitely like that would be a lot more calming.It's like working up-

Speaker 1 21:34
Yeah

Speaker 2 21:34
...to it.I think it, oh, this is gonna be cringe.But-

Speaker 1 21:36
No, go on

Speaker 2 21:36
...I think it does matter like who you're comfortable with.Like I'm so comfortable with you-

Speaker 1 21:40
Yeah

Speaker 2 21:40
...as like a teacher you'll, you make the space so, like I'm not afraid to like-

Speaker 1 21:46
Thanks

Speaker 2 21:46
...go off.

Speaker 1 21:46
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 21:47
You're not gonna be like, "Oh, what was that?"

Speaker 1 21:49
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:49
You know?

Speaker 1 21:50
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 21:51
And that is really like, that is so like-

Speaker 1 21:54
Yeah

Speaker 2 21:54
...helpful and like, I, that means a lot to me like I think.

Speaker 1 21:57
Okay.That's good.Thanks.Um, so would you say that having a safe space to explore is an important-

Speaker 2 22:05
Mm

Speaker 1 22:05
...part-

Speaker 2 22:06
Definitely.Yeah

Speaker 1 22:07
...of improvising?

Speaker 2 22:08
Yeah.

Speaker 1 22:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:10
Yeah, I think so.

Speaker 1 22:12
If, I mean this is a question that you may not know the answer to but I'm curious to ask anyway. If you, let's say you aren't, you were in a group with a group of [year 9s] and you needed to, you want ... Someone said, "Right, can you work with them on improvisation and singing?"

Speaker 2 22:30
Mm.

Speaker 1 22:30
Would you know what to do?Would you have any ideas how to do that?

Speaker 2 22:34
No.I ...Yeah, I'd probably just be like, I don't know, like, "Listen to this song and sing it back-

Speaker 1 22:43

Yeah

Speaker 2 22:43
...but change it and-"

Speaker 1 22:45
Change it a little.

Speaker 2 22:45
Like add something or remove bits.

Speaker 1 22:48
And if, if that task was given to you as, as a ... as or a year nine-

Speaker 2 22:54
Mm

Speaker 1 22:54
...how would that have made you feel?

Speaker 2 22:58
Oh, I think if it was like, I think I would've loved it if it was like one-on-one.

Speaker 1 23:03
Okay.

Speaker 2 23:04
Or maybe I would have hated that more.I dunno.But I think if it's like a group of people, I think it would be fun if it's like a group of people like doing it together.If it's just you individually-

Speaker 1 23:13
Okay

Speaker 2 23:13
...that's so different.

Speaker 1 23:14
Yeah.

Speaker 2 23:14
'Cause then you have to like sing it in front of everyone with no practice.Like I really rely on like practice before I sing.

Speaker 1 23:21
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 23:21
I think I definitely, less now I feel like if someone said, "Can you sing me this song?" I'd be like, "Yeah, I can probably sing that." But before it was like I have to genuinely know every vowel and like how I'm exactly singing that note.

Speaker 1 23:35
So feeling extremely prepared-

Speaker 2 23:37
Yeah.Yeah

Speaker 1 23:39
...is a really important part.

Speaker 2 23:41
Yeah, I think so.

Speaker 1 23:42
How-

Speaker 2 23:42
Which is now like I'd say that's gone down 'cause like especially in choir, we kind of just do it now 'cause go to one rehearsal and you kind of just have to do it. And that's definitely helped that, that-

Speaker 1 23:55
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:55
...aspect of me being like I need to know every single move and how I'm gonna put my hand on my, my, my hip, you know?

Speaker 1 24:03
Yeah.Is there an element of in terms of how you, um, that fear of judgment thing and that comparison element-

Speaker 2 24:14
Mm

Speaker 1 24:14
...do you think, why w- Is there anything conte- textually like about the world that exacerbates that feeling-

Speaker 2 24:28
Mm

Speaker 1 24:28
...do you think in terms of-

Speaker 2 24:30
Yeah.I mean, I think everyone just- Loves to hate everyone

Speaker 1 24:34
Okay

Speaker 2 24:34
People just love to be hateful, I think.I think the Internet's really helped with that, you know?

Speaker 1 24:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 24:39
Like in a bad way.

Speaker 1 24:40
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:40
Um, yeah, I think 'cause I f- on Ti- I follow, and you might not know her, Echo Picone. She's like...- she's just insane.

Speaker 1 24:49
Okay

Speaker 2 24:49
And ev- she like is known f- she just does singing TikToks and she like riffs-

Speaker 1 24:54
Okay

Speaker 2 24:54

...crazily.And it's like she's actually insane.

Speaker 1 24:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 24:57
But then she still gets these hate comments being like, "You're doing too much.You're so annoying.You're so..." Like-

Speaker 1 25:02
Okay

Speaker 2 25:02
And it's like people will find any which way to dislike someone-

Speaker 1 25:06
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:06
...for anything.

Speaker 1 25:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:08
And I think that is just...That does like hang onto you through everything you do.But I think that's something you have to detach yourself from.

Speaker 1 25:16
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:16
Or at least try to and be like, "Well..."

Speaker 1 25:19
Do you think as you get older detaching yourself from that is becoming easier?

Speaker 2 25:23
Yeah.

Speaker 1 25:23
It is?

Speaker 2 25:25
I think you just need to learn to know that I don't like things that some people love, you know?What's the, what's the phrase?Like, every moldy cheese has its s- dry bread or something like that.

Speaker 1 25:38
Yeah, that'll be the title of my essay. Every moldy cheese has its dry bread.Okay, yeah. Okay. Do you think you can…So that's good, so you can see a world where you are able to detach y- yourself-

Speaker 2 25:53
Mm

Speaker 1 25:53
…from that comparison?

Speaker 2 25:54
Yeah.

Speaker 1 25:55
Have you grown up with like social media your, the whole time?

Speaker 2 25:59
Mm, not really, no. I got…I probably got social media when I was like in year like six I wanna say.

Speaker 1 26:05
Okay.That's-

Speaker 2 26:06
Which is still quite young

Speaker 1 26:07
…that is really young.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 26:08
Unless maybe it's before, but that was like a private account.I think it's only more like since joining I think [year 9].

Speaker 1 26:14
Okay

Speaker 2 26:15

I got more like, was allowed to like have TikTok and stuff and like look in like comments and-

Speaker 1 26:20
Yeah.Does everyone have it?

Speaker 2 26:21
Yeah.I don't know anyone that doesn't.

Speaker 1 26:24
And is it a big part of how you all like-

Speaker 2 26:27
Mm.Very much

Speaker 1 26:29
...communicate or whatever?

Speaker 2 26:30
Well, like people throw parties purely to film a TikTok before, you know?Like, and obviously it's not just that.

Speaker 1 26:38
Yeah

Speaker 2 26:38
But it sometimes feels like that, like people will be like, "We're going out to get Pizza Express, let's just make sure we look really cute though like for the Instagram post." I think I do dictate my life a lot on like... I try not to, but I do, I do dictate my life on like what I'm gonna post on Instagram, and I wish I didn't say that.

Speaker 1 26:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:58
But I, I...Like I will like make sure I get a cute photo.Like if I'm...Like I mean, yeah.

Speaker 1 27:03
Yeah.Okay.

Speaker 2 27:05
Which is bad, but...

Speaker 1 27:07
Oh, you have...I don't think you are in the minority there.

Speaker 2 27:09
No, I don't. But like, yeah, if I didn't have like any form of social media I think, I think it'd just be different. I don't, I don't know if it would be... It'd probably be better, but- But like I do love-

Speaker 1 27:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:22
...I love it as like a creative form.

Speaker 1 27:24
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:25
But that's-

Speaker 1 27:27
But does it mean that you feel everything that you put on there creatively-

Speaker 2 27:30
Mm

Speaker 1 27:31
...has to be of a certain standard-

Speaker 2 27:33
Yeah

Speaker 1 27:33
...of a certain thing?

Speaker 2 27:35
Yeah, 'cause it's still judgy.Like, yeah, I'll have friends come up to me like, "Look what she just posted.That's so weird."

Speaker 1 27:41
Okay.

Speaker 2 27:42

And like I think everyone does that.

Speaker 1 27:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:44
But it's like...Yeah, that is true.I think that is just a pressure from society in every aspect-

Speaker 1 27:54
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:54
...of everyone's lives, I guess.

Speaker 1 27:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 27:56
But I think that's always been the case.I think social media's definitely made it worse, but-

Speaker 1 27:59
Oh my gosh, yeah

Speaker 2 28:00
...like I think that's always been the case like in like the Regency era.

Speaker 1 28:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:04
You'd have to choose the right husband.You know?

Speaker 1 28:07
Yeah

Speaker 2 28:07
And you'd be judged if you didn't.

Speaker 1 28:08
Yeah.Yeah, yeah, yeah.That is true.

Speaker 2 28:09
And you have to do everything right.But I think, yeah, everyone, everything's just very...I think, yeah, society's just a weird, weird concept.Like we are animals.

Speaker 1 28:20
Yeah.We are animals

Speaker 2 28:21
It's just a weird concept that we've made up ourselves

Speaker 1 28:24
Under a microscope.Okay, great.Thank you so much.

Speaker 2 28:27
Thanks.

Speaker 1 28:28
Is there, is there anything else about improvisation or anything that you feel like I haven't asked you?

Speaker 2 28:33
I don't think so

Speaker 1 28:33
Or that you want to talk about?

Speaker 2 28:36
No, I don't think so.

Speaker 1 28:37
No?Okay, great.

Speaker 2 28:38
I think I managed to go really off track at the end then.

Speaker 1 28:40
No, but it's good.'Cause that's what I'm kind of gonna do.

Speaker 2 28:42
Yeah.

Speaker 1 28:43
Um, okay, thank you so much.

Harriet – 1H

Speaker 1 = Meg, Speaker 2 = Harriet

Speaker 1 00:01
Hello. Thanks for doing this with me today. Before we start, I just wanna have a quick chat about why we're here and what we're doing.

Speaker 2 00:09
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 00:09
So as you know, I'm doing some research about singing and improvisation, and I'd love to hear about your experiences and what you think about it. There's no right or wrong answer, and whatever you think and feel is what I'm interested in. A few important things I'd like you to know: you don't have to answer anything you don't want to. If a question feels uncomfortable or you'd rather skip it, that is completely fine. Just say so, and we can move on. You can stop the interview at any time for any reason, and that won't affect anything at all, including our lessons together. I'm gonna record our conversation so I can listen back to it later, but the recording is just for me. I won't use your real name anywhere in my research. You'll be given a different name. You can choose your pseudonym if you want.

Speaker 2 00:51
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 00:51
And nobody reading my work will be able to identify you.Do you have any questions before we start?

Speaker 2 00:58
Uh, no.

Speaker 1 00:59
No?You happy to go ahead?

Speaker 2 01:00
Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:01
Amazing.So before we get into improvisation, I'm curious about you and yourself as a singer.

Speaker 2 01:09
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 01:09
So how long have you been singing, and what is it that you love about singing?

Speaker 2 01:14
Uh, I think I've been singing s- I mean, kind of since I could talk 'cause-

Speaker 1 01:18
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:19
...like, even if, like, I'm not reading music, like I kind of just sing to myself, like random songs that I've, like, listened to.

Speaker 1 01:25
Okay, nice.Since, so that, a really long time.

Speaker 2 01:28
Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:29
What is it that, uh, you enjoy about singing?Or like what, why do you do it?

Speaker 2 01:34
Well, I really, like, enjoy singing overall, and also I like listening to music, so then kind of singing it back to myself.

Speaker 1 01:41
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:42
Listening to, like, that's what I like.

Speaker 1 01:43
Do you think you're good at singing?

Speaker 2 01:46
Uh.Uh, I think I'm all right.I-

Speaker 1 01:50
Yeah?

Speaker 2 01:50
Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:51
Okay, nice.Have other people told you you're good at singing in your life?

Speaker 2 01:54
Yeah, but it's only, like, my family-

Speaker 1 01:56
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:56
...so they're gonna have to say.

Speaker 1 01:59
Um, how would you describe yourself as a singer, or what kind of singer do you think you are?

Speaker 2 02:06
Um, I'd say I can be a bit, like if I have to sing in front of people I don't know, I'm a bit nervous, so sometimes I'm kind of don't sing as loud as I can or, like, as confident as I can. So I'd say I'm not hugely confident, but when I'm, like, singing in front of, I don't know, like, people I know, then I'm more confident.

Speaker 1 02:23
Okay, nice.What's encourage you to keep going with singing or to continue?

Speaker 2 02:29
Well, I wanna be able to reach grade eight, hopefully.

Speaker 1 02:32
Okay.

Speaker 2 02:33
'Cause that's a goal-

Speaker 1 02:34
Yeah, totally

Speaker 2 02:34
...that I'd wanna do.But, yeah, I just wanna be able to carry on singing and, like, when I'm older, be able to, like, join, like, a choir or something.

Speaker 1 02:42
Okay, nice. That's lovely. That's really nice. Um, okay, so let's move on to the improvisation element now.Do you remember the first time you were asked to improvise?

Speaker 2 02:55
Um, I asked?

Speaker 1 02:58
Uh, you were asked to-

Speaker 2 02:59
Oh

Speaker 1 02:59
...improvise.Or you, or just you improvised.

Speaker 2 03:02
I think it was, like, when we were practicing for my grade.

Speaker 1 03:05
Yeah?

Speaker 2 03:06
Yeah.

Speaker 1 03:06
How, do you remember what happened or what, like, what that made you feel?

Speaker 2 03:13
Well, I kind of enjoyed improvising 'cause I don't really find it, like, as hard as, like, sight reading something 'cause if you just kind of go along with, like, with what you can hear, then it's-

Speaker 1 03:23
Okay, nice.So it's something that you enjoy doing?

Speaker 2 03:27
Yeah.

Speaker 1 03:28
And you pref- why do you think you prefer it to sight reading?

Speaker 2 03:31
Um, I feel like sight reading I'm not confident to, to confident enough, like, sing it as like, I don't know, as a, 'cause with improvisation, like, nothing's, like, wrong.Or it can be wrong, but-

Speaker 1 03:42
Okay

Speaker 2 03:42
...you can kind of make it up as you go.So-

Speaker 1 03:44
Okay.Whereas sight reading-

Speaker 2 03:48
It's just, you have to actually read the music and understand the rhythm, which sometimes I'm not very good at this too much.

Speaker 1 03:56
So you feel you're more inclined to make a mistake with-

Speaker 2 04:00
Yeah

Speaker 1 04:01
...sight reading?

Speaker 2 04:01
Yeah.

Speaker 1 04:01
Okay.And what, when you ma- that kind of feeling of making a mistake, what does that do?What does that feeling bring up?

Speaker 2 04:09
Well, that, like, kind of makes me spiral.Like the r- With like, I don't know.'Cause if I make a mistake, then I kind of overthink it too much, honestly.

Speaker 1 04:19
Really?

Speaker 2 04:19
Yeah.

Speaker 1 04:20
Do you think, is that something that you've always experienced, or is that something that is newer to you?

Speaker 2 04:28
Um, always probably.

Speaker 1 04:29
Really?Even, so even when you were, like, two?

Speaker 2 04:32
Only- …probably when I started, like, doing, like, actual grades.

Speaker 1 04:37
Okay, yeah.How old was that?

Speaker 2 04:39
Um, I think year five.

Speaker 1 04:42
Okay.So around 10?

Speaker 2 04:43
Yeah.

Speaker 1 04:43
11.So when you had that kind of pressure of exams or outcome-focused singing-

Speaker 2 04:50
Yeah

Speaker 1 04:51
…that was when the feeling of a mistake-

Speaker 2 04:53
Yeah.

Speaker 1 04:53
Yeah.When you say you spiral, do you feel comfortable talking about what that is?What, where do you go?What do you spiral into?

Speaker 2 05:00

Like, as in, like, I kind of get worried for, like, the rest of the exercises.I don't know.'Cause if I make one mistake or, like, that's gonna ruin, like, my result by a lot, but-

Speaker 1 05:11
Okay, cool.So would you feel like that even in, in a lesson?

Speaker 2 05:14
Mm-mm.

Speaker 1 05:15
So the mistakes, you're not a- afraid of mistakes in a lesson so much-

Speaker 2 05:19
I'm not

Speaker 1 05:19
...but if you were in your exam and you made the mistake-

Speaker 2 05:22
Yeah

Speaker 1 05:22
...that feels-

Speaker 2 05:23
Yeah

Speaker 1 05:23
...that sends you off.

