

Dan 0:00

You're listening to Dan and Holly and we're on the committee of young musicians of social justice. young musicians for social justice seeks to bring together and empower young musicians to recognise their potential as agents of social change. This podcast asks the question, what is the role of music in bringing about social justice? Over the next 12 weeks we're going to be hearing from a number of different speakers all with unique perspectives on this question. We hope you enjoy listening to our conversations. The music you're hearing is a snippet of 'Buzzin' - sung by one of our guests William and his band Electric Fire.

William plays drums bass keyboards, he sometimes sings with backing vocals. He's currently in college doing level three music production and performance. He is part of heart and soul and also part of the band 'electric fire', which he says has helped him to gain a lot of experience which you can't get from college. His plan after college is to find a job in the music industry, such as being a beat maker, producer or music performer. He uses Ableton Live 10 as his software for making music and also Logic Pro. He makes all types of genres and mostly ends up making chill beats, which he says helps him to calm his mind and keep him focused.

We also have Robyn with us today. Robyn grew up in Suffolk and lives in London. She's an avant garde left field trumpeter, and curator of Robyn's rocket inclusive conscious gigs. She's an author of two books, one about periods and menstruation, and one about autistic women's safety. She's played at the Barbican and Southbank Centre, and in 2018, was named as one in 100 list of most influential disabled people in the UK. She is a core team member and recipient of the Welcome hub award 2018 to 2020, and is a **research associate (correction from audio)** at University College London, as well as having spoken internationally in America, Australia and Russia. Together Robyn and William both run a monthly online music jam with heart and soul.

Holly 2:14

Welcome, guys to the podcast. Thank you so much for coming.

William 2:18

You're welcome.

Robyn 2:19

Thanks for having us.

Dan 2:20

Yeah, so we'll get started. We ask this question to all our guests we have done so far. And so - what sort of music has helped to get you through the COVID-19 restrictions over the past year or two years?

William 2:32

How should we do it Should I go first and then you ?

Cool. I'd say spoken word music, stuff like Dave santan, And J. Cole. I'd say Meek Mill sometimes. And then sometimes radio stuff that just helps to keep the vibes going when I'm washing up and stuff, but most of the spoken word music has got me through COVID-19 because it's helped me to like, think further ahead than normal. It's helped me to keep in a mode. It's made me think, look at stuff more seriously. And actually just yeah, that Yeah, that's right. Makes me Just think about stuff mostly. So yeah, helps keep me focused.

Robyn 3:15

Yeah, for me, I think (?) seems to have had like, a like creativity explosion during, during the last sort of 18 months, or however long this situation has been going on for now. But quite early on, he put out an album called the spirit cancel. And there's a track on there, which I think thinking might be called eight spring street, or maybe it's just called Spring Street or something. But something like that. That's been really helpful. I think also, I've been on a bit of nostalgia trip, I've listened to a lot of the stuff that was like in charts when I was growing up, which I wasn't particularly into... but it just, I just it's been a very reflective time for me. And then also like I've, like I sort of have some albums you know that you can like return back to like a comfy jumper. Like Pink Floyd's dark side of the moon or the dub All Stars version of it is really good. Yeah, I mean, I've listened to a bit of Ornette Coleman. I've listened to (?) I mean, I've listened to a lot of stuff. But then the new things I listened to have been...

Yeah, has has really Oh, I mean, actually, that's a lie because I listened to the May I destroy you soundtrack.

Holly 4:36

Oh, yeah, that's that's really good, isn't it?

Robyn 4:39

I think that might be where that theme of the 90s came from. I think there's a few things with within that, but there's also like, it's really quite wide. Like there's I don't know if you'd say it was a gospel, I don't know quite to say that it fits into that genre. But there is a track I think it's called Let it rain, which It's really beautiful the harmonies are really amazing. So yeah, so I mean, that's kind of what I've been listening to also. Yeah, that is probably what I've been listening to. But I mean, it's such... pretty wide tasting. I'm trying to remember what Spotify says in my time capsule. Oh, the Asian dub foundation at that thing with Stewart Lee. I don't know whether that came out during lockdown, or whether it's just had a resurgence or something. But that album that's got like flyover and things like that on it. I've listened to that a lot as well.

Holly 5:34

Nice.

Dan 5:35

Well, very wide ranging. Yeah.

Okay, great. So, um, so to start off. So could you perhaps both Tell us about your relationship with music?

William 5:47

I would say that music is my girlfriend (laughter). Yes, I'd say it's the main thing that keeps me calm it's the main thing that keeps me focused. Whenever I'm struggling, that sort of thing. Music is my go to, if I could, like mess about on the drums in a soundproof room, I would be there cos that is more effective and stuff. So yeah.

Robyn 6:19

My relationship with music is like Will said, It calms me that's important. But it also is, like, very deep in my core, because I learnt to talk through music. Music was the thing that really, I have autism. And when I was small, my mom tried all these different things to get me to sort of be part of the world, because I would pull away from her and I wouldn't, when I was a bit older, wouldn't bring my arms up to be picked up. And so she was trying to find ways to help me communicate. And one of the ways she tried was playing the guitar and singing to me. And I really responded to that. And so I took an interest in music very early. And I think that's shaped things for me, because it's always been like a way to communicate. Like, if I'm feeling depressed or unhappy, I can sit and make a piece of music. The trumpet, I think, is an instrument that's like, because it's a wind instrument it in a way, it almost becomes part of you. Because you're, you're like, blowing into it. And, like, obviously, the trumpet is not like, you know, my hands or anything, but I think there's something about the fact that you are breathing into this instrument, and that's what's making the sound. I think that that opens up possibilities for expression. Yeah, I'd say communication was really key for me in terms of my relationship, and I think also fascination. I remembered that, you know, as a kid, like, the things that fascinated me about music were like, I really liked ABBA, which might sound really strange, but I liked it. Because of like, the vocal harmonies, I thought that they were really incredible. And I didn't really have words to articulate it and the same with Lou Reed like Lou Reed's very, like raw, like the Velvet Underground. And, but also, you know, this...is very, like walk on the wild side, has really beautiful vocals within it. But it's also quite an edgy type of song. So...

