Race, Disability & Intersectionality – June 2024

Understanding layered identities in music education

The Race, Disability & Intersectionality seminar brought together voices whose lived experiences challenge the sector to think beyond single-issue inclusion. By exploring how race, disability, gender and other identities intersect, the discussion revealed both the complexity and the urgency of building a genuinely equitable music education system.

Panellists Hillary Juma, Elle Chante, Jason Dasent and Miss Jacqui—each an artist and advocate in their own right—spoke candidly about the realities of navigating a profession that often compartmentalises identity. Juma set the tone early: "You can't separate my Blackness from my disability. Both shape how people perceive me before I've even sung a note."

Chante reflected on the pressure to present a simplified or "palatable" version of oneself in professional spaces, noting how this expectation erases the richness of intersectional experience. "When I perform, I bring all of me," they said. "If we want authenticity in music, then the industry has to be ready for that authenticity in people too."

Dasent, a producer and accessibility consultant who has worked with major UK organisations, highlighted how systemic design failures perpetuate exclusion. "Accessibility isn't just ramps and captions," he explained. "It's about recognising that people experience barriers differently depending on race, class, and disability. If you design for one, you risk excluding another."

Miss Jacqui, a poet and musician, spoke of the emotional labour involved in constantly educating others about intersectionality. "I'm tired of being the only one in the room raising these points," she said. "Representation matters—but it's not enough. We need structural change and shared responsibility."

Throughout the conversation, the panellists discussed how music education often

perpetuates narrow definitions of excellence, rooted in Eurocentric and able-bodied traditions. They argued for an expanded understanding of musical achievement—one that honours different ways of making, hearing and experiencing sound.

Hillary Juma summed up the collective sentiment: “Equity isn’t about lowering the bar. It’s about realising the bar was never in the same place for everyone.” The session concluded with a call for intersectionality to move from the margins of EDI policy to the heart of curriculum design, leadership training and funding priorities.

The takeaway was clear: to create a truly inclusive music ecosystem, we must see identity as a composition of overlapping rhythms—not separate tracks. When the sector learns to listen to that full harmony, music education will finally reflect the diverse world it serves.