Speaker 2 05:24
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 05:24
Okay.I get ya.Um, what is it that you enjoy about improvising?

Speaker 2 05:30
Um, I don't know.It's kind of you can, the fact that you can make it up as you go along, and it's kind of hard to get it wrong.

Speaker 1 05:38
Okay, nice.Is there, can you think of, do you improvise on your own, like, when you're not in lessons?

Speaker 2 05:45
Well, yeah, sometimes, like, if I'm singing a song that I know and I don't remember the rest, I kind of just make it up.

Speaker 1 05:51
Really?

Speaker 2 05:52
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 05:52
That's fun.Is that, is that something you enjoy doing?

Speaker 2 05:55
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:55
Okay, nice.Is there a time that you can think about that improvisation felt hard or uncomfortable?

Speaker 2 06:05
Maybe a bit in the exam, 'cause they're kind of like watching you and you're a bit like, "Oh." But other than that, like, if it's, like, in a comfortable environment, then, like, it's fine.

Speaker 1 06:16
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 06:17
But in a exam it's more stressful.But I feel like once you start, then it's fine.

Speaker 1 06:21
Have you ever improvised in front of a, like, an audience or as part of a gig?

Speaker 2 06:24
No.

Speaker 1 06:25
How would that make you feel?

Speaker 2 06:28
I would probably be a bit scared, 'cause it's... And if you like... 'Cause with actual music and, like, you've learned, then it's easier to, I don't know. 'Cause with

improvisation you have to make it up and then, yeah, I'd feel a bit scared doing it in front of, like, a lot of people.

Speaker 1 06:44
Would it be something you'd want to try?

Speaker 2 06:47
Maybe. Take a bit of time.

Speaker 1 06:49
I'm not gonna hold you to it.

Speaker 2 06:51
Yeah.

Speaker 1 06:52
But for now, okay, so for now, improvisation is something that you enjoy doing, you're comfortable doing it in lessons.It's maybe a bit scary in an exam, but it's, like, okay once you get going.

Speaker 2 07:03
Yeah.

Speaker 1 07:04
But if you were to do it in an audience setting, like as part of a performance, that would feel-

Speaker 2 07:09
Yeah, scary.

Speaker 1 07:10
Scary?

Speaker 2 07:10
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 07:11
But it's something in...You mentioned time.Do you think it's something that you could see yourself doing in time?Or is it something that you're like, "No, I don't see that for myself"?

Speaker 2 07:19
Mm, I don't think so.

Speaker 1 07:21
Really?

Speaker 2 07:21
I think if I was gonna sing in front of an audience, it would be a piece that I, like, know.

Speaker 1 07:25
Okay.

Speaker 2 07:27
Yeah.

Speaker 1 07:27
Why is that?

Speaker 2 07:29
'Cause I feel, I like being prepared. Like, I don't like the feeling of not being prepared going into, like, especially in front of an audience. With an exam, I, improvisation's okay, 'cause it's, like, only a few bars, but-

Speaker 1 07:42
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 07:43
...like a whole thing in front of a lot of people, I don't know.I don't like th- thinking of that.

Speaker 1 07:49
What does feeling unprepared feel like?

Speaker 2 07:52
Well, then I just kind of, I don't know.Like, I feel worried about-

Speaker 1 07:56
Okay

Speaker 2 07:57
...'cause being prepared, like, at least you just know what you're gonna be doing.

Speaker 1 08:00
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 08:01

But not knowing what you're doing, you don't really know what it's gonna end with.

Speaker 1 08:05
Yeah. I get ya. I get ya. Okay, that's interesting stuff. Um, so even though you enjoy improvisation, you can't see it being something that becomes, like, something that you do. Imagine, like, when you leave school and you're looking at doing mu- maybe you're at uni and you join a band or you do something like that, you wouldn't be like, "Ooh, I'd like to try improvising in this context"?

Speaker 2 08:35
Mm, I don't think so, but then I wouldn't completely put the idea away.Like, I would may- maybe I'd try, like, but-

Speaker 1 08:44
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 08:44
...at the moment I don't see.

Speaker 1 08:46
No?Would it be something that you would enjoy, and again, I'm not gonna hold you to this, and be honest with this answer-

Speaker 2 08:53
Yeah

Speaker 1 08:53
...is there, is there, is it something that you think you would enjoy in lessons spending more time on?

Speaker 2 09:00
Doing improvisation? Mm, it depends, 'cause mainly in lessons I like just singing through, like, pieces.

Speaker 1 09:09
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 09:10
And then maybe, like, changing, like, a f- few parts of the piece, but I don't know, like, in what, like, context would more improvisation be just-

Speaker 1 09:19

So, like, you know how sometimes in lessons we will change bits, but quite often I will change it and you'll learn that? Or, like, in the Dream a Little Dream of Me solo that we did-

Speaker 2 09:30
Oh, yeah

Speaker 1 09:31
...I kind of, we wrote it together, but I guided you quite a lot.

Speaker 2 09:36
Yeah.

Speaker 1 09:36
It would be like developing the skills for you to create that stuff on your own.

Speaker 2 09:41
Oh. Mm, I don't know. I feel like I wouldn't, I would be worried it wouldn't sound like the piece.

Speaker 1 09:53
So you feel worried about...What do you feel worried about?

Speaker 2 09:58
I don't know.That, like, I mean, in our lessons I wouldn't mind if it sounded a bit weird, but, like, if I had to perform it with my own improvisation, I can't be worried that I wouldn't sound-

Speaker 1 10:10
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 10:10
...good.

Speaker 1 10:12
Have you ever felt like that with any other parts of your singing?

Speaker 2 10:15
Like?

Speaker 1 10:17
Like, did you ever feel like that about pieces or about, I guess pieces is the main one.Pieces, scales, or, like, singing in choirs or harmonizing or anything like that?

Speaker 2 10:28
No.

Speaker 1 10:28
No?

Speaker 2 10:28
No.

Speaker 1 10:28
That, you've always had a bit more confidence, like, doing that stuff?

Speaker 2 10:31
Yeah.

Speaker 1 10:32
Okay, interesting.So it's, improvisation is, like, unique in that way?

Speaker 2 10:36
Yeah.

Speaker 1 10:37
Okay, cool.Um, is there a time that you can remember, like a specific experience that improvisation felt really good or quite exciting?

Speaker 2 10:49
I think when we first tried it, 'cause I didn't really know that that was an exercise you did-

Speaker 1 10:53
Mm

Speaker 2 10:53
...for this exam board.So I thought it was quite fun, like, in different keys, like, doing different improvisation.

Speaker 1 11:00
Mm-hmm.Were you, how did you, when you heard it back, how did you...Well, I guess you didn't.We never recorded it.But as you were doing it, what felt good about it?

Speaker 2 11:12
I don't know.Like, 'cause I was in, like, a comfortable, like, environment.

Speaker 1 11:17
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 11:17
Because, so if I made, like, a mistake or it sounded, like, off, then it wouldn't really matter.I just, I don't know, it was kind of fun making up stuff.

Speaker 1 11:25
Mm-hmm. And so you enjoyed the making up experience?

Speaker 2 11:30
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:30
So you enjoy m- the ma- you enjoy that process of it?

Speaker 2 11:35
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:35
But when it comes to being, like, evaluated or judged-

Speaker 2 11:40
Yeah, that's when it-

Speaker 1 11:41
That's when it becomes

Speaker 2 11:42
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:43
That's when it becomes scary.

Speaker 2 11:45
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:46
So do you think there's a way you could, we could look at, like, bridging that?

Speaker 2 11:51
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:52

Would that be something you'd want to do, though?

Speaker 2 11:56
Um, I don't know, 'cause I've, because at the moment I've only really done, 'cause I've only done the part of improvisation in the exam.

Speaker 1 12:02
Mm.

Speaker 2 12:02
So I've only r- really been, like, 'cause I did, like, classical singing before.

Speaker 1 12:06
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 12:06
So it's always been like get this note right.So-

Speaker 1 12:09
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 12:10
...I don't know I feel like I've always been comfortable with that, so, like, the different, like, the change between the two would be a bit-

Speaker 1 12:18
Would be scary.

Speaker 2 12:19
Yeah.

Speaker 1 12:20
Okay, interesting.For me it sounds like there's definitely, definitely within your capability, you know?

Speaker 2 12:27
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 12:28
Maybe that's a mindset shift of-

Speaker 2 12:30
Yeah

Speaker 1 12:31
... does that resonate? That maybe it's just like, 'cause y- when you hear yourself improvise, again, sorry if this is an uncomfortable question, but when you hear yourself improvise, do you think, "That sounds all right?"

Speaker 2 12:43
Yeah, most of the time.

Speaker 1 12:45
Yeah?So you trust your ability to improvise-

Speaker 2 12:49
Yeah

Speaker 1 12:49
...to an extent?

Speaker 2 12:50
Yeah, to an extent.

Speaker 1 12:51
Yeah.Okay, cool.So if you do that, eventually, hopefully you might feel-

Speaker 2 12:57
Yeah

Speaker 1 12:57
...like you could transfer it.Um, okay.Is there a time, a specific time that you felt really confident with your singing in general?

Speaker 2 13:11
Um, I think the times when I feel confident when I'm singing is if I'm halfway through a piece and I feel like it's gone well so far, then I feel more confident-

Speaker 1 13:20
Mm

Speaker 2 13:20
...to, like, sing out more.

Speaker 1 13:22
And go for it?

Speaker 2 13:23

Yeah.

Speaker 1 13:23
Is there a specific time that that happened or a specific memory that you have?

Speaker 2 13:28
I think it was probably when we were f- like rehearsing with [school accompanists] before my exam.

Speaker 1 13:35
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 13:36
That was like, 'cause I, 'cause I felt prepared, so like-

Speaker 1 13:38
Yeah

Speaker 2 13:39
…I felt more confident singing.

Speaker 1 13:40
Okay, that's nice.That's really good.Um, so would you say the prepare- the fact that you felt prepared, is that what made you feel that way?

Speaker 2 13:51
Yeah.

Speaker 1 13:51
Was there anything else that made you feel…

Speaker 2 13:54
I don't know, like, I enjoyed it more than, like, being stressed about, like, me not getting a good mark on my singing.

Speaker 1 14:00
Mm-hmm.So there's the enjoyment overrided, overrode the, like-

Speaker 2 14:06
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 14:07
…I wanna get a good mark on this, kind of?

Speaker 2 14:09
Yeah.

Speaker 1 14:09
Interesting.Okay, cool.Um, when you listen to music, do you ever hear improvisation?

Speaker 2 14:21
Um, I don't know.I've, I've never thought of it like that.Like, I've never been like, "Ooh, I can tell she's improvising." Um, the only one is Dream a Little Dream of Me, like when at the end-

Speaker 1 14:34
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 14:34
...it sounded a bit like that, but I haven't really, like, listened out-

Speaker 1 14:39
Listened

Speaker 2 14:39
...to it.

Speaker 1 14:40
So in terms of, like, learning about improvisation, what it is, it's the first time you'd ever really thought about it, in our, in our lessons?

Speaker 2 14:47
Uh, yeah.

Speaker 1 14:48
Crazy. That's cool. Is it something that you're aware of within music more generally?Like, when you, would you hear instrumentalists do it more?

Speaker 2 14:58
Uh, yeah.I'd say when it's an instrument by themself-

Speaker 1 15:02
Mm

Speaker 2 15:02
...it's more easy to hear.

Speaker 1 15:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:04
Like with jazz and stuff-

Speaker 1 15:05
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 15:06
...'cause my dad's very into jazz.

Speaker 1 15:08
Is he?Okay.

Speaker 2 15:09
So, like, improvisation jazz.

Speaker 1 15:12
Okay.I get ya.Um, interesting.Would you say in terms of, like, the fear of making mistakes, is that something that is common to you amongst other things, like in other subjects?

Speaker 2 15:29
Yeah.

Speaker 1 15:29
It is?

Speaker 2 15:29
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 15:29
So it's not just singing?

Speaker 2 15:31
Mm-mm.

Speaker 1 15:31
It's-

Speaker 2 15:31
That's just kind of what I've always been like-

Speaker 1 15:34
Okay.

Speaker 2 15:34
...with, like, exams and, I don't know, I w- like, even with, like, sport, like, I get scared of, like, making a mistake.

Speaker 1 15:43
Really?What sports do you play?

Speaker 2 15:44
Um, hockey, netball and tennis.

Speaker 1 15:47
How easy is it to be fully prepared for, like, a game of hockey or a game of tennis?

Speaker 2 15:53
I feel like it's kind of unpredictable how it will go, 'cause you don't, if the team is, like, good.

Speaker 1 15:58
Okay, yeah. Is that feeling of, like, going into a game, a sports game, are there any comparisons that you can make between that and that feeling of improvising? 'Cause I feel like there's maybe similarities in that, like-

Speaker 2 16:11
Yeah.I'd say, like, if, like, you have, like, the one hockey and, like, you're one, 1v1 with someone else, like, you don't really know how it's gonna go, 'cause you have to get around them-

Speaker 1 16:21
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 16:22
...but they could tackle you, and then you have to, the other team has the ball.

Speaker 1 16:26
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 16:27
Yeah.

Speaker 1 16:28

How does that, that feeling of, like, is that, can you, it, does it feel s- the feeling that you get in those, in the moment of, like, improvising potentially in an exam or even if you were to imagine what it would feel like to improvise in front of an audience, and then the feeling of, like, that 1v1 moment in a hockey game, do they feel similar or does it feel different?

Speaker 2 16:47
I'd say it does feel similar, 'cause if you go around that person, then you feel more confident to carry on-

Speaker 1 16:53
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 16:53
...which is a bit like improvisation.If it's going okay, then, like, you feel more confident-

Speaker 1 16:58
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 16:58
...to carry on, like, singing.

Speaker 1 17:00
Mm-hmm.So it's when, when going well and doing something well is a good motivator to be...

Speaker 2 17:08
Like, I don't know, more motivated to carry on and be more confident with, like, singing.

Speaker 1 17:14
Okay, nice. Yeah, that's good. Um, in terms of how improvisation is introduced to singers your age, so I'm, in my research, I'm looking specifically at, like, working with teenagers and m- mostly teenage girls actually-

Speaker 2 17:38
Mm

Speaker 1 17:38
...'cause I think it's slightly different working with girls than working with boys.Is that something you would resonate with or does that feel something different?

Speaker 2 17:45

Um, I don't, don't know.

Speaker 1 17:50
No, that's okay if you don't know the answer to that. Um, but if you were, when introdu- working with, like, introducing improvisation to people your age, do you think certain things should be considered for the teacher? Like, should the teacher-

Speaker 2 18:08
Um-

Speaker 1 18:09
...think about certain things?

Speaker 2 18:10
I feel like they should consider that someone might be definitely more scared than to do improvisation than just, like, learning a piece. And maybe to do diff- before going straight into it, like, kind of teaching them how to understand to improvise-

Speaker 1 18:28
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 18:28
...maybe.

Speaker 1 18:30
Is that something that you would like, is that something, is there specific exercises or things that we've done or that you've done with other teachers that has helped to, like, those exercises that you think of when you're improvising?

Speaker 2 18:44
I think when we do our, um, warm up, or we go up the scale-

Speaker 1 18:50
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 18:50
...and then in different keys, you kind of understand which notes tell you, like, which-

Speaker 1 18:56
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 18:57

...how do I explain that?Like, let's say you're in the right, you're singing in the right key-

Speaker 1 19:01
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:01
...and, like, yeah, right rhythm and stuff.

Speaker 1 19:03
Okay, cool.So having an understanding of, like, hear it, being able to hear the key center and the tonal home of where you're singing-

Speaker 2 19:14
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 19:14
...helps you.Do you think about it in terms of, like, I'm singing a C, I'm singing a D, I'm singing an E, or are you just thinking about how it sounds?

Speaker 2 19:21
How it sounds.

Speaker 1 19:22
Yeah.Okay.And when you're improvising, can you hear ahead of what you're doing or are you just, like, is it just coming out of you before you're even thinking?

Speaker 2 19:30
I feel like it's kind of a mix of both.Like, sometimes I can hear what I'm gonna sing next, or, like, I kind of just go with how it sounds.

Speaker 1 19:36
Cross your fingers and hope.

Speaker 2 19:38
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:39
Is there an experience of it makes you feel more confident?

Speaker 2 19:43
Um, I feel like just not under exam, like when I wasn't in exam.

Speaker 1 19:49

Mm-hmm. Okay, I get ya. Um, okay. Thank you so much. Is there anything else about your experience of improvisation that you'd like to tell me, or anything that we haven't talked about that feels important?

