## Instrument + Musician = Music – April 2025

Redefining virtuosity and accessibility through innovation

The Instrument + Musician = Music seminar explored the evolving relationship between the musician and their instrument, and how technology, design and inclusive thinking are reshaping what musicianship means today.

Chaired by Kris Halpin, the conversation brought together panelists, Claire Johnston, Alessandro Vazzana, Jessica Fisher and Rhona Smith—each offering unique perspectives on how instruments can be reimagined to enable more people to create, perform and express themselves.

Halpin, known for his pioneering use of the Mi.Mu Gloves, opened with a striking statement: "When the technology fits the body, the music becomes limitless." Demonstrating how motion-capture gloves allow him to manipulate sound through movement, he explained that the aim isn't to replace traditional instruments, but to extend the possibilities of performance for disabled and non-disabled musicians alike.

Designer Alessandro Vazzana spoke about the creative potential of adaptive design, noting that too often innovation in instrument-making is framed as a form of "special provision." "We shouldn't design from deficit," he said. "We should design from creativity." His words resonated with the group's shared belief that inclusion and innovation are inseparable.

Rhona Smith emphasised that the educational system has a crucial role to play in normalising a diversity of instruments and playing methods. "If we only teach one model of what a musician looks like, we teach children to see limits," she said. "But music isn't about sameness—it's about connection."

Composer and researcher Jessica Fisher described how working with bespoke and digital instruments has influenced her own creative process: "It changes the relationship between thought, sound and action. It's a feedback loop that invites more play, more risk-taking, and more empathy."

The discussion also tackled the power dynamics within music technology. Johnston cautioned against tech becoming a new gatekeeper, accessible only to those with financial or institutional backing. “Innovation must serve equity,” she said. “Otherwise, we risk building new barriers in place of old ones.”

Throughout the seminar, a unifying message emerged: that the act of making music is a dialogue between the body, the tool and the imagination. Whether through strings, sensors or digital soundscapes, what matters is the agency and artistry of the musician.

As the panel concluded, “When the instrument and the musician meet each other as equals, that’s when music truly happens.”