Holly 8:49

yeah, I love ABBA as well. So, you gotta agree with that one.

Dan 8:55

Yeah, that's great. So, um, you're both from heart and soul. Could you both tell us a bit about what heart and soul do?

Robyn 9:02

So heart and soul is an arts organisation based in southeast London, in Deptford, southeast London. And it was started over 30 years ago. And heart and soul's like, motto, if you like is believe in the talents and powers of people with learning disabilities, and sort of tag autistic people into that as well (haha). Because there are a few of us that don't have a learning disability, but are autistic and really benefit from heart and soul. And I think that that thing about belief is really, really important. And that might seem like a wishy washy thing, but it really isn't. I think the thing about heart and soul is that heart and soul is a really good name of the organisation because it's like, because what, you know, like, that is who they are they're heart and soul like to believe in someone. That - That seems like a really fundamental thing to like, believe in people. And so what heart and soul do is they do things like they do a regular adults - Like, what it's called 'all sorts'. And obviously it used to be in person, it currently is on zoom, but hopefully one day it will be in person again, when it was in person, it was a full day and online, it's two and a half hours. What it is, it's a bunch of creative activities. And you can choose, but and it's a range of things. So they'll normally be like a music based activity, maybe a movement based activity, like a visual art variety. And there's normally a theme to each season. Like the rewrite the - "reinvent yourself" season, or the, I don't know what the current one that's coming up is called. But anyway, so we do that. There's also because of lockdown, we've been doing stuff online. So there's regular, there's something basically every day of the week online. And there's also the do your own thing, which is a young people's project. And it's very similar to all sorts, and it gives people the opportunity to try different art activities. heart and soul also have an artist development programme. So they support artists by teaming them up with someone so that might be teaming them up with a musician and then forming a band, like the - The Fitch police was like that with Charles Stewart, who I think is the musical director for Grace Jones the jazz singer. So yeah, so things like that is, is possible, but it might also just be like, like giving somebody space to be able to like, you know, have a drawing session or whatever kind of art they want to do with somebody that can help facilitate that space to sort of hold space. I think also, heart and soul like is important in that people are connected to each other. And I think with people with learning disabilities and autistic people, that's very important, because often people are quite isolated. So it's good that people can connect with each other. And then, and then yeah, they also have the one to one sessions, and then like, I've been like a recipient of the artist

development programme, and that helps pay for some equipment. And they do things like take bands on tour, and, you know, get gigs and stuff like that. And so it's quite, it's quite wide ranging, but it's all really focused on the belief in the power and talents of people. And I think that that's really important because so often, people with learning disabilities, and autistic people don't get the opportunity to take part in mainstream society in the same way because things aren't always easy read. Like when the first lockdown happened, the government wasn't putting out easy read documents that explain to people with learning disabilities, or people with any kind of communication need about the lockdown, or about COVID. And so that there's a lot of, a lot of inequality that's almost swept under the carpet, you don't see it, you know, like, with, with, say, if you're a wheelchair user, you know, you see when people put ramps, and you know, they provide step free access and things like that you've got the wheelchair symbol on the tube map in London, but in - with learning disability and autism it's less visible. But there's a lot of people who aren't included in society. And I think one of the key things about art is that anyone can take part in art and there's as many ways to take part in art as there are people. One thing that heart and soul is good at is finding people's way that they like to express themselves and then helping them to be able to do that. So you get, you know, all artists are different - it's not like a group of people that sort of fit into a mould it's very, very different. And I think that's reflective of how many different kinds of people there are at Heart n soul.

William 14:11

Yeah, I'm gonna say some stuff as well. Um, I like the 'do your own thing'. All sorts is basically like a, like a more older people version of like the activities that Robyn said, what I go to is 'do your own thing'. This is from I think age 16 to 25.

Robyn 14:35

ages 10 to 25.

William 14:37

And then 'all sorts' is like age 25 and upwards. So you get that splitted kind of group. What I do - 'do your own thing' is like they have lots of stuff going on, they have a DJ. They have writing sessions and these are all in different rooms. It's like a big Carnival with different doors to different activities and everything's safe. the staff

they're always walking about so nothing can happen. Any arguments there's staff there as well. There's kind of enough staff to control the crowd, which is a good thing. People who are scared of crowds and stuff, or who are not like, have that motivation to speak to someone, they can always like, the staff kind of good are good at picking them out, in a way, so yeah and they're good. So yeah. And then the other activities there's jamming sessions, I'm always in the music jamming session, I can't lie. We're just - the music jam session is like a group, literally just goes in there, everyone's different, everyone does different things. We just try to make something and we just jam and chill. And then we swap around in groups. Because sometimes there's kind of like a lot of people, we swap around instruments and we swap around in groups, and we just jam, we chill. On the end, when if we have if we have something like structured, we basically perform it at the end. Sometimes if there's enough time. There's DJ section where they DJing and they do DJing, and they have the equipment they use, I think the normal DJ software with a desk and everything, like a portable one, in like some big hall. Yeah, they do DJing and um, yeah, I haven't really done DJ much. But yeah, it's alright I tried it sometimes. They do radio, radio like Heart n soul radio, our own radio station where you could just speak freely about stuff. Sometimes people go up on a website and people who can't attend 'do your own thing', go up on the website, and they speak back to the radio, they send emails and texts. It's like craziness, like lots going on. There's writing, where people who are proper into lik writing and showing their words and speaking for yourself and stuff. You can go in there and write Something, you have someone called Ned, who's good at playing keyboard and stuff. He's one of the staffs. He's sitting there with you, he probably triesa to make something up or trying to make it in a way you like it. And then you have a song in a way like a little start. And then you have you got arts going on always arts, arts is the main thing, like drawing going on. People make stuff, sometimes they do themes for the drawing, they have studio, they have a soundproof studio, where people go in, they actually make tracks, they actually bring in their own tracks, they add more vocals to it. And this - these times, it's free, as well. So yeah, and it's like it's really, really good for young people to express themselves, to actually do something instead of sitting on their phones every day. Because I know a lot of people who sit on their phones every day, and they do that for the whole week. I'm like how -How could you do that?