Speaker 2 20:02
Mm.

Speaker 1 20:02
No?

Speaker 2 20:02
No.

Speaker 1 20:03
Okay, great.Thanks so much.

Speaker 2 20:05
Oh, yeah.

Charlotte – 1I

Speaker 1 = Meg, Speaker 2 = Charlotte

Speaker 1 00:01
Hello. Um, before we get started, I just wanted to have a quick chat about what today is. As you know, I'm doing some research about singing and improvisation, and I'd love to hear about your experiences and how you think and feel about it. There are no right or wrong answers. Whatever you think or feel is exactly what I'm interested in. A few important things I want you to know. You don't have to answer anything you don't want to. If a question feels uncomfortable or you'd rather skip it, that's completely fine. Just say so, and we can move on. You can stop the interview at any time for any reason, and that won't affect anything at all, including our letter scale. That's less relevant now, but, um, I'm going to record our conversation so I can listen back to it later, but the recording is just for me. I won't use your real name anywhere. You'll be given a different name and nobody reading my work will be able to identify you. Do you have... And I'll remove any identifying factors, if that makes sense. So like, if you mention anyone else or school or whatever. Uh, do you have any questions before we start?

Speaker 2 00:59
No.

Speaker 1 01:00
Are you happy to go ahead?

Speaker 2 01:01
Yes.

Speaker 1 01:02
Great.Okay.So, um, before we get into improvisation, I'd love to just hear about yourself as a singer, how long you've been singing, what you like about it, how you see it in your life moving forward.

Speaker 2 01:16
Okay. Um, I have been singing and been involved with music from since I can remember, a very, very young age. Um, more recently, last three years probably, singing has been a big part of my life and yeah, it just brings me so much joy. Um, especially jazz, sort of discovering that genre felt very right-

Speaker 1 01:44
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 01:45
...having been brought up in sort of a classical setting.

Speaker 1 01:47
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 01:48
Um, and did I miss anything else in the questions?

Speaker 1 01:54
I guess a bit about like how singing is gonna manifest for you in the future-

Speaker 2 01:58
Okay

Speaker 1 01:58
...if you'd like to know.

Speaker 2 01:59
Well, obviously, I'm pursuing it as a career-

Speaker 1 02:02
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 02:03
... in a degree. Um, and I'll always want singing in my life, whether that's professionally or as a hobby. Um, and I hope it will take me somewhere where I can do it consistently and because it makes me so happy. Um, and it makes me feel it's a creative way to-

Speaker 1 02:24
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 02:26
...sing what I'm feeling, you know?

Speaker 1 02:30
Yeah.

Speaker 2 02:30
That's the word.

Speaker 1 02:30
Sing what you're feeling. I like it. Okay. Um, so the next... That's quite helpful. How would you see singing as part of your... Would you see singing as part of your identity, or is it something that you like to do? Are they kind of-

Speaker 2 02:46
S-

Speaker 1 02:46
What's that relationship?

Speaker 2 02:48
Um, as an identity, possibly.I haven't really thought too much about it-

Speaker 1 02:54
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 02:54
...but, you know, I do think when sort of I introduce myself to someone, singing is something that I definitely include.

Speaker 1 03:06
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 03:06
Um, and it is not a defining factor, but it is a very big part of my life.

Speaker 1 03:12
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 03:12
So yeah, but obviously it is, it's not a hobby.It's more than a hobby for me.

Speaker 1 03:17
Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 2 03:17
Um, and yeah.

Speaker 1 03:20
Nice.So let's move into improvising a little bit.There's obviously some of these I know the answers to already, but it will be helpful to know and-

Speaker 2 03:28
Yeah

Speaker 1 03:28
…you know, hear again. Um, have you ever…Wha- Um, start again.Can you tell me about the first time you remember being asked to improvise?

Speaker 2 03:44
The first time was in our lesson.

Speaker 1 03:45
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 03:46
Well, actually- …no.First time I was asked to improvise was at a choir festival when I was eleven.

Speaker 1 04:03
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 04:03
And they just told me to jam out, and I was, like, very stunned.I didn't know what that meant.

Speaker 1 04:11
Okay.

Speaker 2 04:11
I didn't know how one would do that.I mean, it came naturally to a point, but you know, it is technical, and you do need to know things.

Speaker 1 04:19
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:20
It was very, um, sort of confronting to me.

Speaker 1 04:26
How did…Yeah.Okay.Can you go into that more?

Speaker 2 04:29
Um, sort of the whole feeling about getting it wrong-

Speaker 1 04:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 04:33
...um, was very present, and judgment from others, um, and sort of not knowing what I'm doing, even though it does come to me naturally in some way.

Speaker 1 04:43
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:44
Um, so yeah, it-

Speaker 1 04:47
Did you know that was coming up?Like, did you know that was gonna be asked of you-

Speaker 2 04:51
No

Speaker 1 04:51
...or was it just sprung on you?

Speaker 2 04:52
It was sprung on me, um, which probably isn't very fair for an eleven-year-old.

Speaker 1 04:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 04:58
But, um-

Speaker 1 05:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 05:00
...I mean, I tried. Made me very upset, I will say, and I didn't expect it would because I'd never experienced-

Speaker 1 05:06
Yeah

Speaker 2 05:06

…something like that.Um-

Speaker 1 05:08
So it ma- it made you feel…You felt upset-

Speaker 2 05:10
Yeah

Speaker 1 05:10
…with that experience?

Speaker 2 05:11
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:11
It was upsetting.

Speaker 2 05:12
Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:12
Interesting.

Speaker 2 05:13
I mean, you know that of our lessons.

Speaker 1 05:15
I'm sorry.

Speaker 2 05:15
It's okay.

Speaker 1 05:15
I'm sorry that happened to you.Um, okay.And then you said the other time was obviously in our lesson.

Speaker 2 05:20
Yes.That was more I knew it was coming-

Speaker 1 05:23
Yeah.

Speaker 2 05:23

…sort of situation. Um, I mean, over the, what, two years we had lessons together?Um-

Speaker 1 05:31
Longer than that.Three.

Speaker 2 05:33
My GCSEs?

Speaker 1 05:35
Yeah.You were fifth.

Speaker 2 05:36
Was I? Oh. Um, you know, the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Speaker 1 05:41
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 05:41
Um, but at the beginning, there were tears involved. There were… You did have to turn around and close your eyes. You know, things like that, that sort of gave me a small weird comfort that I wasn't being watched.

Speaker 1 05:55
So obvious- with the tears, do you know, can you attach an emotion to that?

Speaker 2 06:08
The fear of being judged-

Speaker 1 06:11
Okay

Speaker 2 06:11
…and the fear of getting it wrong.

Speaker 1 06:14
Okay.So it was a fear-based-

Speaker 2 06:17
Yeah, definitely

Speaker 1 06:19
…feeling.

Speaker 2 06:19
Yeah.

Speaker 1 06:20
Do you, did you ever have that singing outside of improvisation?

Speaker 2 06:25
Yes. I used to really struggle with being on stage.

Speaker 1 06:30
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 06:30
Um, not in a choir obviously, but singing solos and I stopped music pretty much completely for a year-

Speaker 1 06:41
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 06:41
...because it scared me so much when I joined [school]. Um, and then the more I did it and the more I put myself out there and told myself, "Don't be stupid," you know?

Speaker 1 06:50
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 06:51
"Believe in yourself," it-

Speaker 1 06:52
Mm

Speaker 2 06:52
...got a lot better and-

Speaker 1 06:54
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 06:54
...you know, I don't cry on stage anymore, so.

Speaker 1 06:56

That's exciting. So at, 'cause obviously when we first started having lessons, you were singing quite comfortably in the lesson.

Speaker 2 07:04
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 07:05
It was only improvisation that was the moment that felt...Could you, do you know why, do you...That's kind of my que- Like, was there a difference between the two at that stage? Do you know what-

Speaker 2 07:19
What do you mean?

Speaker 1 07:20
Well, 'cause, like, you'd sing a song very comfortably in that class-

Speaker 2 07:22
Yeah

Speaker 1 07:22
...in the lesson.But then as soon as we'd improvise, that, those emotions would come forward. So what do you think it was about improvisation that was different to the songs?

Speaker 2 07:34
Um. Okay, so the songs I have a basis to learn off of-

Speaker 1 07:44
Yeah

Speaker 2 07:44
...and know what it's supposed to sound like and how it goes and the melody and rhythm.And obviously you can change that and make it your own, but you're still doing it based off of something.

Speaker 1 07:54
Yeah.

Speaker 2 07:55
Um, whereas improvisation is, you know, just completely a new, new melody.

Speaker 1 08:01

Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:02
Syllables, all of that.Very different to, you know, changing the rhythm of a line or-

Speaker 1 08:09
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 08:09
...something like that. So I think creating something new when I've never sort of done any sort of writing was very, not confronting, but-

Speaker 1 08:23
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:23
...it was just a completely new and scary experience that I hadn't-

Speaker 1 08:27
Hadn't had before

Speaker 2 08:28
...hadn't had before.Yeah.

Speaker 1 08:29
Yeah. I get ya. How, is there a time, a specific time, I guess you've kind of covered that, but, so if it's... Hmm, okay, let's talk about both those experiences that you've mentioned. The one when you were 11 and in our lessons. Can you explain or did you notice anything, like, physically? Obviously you've spoken about tears and crying.

Speaker 2 08:51
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 08:51
Was there anything else that you felt in your body?

Speaker 2 08:55
Um.

Speaker 1 08:56
If you can remember.

Speaker 2 09:03
I, I remember I'd always feel like I'm shaking, but I'm actually not.

Speaker 1 09:07
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 09:08
Um, and I had that with just normal performances before I got my confidence where I'd come off stage and people would say, "Oh, you look so comfortable up there."

Speaker 1 09:16
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:17
And I'd feel completely the opposite.

Speaker 1 09:18
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:19
Sometimes I wouldn't remember a performance-

Speaker 1 09:21
Okay

Speaker 2 09:21
...because of how-

Speaker 1 09:23
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 09:23
...you know, big and scary it was for me.Um, with improvisation, yeah, just the same sort of nervousness.

Speaker 1 09:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:36
And sort of feel it in your gut like, "Oh, this is happening."

Speaker 1 09:40
Okay.Yeah.

Speaker 2 09:41
That sort of-

Speaker 1 09:42
Okay.Um, can you tell me about that kind of fear of judgment feeling?

Speaker 2 09:53
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 09:54
Is that something that you feel with a lot of things that you do? Or is it kind of more specific to singing and improvising?

Speaker 2 10:03
I think it's more specific to singing because I always grew up in a musical family and since thinking about why I felt these things, it was very much a comparing myself to my sister-

Speaker 1 10:16
Okay

Speaker 2 10:16
...who was always big and open in the music world and everyone in the school knew her and-

Speaker 1 10:21
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:22
...she was sort of number one at this/that, you know.

Speaker 1 10:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:25
And, you know, the feeling of their, you know, obviously they wouldn't compare me to my sister, but I immediately thought that they would.

Speaker 1 10:36
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 10:37

And then once I got over that, it made it a lot easier.

Speaker 1 10:39
Okay.So that was like a, a specific marker for you of a thing that was challenging you in that?

Speaker 2 10:47
Yeah.

Speaker 1 10:48
Interesting. Did you feel that wider, that kind of judgment more widely? Is it kind of where you were within your community of, like, that school community, the judgment came from there? Or was it from ev- almost, like, all angles?

Speaker 2 11:03
Um.

Speaker 1 11:05
Or not something you've thought about?

Speaker 2 11:07
It's not really something I've thought about, but I mean, it was also self-judgment as well as peers.

Speaker 1 11:14
Okay.

Speaker 2 11:14
It was like, "I'll never be as good as my sister." That sort of thing.

Speaker 1 11:17
Okay.Yeah.I get you.Um, is there a time that you felt really confident improvising?

Speaker 2 11:31
Um, yes and no.

Speaker 1 11:34
Okay.

Speaker 2 11:37
I'd say, for example, if I'm improvising over a specific song-

Speaker 1 11:46

Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 11:47
...so for my auditions-

Speaker 1 11:48
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 11:49
...um, I'd do a new scat solo each time I sang the song, and the more I did it, the more-

Speaker 1 11:55
Yeah

Speaker 2 11:56
...it felt easy and I felt confident. Um, but then during the audition it wouldn't feel the same as when I'm doing it alone. So-

Speaker 1 12:04
Okay

Speaker 2 12:04
...confidence by myself, yes

Speaker 1 12:08
Okay.

Speaker 2 12:09
But when I put myself in front of, you know, professional jazz musicians it was like-

Speaker 1 12:15
Okay

Speaker 2 12:16
...yeah.

Speaker 1 12:17
More, more scary.

Speaker 2 12:18
Yes.More scary.Definitely more scary.

Speaker 1 12:20
More scary.When you're on your own improvising, what does that feel like?

Speaker 2 12:25
Um, it feels good.I don't think that I push myself enough when I am alone.

Speaker 1 12:35
Okay.

Speaker 2 12:35
And that's why our lessons are so good, is because you made me do it.Whereas if I mess up, I'd sort of just stop and start again when I should just keep going.

Speaker 1 12:44
Keep going.

Speaker 2 12:45
Um, yeah.

Speaker 1 12:46
So do you- That self-evaluation, does that happen even when you're on your own?

Speaker 2 12:50
Yeah, def- I mean.Yes.So for example, I'm doing it in my bedroom.

Speaker 1 12:58
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 12:58
Just having a-

Speaker 1 13:00
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 13:00
...you know, a little sing song.

Speaker 1 13:01
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:02
And then I, like, do something, in quotes, wrong.

Speaker 1 13:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:06
It sounds not right, right? Um, and I'll like look around just check nobody heard it. Something like that. But

Speaker 1 13:13
Okay.

Speaker 2 13:13
Yeah.

Speaker 1 13:16
Okay. Get ya. So even on your own it's not something that feels always ... Is it fa- In, until that moment where you maybe ma- might make a mistake or, in inverted commas, mistake, is it something that you enjoy?

Speaker 2 13:33
Oh, I love it when it goes right.

Speaker 1 13:35
Okay.

Speaker 2 13:36
When it sounds right and-

Speaker 1 13:37
Yeah

Speaker 2 13:38
...you know.But I don't feel like I have the ability to plan what I'm gonna sing next in my head.

Speaker 1 13:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:45
So it's sort of just whatever happens, happens.

Speaker 1 13:48
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:48
And if it's wrong, sorry, inverted commas, wrong-

Speaker 1 13:50
Wrong, yeah

Speaker 2 13:51
...um, then I sort of have a meltdown.Not an actual meltdown.I don't cry anymore when I improvise.

Speaker 1 13:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:57
But, um, yeah.

Speaker 1 13:58
But that's progress in itself, no?

Speaker 2 13:59
Yeah, definitely.

Speaker 1 14:00
Like, the fact, the fact that, you know, it's not something that is as emotive for you at this point.

Speaker 2 14:08
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1 14:08
Do you know what it was that helped you get there or move in the right direction?

Speaker 2 14:13
Definitely taking sort of ...Well, learning scat solos and vocal leases-

Speaker 1 14:22
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 14:22
...definitely helped me to then, not give me ideas, but inspire me to what style I could improvise in or-

Speaker 1 14:30

Yeah

Speaker 2 14:31
...different phrasing and, um, syllables.And I think learning a scat solo that's previously written helped me-

Speaker 1 14:41
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 14:42
...a lot.Um, and then performing that on stage, for example.

Speaker 1 14:46
Yeah. Do ... Is there, are there any other ... Was there anything kind of internally that you did to help find more confidence within improvisation? Or any kind of like epiphanies that you had? It was like, "No, this is actually something I should, I can do, I can learn to enjoy"?

Speaker 2 15:04
Definitely the epiphany about my sister.

Speaker 1 15:06
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:07
Um, and I do tell myself off when I-

Speaker 1 15:11
Okay

Speaker 2 15:11
...you know, mentally have a go at myself.

Speaker 1 15:14
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:15
Um, but it's not even that I do have a go at myself, it's just I get upset. There's no sort of thought behind it.

Speaker 1 15:23
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:24
It just happens.

Speaker 1 15:24
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:24
Which doesn't happen anymore. But, um, yeah, I think sort of learning other people's music helps me.

Speaker 1 15:34
Okay. What was something maybe in the learning process that ma- that made it more difficult to do? Or i- is there anything that springs to mind? Like, anything that was maybe less helpful in that?

Speaker 2 15:55
Um-

Speaker 1 15:56
And it can be something that I told you to do.

