



Disability Taking the Lead – March 2024

Reframing representation, access and leadership in music education

The Disability Taking the Lead seminar shone a vital spotlight on what authentic disability leadership looks like in music education, asking not just how we include disabled people, but how we ensure they are leading and shaping the sector itself.

Panellists Kris Halpin, Sorchá Pringle and Ben Lunn – all distinguished disabled musicians and advocates – shared deeply personal and political insights into navigating a system still too often designed without them in mind. Halpin, known for his work with the Mi.Mu Gloves, opened the discussion by challenging the language of deficit. “Disability isn’t a tragedy,” he said. “The real barrier is the environment that disables us.” His use of technology exemplifies the creative possibilities unlocked when we remove those barriers and reimagine musicianship itself.

Pringle spoke about the dual challenge of being both a musician and a disabled woman in spaces that prize endurance and conformity. She described her work leading inclusive choirs and workshops as a form of quiet activism: “I’m not here to inspire people by existing – I’m here to make music on my own terms, and to make sure others can too.” Her reflections illustrated how leadership emerges through lived experience and community practice, not just through formal positions of power.

Composer and conductor Ben Lunn added a structural perspective, arguing that inclusion policies too often focus on participation rather than leadership. “If we want a truly representative sector,” he said, “we can’t just open the door; we have to hand over the keys.” He called for funding models, commissioning processes and education frameworks that embed disabled voices at every stage, from classroom to conservatoire to boardroom.

Throughout the conversation, the panellists returned to the importance of moving beyond tokenism. True equity, they argued, lies not in fitting disabled people into existing systems

but in reshaping those systems entirely. The seminar revealed that accessibility is not a single adjustment but an ethos – a creative redesign of how music is taught, shared and valued.

As one participant summed up, the future of music education depends on “seeing disability not as something to accommodate, but as something that leads.” This conversation marked a powerful step towards that future: one where leadership in music is as diverse and dynamic as the sounds it creates.