Holly 17:44

I'm definitely guilty of that - hahahah

It's impressive.

William 17:48

I do that sometimes. But, that's only when it's anime stuck in my head. That's different. But um, yeah. And they, this was when we were going in person. This was when we was going to do everything in person. And they have lots of going on. And I loved it. And aside from I think it was 12 to 4. Sometimes people wanted to stay longer, because it was so fun. And it was only like, I think it was once a month. Yeah, so basically, yeah, they do a lot. And um, they've helped me to like, express myself more. They've helped me to actually think about doing more with my life, instead of staying at home thinking what I want to do in the future, and thinking what is the next step for me to actually get to I want to get, instead of having college teachers nagging in my ears. And they like they've, they've literally helped me a lot, really. And I found myself going there. Since when I was young. When I used to have anger issues. I found myself going there and I had fun, that there's never been a fight broken out in there. I'm surprisingly I'm surprised a lot of people in one place and there's never been a fight. I can't lie.

It is because like everyone there is like they they've come to actually enjoy yourself and do something. Sometimes there's been arguments and Mis, like communication about stuff, but the staff have took them to one side in a room and and solved it all for them. And yeah, if it was more worrying than usual, they would contact their parents and stuff like it's just properly organised. That's the thing that's actually kept me in a safe environment and made me think that they're actually professional about it. Because you could do that stuff. You can get everyone in one spot. But if you're not organised, you'll be very it's very obvious. Yeah.

Robyn 19:34

I think one of the big advantages of being an arts organisation is like, like Will was saying that the staff of freelancers that work for heart and soul there have been working with heart and soul for a long time and that really know the participants, the

people taking part. And I think because we're an arts organisation, we pay people like as art practitioners rather than support workers, which means they get paid a bit more than if there were support workers. So that means less high turnover, like you know staff don't leave that often, people love it. And like, I mean, Helen, who's one of the people that really knows, everyone really well, she's been working heart and soul for 15 years.

Holly 20:19

Wow.

Robyn 20:20

And so I think that that really doesn't, you know, really, really helps everyone. I think also, like, obviously, the area that heart and soul is in, you know, like, I think, you know, sort of, you know, brought attention to Deptford and Peckham and the tension between them. And so I think that I think, you know, that it's good that we have people around who like understand us and can support us. And yeah, just make everything calm. And also, like William was saying, at the end of day we do sharing, or the end of the event. And then twice a year we do events, they're really like a massive sharing event.

Party. Yes - Squidz Club for the young people and the Beautiful octopus club festival, for everyone.

William 21:18

It's actually very big.

Robyn 21:19

Yes. It used to be at the Royal Festival Hall, and like 3000 people would come in one night.

Holly 21:26

Wow.

Robyn 21:29

last couple of years, it's been online. So, but there's still a lot of people that have come.

Holly 21:36

Yeah, that's great. That's so many people as well.

William 21:39

it is for just stuff you make in one day with random people. And you kind of put together like a, you have a kind of song. And then you add it to the list of other songs. And then they organise like a big event for you to perform that is kind of nuts. So yeah, that much people to actually attend to see what's actually happening. I forgot to say as well there's one thing that made me feel very comfortable. When I was at do your own thing, or when I'm actually with heart and soul is that the staff that are in it - are kind of they're not in it for the money. And The reason how I noticed that because I have a Jamaican Dad. So he's very, like, stuck on some stuff, like he knows his stuff. He knows when people are just there for stuff, and how people act because he's very good at that stuff. I don't know how but yeah. And I've noticed what you said sometimes are true, but he's there, like they're not in it for the money like they're in it because they actually like doing it. And they like participating with people with disability. And you can really notice that because if I tell one of the staff, that I'd like to work on a track, and he said, and he's like, Okay, well, we're finishing now next time, when you come, I'll put you first to do that. Like they're very caring, like, it's very different than when you speak to someone who you know, who's like an office person. And they're good at doing offices and stuff. Or they're like a teacher or something. And they're working to help with money and stuff and all that. And you can vote you can pick up the difference, right? The person, the other person is way more caring way more spoken word, or way more like delicate than the other person who's actually getting like who's actually focusing on the the grind for the money. Like, it's a really big difference. Because if they were in it for the money, I don't think they would have been able to like have such a calm, peaceful space when we all go to do your own thing. So yeah, that's one thing that's really like, kept me that kept me going as well. So yeah,

Robyn 21:39

so heart and soul works quite hard to like, look after staff and practitioners. And that's quite important. But also to, like if there is an issue ever, that is like dealt with and taken really seriously and like so people's feelings are really important. And also the people that work for heart and soul generally, are also artists. So they like understand the idea of, you know, like, artistic integrity and stuff like that. Yeah. And you know, so like Will was saying, you know, it's not like, Oh, we haven't got time and brush the person off. It's like, no, I take you seriously, we don't have time today, but we can do it in next session. Or you know, whenever the next session is. I think also just to mention that there's also the thing called sound lab, which is like experimenting with technology and like helping people with learning disabilities and autism to like, use the technology to like be able to make music. I think that's really cool.

William 24:35

Yeah, they have a lot of stuff going on, like big categories - there's do your own thing, There's 'all sorts', 'sound lab'...

Robyn 24:43

there's music jams,

William 24:44

there's like, yeah, they've grown a lot of stuff. it's good to look at the website where there's a lot of stuff going on, cos if we do talk about it all we'd be going on for days, so yeah,

Dan 24:58

I mean, it really sounds like they they have so much To offer - your community of people It must be Yeah, it's such a great thing to have. Yeah, the opportunity. So, yeah, kind of brings on to the next question. So you sound like you've got a very sort of tight knit community there. Do you think that having this community or just community in general, is an important thing to have?