Speaker 2 15:59
No.It was [student] put me on the spot at his house.

Speaker 1 16:05
Okay.

Speaker 2 16:06
At one of their jam sessions.

Speaker 1 16:08
Okay.

Speaker 2 16:08
Over Christmas. And I was like, "No."

Speaker 1 16:12
Okay.Yeah.

Speaker 2 16:12
You know, improvising in itself is scary, but then not knowing you're about to do it is a whole other thing. Um, so that definitely didn't help me. Um, I mean, it did make me think about the idea that that definitely can happen in future and will.

Speaker 1 16:30
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 16:30
Especially going to [Conservatoire].Um-

Speaker 1 16:32
Going to jazz school.

Speaker 2 16:33
Yeah.Um, but, I don't know, just if I know I have to improvise I'd like some notice.

Speaker 1 16:45
Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I get that. I also think as you, as you, like, improvise more the pressure to improvise in a way that's like the best solo you'll ever do straight away-

Speaker 2 17:00
Yeah.

Speaker 1 17:01
It kind of ... Actually, a lot of the time when you improv- like when you're on the spot, put on the spot, it's about like feeling your way through something. Because when, you know, it's not like an instrumentalist-

Speaker 2 17:12
Yeah

Speaker 1 17:12
...can see the chords and press the buttons.You don't have that.

Speaker 2 17:16
Yeah.

Speaker 1 17:16
Is that something that you, in terms of the like thinking about instrumentalists and improvising, is that something you've ever thought about?

Speaker 2 17:24
I have.Sort of thinking about going to - well, jazz school-

Speaker 1 17:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 17:29
...um, and things like that.I do sort of think about a concert, for example, and each member of the band improvises and how it's such a different experience and process-

Speaker 1 17:44
Yeah

Speaker 2 17:44
...for a vocalist versus an instrumentalist because, you know, it is all about music theory and obviously ear, but also you can't really prepare as a vocalist that much.

Speaker 1 17:59
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 17:59
Whereas an instrumentalist will think about ...well, so could a vocalist, but I personally don't.Think about the chords, think about, you know-

Speaker 1 18:08
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:08
...fifths and all of that.

Speaker 1 18:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:10
Um, but that's not something that I process yet.

Speaker 1 18:14
Yeah.It takes a long time to be able to think in that way.

Speaker 2 18:17
Yeah.

Speaker 1 18:17
And not everyone, not everyone does.

Speaker 2 18:20
Yeah.

Speaker 1 18:20
There's some great improvising- improvisers who don't think in that way at all-

Speaker 2 18:24
Mm-hmm

Speaker 1 18:24
... I would say. Did you, um... When you think about improvising moving forward, is there a way or a style or something that you find exciting? Like, something that you're like, "I can't w- I wanna be able to improvise like that. Being able to do it like that excites me."

Speaker 2 18:49
Definitely more fast-paced.

Speaker 1 18:54
Okay.

Speaker 2 18:54
Like, um, something that really shows off vocal agility-

Speaker 1 18:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:59
...um, excites me-

Speaker 1 19:01
Okay

Speaker 2 19:01
...and makes me feel that, well, it's not impressive, but to a non-musician, that sounds more impressive than-

Speaker 1 19:09
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 19:10
... you know, a, a slow ballady sort of thing. But, um, yeah, I think learning about it in the future does excite me, because I think it's such a cool thing to be able to do that I really want to be able to do it without, you know... Alwa- there will always be small fear, but without a big fear, you know?

Speaker 1 19:33
Yeah. So even though there's the f- the fear doesn't outweigh the desire to-

Speaker 2 19:38
Do it, correct

Speaker 1 19:39
...to achieve it.

Speaker 2 19:40
Yeah. And if it did, I wouldn't be going to-

Speaker 1 19:42
To jazz school

Speaker 2 19:44
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:44
If it did, I would be saying, "Don't go to jazz school." For sure.

Speaker 2 19:49
Yeah.

Speaker 1 19:49
Um, do you think there's anything about improvisation that is specifically difficult for teenagers to do?

Speaker 2 20:00
Hmm. Well, the whole self-consciousness we talked about earlier. Sounds really, really silly, but syllables.I found syllables so difficult-

Speaker 1 20:19
Yeah

Speaker 2 20:19
...because, you know, you can literally use any syllable you wanted, and it might sound a bit funny, but, you know, it's not-

Speaker 1 20:32
Doesn't sound silly at all.I think syllables is, that's the great, you know?

Speaker 2 20:36
Yeah.

Speaker 1 20:37
That's a huge part of, um, how we com- how we communicate.

Speaker 2 20:44
Yeah.

Speaker 1 20:45
How did it feel in that process of, like, exploring the syllables?

Speaker 2 20:50
I did feel silly, I will say, in our lessons-

Speaker 1 20:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 20:52
…just going through the different syllables.Um, but then listening to different people perform or-

Speaker 1 21:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 21:01
…just music, um, it made me s- realize how many syllables you can use, and that you're not limited to shoobadoobap bap, you know?

Speaker 1 21:11
Shoobadoobap bap is terrible.Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:14
Um, and also seeing people perform, for example, in [School music festival], and only using one syllable, and not…I mean, obviously it sounds good, but-

Speaker 1 21:22
Yeah

Speaker 2 21:23
…you know, if you just change the syllable, you can see how different an improv- improvisation could be.

Speaker 1 21:30
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 21:31
Um, yeah. But I don't know if that's specific to teenagers.

Speaker 1 21:38
I mean, I, I think the self-conscious element is-

Speaker 2 21:40
Yeah

Speaker 1 21:40
...potentially interesting. Do you...You know, you're within my, like, young person, teenager section. You are the oldest person that I'm interviewing.

Speaker 2 21:48
Oh, am I?

Speaker 1 21:50
Yeah.

Speaker 2 21:50
Okay.

Speaker 1 21:50
Well, 'cause I mean, 13 to 19-year-olds is in th- the teenager element-

Speaker 2 21:54
Okay

Speaker 1 21:55
...of the research. So I'm interested if in your perspective as someone who is, like, on the cusp, you know?

Speaker 2 22:03
Yeah.

Speaker 1 22:03
I'm interviewing teenagers and professional musicians.So in-

Speaker 2 22:07
Okay

Speaker 1 22:07
...three years' time, in just three years' time, you'll be on the other side of that-

Speaker 2 22:12
Okay

Speaker 1 22:12
...if that makes sense.

Speaker 2 22:13
Got it.Yeah.Yeah.

Speaker 1 22:14
So I'm curious to know if with, like, any hindsight that you have now as a 19-year-old-

Speaker 2 22:21
Okay

Speaker 1 22:21
...looking back on 15-year-old you, if there was anything-

Speaker 2 22:25
Mm

Speaker 1 22:25
...about your context, your life, like, what was going on in terms of, like, your social context maybe-

Speaker 2 22:33
Okay

Speaker 1 22:34
...that made that fear of judgment.

Speaker 2 22:37
Yeah. Okay. With the syllables, for example-

Speaker 1 22:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 22:41

...I was doing a performance, and I came out with a really weird syllable, which is fine-

Speaker 1 22:47
Yeah

Speaker 2 22:47
...which I now know is fine, but back then I'd be like, "Oh." Like, "People might think that I'm just making noises with my mouth." Which technically I am.

Speaker 1 22:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:59
But, but it's not, it's not that it's planned, but that, that I did something wrong even though I myself may not know, well-

Speaker 1 23:07
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:07
...I myself may know that it isn't wrong, and it was sort of planned, but not to sort of the untrained ear-

Speaker 1 23:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:16
...for example.

Speaker 1 23:16
Was there ever, you know, that fear of judgment, was there ever, was that, did that ever manifest? Did you ever feel that judgment a- like, was that judgment ever expressed to you, that kind of external evaluation? Or is that something that kind of lived rent-free in your brain-

Speaker 2 23:33
Um-

Speaker 1 23:33
...without kind of...Was that ever a consequence maybe, is the question.

Speaker 2 23:38

I was very egotistical No one has ever said something negative about me-

Speaker 1 23:43
Yeah

Speaker 2 23:43
...to my face.

Speaker 1 23:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 23:45
Right?And even now I'm saying to my face assuming that- ...they're saying it behind my back.

Speaker 1 23:48
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 23:49
But, you know, I need to have that confidence that they're not.Um, and even watching new singers perform, all I'm thinking about is the positives.

Speaker 1 23:59
Yeah.

Speaker 2 23:59
So why would anyone be thinking negatives about me?

Speaker 1 24:02
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:03
Um, so yeah. I mean, it was never expressed properly, yeah.

Speaker 1 24:10
But I, I think that's an interesting thing, right?

Speaker 2 24:12
Sure.

Speaker 1 24:12

Is, like, it's quite common for- T- anyone, but I think particularly teenagers to feel that sense of like, "Everyone's gonna judge me, everyone's gonna judge me, everyone's gonna judge me."

Speaker 2 24:21
Yeah.It's always the core of it is self-evaluation-

Speaker 1 24:25
Yeah

Speaker 2 24:25
...and comparison all of that.So-

Speaker 1 24:28
Yeah.About-- It's not necessarily even others.It kind of- But for you, it was the root was as much yourself as other people.

Speaker 2 24:36
Oh, yeah.I mean, if anything, just myself.

Speaker 1 24:40
Okay.

Speaker 2 24:41
And maybe some sort of diehard musicians my age.

Speaker 1 24:48
Yeah.So the opinion of other musicians around you, other people around you who also would fit into that, like, musician camp?

Speaker 2 24:59
Yeah, definitely.I think, I mean, it was a very competitive environment. Not in terms of jazz because it was quite niche-

Speaker 1 25:11
Mm

Speaker 2 25:11
...but sort of everyone was competing for [Head of Music's] validation, for example.Um-

Speaker 1 25:23
Okay

Speaker 2 25:23
...and he doesn't really express, "You were amazing," very often.Um, Sounds bad-

Speaker 1 25:32
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 25:32
...but, um, it was a very competitive environment, and I do think that people craved the view of other musicians as a positive one because they know what they're talking about, for example.

Speaker 1 25:44
Mm.

Speaker 2 25:45
Um, but yeah.

Speaker 1 25:48
Would positive, such as positive evaluation, positive reinforcement, did that mean-- how much did that mean to you and, and your peers if you, if you know that?

Speaker 2 25:58
I mean, not a huge amount.I know it meant a lot to certain people.Um, my sister was very self-assured, but she did thrive off compliments-

Speaker 1 26:09
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 26:10
...'cause she got a lot. Um-

Speaker 1 26:11
Mm

Speaker 2 26:12
...and for, like, my friends who played instruments, they also loved a compliment.

Speaker 1 26:19
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 26:20

Um, and obviously I still love a compliment- ...but, um, I do sort of, sort of validation through other ways.So getting into music school was a big thing for me.

Speaker 1 26:30
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 26:31
Um, definitely made my confidence grow and getting positive reinforcement from other musicians, whether that's in school or out-

Speaker 1 26:42
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 26:43
...so [friend] family, who are all musicians-

Speaker 1 26:45
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 26:45
...um, whenever they'd say something positive about me, I'd be like, "Oh, but a musician thinks I'm good." Like-

Speaker 1 26:52
Yeah, yeah

Speaker 2 26:52
...doesn't matter about the general public because they don't know what they're talking about.

Speaker 1 26:56
Yeah.

Speaker 2 26:57
You know?

Speaker 1 26:57
Yeah, yeah. I get you. That makes a lot of sense. Um, okay. That's great. Thank you. In terms of if you were... And this is an interesting one for you because I can imagine that there's a world where you have to do this one day.

Speaker 2 27:14
Right.

Speaker 1 27:15
If you were to introduce improvisation to a young singer- ...is there a way that you would, an approach that you think would be valuable?

Speaker 2 27:29
Um, for me, what worked best was probably call and response.

Speaker 1 27:36
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 27:37
Um, and then you'd slowly ask the student to make it their own a little bit, make small tweaks-

Speaker 1 27:48
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 27:49
...um, and things like that.And I'm trying to think what else.It's a tough one.I think it really depends on the student as well-

Speaker 1 27:59
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 27:59
...what their level is, what their-

Speaker 1 28:02
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 28:02
...confidence is, things like that.But it's not really something that you can- You sort of have to just go straight into it.

Speaker 1 28:13
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 28:13
It's not a gradually make your way up-

Speaker 1 28:16
Okay

Speaker 2 28:17
...I don't think.In my opinion, it's sort of you just have to do it until you feel it's right.

Speaker 1 28:22
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:23
Um, and if they don't enjoy it, sorry.I didn't enjoy it at first.

Speaker 1 28:29
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:30
And now it's like, okay.

Speaker 1 28:31
Did you always-- Even when you didn't enjoy it, did you always know it was something you wanted to do? You know, that first lesson when I said, "Right, let's improvise," was there a part of you that was like, "This is awful, but I know I wanna be able to do it"? Or was it entirely, "I hate you. Why are you making me do this?"

Speaker 2 28:49
Bit of a mixture.

Speaker 1 28:50
Okay.

Speaker 2 28:50
Um, 'cause at that point when we first started improvising, I don't think-- I wasn't-music wasn't sort of a thing in my head that I could pursue.

Speaker 1 29:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:04
So it was sort of like, "Why am I doing this when I just wanna sing a silly song and-

Speaker 1 29:07
Yeah

Speaker 2 29:08
...you know, sing at a charity concert or something like that?"

Speaker 1 29:10
Yeah.

Speaker 2 29:11
Um, but then as soon as I sort of got into my head that this could be something that I do in the future professionally, I immed- well, I mean, even before that, I, I wanted to be able to do it just partly so I could do it-

Speaker 1 29:28
Yeah

Speaker 2 29:29
...you know, and say that I could do it-

Speaker 1 29:30
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 29:30
...but also because getting it right in 'inverted commas' feels so good.

Speaker 1 29:35
Yeah.So you e- you could tell even then, even at the start, there was that, there was a slither of you that was a bit like, "I can see a world where this is something."

Speaker 2 29:46
Yeah.

Speaker 1 29:46
Good.

Speaker 2 29:47
Definitely.Um, I mean, even with the crying-

Speaker 1 29:52
Mm

Speaker 2 29:52
...I was crying because I didn't wanna be judged, but then I was then more upset because I didn't wanna be judged 'cause I was crying.So it's like a full circle moment-

Speaker 1 30:02

Yeah

Speaker 2 30:02
...where I was like, "I just don't wanna do this anymore."

Speaker 1 30:05
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:05
But then the more you forced me to do it- ...and the more I cried, the less I then cried.

Speaker 1 30:11
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:12
You know, I didn't, I didn't go back to my room and then cry the whole, the whole evening.It was just whilst I was doing it.

Speaker 1 30:17
Just in that moment.

Speaker 2 30:17
Yeah.

Speaker 1 30:19
Okay.I'm glad to know that you didn't go back and cry in the room.What a relief.

Speaker 2 30:24
Yeah.

Speaker 1 30:24
Um, is there anything else about your experience of improvisation that you think I should have asked you or that feels important to say or talk about?

Speaker 2 30:41
Um, I think in terms of the teaching it, so your position of teaching me improvisation-

Speaker 1 30:48
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 30:48
...I think it's definitely important to stress how far validation can go in the moment.

Speaker 1 30:57
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:57
'Cause even though I may not have thought that it sounded very good, if you told me I was like, "Well, if she thinks it's good, then I'm fine," you know?

Speaker 1 31:06
Okay.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 31:06
Um, so that definitely helped me personally.Other than that...

Speaker 1 31:13
So validation being...Is a good...That's why, you know, when you said about, oh, people were competitive for, like, [head of music's] atten-attention-

Speaker 2 31:22
Yeah

Speaker 1 31:22
...kind of thing, um-

Speaker 2 31:26
I mean, I didn't have to compete for yours 'cause I was your favorite, so.I was your favorite one. No, no question about it.

Speaker 1 31:35
Um, the

Speaker 2 31:39
Let's move on, yeah.

Speaker 1 31:40
The competition for validation, is that, you know, is...Do you think if somebody, if validation was just standard-

Speaker 2 31:49
What do you mean?

Speaker 1 31:51
Would that still hold?If, you know-

Speaker 2 31:53
No.

Speaker 1 31:54
So you think-

Speaker 2 31:55
Because I, I value your opinion highly.

Speaker 1 32:00
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:02
So... And I know if I'm bad at singing, you're not just gonna tell me that I'm great, you know? Well, I mean, you might. I don't know what you do with your other students. But, um, and it's not even validation in that sounded great, it's just in, um, it could be, like- ... validation that there's nothing wrong with what you've just done.

Speaker 1 32:26
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 32:26
So, like, if I got all clammy because I'd just sung a, inverted commas, "wrong note"-

Speaker 1 32:32
Yeah

Speaker 2 32:34
...you saying there's nothing wrong with that.

Speaker 1 32:35
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:36
I think that definitely also helped.It was, it wasn't that I was seeking positive ref, uh, reinforcement, it was that I was trying to avoid negative.

Speaker 1 32:46
Yes.That makes a lot of sense.

Speaker 2 32:48
Yeah.

Speaker 1 32:48
That makes a lot of sense.Okay, yeah.That's, that's simple.

Speaker 2 32:54
Yeah.

Speaker 1 32:55
That's easy to do.

Speaker 2 32:56
Yeah.

Speaker 1 32:58
Um, okay, great.Thanks so much.

Speaker 2 33:00
You're welcome.

Speaker 1 33:00
Anything else?Any questions?Anything else you'd like to say?

Speaker 2 33:03
That's everything, I think.

Speaker 1 33:04
Great. Thank you.

Penelope – 1J

Speaker 1 = Meg, Speaker 2 = Penelope

Speaker 1 00:00
So I've just started recording. Um, before we get started, I just want to have a quick chat with you about today. As you know, I'm doing some research about singing and improvisation, and I'd love to hear about your experiences and what you think about it. There's no right or wrong answer. Honestly, whatever you think and feel is exactly what I'm interested in hearing. A few important things I want you to know. You don't have to answer anything you don't want to. If a question feels uncomfortable or you'd rather skip it, that's completely fine. Just say so, and we can move on. You can stop the interview at any time as well for any reason, and that won't affect anything at all, including our lessons together. I'm gonna record our conversation so I can listen back to it later, but the recording is just for me. I won't use your real name, so you can choose your own pseudonym if you like.

Speaker 2 00:47
Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:47
Um, I won't use your real name anywhere in my research and anything that could identify you. So if you talk about school or anyone in school or anything like that, that will all be omitted, so no one will know it's you.

Speaker 2 00:58
Okay.

Speaker 1 00:58
Um, I've not told anyone at school who I'm interviewing either, so no one will know if anyone-

Speaker 2 01:03
Okay

Speaker 1 01:03
...I also can't imagine anyone will read it.Um, you'll be given a different name, and nobody reading w- my work will be able to identify who you are.Do you have any questions before we start?

Speaker 2 01:14
No, that sounds good.

Speaker 1 01:16
And are you happy to go ahead?

Speaker 2 01:18
Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:18
Okay, fab.So before we start talking about improvisation, um, I'd love to hear a little bit about yourself as a singer.So how long have you been singing for?

Speaker 2 01:34
Um, I mean, I've always liked singing. Um, I suppose... Yeah, I mean, I've always kind of known I could, uh, sing in tune and like so that was, um, why I liked it, but I've never really tried to train my voice or make it sound like pop stars or anything until maybe two or three years ago, I think.

Speaker 1 01:56
Okay.

Speaker 2 01:57
Um, but yeah.

Speaker 1 01:58
And how old are you now? What, 14, 15?

Speaker 2 02:01
I'm 15, yeah.

Speaker 1 02:01
15, okay. Um, okay, cool.A nd what, what is it that you, you like or...I mean, do you like singing? Do you enjoy singing?

Speaker 2 02:12
Yeah, I really do. Um, I mean, yeah, I think I'm... I enjoy it most when I, I'm just alone or not really thinking about anything in particular, but just kind of singing depending on like what I've heard or yeah-

Speaker 1 02:25
Mm

Speaker 2 02:25
...different songs basically, yeah.

Speaker 1 02:27
Okay, cool. Um, how do you feel like... Is there a connection between the fact that ch- you're a singer and kind of who you are and how you view-- Do you view yourself as a singer, or do you view yourself as someone who sings?

Speaker 2 02:45

Um, that's a good question.I mean, I wouldn't view myself primarily as a, like a singer.Um, yeah, probably just someone who can sing.

Speaker 1 02:55
Mm.

Speaker 2 02:55
But n- that's not like my primary like personality trait, if that makes sense.

Speaker 1 03:00
That does make, that does make sense.What's made you kinda keep going with singing?

Speaker 2 03:06
Well, I think at [School] obviously there's lots of good opportunities and, um, I re- I really don't wanna miss out on any opportunity to just... I mean, it, it's been great to build my confidence, um, apart from anything, but also be able to share, um, kind of like my for- like h- singing with like other people and-

Speaker 1 03:26
Mm

Speaker 2 03:27
...yeah, like, like kind of, yeah, show off how I can sing.

Speaker 1 03:31
Yeah, yeah, yeah. 'Cause you said at the start that you enjoy singing most kind of when you're on your own, but then-

Speaker 2 03:36
Yeah

Speaker 1 03:37
...you also enjoy that kind of sharing element of it as well?

Speaker 2 03:40
No, yeah, yeah.I know it's good to like push myself to perform because, yeah, it's just better to, yeah, grow like that.

Speaker 1 03:48
Yeah. And how does it make you feel after you've sung to other people?

Speaker 2 03:51
Pro- yeah, it definitely is rewarding, but, um, yeah, it's the anxiety beforehand.But yeah, after I sing it's, it's fine 'cause it's over.

Speaker 1 04:01

Yeah.Is, is the feeling mainly relief once it's over, or is there other, are there other feelings as well?

Speaker 2 04:07
Yeah.I mean, I also like kind of, I don't know, feeling proud of myself and, yeah, accomplishment I guess.

Speaker 1 04:12
Yeah. Okay, cool.So if you're happy, let's move on a little bit about improvisation.

Speaker 2 04:17
Yeah.

Speaker 1 04:17
And also feel free to ask me any questions at any point if you'd like to.

Speaker 2 04:21
Sure, sure.

Speaker 1 04:22
Um, so do you remember the first time you were asked to improvise?

Speaker 2 04:27
Ooh, um, not specifically, but yeah.

Speaker 1 04:32
Okay, that's fine. Um, how-- Do you have kind of a... Even if you can't remember the specific, a specific moment you were first asked, asked to improvise, do you remember how you kind of felt when it was first broached as a task?

Speaker 2 04:47
Yeah, I mean, probably I think, um, probably just, yeah, ner- nervous. Um, probably like shyness 'cause there's not like a, a script that's like set out before me that I can follow or like a, like notes that I know that I have to do. Um, it's kind of all up to me. So yeah, probably, yeah, a bit nervous, especially doing it in front of someone else and like anyone else.

Speaker 1 05:13
Yeah.

Speaker 2 05:13
Not even like a big audience, but-

Speaker 1 05:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 05:15

...yeah, anything like that would be-

Speaker 1 05:17
Does it feel different to singing a song or something like that?

Speaker 2 05:21
Yeah, I think so 'cause you, like you don't even know what's coming next, let alone the people listening to you, I guess-

Speaker 1 05:27
Mm

Speaker 2 05:28
...or a- anyone listening.

Speaker 1 05:29
Okay.Is it something that you've ever done on your own?

Speaker 2 05:33
Um, I mean, probably. I do... Sometimes I like to like embellish songs or s-something like that alone. But, um, yeah. I mean, I know I can-- I'm definitely capable of it, but I just... I, I don't like practice it in front of people-

Speaker 1 05:49
Mm

Speaker 2 05:49
...by myself like not, like knowingly, if you know what I mean.

Speaker 1 05:52
Yeah.Yeah, I get you.So it's more something you do subconsciously?

Speaker 2 05:56
Yeah, kind of.Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:57
Yeah.Okay.Um, is there a memory that you have about improvisation that you, or kind of an experience of improvisation that felt really hard or uncomfortable?

Speaker 2 06:09
Um, I mean, probably, I think, yeah, um, definitely, uh, the more people listening, the harder it is. Um, so yeah, I think probably like in, well, in the exam-

Speaker 1 06:22
Okay

Speaker 2 06:22

...I, I think I, I, I wasn't like unhappy with how I did, but, um, obviously I knew there was like some stuff riding on it. So it was, yeah, it was kind of like, yeah. But, um-

Speaker 1 06:34
How did-

Speaker 2 06:34
Yeah, I think it went well.

Speaker 1 06:36
So even though it went well, it, you don't think of it as a fond experience?

Speaker 2 06:41
Yeah, just 'cause like it wasn't like fun and like breezy improvisation. It was like, it was important improvisation, I guess. So yeah.

Speaker 1 06:50
Okay.And how-- can you describe the f- kind of in the moment of improvisation, can you describe, um, how you felt? Like emotionally or physically, did anything happen?

Speaker 2 07:08
Um, I mean, just kind of concentrating on like where to go next with the notes.Um-

Speaker 1 07:15
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 07:16
Yeah, I mean, physically probably just not much changed, but, um-

Speaker 1 07:21
Okay

Speaker 2 07:21
...yeah, emotionally just kind of, yeah, working out what to do next.

Speaker 1 07:26
Was that a moment, was that a moment that stuck out to you within that exam that was almost like, in terms of were you more nervous for that moment than any other?

Speaker 2 07:36
I mean, well, obviously I followed the sight reading, um, so I think there was some relief. Uh, and I, I think I knew that I was capable of doing improv-improvisation better than the sight reading. Like in my mind, that's how I felt about it. So, uh, yeah, obviously I was, I was relieved at the same time, and I was thinking, okay, I can kind of relax, and I don't have to worry too much about this, but I still have to make sure it, it kind of fits in with like, you know-

Speaker 1 08:02
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:02
...the gist of like the song I was singing

Speaker 1 08:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 08:04
Or like the, the tune that was, I was supposed to be following.But yeah.

Speaker 1 08:08
Okay.So the sight reading element is, the sight reading almost feels worse than the-

Speaker 2 08:12
Yeah

Speaker 1 08:13
...improvisation element. Okay. And why do you think that might be?

Speaker 2 08:18
Um, I mean, pro- I've never felt quite so comfortable with sight reading just 'cause, um, yeah, uh, the kinda theory element I've always, um, been a bit afraid of, and like just like-

Speaker 1 08:31
Mm

Speaker 2 08:31
...doing it.But whereas improv, it can kind of come from me, and I don't have to, like I don't have to get it right according to a sheet of paper.It's just like-

Speaker 1 08:39
Yeah

Speaker 2 08:39
...whether it makes sense, yeah, but from listening to it.

Speaker 1 08:43
Okay.Um, do you have a really positive experience of improvisation, something that felt good or exciting?

Speaker 2 08:54
Um, I mean, not specifically.Um, but it's definitely not something that I feel like an aversion to.Like I, I, it, it makes me a bit nervous, but it's not like something I, I don't like-

Speaker 1 09:06
Mm

Speaker 2 09:06
...like specifically.

Speaker 1 09:08
Is there a part of you that enjoys it?

Speaker 2 09:11
Yeah, I think so. I mean, as long as I know the kind of... I don't know really how to de- how else to describe it, but I, I know the like it, like and I know if I can make it like fit in with the song that it was-

Speaker 1 09:24
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 09:24
...part of, if that makes sense.

Speaker 1 09:25
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 09:25
Like kind of just, like, you know, like in Dream a Little Dream, like it kind of, like that was quite hard to improvise 'cause it was quite jazzy and like you had to, there was, like it was quite complicated, but-

Speaker 1 09:35
Yeah

Speaker 2 09:36
...um, yeah, like if I, if I can, if I know I can achieve it, like-

Speaker 1 09:40
Okay

Speaker 2 09:41
...yeah, I don't know.Yeah.

Speaker 1 09:42
So I guess-

Speaker 2 09:43
In, in that exam.

Speaker 1 09:44

Yeah, definitely.So I guess in the exam, right, the improvisation section, the chord sequence, so that's kind of what you were saying about, oh-

Speaker 2 09:51
Yeah

Speaker 1 09:51
...it needs to fit with the song.That would be the chord sequence of, of underneath it.Does that make sense?

Speaker 2 09:57
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1 09:58
So the chord sequence that you have for the exam is a fairly simple sequence in which-

Speaker 2 10:03
Yeah

Speaker 1 10:03
...there's no surprises or no, nothing kind of-

Speaker 2 10:06
No, exactly

Speaker 1 10:06
...whereas Dream a Little Dream of Me, I know exactly what you mean, that-

Speaker 2 10:10
Yeah

Speaker 1 10:10
...it feels less, less natural maybe in terms of-

Speaker 2 10:13
Yeah

Speaker 1 10:13
...where the harmony might go. Um, so obviously for that we, we wrote a solo, didn't we?

Speaker 2 10:19
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1 10:19
So you went in knowing what you were gonna sing.

Speaker 2 10:22

Yeah.

Speaker 1 10:22
If we hadn't done that, how would that have made you feel?

Speaker 2 10:26
Definitely a lot more nervous for that section.Um, yeah, I mean, I would, I think, yeah, I mean, you know, that we, um, like tried, uh, a few times to just like go with it-

Speaker 1 10:37
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:37
...in the moment, and like I, I think knowing that it hadn't gone so well

Speaker 1 10:41
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:41
...um, when I tried, that would probably have made me-

Speaker 1 10:44
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:44
...feel more nervous going into the exam.

Speaker 1 10:47
Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:47
Um, so I'm, I'm glad that we planned out.But I think with the improv section, uh, that wasn't part of the piece, I think that was-

Speaker 1 10:56
Mm.

Speaker 2 10:56
I, I just, yeah, I think I, I enjoyed that more than-

Speaker 1 10:59
Yeah

Speaker 2 10:59
...um, sight reading.

Speaker 1 11:01

So the, so the, when we were trying to, when we had a go at the Dream a Little Dream of Me, the slightly hardest improvisation section in the piece-

Speaker 2 11:10
Yeah

Speaker 1 11:11
...um, and you said to, that didn't feel like it went well to you.

Speaker 2 11:16
Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:17
How did you, what, what did that kind of feel like in that moment?

Speaker 2 11:22
I mean, I, I tend to get embar- you probably know this, but like- ... I get a bit embarrassed if like it doesn't go quite to like plan or like sometimes I think I'm able to do it, and then when I, I actually start doing it, I realize I'm not able to like pull it off.

Speaker 1 11:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 11:36
So like, um, yeah, probably like embarrassment.Um, and yeah, just like may- maybe like disappointment to an extent, like just like, oh, yeah-

Speaker 1 11:46
Yeah

Speaker 2 11:46
...maybe it's like harder than I thought it would be.But, um-

Speaker 1 11:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 11:49
...yeah.

Speaker 1 11:49
Would you say generally you consider yourself, and I don't want this to, I don't want you to feel awkward in this question. Um, would you generally consider yourself confident that you're a good singer?

Speaker 2 12:04
I mean, I, I know that I can sing like if I, like relatively well if I, um, you know, know the piece, and I know-

Speaker 1 12:11
Mm

Speaker 2 12:11
...I can like bring a certain quality to it if- Yeah, if I can, yeah-

Speaker 1 12:16
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:16
...find it.Um, so yeah, I, I always feel confident in my abilities, m- some of the time.But, you know, depend, um, given that I know, like, what I'm doing-

Speaker 1 12:29
Yeah

Speaker 2 12:29
...to an extent, but yeah.I mean, yeah, that's where improvisation is a bit different 'cause you don't really know what you're doing, I guess.But yeah.

Speaker 1 12:36
I was g- that was kinda my follow-up was, is there a time that improvisation made you feel differently about yourself as a singer?

Speaker 2 12:44
Yeah, I mean, probably the, yeah, that Dream a Little Dream, um, section did challenge me-

Speaker 1 12:51
Mm

Speaker 2 12:51
...um, musically, I guess.

Speaker 1 12:52
Mm.

Speaker 2 12:53
Um, and yeah, that made me have to consider, like, the, the kind of weirder, like, chord, chord changes-

Speaker 1 13:00
Yeah

Speaker 2 13:00
...and having to try and improvise around that, but yeah.

Speaker 1 13:04
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:04
Finding, like, the notes that you don't think you have to go to.

Speaker 1 13:08
Yeah.

Speaker 2 13:08
Like, yeah.

Speaker 1 13:09
Is there any time outside of our lessons, I mean obviously we work a lot together at school 'cause obviously of [choir] and stuff-

Speaker 2 13:16
Yeah

Speaker 1 13:16
...is there any, any time outside of our lessons, maybe before you were having lessons with me, with another teacher or something, where you were asked to improvise?

Speaker 2 13:25
Um, no, not that I can recall.I mean, uh, on the s- in, in my [choir] performance of, um, You Send Me, like, that was ...And I think, like, in the run-through-

Speaker 1 13:37
Mm

Speaker 2 13:38
...um, they'd, like, at the end I didn't really know how to, we didn't really know how to finish it off.