William 25:21

I would say yeah, because, um, keeps people off the streets. It definitely keeps people doing some, like, getting stuff done with their day. It definitely gives parents time to have time to their self, because when they send them there, the parents can be with them as well. The parents can sit down next to them as well, so the parents know that they are safe of travelling, they're safe with being there, or they can pick them up after, the parents can just leave them there, and come back after. And there's hardly any bad feedback from the parents or from the children, or not the children - from the people when they go back home. And I think it is very, very good, because it literally makes you do what you love. And for them, to sometimes take you for them, it is kind of a chance to take you further and literally help you do what you like doing. And I think, it's very important for someone to be in Deptford like, Deptford it's a very, like, serious place for young use, for something like heart n soul to be in Deptford, and for you to go and do that much stuff in one big building it's very, very good. I really think as a group, because you don't find that anywhere else. First of all, even if you did find something like that, you would have probably have to pay like 20 pounds a month or something like that, for it to be free. And for you to actually take part in activities and get a chance to just express yourself and meet new people, or at least get a chance and just look at something instead of staying at home. Yeah, it's really good. So yeah, and it's, it helps clear your mind. And I think it's very, very important. I think should be more like, places like heart n soul

Holly 27:03

yeah, I was gonna say it sounds really like, like when you were describing all the rooms and like the different options and everything.

William 27:09

Yeah, cos that's literally how it is hahah

Holly 27:11

it sounds so like fun. Like, it just sounds great.

William 27:14

Yeah, the best thing is when you actually walk like because I'm, I'm always a late guy. I'm always going to stuff late,

Holly 27:21

not today!

William 27:22

Not today I was here early. College, meetings I'm always popping up late. I don't know why I have a bit of a habit. But when I'm going in there, even though it starts at like, 12, when I'm going in there at, 1:30 or something. Yeah. Even though, it's not like a thing I have to really go to, you can go to if you want or not. But um, when I go in that 1:30 and I see I'm walking past the rooms, and I'm seeing bare stuff go on. I feel like I'm a famous actor. So (laughter) You are walking past and there's music going on. that sounds sick. And you walk past the studio, there's another music going on you hear the 'boom boom'. Because it's a studio, and it's soundproof. You're walking past and you see see DJ going on in the next room, and you're just walking through this corridor and there's rooms in there, and rooms in there. And it's just nuts. It's like, it's a good feeling. I feel like you just feel happy, because you don't see that every day. And yeah, for it to be going on for a lot of people. Like it's very important, especially for us nowadays, especially get people off the streets. And yeah, help with expressing yourself and doing what they like doing.

Dan 28:26

So yeah, one thing we're thinking about is, do you think music is capable of creating a sort of real change in society?

Robyn 28:36

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. I mean, you know, that's happened with music a bit already, hasn't it? And, you know, sometimes it's about like, raising awareness or raising money or, you know, thinking about Live Aid and live eight and forgotten what the guy's name is, but the guy that sang 'I need a dollar dollar dollar'... Um, I think that that made people aware of social injustice. I think, yeah, I think that music can have both a subtle and a powerful effect on people. Subtle in that it's sort of it's helping to inform a person's opinion of the world around them, or maybe even not the world around them, but the world that they don't see necessarily, but I think it's also because people yeah, I think it can give people hope.

Holly 29:39

Yeah, absolutely.

Dan 29:41

Yeah.

Robyn 29:41

It can inspire people. And I think also it can bring people together. And, you know, like, I think it's Liverpool, Liverpool Football Club. You know, they're like their song is you'll never, never walk alone. I think and the first time I heard that - I think that's right. The first time I heard that was actually on a Pink Floyd album. And I always wondered about it. And then it's only when I got older, and I really like understood. You know, the, I don't know how it related to that particular album, but I just think, you know, like, one song, everybody can sing it together, and it can join people together or excite people like in 1996 euro 96. When everyone was singing footballs coming home (laughter) you know, like, it can like really like, ignite a nation.

Holly 30:39

Absolutely.

Robyn 30:41

Everyone together.

Holly 30:42

Yeah, I remember singing that the world cup where England got to a quarterfinal or something in the street.

Dan 30:48

Oh, no. (laughter)

Holly 30:50

Yeah. Well, I mean, in relation to music as well, obviously, you guys both run the thing called the musical jam. And you've told us - perhaps you could sort of tell us a

little bit about that. And maybe how you feel some of that maybe relates to music as change.

William 31:07

The music jam is basically a thing where I mean, run as just staffs. And we, we don't look at ourselves as staff to the people we're actually helping. And because they kind of know us in a way through other events through heart n soul. And so so it's like, We're friends to them but we are helping them with like a music jam. But it's what we do is we - how do I say it Robyn - we get everyone, we kind of have like people come into our event, then we don't really force them to people who normally do like....

Robyn 31:40

We definitely don't force them!! hahahah

William 31:43

I'm saying it, it might have sounded like that. But yeah, you basically got to come into the event and then after what we do, we do like little activities. We do like music activities like how can I say it, like call and response activities for warmups, we do live jams online, like this is all online now. We do live jams online. And we take their sounds like from, we might do like a soundscape thing where everyone has like spoons, shakers, hand claps, rubbing hands in the mic and stuff to make sounds. And we kind of form a song. And then what we do what I do, I basically take their sounds from zoom, I put them into Ableton or logic pro X. And I basically like, put them in time and try and make something out of it, and make it into a full fledged track. And then what I do the next time we come back, I play it back to them. And then they listen to it. And then they can keep the track for themselves. Or they can ask for them for the track. And then after that, they can send it to them, show it to their parents. That's my sound. And what I do when I'm basically mixing the sounds together, I kind of separate them. So eight bars for each sound. And I say the name as well. So you know, because after a month, you you're not gonna really remember what he did on the one meeting. So I kind of say the name, like this is Robyn's sound, and then a beats going in the background. And you hear the sound like (claps rhythm). goes into the next one. This is thingy's sound. And it goes like that. And

that's what I kind of do. Robin helps me to basically keep everyone in time, she helps present everything, as well as to see what's going on next. And all that Robyn's like the formal person of me who I can't really reach all the time.(laughter)