Speaker 1 13:42
Mm.

Speaker 2 13:42
Um, and they were like, "Oh, just like..." I think I'd, like, just been, like, scatting or something or, like-

Speaker 1 13:46
Yes

Speaker 2 13:46

... improvising a little bit at the end. And then, like, they were like, "Oh, yeah, that's perfect. Like, just do that." Um, and then like, in the real performance, like, it was, uh, I, I, I mean, I int- I felt it was quite, like, awkward, or I, I felt like, quite, um, yeah, awkward, um, doing it in the real performance-

Speaker 1 14:04
Okay

Speaker 2 14:04
...just 'cause I don't think it really, like, was cohesive with the piano. But, um, yeah, I mean, watching it back it didn't look too bad. But, um, yeah.

Speaker 1 14:13
So-

Speaker 2 14:13
That was kind of like a panicked-

Speaker 1 14:15
Yeah

Speaker 2 14:15
...improvisation.

Speaker 1 14:16
So that's-

Speaker 2 14:17
But yeah

Speaker 1 14:17
...that's really interesting that in the moment you felt, like, awkward and you were a bit panicky, but then watching it back-

Speaker 2 14:24
Yeah

Speaker 1 14:25
...you, it didn't actually seem as awkward as it felt at the time.

Speaker 2 14:28
Yeah. I mean, I think, like, um, obviously, like, yeah, it was at the end of the performance so I was, like, trying to, like, um, yeah, it was, like, almost the end so I was like, "Okay," like, um, and I was, uh, feeling s- like, still, like, quite, um, scared from, like, being the center of attention. So I was still like-

Speaker 1 14:47

Yeah

Speaker 2 14:47
... yeah, feeling a bit, like, anxious. So then I was like, uh, and I didn't, and I wasn't, like, sure how to finish it off, so that's why I was, probably felt, um, lesser of myself in that moment. But yeah, watching it back it didn't, uh, obviously m- most of the time it doesn't look as bad as you think it does.

Speaker 1 15:03
Yeah.

Speaker 2 15:04
It was fine.Um, but yeah.

Speaker 1 15:06
That's really, I mean, that's a great, that's a great skill to be able to look back at something and recognize that even if you were nervous in the moment, not write off the performance.

Speaker 2 15:15
Yeah.

Speaker 1 15:15
That's really good.

Speaker 2 15:15
No, exactly.Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1 15:18
Um, okay.So in terms of the ...Is there anything, actually, when, sort of when you listen to music, have you, have you come across improvisation at all?

Speaker 2 15:31
Um, I can't think of a specific example.I mean, I know, uh, there's kind of like, you know, like, some artists, like, vocalize, but that's not quite the same thing, I guess.

Speaker 1 15:41
Mm.

Speaker 2 15:42
Um-

Speaker 1 15:43
Definit- riffs and stuff I would consider improvisation for sure.

Speaker 2 15:46
Yeah.

Speaker 1 15:47
Yeah.Um, and is it something that you've, is it, is, is it something that you kind of want to be able to do well?Or is it not something that matters to you?

Speaker 2 16:00
I think it would be, it's a good skill to have, um, and especially, like, songwriting or composing of any kind, uh, it's, you know, important to be able to, like, work through different ideas-

Speaker 1 16:13
Mm

Speaker 2 16:13
...and, like, get things wrong, I guess, and, like, play around with, like, the chord progressions to, like, find, like, a tune in that.Um-

Speaker 1 16:21
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 16:22
...so yeah, I think, yeah, I think it definitely is an important thing to be able to do.

Speaker 1 16:27
Can you see a world where it would be a fun thing to do?

Speaker 2 16:31
I mean, like, maybe. Like, yeah, I mean, probably in the comfort of, like, being alone, you know. It'd probably be fine. But, um, yeah, I mean, if I'm sure I can, like, definitely think of something on the spot, like, if, if-

Speaker 1 16:47
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:47
...yeah, if I've done it before and I've come up with, like, a, a, like, a good sounding riff, then, like, it should be, yeah, I probably would be fine with-

Speaker 1 16:57
Yeah

Speaker 2 16:57
...doing it in front of people.But, um, yeah.

Speaker 1 17:00
Okay. Do you, are you someone who generally feels like, um... Actually, this, before I ask that question, are there any other areas in your life where you've had to improvise? So

within maybe, like, a drama class or do you ever feel like in an exam you've been like, "Oh, I've had to make something up and..." Or that kinda thing?

Speaker 2 17:19
Yeah, I mean, like, in, uh, not singing, but, like, in, yeah, in drama, um, I d- I actually did really enjoy improvising, like, um, I think, yeah, like, in games they often have games that, like, help you to, like-

Speaker 1 17:32
Mm

Speaker 2 17:32
... think of things on the spot and, like, create, like, a storyline and stuff. And I did actually find that really fun, um, when I used to do that, just 'cause you can just, like, create something. Like, it's just, like, the first thing you think of, and, like, you have to, like, go with it-

Speaker 1 17:45
Mm

Speaker 2 17:45
...which is, yeah, I, I did enjoy that, um, young- when I was younger.But yeah.

Speaker 1 17:50
Why do you think, how old were you when you kinda did that sort of thing?

Speaker 2 17:54
Oh, may- like, maybe, like, 10, 11 or-

Speaker 1 17:56
Okay

Speaker 2 17:56
...11, yeah.

Speaker 1 17:57
Why do you think that was something that you were able to really enjoy, whereas singing improvisation feel, is there a difference in how it feels?

Speaker 2 18:06
Yeah, I, I think so.I think it's just, like, um, well, singing, uh, I, I often feel a bit awkward with, like, the sounds that I have to sing.

Speaker 1 18:14
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 18:15

Um, 'cause like, and I'm never quite sure, like, which, um, yeah, like, syllables or, like-

Speaker 1 18:20
Mm

Speaker 2 18:21
Look like the way I say it, like the way...Yeah, like the scat noises, I guess.

Speaker 1 18:25
Like, yeah, totally.

Speaker 2 18:27
Yeah.So I always...I, I, I don't ever know how they're gonna sound, like, like I know that they would sound silly if I was like speaking them, so like-

Speaker 1 18:33
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:33
...I don't know if they'll sound like weird if I like sing them.

Speaker 1 18:36
Yeah.

Speaker 2 18:37
Um, and like, uh, I don't know, yeah, I never really know like if I'm doing like an accent or anything when I'm singing, so I don't want them to sound like a bit strange, but yeah.

Speaker 1 18:46
Yeah,

Speaker 2 18:46
So yeah, like there's kind of that, like that makes me a bit more anxious compared to doing drama where like I can just talk in my own voice.But, um-

Speaker 1 18:54
Yeah

Speaker 2 18:55
...yeah.

Speaker 1 18:56
Are there any other, any other elements of it that feel different to drama outside of the sort of, the syllables?

Speaker 2 19:03

Um, I mean, I guess drama, like you can kind of...I, I mean, obviously, like y- you're in front of people who you are do- interact with like with your voice, like speaking.

Speaker 1 19:13
Mm.

Speaker 2 19:13
Um, so if you're speaking and improvising, then it's like there's not much difference-

Speaker 1 19:17
Mm

Speaker 2 19:17
... um, in how they perceive you. But then like if you're singing, like that's a... You don't really... Yeah, it's not as common to be singing in front of people than speaking. So like, um, yeah, I guess they, they just perceive you differently, um, if you're singing.

Speaker 1 19:32
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 19:32
In a way.

Speaker 1 19:32
Do you think...Is, is how you're perceived, does that play a part in, in... When you're singing, is that something that you're thinking about?

Speaker 2 19:42
Yeah, I think, I mean, yeah, it probably plays a part in how nervous I am or like-

Speaker 1 19:46
Mm

Speaker 2 19:46
... like depending on who's in the audience or like how well I know people. Um, for like, for example, like I'd be much less nervous performing in front of people I don't know, um, than people I do know. Um-

Speaker 1 19:58
Yeah

Speaker 2 19:58
...obviously that would depend on the people, but yeah.Um, so yeah, I guess, yeah, I think probably that does play a part in, um, how well I perform maybe or-

Speaker 1 20:07
Mm

Speaker 2 20:08
...yeah, how able I am to improvise on the spot.

Speaker 1 20:11
Yeah, I get you.Do you think there's anything about, in terms of that perception thing-

Speaker 2 20:18
Mm

Speaker 1 20:18
... do you think that's something that is, um... Are, is that something you're no- y- noticing more? You, you said about, you know, when you were improvising in drama and stuff, you were a bit younger. Do you think the fact-

Speaker 2 20:31
Yeah

Speaker 1 20:32
...do you think that, you know, your age has an impact on, on that sense?Like if you were to do a drama improvisation tomorrow-

Speaker 2 20:42
Yeah

Speaker 1 20:42
...with a group of your peers, do you think you'd feel more awkward now than you did five years ago to four, five years ago?

Speaker 2 20:48
Yeah.I mean, probably.Um, I mean, I guess like, yeah, being a teenager, like you just become more self-conscious in lots of aspects of your life.So-

Speaker 1 20:57
Mm

Speaker 2 20:57
...yeah, I probably would.Um, and I haven't done drama for a little while, so-

Speaker 1 21:01
Mm

Speaker 2 21:01
... it would definitely be, yeah, it would be different to like when I was younger. But, um, yeah, I think, yeah, I think, yeah, just being conscious of how people look at you is something that, um, has developed like as, as I've become a teenager-

Speaker 1 21:18
Mm

Speaker 2 21:19
...um, more and more.But yeah, I'm, yeah, I mean, it does le- hold me back and that's probably why I'm, I get, um, more anxious nowadays than I used to when I was younger, but-

Speaker 1 21:28
Mm

Speaker 2 21:29
...um, yeah.

Speaker 1 21:30
Do you c- do you know why that might... Have you th- ever thought about why that might be? Or what is it about being a teenager today that makes that, that means you're more aware of how people perceive you? Or do you think that's just-

Speaker 2 21:44
Um-

Speaker 1 21:44
...like a standard thing of being a teenager?

Speaker 2 21:47
I mean, I would say it probably is a standard thing or maybe like being a girl as well. I don't know. I, yeah, I, I would, don't really know like, um, much about how others feel, but I mean, yeah, I know a lot of people would... I, I know that like performing is something that makes a lot of people feel nervous or embarrassed or-

Speaker 1 22:05
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 22:05
...um, stuff like that.So I, I think it would be a standard thing, but, um, I think it probably is a teenage thing as well, you know, like maybe social media or something just makes people-

Speaker 1 22:16
Mm

Speaker 2 22:16
...more self-conscious or, uh, yeah, I don't really know.

Speaker 1 22:18
Yeah.Are you on social media?

Speaker 2 22:21
Um, a little bit, like not, not that much, but, um, yeah.

Speaker 1 22:24
Okay.

Speaker 2 22:24
I know that like a lot of people my age are, so.

Speaker 1 22:27
Yeah.

Speaker 2 22:28
Yeah.

Speaker 1 22:28
Would you say, would you say that you have a sense that le- most people your age have that kind of fear of being perceived negatively?

Speaker 2 22:38
Um, I think so.

Speaker 1 22:39
Okay.

Speaker 2 22:39
I mean, yeah, like I think a lot of teenage girls are like too afraid to like do things in like in case people think that they're like weird or like-

Speaker 1 22:48
Mm

Speaker 2 22:49
...just like in case they judge them in a way that they don't want.So, uh, uh, yeah, I definitely think it holds people back, but, um, yeah.

Speaker 1 22:56
And do you think that's more...Has, have you noticed that amongst girls as w- like more specifically?

Speaker 2 23:02
Yeah, prob- I, yeah, I d- I definitely think, yeah, I think it's more prominent amongst girls. Um, but I mean, I guess, yeah. I mean, boys haven't really changed all that much since being children, but yeah.

Speaker 1 23:18

I get you.

Speaker 2 23:18
I mean, you know, like they develop slower and everything, but yeah.

Speaker 1 23:20
Yeah, I get you.Okay.That's really interesting.Do you have any, any more thought...Like, is there anything else about that that you kinda wanna say?In terms of-

Speaker 2 23:28
Um-

Speaker 1 23:28
...your experience as a, as a teenage girl, is there...And, and how that might imp- like influence your attitude performing or are you, do you think you've kinda covered it?

Speaker 2 23:40
I think we've kinda covered it.Um, yeah.

Speaker 1 23:43
Cool.I just in, in just in case before we move on to the next section.

Speaker 2 23:47
Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1 23:47
Um, okay. So in terms of how we've learnt improvisation and looked at improvisation, is there anything that we've done or that you've done on your own in your own practice that you found has really helped?

Speaker 2 24:03
Ooh.Um, I mean, I definitely think it was good to like, um, when we were doing the thing where like you kind of just like stay on one note until the, uh, key, like the chord changes.

Speaker 1 24:15
Yeah.

Speaker 2 24:16
Um, I thought that was definitely useful for like just like kind of getting a feel for like that section of the song that you have to improvise for.

Speaker 1 24:24
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 24:24
Um, and that was good to like just like, that's like a completely like basic level of ...improvisation, but you know that, like, you can just go back to that, um, if you're stuck-

Speaker 1 24:35
Yeah

Speaker 2 24:35
...in that section.

Speaker 1 24:37
Okay, nice.Is there anything that we've done or that you've done and you're like, "That was too hard, and it made me feel really uncomfortable, and I hated that"?

Speaker 2 24:46
Um, I don't know.I mean, uh, actually, yeah, I can't really think of one.Um, maybe, yeah, just, like, improvising when I wasn't quite, like-

Speaker 1 24:55
Yeah

Speaker 2 24:55
...ready.Yeah, like, yeah, like Dream a Little Dream, obviously.I keep going back to it, but it was-

Speaker 1 24:59
No, it's really good to keep-

Speaker 2 25:00
...quite-

Speaker 1 25:00
...referring to an u- user experience.

Speaker 2 25:02
Yeah, yeah, yeah.Um, and obviously, like, that was quite tricky to navigate but, um, yeah, I mean, yeah, I had to do it sooner or later, so -

Speaker 1 25:12
Yeah

Speaker 2 25:12
...um, it was good to try and tr- have a go, um, and then realize it was harder than I, I had anticipated it would be.

Speaker 1 25:19
Do you think...So you a- so actually you arrived at it feeling more confident, thinking it was-

Speaker 2 25:24

Yeah

Speaker 1 25:24
...something you'd be able to do? Okay.'Cause we'd done, I can't remember, c- had we done improvisation before that?

Speaker 2 25:31
Um, I don't think...Not, I mean, not in great detail I don't think.

Speaker 1 25:36
Okay.So Dream a Little Dream of Me, that was kind of the first time.Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:41
Yeah, that's the first time I remember doing it with you, definitely.

Speaker 1 25:44
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:44
Well, yeah, with anyone.

Speaker 1 25:45
Okay, cool. And then we did the exercise where we stayed on the same note, did we?I can't remember.

Speaker 2 25:49
Yeah.

Speaker 1 25:50
Okay.I didn't just throw you into the deep end, or did I?

Speaker 2 25:53
No, no, no.Yeah, yeah.Oh, yeah, staying on the same note, that was good as a, as like...Yeah.

Speaker 1 25:58
Yeah.

Speaker 2 25:58
Just helped you to like...Yeah.

Speaker 1 26:01
Okay, cool. So in terms of learning, if you were, this is maybe a mean question, but if you were, if you could... Okay, let's do this one first. Is there anything about how improvisation feels for you that you don't think adults or teachers understand?

Speaker 2 26:22

I mean, that would kind of be...I, yeah, I'm not sure.Um, I mean, we've already talked a bit about, like, how, like, teenagers feel like they're being-

Speaker 1 26:31
Mm

Speaker 2 26:31
... perceived by other people, and I mean, like, I think it's n- more nerve-wracking to be in front of your peers, but I think in front of anyone, like, um, going somewhere where you're not, like, sure what you're doing-

Speaker 1 26:45
Mm

Speaker 2 26:46
... um, like I, I think that's always gonna be, like, quite scary, but, like, also, I mean, also a chance to kind of show that you can improvise. I mean, if, yeah, if you can improvise, it's quite good to... Yeah, it's, uh, you get a feeling of, like, accomplishment after you've, like, managed to-

Speaker 1 27:04
Yeah

Speaker 2 27:05
...find your way through, but -

Speaker 1 27:07
Yeah.So-

Speaker 2 27:08
Yeah

Speaker 1 27:08
...so that feeling of, like, there's a wo- there's, in one breath, it's something that's can be quite scary, and that feeling of, you know, that feeling of not knowing what to do.

Speaker 2 27:18
Yeah.

Speaker 1 27:18
What are the feelings that are a- as- attached t- to that?Can you think of-

Speaker 2 27:23
Um, I don't know. I mean, like, kind of, yeah, just like, you, you gotta, like, kind of think about it for yourself, and, like, you c- it is not like something you can be taught note for note. It's just like-

Speaker 1 27:37
Mm

Speaker 2 27:37
...you got to, yeah, do it by yourself.Yeah.

Speaker 1 27:40
But in, in terms of that moment, let's say there's a moment of, you know, I ask you to improvise, or you go to improvise, and you're like, "Ah, I actually am really struggling to navigate a path through this."

Speaker 2 27:52
Yeah.

Speaker 1 27:52
That kind of feeling of like, "I don't know what I'm doing.I don't have a plan here." How does that-

Speaker 2 27:57
Yeah

Speaker 1 27:57
...is there a kind of a feeling attached to that experience?

Speaker 2 28:01
I mean, yeah, probably, like, nervous, like, yeah, kind of like shyness and, like-

Speaker 1 28:07
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 28:07
... you kind of worry how the other person... Like, I, for me, like, I kind of worry that they're thinking like, "Oh," like, you know, I don't know, "What's she doing?" Or something like- ... and I, then I get all kind of shy. You know, you know how I-

Speaker 1 28:20
Yeah

Speaker 2 28:20
...if I, like, I'm doing something, and then I'm like, "Oh, no, that's not working," so.

Speaker 1 28:25
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 28:25
Um, yeah.

Speaker 1 28:26
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:27
Um-

Speaker 1 28:28
And I, I know, I'm-

Speaker 2 28:29
Yeah, I tend to-

Speaker 1 28:30
I know I know how I get.You get, sorry.

Speaker 2 28:33
Yeah.

Speaker 1 28:33
Is that-

Speaker 2 28:33
Yeah

Speaker 1 28:33
...would you be able to s-

Speaker 2 28:36
Yeah

Speaker 1 28:36
...put that into words if you can?Don't worry if you don't want to.

Speaker 2 28:40
No, yeah.Um, I mean, tend, like, personally, like, I tend to apologize quite a lot for, uh, things I don't need to apologize for.

Speaker 1 28:48
Yeah.

Speaker 2 28:48
Um, so, like, yeah, I tend to just, like, kind of, I break character, or not character, but I break, like, from singing, and, like, I just tend to, like, apologize or, um, yeah. It just, a- and I, and I also kind of shrink a bit and, like, um, don't sing as loudly or as confidently-

Speaker 1 29:07
Mm

Speaker 2 29:07
... as I could be. Like, I, I kind of overcompensate, and I, I think that what I'm doing is not, like, good enough, so then I just, like, I'm more nervous even though what I am singing is, would probably be fine, but-

Speaker 1 29:20
Mm

Speaker 2 29:20
...I, I just, yeah, I don't feel as confident in it if I, I'm not, don't know what I'm doing, basically.

Speaker 1 29:25
Yeah, yeah, yeah. I get you. Um, okay. That's really helpful. Is there anything, if, if you... This is kind of the last question. If you were, um, improvising and... Sorry, if you were, if we were swapping roles,

Speaker 2 29:41
Mm.

Speaker 1 29:41
So if you were becoming the, the teacher, and you were working with someone your age, probably a girl, do you have any... What, how would you, what approach would you take? Like, how would you introduce improvisation to them?

Speaker 2 29:56
Ooh. Um, that's a good question. Um, I guess, I mean, I think those techniques that you did with me were really helpful with, like, just staying on the same note and, like, kind of just going through really simply. Um, and yeah, getting them acquainted with, like, the chord changes. Um, and yeah, I mean, probably just, yeah, maybe just doing, like, some scales or like-

Speaker 1 30:24
Mm

Speaker 2 30:25
... going up and down and seeing, like, you can go to any of these notes and just, like, I guess encouraging them to be, like, free with it and, like, not, not worry too much about How it sounds, um, and just, yeah, try and stay within the, the notes that sound right.

Speaker 1 30:42
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 30:42
I mean, I, I wouldn't be sure about which notes do sound right-

Speaker 1 30:46
Yeah.

Speaker 2 30:46
...but, like, kind of just, yeah, like mapping it out-

Speaker 1 30:49
Yeah

Speaker 2 30:49
...and then saying, like, you can, you kind of have free rein over this so you can just do what you want.

Speaker 1 30:54
Yeah, of course.Is there any, is there any, um, anything about, like, the atmosphere in the room that you find helpful or not helpful?Um, does that question make sense?

Speaker 2 31:08
Um, yeah, yeah.Um-

Speaker 1 31:08
Like the kind of environment.

Speaker 2 31:11
Yeah.I mean, yeah, I think it's great if it's just one other person 'cause it's really helpful to, like-

Speaker 1 31:17
Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 31:18
... for them to see what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong, and then, like, tell you what you can do. Um, but yeah, just as long as, like, there's definitely, like, no one, like, around or, like... Yeah.

Speaker 1 31:30
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 2 31:31
You, you like, you know that it's just one other person 'cause, I don't know, sometimes, like, it can be a bit, um, worrying if you're worrying someone's, like, listening or-

Speaker 1 31:38
Mm.

Speaker 2 31:39
Yeah.

Speaker 1 31:40
And if, if you were to make a mista- If, if your st- Let's say, let's maybe flip it to this imaginary student that you're teaching.

Speaker 2 31:46
Yeah.

Speaker 1 31:47
If this imaginary student who you're teaching were to make loads of mistakes or really struggle with improvisation-

Speaker 2 31:53
Yeah

Speaker 1 31:53
... what would be a helpful... How would you... What would be a helpful thing? How would you find it helpful to be... Sorry, let me rephrase that. What would be... If you were to make a mistake or the student were to make a mistake, what would you want in that moment? Would you want affirmation, or would you want it to be brushed over, or what's helpful in those moments?

Speaker 2 32:14
Yeah.Um, I think kind of like highlighting the good points and then, um, just kind of, yeah, like just going over it again and, like, going into what they're, they're not sure they're doing.I mean-

Speaker 1 32:27
Mm

Speaker 2 32:27
...I, I don't know.Like, I'm just going from my own personal experience, so I don't know.

Speaker 1 32:30
That's all I need.

Speaker 2 32:32
Um-

Speaker 1 32:32
That's what I want.

Speaker 2 32:32
I don't know. Yeah, I don't know how other people would find it. Um, but just, yeah, maybe like... I don't, yeah, I don't really know. Maybe, like, helping with confidence levels if they're feeling not confident about it, or if they're really struggling with, like, the kind of no- or, like, just, yeah, maybe just wor- wondering what to do, maybe, like, just-

Speaker 1 32:52
Yeah

Speaker 2 32:52
...yeah, give an example maybe or something like that.

Speaker 1 32:55
Okay.So practical advice, practical solutions is helpful.

Speaker 2 32:59
Yeah, yeah, I suppose, yeah.

Speaker 1 33:01
Okay, cool.All right, [YP6]. Uh, is there anything else you wanted to say?

Speaker 2 33:05
No, that's fine.

Speaker 1 33:06
Okay, great.Well, thank you so much for this.I'm so-

Speaker 2 33:08
Oh, you're welcome

Speaker 1 33:09
...so grateful.

Speaker 2 33:10
Good luck with your, um, dissertation.

Speaker 1 33:12
Thank you.

Speaker 2 33:13
It sounds really interesting.

Speaker 1 33:14
I'm very ready for it to be done, to be honest.

Speaker 2 33:16
Oh, I'm sure, yeah.

Speaker 1 33:18
Um, okay, I'm just gonna stop the recording quickly.

Appendix 2: Meg Bird – Self-Employed Approval Letter

MEG BIRD

07807 602 791 | megbirdmusic@hotmail.com

12/01/2026

Dear UWTSD,

RE: **"Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers: A Comparative Study of Beginners and Experienced Improvisers"**

I confirm that I approve of the research proposed into 'Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers' to be carried out by Meg Bird of Meg Bird Vocal Coaching as interviews, in specific interview sessions. These will be carried out between Feb (project start date) and September (project end date) 2026.

Kind Regards,

Meg Bird

Appendix 3: Workplace Approval Letter



To Whom It May Concern:

RE: **"Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers: A Comparative Study of Beginners and Experienced Improvisers"**



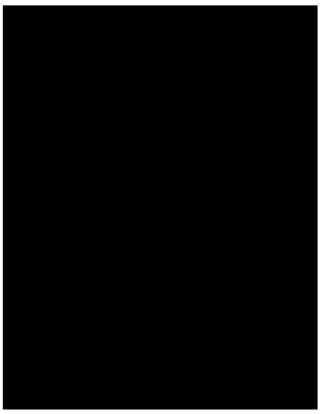
I am writing in my capacity as Director of Music at The King's School, Canterbury, to confirm that I grant permission to Meg Bird to conduct research within our organisation as part of their Master's dissertation.

We understand that this research is being undertaken in partial fulfilment of the requirements for their Master's degree at The Voice Study Centre (University of Wales, Trinity St David). The proposed research will involve interviews with students and will be conducted within the workplace environment.

This permission is granted on the understanding that:

- All research activities will be conducted in a professional and ethical manner.
- Participation of staff members will be voluntary.
- Confidentiality and anonymity of the organisation and its employees will be maintained where required.
- All data collected will be used solely for academic purposes.

We are satisfied that the research will not interfere significantly with normal business operations and are pleased to support this academic endeavour.



information, please do not hesitate to contact me.



The King's School Canterbury | 25 The Precincts, Canterbury CT1 2ES | +44 (0)1227 595501

Appendix 4: Consent Form

Meg Bird
The University of Wales Trinity Saint David
megbirdmusic@hotmail.com
19/06/2026

Dear [insert name],

Invitation to Participate in Research

Thank you so much for agreeing to be involved in my research. As you know, I am currently completing a Masters dissertation at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and I am writing to provide you with full information about the study before asking for your formal consent to participate.

About the Research

The study is titled "Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers: A Comparative Study of Beginners and Experienced Improvisers." It explores the experiences and attitudes of musicians toward vocal improvisation, with a particular focus on understanding the conditions under which improvisation feels accessible or anxiety-inducing. Your perspective as an experienced musician is invaluable to this research. The study has received full ethical approval from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David Ethics Committee.

What Will Participation Involve?

Participation will involve a semi-structured interview with me, lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. The interview will take place at a time and location convenient to you — either in person or online via a secure video platform. I will ask you open questions about your experiences of learning and using improvisation, and how it has featured in your professional practice. There are no right or wrong answers and you are welcome to decline to answer any question at any point.

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes only.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All data will be kept strictly confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym and no identifying information will appear in the final dissertation or any related publications. Audio recordings will be retained securely until [specific deletion date] and then permanently deleted. Anonymised transcripts may be retained for examination and marking purposes in line with University policy, for a period of [X years].

All data will be accessible only to myself and my academic supervisor. The data controller for this study is the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Data will be

processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Voluntary Participation and the Right to Withdraw

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without any consequences to our relationship. Should you wish to withdraw after your interview has taken place, you may do so up until [withdrawal deadline date], after which your data may have been incorporated into the analysis. If you withdraw, all data relating to your participation will be destroyed promptly.

Risks and Benefits

No significant risks are anticipated beyond those associated with normal professional conversation. If any question feels uncomfortable, please feel free to skip it or indicate that you would prefer not to answer. Your participation will contribute to research that aims to improve understanding of improvisation pedagogy and support music educators in teaching this skill more effectively.

Further Information

If you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at: megbirdmusic@hotmail.com. You are also welcome to contact my academic supervisor, Joshua Lee-Cummins at: joshua@voicestudycentre.com or the University's Research Ethics Committee at: academic.office@uwtsd.ac.uk.

If you are happy to proceed, please complete the consent form below and return it to me at megbirdmusic@hotmail.com before our interview.

Thank you so much — I really appreciate your time and generosity in supporting this research.

Warm wishes,

Meg Bird| The University of Wales Trinity Saint David |

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study Title: *Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers: A Comparative Study of Beginners and Experienced Improvisers*

Researcher: Meg Bird | The University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Please read each statement carefully and tick to confirm your agreement. Please initial next to each statement and sign at the bottom.

☐ I have read and understood the participant information letter for this study.

☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the information provided.

☐ I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without consequence.

☐ I understand that my data will be kept confidential and that I will not be identifiable in any published work.

☐ I understand that the interview will be audio recorded, that recordings will be kept securely until [deletion date], and that anonymised transcripts may be retained for examination purposes in line with University policy.

☐ I understand that my data will be processed in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, and that the data controller is the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

☐ I give my consent to take part in this research study.

☐ I am happy to be contacted to arrange my interview.

Full Name

Date

Email Address

Signature

Please return this form to Meg at megbirdmusic@hotmail.com prior to your interview.

A copy of this letter is provided for your own records.

Appendix 5: Study Journal

Research Journal

10/08/2026

New research questions (codes in bracket):

How do gendered and instrumental pedagogical traditions shape the way improvisation is taught and experienced by vocalists?

(Gender Dynamics)

What role does self-concept and vocal identity play in shaping the emotional experience of improvisation for female singers?

(Identity and Self-Concept)

How do adolescent female singers' experiences of learning improvisation compare with the retrospective accounts of experienced female musicians?

(

What contextual and psychosocial conditions shape whether improvisation mitigates or exacerbates symptoms of MPA for adolescent female singers?

(Determinative contexts and conditions)

20/08

Understanding the relationship with theoretical knowledge is complex. On the one hand, all professionals, have craved/ continue to crave that knowledge. For all, learning and implementing that knowledge within improv led to a sense of reduced creativity, or a reduced experience of creative expression. However, all recognise that process of acquiring said knowledge, has become a foundational element of their current practice. Perhaps the shift needs to be in how that theoretical knowledge is instilled? Dylan Bell argues singers do not need to understand the theory as it is impossible to draw upon the theoretical knowledge if the aural processing are not balanced with the theoretical knowledge.

OR does the need for theoretical knowledge come from a gendered idea, that theory (masc) gives a credibility? Researched “is music theory masculine” and was surprised at the amount of content on the subject:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/833390?casa_token=MvtdsL4cE_sAAAAA%3AjRhl-1Z2QWPNOZXYeDZXbGjMrnHD61QarBstPWsm0BjmRoxFSkvpKS2gjU69tOucSFSBrGq6Xq6LdDhEqpbsboJ9y6g2GcTXAVrt_OBbtI5hVmDTOMnR&seq=1

https://6jornadesmusicologia.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/nicola-dibben.pdf

- "for women to behave with modesty and deference towards men discouraged women from singing in public, and from the explicit displays of improvisation and creativity, which men engaged in more frequently.
- "In her book Music, Gender, Education, Lucy Green uses the school music classroom to illuminate processes involved in the construction of gender identity through musical participation, beliefs and preferences. Using questionnaires, interviews and observation, Green found a number of widely held beliefs about the gender-appropriateness of musical practices: according to teachers, girls were more 122 MUSICAL IDENTITIES successful at singing (a belief which agreed with pupil's perceptions), girls were more active as instrumentalists and more involved in classical music, and girls' attitudes were understood by teachers as linked to 'expressivity', 'decoration' and 'delicacy' (Green, 1997, pp. 151–152). Girls were also seen by both pupils and teachers to lack the necessary abilities for composition—a lack which constitutes their femininity. Green argues that boys and girls 'experience their own music as a reflection and legitimation of their own gender identities' (Green, 1997, p. 229), thus boys presented themselves as more positive about their own composition, and positioned their own work positively in relation to others."

https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/17/article/673628/summary - Ella FItz

- https://open.bu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/9737b73a-5533-4ed3-a81e-5dca4a26b0ad/content
  In this essay, I join those scholars critical of jazz's institutionalization by suggesting that higher education's most dominant form of "jazz theory" too often serves as a white-masculinist technology that performs various functions to reinforce patriarchal jazz cultures and white supremacy both, or, as Tracy McMullen puts it, "at worst, jazz education teaches sexism and racism to its students."7 My concern here is not to relitigate old debates in jazz studies around theory versus practice, formal versus informal learning, or other questions about jazz school's role in producing improvisers who all sound the same (and therefore "inauthentic"). Rather, I am concerned with the racial and gendered exclusions that music theory exacerbates, if not causes, when it is defined in narrow Western terms and then prioritized in curricular development.

https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.05.11.3/mto.05.11.3.burns.html - differentiating between 'style' – louis Armstrong, and 'feeling' – Bessie Smith. Bille Holiday said this – could this be a reinforcement of the gendered stereotypes?