Robyn 33:38

Yeah, I mean, so I think music jams a bit different, obviously, because they're online at the moment. But when I started the music jam, I mean, I wouldn't even really think about that I'm paid for it. I just think of myself as a host of the music jam. And the reason I wanted to start it was because I've been to a lot of like, jazz and blues jams, where there was a sort of expected standard for musicianship or that you would know particular modes or that you would, that you would be able to read a chord chart or tab or whatever. Or that you would be able to play just by ear, you know, for a certain standard and I found that really elitist and also I thought that people messing about on modes and being all fancy, I thought that was not really the point. Like it was really distant from the actual what the piece of music was about. And it also Yeah, it did seem like it was like this secret club. And as I got better on the trumpet, and I was able to participate. Actually, I didn't really want to do this like this is really like snobby and I don't. This is not what I wanted to do. I want to like go to a jam and just be not have rules that are Apart from like, listening to each other, and, you know, like being respectful to each other, I don't you know like, I don't like this in-club thing as if music is just for some people. So I wanted to create a safe space where people with and without learning disabilities and autistic and non autistic people could all come together and it started as part of the Welcome hub residency. So the welcome building, and they employ like 850 staff. So, it was

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>

Robyn 1:03

And it started as part of the welcome hub residency. So the welcome building, and they employ, like 850 staff. So it was a chance to have everyone mixing but as equals and with it not being about anything other than expression and connecting with each other. And so really, like I was very focused on just having that space in it. And because there's lots of gems out there, like obviously, now we're online and it's it's limited to what you can do online and any kind of music jamming online is, is

good, because there's so little of it. But in - in like real life, when we go out to real life, I wouldn't want it to be sort of that focused like it is now because there's lots of gems that you can do that in. But it's a safe space to just play music together. And you don't have to know - that you don't have to know how to play an instrument. And in fact, that has inspired people to come along with an instrument that they don't really know how to play and then to have a go at it. And also I remember one time me and will between us, we managed to tune a ukulele.

William 3:14

Oh, yeah. That was mad hahahahaha

Robyn 3:19

neither of us have done that before. And well, to be fair Will is a lot more qualified at tuning a ukulele than I am hahah

William 3:27

I don't even know notes, I can't lie, I just play it by ear.

Holly 3:30

So I guess that's what tuning is.

Robyn 3:34

We managed it. And we had, you know, when we met face to face with a few people who used to play ukulele together. And also people who had maybe never been to a music jam, and felt like it was not something for them. They liked music but they felt like they couldn't join in. And we made a space where people did feel they could join in so really, like I'm the host and on online, it feels more like facilitation. But, you know, to start off with I was hosting on my own and actually like when we had like 30 people 40 people that was a lot to manage. So that's why Will became a co host so that we could sort of split it between us. But also because Will and I have different skills like will can like play the bass like properly. Like I mean...

William 4:27

Sometimes when I play instruments it's like one month I'm good at drums, one month I'm like extra on keyboards. The next month, if I don't play bass I'm an expert at Singing or something it's crazy.

Robyn 4:43

I think it was good that Will was able to like, you know, kind of like hold the rhythm section together, which sometimes is important. Like even if you just make it up as you go along and have like a sonic anchor. And like if we're doing like call and response and also just like Helping people to increase their confidence. We always used to have a tea break with biscuits, and also just encouraged people to come and listen, they didn't have to take part - nobody was forcing anyone to do anything that they didn't want to do. And we encouraged people to swap instruments we, we had a bit of budget by instruments and we wanted to make sure that the instruments were accessible to as many people as possible. So we had like a one handed triangle. And then we had this tambourine that you can strap onto your arm or your foot. Or I guess you could put it around your neck as well. So we, so we're quite, I was quite conscious, me and Jenny, when we, when we did the buying that we were quite conscious that we should have lots of different ways that people could make music so that anybody, regardless of their disability would be able to take part. I think that really works because we had such a range of people. And I'm really looking forward - like, making the tracks is really great. And we put it on the EP, and it's really nice and everything. Yeah, I'm looking forward to when we're not so focused on like, right, we're gonna record individual sounds and make a track out of it. Be together in real time without any sort of latency or delay or anything. Yeah.

William 6:18

I can't wait to be in person again, the music jam was so lit.

Dan 6:23

Yeah, it must just be completely different.

William 6:26

Yeah, the thing that surprised me the most was when staff came from, like staff within what's it called again, the hub? came from their own office from a long days of

work, yeah the welcome people from the hub came from their own office, from a long day of work, yeah, to come and sit down and listen, and then eventually took part as well. And then left home, like jumping off their feet, literally. That's what surprised me the most because I can't do that.

Robyn 6:57

There are some videos about like how the music jam evolved. The hubs website and the web address is, [www dot art and soul at the hub.com](http://www.artandsoulatthehub.com).

Dan 7:10

That's great.

Holly 7:11

Yeah, I'll link that below.

Dan 7:13

And we listened to some of the musical jams ourselves. And one of the things that really stood out to us was one called Black Lives Matter. And we were just wondering, why you decided to give it that name.

William 7:23

Because the theme was basically me and Robyn we run out of ideas, I mean, we kind of asked the others what they like to do.

Robyn 7:31

We didn't hahahah - we had lots of ideas!

William 7:34

Well I ran out of ideas hahah

Robyn 7:38

That was because that was about when George Floyd, I don't really know how you describe that in a sensitive way. But basically, when George Floyd was killed, you know, the people that come to the music jam are quite a passionate lot of people.

And we knew that, you know, people were feeling upset and angry about it, understandably. And we wanted to give people the opportunity to express that in like, a really positive way. And yeah, and it was called Black Lives Matter, because that was the theme of that, that day, we split into a lyrics group and a beats group. So the beats group was will making the beat and then lyrics group was with me. And the theme kind of emerged from having, you know, from chatting and saying what, you know, what, what do you want to tell people you know, about your experience. And I felt like that was a really like, important thing. So that's where that came from.

Holly 8:35

Yeah, maybe like a way to you said, like, a way to channel some of the emotions through music.

William 8:40

Yeah, everyone was very emotional when we done it, some of them were like so emotional, they couldn't like finish singing, and then some of them are so emotional, like, they actually ended up speaking about what they thought for, like the whole session. So it was like, it was really touching people. But I really liked it. I really liked it a lot. There was a beat group and a singing group. And that helps me to focus on my side and helps Robyn to focus on getting people to think what do you want to say and stuff and we all came together at the end. To actually like, put it together and perform it as a live gig feels really, really good.