How can we teach improvisation in a way that best prepares young girls for formal, improvisation, often in jazz, without perpetuating the idea that jazz theory surpasses all other types of knowledge?

24/08 – Something in the fact that all pro musicians found singing improv easier than instrumental improv. For the musicians who were, primarily, singers, who studied in a conservatoire setting, the perceived attitude of vocal improv is somewhat belittled. Singers feel that other musicians have a low expectation of what they can achieve, and yet some of the tasks presented to them in a learning environment felt much more challenging.

Perhaps the entry point for improv is easier – you can rely on ears to take you so far (Darcy said this). Once you start implementing the technical, theoretical language, there is a greater challenge for vocalists. This process is, perhaps, easier for the instrumentalists. Reference – What do they need?. Talks about the 3 phrases of internalising language, and how instrumentalists/vocalists, move through the different stages at different rates.

This difference hasn't been perceived by young people – perhaps lack of exposure?

Thinking about it! – When YP2 has to think about improv, it goes wrong. Correlates to experience of pro musicains – when they had to insert theoretical language, improv = less musical.

"I didn't know how one would do that.I mean, it came naturally to a point, but you know, it is technical, and you do need to know things." – I feel like this perhaps sums up the learning improv process. Natural ability can get you so far, but technical understanding is necessary to progress? Or is this an example of entrenched, systemically patriarchal understanding that knowledge it necessary? Do Aural Skills count as theoretical understanding? This article suggests that current aural practices are built upon a reliance on "musical theory" https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.21.27.2/mto.21.27.2.chenette.html. Perhaps this stems from the need to quantify an artistic process – for teacher and student?

https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=diSAUKUMOQUC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=aural+vs+theoretical+knowledge+in+music&ots=UTlEl18a2h&sig=E-cB8cWJ4GJ_VVdAIF6uwC54Jtk&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false → The intro of this book talks about how traditional aural exams focus on pitch and rhythmic identification. The expressive elements are neglected. "Narrow training programmes, far from increasing aural awareness, may actually close ears and minds" (pg. 3).

Coding thoughts – In the mitigating/triggering section, perhaps it is best to have "determinaive contexts and conditions". For every mitigating factor, the lack of said factor can become a trigger? EG, validation = mitigating factor, lack of validation stokes competition and insecurity, fuels fear of judgement.

27/07

Juliet – Improv – musical exploration, finding harmonies, developing skills.
Charlotte – again, musical development, finding new notes and melodies – will stop when she gets it "wrong".
Penelope
H – "fun making stuff up"
Alice - Um, yeah, had n- had never had any lessons of like improvisation.It had just been weirdly, I didn't even know the word transcription, but I was just kind of- ... copy it back 'cause it was fun, and my like slight competitiveness of saying, "Can I, can I do this?"

→ developing the skill
Freya - Speaker 2 32:43
So that's a whole, um, thing where I go, "No, no," then up, and then back out again.

Speaker 1 32:51
Yeah.

Speaker 2 32:52
So that's quite fun 'cause it's a mechanical practice of changing the flow.

→ fun is in the challenge

Participant Profiles

Relationship to Improv

"In My Room"

" Benefits of"

Identity and Form of Expression

Determinative Contexts: Controllable Elements

- ***Formal vs Informal Education*** → *Conservatoire. Mechanical learning → Loss of Musicality. Hitting the right notes OVER expression and musicality. Informal education → perhaps a focus on vibe and feel?*
- ***Validation*** *(or lack thereof)*
- ***Control*** *(or lack, thereof)*
- ***Approach to knowledge*** → *The drive to learn can be seen as a mitigating factor – it empowers people to independently take on pedagogical improv, but often the*

lack of theoretical knowledge can be a cause of MPA within improv pedagogy. The absorption of the cultural understanding that theoretical knowledge surpasses aural ability

Things I want to include:

Participant profiles
How young people were able to access 'Flow' within individual improvisations.
Gender Dynamics – theoretical knowledge vs aural skill.

Appendix 6: Ethics Approval

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

RESEARCH STUDENTS This form is to be completed by the student within **SIX** months for full-time students and **TWELVE** months for part time students, after the commencement of the research degree or following progression to Part Two of your course. Once complete, submit this form via the ***MyTSD Doctoral College Portal*** at (https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk). This document is also available in Welsh.
RESEARCH STAFF ONLY All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.
STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:		Megan Bird			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:		Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☒	Postgraduate Research Student	☐

3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	WAPPAR
4	Campus:	Carmarthen
5	E-mail address:	megbirdmusic@hotmail.com
6	Contact Telephone Number:	07807602791
	For students:	

7	Student Number:	2245846
8	Programme of Study:	MA Professional Practice (Voice Pedagogy)
9	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Debbie Winter/Joshua Lee Cummins

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)		**YES**	☒	**NO**	☐
					Date	
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): ***Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval***	Research Degrees Committee		☐		
		Institute Research Committee		☐		
		Other (write in) WAPPAR Ethics Board Representative		☒		

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	**UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice**	☒
2	**UWTSD Research Data Management Policy**	☒
3	*[List any other relevant documents here]*	☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.

1	Institution					
2	Contact person name					
3	Contact person e-mail address					
4	Is your research externally funded?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
7		Employed	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa	If YES then the permission question	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐

	Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	below does not need to be answered.				
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	**"Attitudes Towards Vocal Improvisation in Female Singers: A Comparative Study of Beginners and Experienced Improvisers"**		
2	Proposed start date:	10th Feb 2025	Proposed end date:	01/10/2026
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) **Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the points below:** *Purpose of Research Activity* *Proposed Research Question* *Aims of Research Activity* *Objectives of Research Activity* Demonstrate, briefly, how **<u>Existing Research</u>** has informed the proposed activity and explain *What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge* *How it addresses an area of importance.*			
3	**Purpose of Research Activity** 1) **To contribute to the discourse on improvisational pedagogy.** *My last piece of research explored the paradoxical relationship between vocal improvisation and Music Performance Anxiety (MPA). This study unlocked more questions than answers, and I found very little research that centred the voice of adolescent females who are learning to improvise. Research that explored the attitudes towards the learning processes of experienced or professional improvisers was also limited. By examining and comparing these perspectives, this study aims to contribute to ongoing academic and pedagogical discussions surrounding improvisational learning in vocal education.* 2) **To develop my teaching practice as an improvisational educator.** *Research into vocal improvisational pedagogy is limited when compared with instrumental improvisation, despite evidence suggesting that vocal improvisation presents distinct pedagogical and psychological challenges. My own improvisational training was largely grounded in instrumental pedagogical models. By exploring the attitudes of both beginner and experienced vocal improvisers, this research aims to inform the development of more contextually appropriate and sensitive teaching strategies within my own practice.* 3) **To continue developing my practice as a 'holistic' vocal coach.** *The general theme across all my research has been an exploration into the psychological process and impact of singing. This has revealed that, under pressurised circumstances, music making can become a stressor. This is, in part, due to the complex relationship that*			

	occurs between a singers' sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and identity, and their voice. Generally, when vocalists are stressed, their voice is negatively impacted (stress is often cited as an aetiological factor for voice disorders). There is a need, therefore, to teach with student wellbeing at the core of any pedagogical process, to ensure students can progress to the best of their ability. Gaining an understanding of attitudes towards improvisation, will support me in developing a strategy that is built around mitigating the emotionally triggering factors of improvisation. (this box should expand as you type)
4	**Research Question** - What attitudes towards improvisation are held by beginner adolescent female vocalists, and how are these attitudes formed? - How do these attitudes compare with those of experienced female vocal improvisers? - To what extent do attitudes towards improvisation relate to perceived ability, motivation, and willingness to engage in improvisation in the future? - How far do early attitudes towards improvisation act as a precursor to an individual's relationship with improvisation? (this box should expand as you type)
5	**Aims of Research Activity** - To investigate the attitudes towards vocal improvisation within the adolescent female demographic. - To compare these attitudes with those of professional, female vocalists and improvisers. - To examine whether there is a link between early attitudes towards improvisation, and an individual's ongoing relationship with it. - To garner insight into how attitudes towards improvisation might dynamically relate to an individual's sense of self-efficacy, identity, and self-concept. (this box should expand as you type)
6	**Objectives of Research Activity** - To develop pedagogical improvisation strategies that avoid triggering symptoms of MPA. - To act as an advocate for the somewhat under-researched adolescent female voice, with a specific focus on CCM, in an outcome-focused environment. - TO gather qualitative data on the perceptions and emotional responses of beginner, adolescent, females, towards improvisation. - To gather qualitative data on professional vocalists' perceptions of their learning experiences when improvising, and how that experience shapes their relationship with improvisation in their professional life. - To analyse how attitudes towards improvisation may influence perceived ability, motivation, and future engagement. (this box should expand as you type)
	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that **may** be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.

7	This research will largely use qualitative data, with limited quantitative study, to create a picture of learning experiences in regard to vocal improvisation. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with two participant groups: 1. Adolescent female vocalists 2. Professional/highly experienced vocalists (with ranging experience of improvisation) I will take a flexible interview style, and focus on participants perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of improvisation. Interviews will be recorded and coded when transcribed for analysis. Consent will be obtained for recording. These participants will also be asked to partake in a questionnaire. This will also be opened to non-interview participants to widen the breadth of the data and deepen the strength of the statistical analysis. This questionnaire will include attitudinal statements relating to confidence, enjoyment, perceived ability and willingness to engage in improvisation. This questionnaire will be use to provide a contextual and statistical backdrop for the interviews. If appropriate, a small focus group discussions will take place with adult participants to garner further insights into their experiences and perceptions. This may provide the opportunity for singers, who also teach, to discuss their experiences as teachers. Focus groups will not take place with adolescent participants. A literature review will be conducted alongside this to support the findings and provide a contextualised backdrop for analysis of any data collected. (this box should expand as you type)
	Location of research activity Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
8	The King's School **25 The Precincts** **Canterbury** **Kent** **CT1 2ES** My teaching studio **Fire Eye Land** **The Avenue** **Margate** **CT9 2ST** Online (zoom interviews, google forms) (this box should expand as you type)
	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this.
9	

	(this box should expand as you type)

10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents **NOT** publicly available?	**NO**	☒
		YES	☐
11	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with the current data protection law of the country in question and that of England and Wales. *(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	**YES**	**NO**
12	A prosperous Wales	☐	☐
13	A resilient Wales	☐	☐
14	A healthier Wales	☐	☐
15	A more equal Wales	☐	☐
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	☐	☐
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	☐	☐
18	A globally responsible Wales	☐	☐
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		
	(this box should expand as you type)		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	**YES**	**NO**
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
2	Use of interviews?	☒	☐
3	Use of focus groups?	☒	☐
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☒	☐
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☒
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒

11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☒	☐
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☒
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.		
	Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type)	☐	☒

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

If there are no participants then do not complete this section, but go directly to section H.

	Who are the intended participants:	**YES**	**NO**
1	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☒
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☒	☐
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☒	☐
5	Prisoners?	☐	☒
6	Young offenders?	☐	☒
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.		
	Details of any other participant groups: (this box should expand as you type)	☐	☒

	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected?	12 for the interviews (6 teenagers, 6 adults) 32 for the questionnaires (16 teenagers, 16 adults)

		(this box should expand as you type)
11	Who will the participants be?	Adolescents will be a mix of my students, and students from other vocal coaches within my network. The participants will be any adolescent female who has begun to or needs to learn improvisation for exams or performances. Experienced singers will be vocalists who improvise regularly within their performances and would consider themselves as 'skilled improvisers'. *(this box should expand as you type)*
12	How will you identify the participants?	Participants will be sought through my own network of students, vocal coaches and teachers. I will also reach out for participants through social media. *(this box should expand as you type)*

	Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☒	☐	☐
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☒	☐	☐
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☒	☐	☐
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☒	☐	☐
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	(this box should expand as you type)			

	Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☒	☐	☐
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			

	Audio recording equipment will be used to record interviews and focus groups for transcription. *(this box should expand as you type)*

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.		
1	**Full risk assessment completed and appended?**	**Yes**	☐
		No	☒
2	**Risks to participants** For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
	Risk to participants: - Talking about an act (improvisation) that has potential to trigger MPA may be distressing for some participants. - Interviews and focus groups will be recorded which may risk disclosure of personal data. *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to participants:* - Ensure there are plenty of resources for participants to use, for organisations that may be able to offer support. - Participants will be informed that they can leave or withdraw the process at any stage. - Each participant will be given a code to protect their identity and all footage will be stored according to data protection guidelines. *(this box should expand as you type)*	
3	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities		
	(this box should expand as you type)		
4	**Risks to the investigator** For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest		
	Risk to the investigator: - Lack of participants. - Emotional stress	*How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator:* - Maintain contact with supervisor and keep in touch with wider network. - Make use of the support systems offered by Voice Study Centre, UWTSD, workplace and my own network. Maintain a reflective journal, and thorough planning to avoid overworking.	

	- Loss of recorded audio footage - Conflict of Interest between role as teacher and researcher. *(this box should expand as you type)*	- Back up all footage on a hard drive. Password protect all files according to data protection guidelines. - Maintain a dialogue with course supervisor, and keep a reflexive journal in order to balance this dynamic. *(this box should expand as you type)*
5	**University/institutional risks** For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection	
	Risk to the University: - Bring reputation of university into disrepute. - Accusation of misconduct *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to the University:* - Inform particiants that I am working as an independent researcher. - Ensure I follow research ethical guidelines. *(this box should expand as you type)*
6	**Environmental risks** For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment: NA *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to environment:* NA *(this box should expand as you type)*

	Disclosure and Barring Service			
	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
7	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☒	☐	☐
8	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write “Pending”; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.	**001811386911**		

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	**Feedback** What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	Provide participants with my email address so they can contact me with questions and feedback. *(this box should expand as you type)*
2	**Informed consent** Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	All participants will be emailed an appropriate consent form before interviews and focus groups take place. This will include time commitment, purpose of the research, the information I am seeking to

	gain and details of the research. Consent will be included within any online or physical questionnaire I write. *(this box should expand as you type)*
3	**Confidentiality / Anonymity** Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	Participants' names and their affiliated institutions will not be mentioned in the final research reports. All consent forms will be stored in a password protected files. Names will not be collected with questionnaires. *(this box should expand as you type)*

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	**YES**	**NO**
1	***"Personal data"*** *means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.*	☐	☐
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	Audio and video data will be collected in order to transcribe the information acquired in interviews and focus groups. Consent forms are required for this, so names and email addresses of participants will be collected, but stored in password protected files. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	**YES**	**NO**
3	***"Special category data"*** *means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' –* *(a) racial or ethnic origin,* *(b) political opinions,* *(c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,* *(d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992),* *(e) physical or mental health or condition,* *(f) sexual life,* *(g) genetics,* *(h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),*	☐	☐x
	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	*(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	**YES**	**NO**
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
6	University computers?	☐	☒

7	Private company computers?	☐	☒
8	Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☒	☐
10	"Cloud" storage or websites?	☒	☐
11	Other – specify:	☐	☒
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	All data will be kept in password protected cloud storage on the company's Office 365 system which will not be shared. Audio/visual data will be transcribed and would be shown to participants to check accuracy of reporting. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. All participants will be anonymised or pseudonymised to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder. *(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Data Protection		
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	**YES**	**NO**
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☒	☐
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
20	Data archiving?	☐	☒
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the Company's Office 365 system which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. All data transfers will be encrypted, and password protected. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In accordance with the DPA2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held relating to them, and this data will be deleted immediately if the participant requests this, in which case the data will not be used in the project. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	Meg Bird Joshua Lee Cummins		

	(this box should expand as you type)		
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	Meg Bird *(this box should expand as you type)*		
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the Company's Office 365 system which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected and will be reformatted at the end of the project in order to destroy the data. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
25	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. (*Most relevant to academic staff)*		
	NA *(this box should expand as you type)*		
26	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	**YES**	☒
27	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	**YES**	☒

SECTION K: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	**Signature of applicant:**	Meg Bird	**Date: 06/01**

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Christian Felices	**Date:** 2nd March 2026
3	Signature:	Christian Felices	

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		**Date:**
5	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed **ALL RELEVANT** sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☒	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (**where appropriate**)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) *ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE **ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT***
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS ONLY
Once complete, submit this form via the **MyTSD Doctoral College Portal** at (https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk).

RESEARCH STAFF ONLY
All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.