Robyn 9:20

Yeah. I have to say, that like, like being focused on like, making tracks I like... that's like will's forte, like he is really comfortable.

William 9:30

I'm not just good at it I like it too haha.

Robyn 9:34

I'm really like, I always feel quite out of my comfort zone, which is good as a musician, but I always feel like oh, I don't I mean, the lyrics pretty - what that consists of is I get a jam board, the Google jam boards, I get one of those up and just ask

people for their ideas and try and formulate out of that verses and choruses. And so it's it's not, and obviously because we don't hear what the beats group is doing. In a way it's good because it focuses everyone to what they really want to express.

Holly 10:09

It sounds like you kind of hold hold the situation together and like hold space for people people's ideas.

Dan 10:16

So we were just wondering if you feel that there any sort of difficulties when trying to create more inclusive community, maybe that difficulties that you've encountered whilst being at heart n soul?

Robyn 10:26

Yeah, I think the word inclusive, like that's not really a word that people within the learning disability and autism community I've seen use much. They're talking about, like, I guess people taking part. I guess that's what we say. Like, making it possible for people to take part. I think a lot of the I think a lot of the barriers are language like I think people don't realise. I think some of it is maybe, and maybe this feeds into the Black Lives Matter thing is, is about privilege. So obviously, Black lives matter that like really highlights the issue of white privilege. But I think there's something unsaid about like, like, I think that there's within society, I think that people think that one type of clever is like, the most important. I think that's wrong. I think there's lots of different types of clever and they're all just as valuable as each other. So like, I don't find reading and writing very easy. And I find given presentations, I find that very easy. They are natural to me, or doing doing something technical on computer. And generally I can learn how to use computer software quite quickly. But when I was in school, I always felt like other people thought I was thick. And I think I also felt I was thick. And then as I grew older, I learned - oh that it's really not that I'm thick, it's that my brain works differently. And if I work with the difference, rather than trying to be like everyone else, yeah, like, and so I think that within society, I think that, firstly, I think there is this elite ism around like, people that are good at reading and writing and can do GCSEs, and a levels and degrees and PhDs and all that. But I think that that's really negative because like, my dad doesn't have a degree, but he could build

anything. And I always feel like his talent for being able to build things and fix things like he has never fixed a bass guitar before. But he fixed my bass guitar. Like, by just looking at it, he knew what was wrong. And he watched a youtube video and he just did it like that. Yeah, if you've got a degree and things like that, that opens up a lot of doors to be able to do things, but I think also, it trickles down to like how information is presented, like at heart and soul. You know, if, if we make something that's easy read, that means that everybody can read it. And that's like democratising information. It's like making it so that everybody can access information. And if you think about, like, the year that we've had, with COVID, like, how much of that information provide by the government was in easy read? I'm pretty sure none of it. But also just, you know, if you think about it, like when you're trying to read the packet of, you know, a source or something, you know, like, sometimes it's easy to read. And sometimes it's not - a lot of fonts people choose, sans serif fonts tend to be better for people with dyslexia, versus serif fonts, like Times New Roman, they can be more difficult. And I think, yeah, so I do think I've forgotten what the question was, but

Holly 13:51

I was gonna expand slightly, and the question was about the term inclusivity. And sort of the challenges of that, but I think what you've said is really interesting about how that word isn't necessarily used. And it's about sort of the democratising of information, as you said, and you spoke about at the beginning, that heart and soul sort of word is belief. Do you feel like that's a good thing.... Potentially This is a bit of a big question. But do you feel like that is a good alternative for sort of the word inclusivity? That's often sort of used maybe in the wrong context? I don't know what your thoughts on that are.

Robyn 14:27

I guess it depends on the context. But I think there's something about taking part. And, yeah, I mean, I think it's difficult because so much of our language around disability is sort of through the thinking about it in the medical model of disability. So thinking there's something wrong with this person and we need to fix it, versus the social model of disability which is actually the environment needs to change so that more people can join in. Okay, I mean, even democratising, that's not a particularly

accessible word, I suppose what we want to do is just make it so that everybody can take part and be equal as much as possible. And I think that there's a lot of information out there. You know, like when it was the London mayor, Mayor thing, that wasn't an easy read, you know, they sent this big booklet round. And it wasn't an easy read. So that, you know, like, what about people with learning disabilities? Or what about people that would benefit from the easy read? Maybe if English is your second language, for example? And so how can you that's like, um, like, like alienating a whole group of people saying, well, we don't really care about your vote, because you're already a small minority. But actually, if you made it so that everyone could understand the information by using easy read that would actually benefit everyone, because I think there's a lot of people, you know, who don't vote, because they're turned off by politics, in part because they don't always understand what's been said by politicians, but also, maybe they feel like, they can't really contribute to the conversation, because it's very, you know, a lot of politicians went to, like, private school, and, you know, they're in your, like, they fit into the sort of typical clever bracket, you know, being able to read and write and all that stuff. But what about, what about people, you know, like, maybe it would help to actually have some MPs that were more like, you know, like my dad, like, able to, like build things or, yeah, like, look at things in an engineering kind of way, I think the world would be better for everybody, if we could find a way of, you know, being able to maybe not having an election every five years, but like, not thinking in sort of binary political parties, but actually thinking about, like, what, what people actually want and like, voting for specific things. Like if there was more, if people were more involved with the conversation, if there were more, you know, like regular focus groups about parts of legislation that are coming up that people could go to, or, you know, ways of engaging people in a more sort of conversation way, rather than it being very black and white, because I think the issues that are important to people, I don't think there's people out there that think that, you know, the NHS is really well funded. I think there's a lot, Yeah, I think most people understand the NHS is not particularly well funded, in terms of the people that are on the ground, you know, like your nurses and people like that porters, people like that, health care assistants. And the same with social care that, you know, it's often when you get a social worker overview of your social care it's often about saving money, it's not actually about helping the person to do what they want, it's focused with like, Well, we've got to

save this money. And, you know, the new reforms have been brought in, are often focused on that. And I think, now even for example, Universal Credit, it's all online. So if online is not accessible to you, because the website don't think it's an easy read from start. But if English isn't your first language, if you don't find it easy to get online, if you haven't got the money for the internet, etc. So that's a lot of people...

Holly 15:03

that's so bad that that, that that's not more accessible, o

William 18:22

it's an online thing.

Robyn 18:25

It's to save money. That's why they've done it, they might say oh well it's going to make it better, but actually, it's to save money. And then what, you know, often people with disabilities are the bottom of the pile that no one wants to listen to us. Sometimes people think that people that aren't able to work are like benefit scroungers or like they are lazy, or they don't contribute in any way. But actually, there's a lot of different ways that people contribute to society. It's not just about work. It's also about, you know, your community. And I'd say that heart and soul enables people to be part of their communities in a way that otherwise wouldn't have been possible. It makes us visible, and us able to be part of the world around us in a way that maybe we wouldn't have done. Otherwise, I think, yeah, I do think there's a lot of issues that need to change for the world to be, you know, have more people involved in that. Yeah,

Holly 19:22

I think that's so important to share that. It's also really interesting, what you said about heart and soul being a way for sort of creating a community together and having some level of visibility above what's usually given.

Robyn 19:38

Just want to point out that heart and soul was part of the 2012 para Olympics opening ceremony, I think,

Dan 19:44

oh, oh, wow. Okay.

Robyn 19:46

And they've also been part of liberty festival. They've taken artists to South by Southwest, Will's band electric fire have gone to Hong Kong, right. So it's, it's not just that we make a community but it's also that we're part of the wider community. Yeah, it's gonna be the borough of culture in 2022 Lewisham is

Holly 20:04

Oh, yeah.

Robyn 20:05

And so heart n soul will be part of that. So it's, it's, it's not just about

Holly 20:10

within it's out

William 20:13

Yeah, I think a lot because personally, like, when I started going on like to 'do your own thing' - do you own thing was the thing I went to the most cos I loved it. And I loved the music and the live jams. When I started going there when I was little, I wasn't really sure if I really wanted to do this, I kind of thought, I was very different from everyone else, because I didn't have, have any physical disabilities, like and I was very kind of smart ish in a way, but I still had autism, and a disability in learning. And then when I went down, I saw everyone else, I kind of felt like, Okay, I'm not supposed to be here, not in the right place, or sort of thing. But I kind of fitted in. And I started speaking to everyone, I started messing about the music and instruments. And how my band kind of formed in a way was, heart and soul kind of saw me, saw that I was good at with technology. And using the logic softwares and stuff, because I've practised them at school, but you don't really get the hang of it straightaway. So yeah, so they saw that I was good at using those softwares. So they chose me and three other people and kind of, like, put us in a little group. And I was like, are you

guys able to like try and make something because I've seen that you guys are really good at working together. And I've seen that you're, you're good at these kind of particular stuff. And then we kind of messed about for a day, we actually came up with a song somehow, it was actually lit, it was the first song that drove our whole whole band. Up until now, it was the first song - the first one was called and it wasn't keep on moving, but it was it.... it was pop the balloon! that was that was (laughter) And I think it was I think it was keep on moving. And pop the balloon was the first two tracks that drove our band. And everyone else from heart n soul started started listening to it. We started practising that more, we took stuff more seriously, we grew financially. And as a group, and as a band, we grew a lot like heart n soul has taken me from just playing drums, to being able to perform live in front of 1000s of people. Being able to be self employed, they helped me being self employed, taught me what that is about and stuff as a band so you can earn more money as performances as well. And they've helped me to like be less angry less, more now. I know how to deal with documents more, I see myself, like easily going into meetings, I'm able to read like a whole document from the gov without help. Like all the stuff that I've learned from heart n soul, And from my parents as well, they're there too don't worry. yeah, like if they didn't do that I kind of think to myself where would I be? If they if I didn't go to that if I didn't go if they didn't choose me to like just quickly for my band. If they didn't choose me to like participate with three other members who I literally adore a lot. You've got Sam in my band, who could play anything he hears. I'm telling you anything this guy hears he can play on the synth. Anything. He doesn't even need to look at the chords but he just goes 'dah dah dah' - you got Alessia who's got an amazing voice. Literally. One of a kind, and we've got a drummer, he's got the craziest hi hat and the craziest crashes when you hit the cymbals. Yeah. And we formed the band called electric fire. We've been Hongkong we've been Brighton. We've been everywhere. We've been to a club that literally had a (?) under the floor. In Hong Kong. It was crazy the whole place was shaking - nuts. My family did think about the financial side. So my family was concerned about the financial side and why is Wil going into all these these clubs and stuff and he's been out performing but he's only earning like 50 pound for gigging stuff.

Sorry, I just want to jump in and explain that because I don't want heart and soul to come across like they're exploiting people or anything. But just because not everybody will, you know your listeners won't all know. But people that receive benefits that particularly like employment support allowance and other benefits, and there's a lot of limit on them receiving money for any work that they do. And I think 90 quid was the like what you could get weekly. And the thing is you think, Okay, well, you know, you could just pay him more, but like, if they're, if that's, you know there's a few weeks where the person isn't doing much, or they're ill, or they go on holiday or whatever. And then the benefits system doesn't take that into account. And also, the benefits system is quite black and white. So they think, okay, you run 60 quid, right, where you, you were able to work, you don't need esa anymore. And then there's the expectation that you will be able to work. Like, if you're on Universal Credit, unless you're in certain groups, they expect you to work 35 hours a week and earn at least a minimum wage, that's called the minimum income floor. And if you're not able to do that, because of your disability, and there's there are some groups where you don't have to worry about that. Yeah, when you're put into a group, when you when you first get assessed, but it's very, you know, sort of, it's quite difficult to manage, but also it can affect families, particularly young people, it can affect the family's benefits, benefits, so if any members of the family are like on working tax credit, or child tax credit, or, you know, on JSA, or Universal Credit or anything like that, then if one of their children then starts to earn money, because that child is part of their household that then affects their benefit. If it's that the person isn't going to be earning money for, you know, like, they're just earning money just as a one off thing, then then that upsets the benefit system, and it becomes very complicated to explain - benefit system is very black and white, and really, it sinks in either you're working or you're not working. And yet so, um, so that's not like, I don't want you to think that heart and soul were like exploiting people. For people that are like, like, Will, you know, who like, are starting to do stuff regularly, then self employment, like self employment creates a lot of paperwork. And it depends on having somebody either being able to do it yourself, or having someone that can support you to do that, if you are in that position, which you know, in itself is a privilege because you either have to be able to manage the website or you have to have help to do that, then you can think about registering as self employed, then that has this whole thing about you know, you have to be keeping your books, and then you have to fill out a self

assessment tax form, or get an accountants there's a lot of like responsibility. And for some families, particularly if they've got more than one child for additional needs, that they're not able to support the person to do that. So there's a lot of intricacies around paying people and it makes it very difficult, you know, to manage

Yeah, that sounds incredibly complicated and it's just limiting for you as well.

William 27:49

Yeah, it is but yeah, it's kind of helped me a lot like and just got me to actually realise how to control my money more. They've helped me with the Universal Credit and I'm in a band I've been to places like I never even realised existed in Deptford like and near my area like pubs and stuff where you can perform and stuff which I could have went before I went to heart n soul to get known basically. So it's kind of opened my eyes up to bigger places. The confidence I've built from performance on stage is very very big. My nerves are going crazy when I go up on stage and to the others because they have they have more of a disability than mine. Basically, I don't think they feel that kind of nerves when they go on stage it kind of boosts them - it doesn't do that to me. So when when Sam goes on stage Sam feels boosted like he's up on there like. Yeah, let's do this. And all Sam says sometimes is 'hmm'. That's all he says sometimes. And he sings the song all the time. We do Like a recap of the whole album. We've had, like audiences ask us to perform the whole album in Hong Kong once Yeah, this was a big feels performance the last last last performance before we went home and the whole the whole literally audience shouted out - one more song - and sam as a synth player...And we ended up performing one more song, then three more songs. Then The whole album. Again and, my voice is gone. But my confidence has literally reached sky high - for the others - doesn't get nervous. Sam does not get nervous at all, no matter what. No matter what vibes. No matter what audience it is Sam is literally powering through mate. He's a true performer I can't lie about um, he's really really good. And Alicia is really good. Hema makes me laugh. Like I look at them as family now and we still talk Till this day, and we still actually do songs online as well, to this day, like we've literally made, we've made like seven songs during lockdown online, which we never knew we could do by sharing our sound and sharing, like recording stuff online and stuff. Like, it's really amazing. Like we literally rehearse in the home.

Holly 30:23

So I just have one question that's potentially like a difficult one to answer. And just sort of more of like a big picture question. I was wondering if both of you had any thoughts on, like, the question of first of all what social justice means to you, and whether there's a relationship between music and social justice?

Robyn 30:43

maybe call it changing the system, so that so everyone's equal? Yeah, I mean, I think that heart n soul does that in a way cos it means, you know, like, Will was saying, like, about, you know, that it's opened up a lot of opportunities for him and opened his eyes to things. And I think heart and soul really does that, as well as creating community. I think it also helps people, particularly with the different projects we've been working on recently with heart and soul at the hub, and also now the Believe in us project, which is working with oxleas, which is an NHS Trust, and Greenwich, Royal Borough of Greenwich and is funded by the Health Foundation, and it's all about, like finding out what people with learning disabilities and autistic people in Greenwich want, in terms of like, how they want their healthcare to change, and then finding ways of making that happen. And so I think, over the last few years, we have been more political for those people that are interested in like making a change. And also, there's a lot of people from heart and soul that they go to Lewisham speaking up, which is an advocacy group in Lewisham for people with learning disabilities.

Holly 31:58

Okay, that's interesting.

Dan 32:00

So just to round things up, we were just wondering if there's anything about heart and soul potentially, I don't know, any music, any artists, any events that you'd like to share with our listeners that they might be interested in?

Robyn 32:11

Yeah, um, you can go to heart and souls website, which is www.heartnsoul.co.uk, and click on taking part and you can see all the things that are happening. And then in the autumn, there'll be the beautiful octopus Club, which will be also probably online. And yeah, showing what the adults who come to Heart, heart and soul have been doing there's a chance for people to meet and have a look at all our online events that are happening, because there's a lot of stuff. There's like something every day of the week, and they're all you know, open for people to come and take part. So if you have a learning disability or you are autistic, or you know someone who is then we'd love to meet you.

Dan 33:02

That's great. Thank you so much, Robyn. Yeah, Willlll, thank you.

William 33:05

You're welcome. You're welcome, guys.

Robyn 33:07

And also email, heart and soul. Hello, at heart and soul co.uk. And obviously, emails not accessible to everyone. So I'll just get the phone number up. I can never remember it, phone number. Think is 02086941632

Dan 33:26

brilliant. Thank you.

Holly 33:27

Amazing. Thanks so much, guys. It's been such a pleasure to meet both of you and chat to you.

Dan 33:32

Yeah, really has been

William 33:33

welcome.

Holly 34:01

So Dan, what did you think of our chat with Robyn and William?

Dan 34:06

Yeah, I loved it. I thought it was really interesting. Yeah, so much to be said for the sense of community that they built up and heart and soul just strikes me as just being like this really, really vibrant place. It sounds like there's just so much going on. And just catering for everyone. You know, not just with music, but you know, with arts as well. And it just sounds like a really great place. And well it was interesting what Robin was saying about how it is not only just building community within heart and soul, but it's having an effect on the wider community as well and like making an impact. Yeah, in the area. So yeah, what about you?

Holly 34:46

Yeah, I also thought it was really great and I also just love Robyn and William I think they're such fun people to chat with like they have so many ideas and like all their musical ideas and the like way they spoke about how They run the musical jam I just thought was really good. Like they work really well as like a team. But yeah, I thought it was so interesting. Like all the stuff Robyn was saying about believing in the powers and powers and talents of people with learning disabilities, but sort of, yeah, I guess sort of looking at language in a sort of critical way as well and like how the disabled community sort of gets treated. Particularly in the pandemic, I thought that that was really important to reflect on as well, as well as looking at all like the great things that heart and soul are doing as a sort of completely different perspective.

Dan 35:54

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