

Let's talk about gender, music and the new generations

with Ingrid Dyrnes Svendsen

My name is Ingrid Dyne Svendsen. My pronouns are she, her. And I work at a music organization called JM Norway. I am a music therapist nice facilitator, also work as an advisor there. And I'm based in Oslo in Norway, and that's also where our organization is. And both my work and the organization's work focuses on inclusion, representation, and youth-led cultural and music projects. So, that's kind of the the the work I do in a nutshell.

What is the work of a music therapist?

Yeah, that's a good question. It can be very many things, but um generally it is anything where music and health are connected in some way. So, you can say that the music therapist because music and health is kind of always connected in some ways.

You can say that the music therapist can work very many places, but um I have worked in an acute psychiatric ward at the hospital, for instance, and there are many different within the field of health, different areas where you work, or in the field of education.

Can work with kids that need extra attention or accessibility needs. Yeah, it's very varied. And it can be both like individual or in groups at things.

But in my work I in a in a volunteer organization in an NGO, it's more of a structural thing for me at least, like thinking of how music and art is linked to our well-being and our health, but also the health of our communities, like how culture and art has the ability to connect us to each other, which is also a big part of our health, right?

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Um, so in my work now, it's more on that level that I think about it, but you can work in more clinical situations as well.

Tell us about your work with young people, especially girls.

Yeah. Um, so yes, our Our target group in our organisation is 15 to 25. But we work with younger and older youth as well. But our biggest project that works on gender equality is called Loud and it started as a band camp because every summer 10 years ago and still today really there there are these discussions around festivals and bookings. And how it's not a very diverse and equal booking on most festival stages around in Norway but also in the world in general.

So it started kind of as a response to that because that that that debate came up every summer and it felt like no one was really actually trying to create the spaces that young girls and gender non-conforming youth actually need in order to feel safe enough to challenge norms and also to to express themselves and create art.

So that was kind of the the starting point and then now it's grown and it's the biggest gender equality project for youth in Norway. And it's also part of a bigger global network called Girls Rock Camp Alliance. So there are these camps all around the world. So I encourage want to to see if there's a camp near you.

Um, but there are focus is like I said to try to create some safer spaces where um even if you are breaking some types of norms, it can be gender norms, but it can also be uh different types of of norms. It doesn't need to be that. It can also be accessibility norms or or whiteness norm or it can be any types of norms.

To create a space where even if you are a norm breaker, you are able to feel safe and safety is such a fundamental thing if you are going to create art. Uh, because if you don't feel safe, it's really hard can be to express yourselves and and be able to take up

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space and and and these types of things. So that's the idea and now we also do we do the bandcamp every summer to for two weeks.

And we do uh music production workshops throughout the year and meetups and creating. It's both about giving or like equipping young people with the tools and the knowledge to be able to create art. but it's also about having a network because I think in any field of work or in any field field having a network is like a big thing to be able to move forward. So that's also part of it.

What changes do you see happening with this work?

Um well, if you're talking about in relation to the debates that were going around when we started it, I wish I could like shout yes from the rooftops uh but I um The same debates are still being had every summer about how the bookings are not very equal. Um, but I feel like the bookings are getting a little bit better, like slowly but surely. Um, but I think a lot of I mean the biggest impact I feel like is the one-on-one impact because we've had like youngsters who come up to us and said that loud was the first place where I felt like I can really could really be myself.

It's the first place I felt safe to express my identity. It's the first place I felt like no one was there to harm me. It's So those are kind of the stories that sticks with you even more.

Um and I think that just by enabling creating spaces where kids who challenge norms are able to feel safe That will kind of build some kind of confidence and stepping stones to be able to like you said go out in the world and be more confident and feel more empowered and that their voice really matters and that they have something to say. I think that that is like the this is a grass root project, right? So it's all about being in it for the long haul and and building it's slowly but surely.

So I think like the combination of us like never giving up and still persisting having this project and doing it every year and then again yeah enabling some type of safety or

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freedom of expression for kids who might not always feel like they have the space to do that. I think that combo is kind of the change maker.

But to create really really big change you need to create change on top really with the gatekeepers and and the the men in suits who call the shots and who who control the money. But I think you need to do both things at the same time. Yeah. Yeah, sure.

Pop stars are also changing over the years, and there are more and more strong and diverse women. Does it help to have these role models?

Wow, that's a great question. I think yes, definitely. Um, and I um I can tell that you know the kids that come too loud, they see themselves more in the in these pop stars that are emerging now that are kind of breaking norms. And also, yeah, not being perfect. Um, in the eyes of society and things like that.

I think that's super important and to challenge like the stereotypes and and the small tiny boxes we are allowed to to move around in. Um, so yeah, definitely. I think that's so important. And um, I'm really glad that kids growing up today have some more role models than just Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, which were mine. And it's not the best ones.

Why are you so passionate about gender and music?

Uh, that's a good question. I think um uh because it's also affected my life in some ways like how I'm a musician and I've always felt it was hard to to feel like I belonged in these musician spaces. You know, like we had these uh practice rooms where I grew up and they were always overcrowded with boys playing in rock bands.

And I never it even though no one ever said I wasn't welcome, I didn't feel welcome because I didn't see myself in any of the people who used it, you know? So that is kind of it and I think it like dates back to when I was young and how um I feel like um the sense of fairness is so big when you're a kid.

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Um, and I saw things happening around me and thought this isn't really right. This isn't fair like my mom, my dad was away a lot working. My mom stayed home to care of us and had a job. I was like this doesn't really make sense. You're doing so much more work than he is, right?

And all these kinds of things that you start to realize as you grow older the world kind of reveals itself as being not not fair at all and you're like childhood utopia of fairness where everyone gets the same size cookie kind of crumbs as you grow older. And I think I just didn't want to like lean into that too much. I want I want to stand up against it. It's not it still doesn't feel right.

It didn't when I was eight, it still doesn't today when I'm 32, so I feel yeah, for me it feels very like the the right thing for me to do to work on this. because it feels important and it also makes me really happy to be able to work with youngsters and music and yeah, try to make the world a tiny bit better.

What is the biggest challenge facing feminist today in your opinion and by your field?

That's a big one. I also just need to say that I recognize that it's a very privileged position to be able to work with something that you're so passionate about and you love love so much that I am. Um, not everyone is able to.

I just wanted to say that too, but the biggest challenge facing feminism today, um, I wish I had like a good very good answer. But I think I see feminism always through an intersectional lens, so meaning that, um, we're not free until everyone is free and I feel like every, yeah. Every minority struggle is all of our struggles.

Um, but um I feel like there's been a narrative that is trying to be pushed upon us that is that there is not enough resources or opportunities or space for everyone in the world and that is just wrong. And I think that that narrative keeps being pushed by people who

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have a lot of power who there it's in their interests that we think that there's not enough room for all of us. but there really is.

We're just um dividing it in a very unfair way. Um and I think the notion on that note um I think power needs to shift in some way. Um and I know that that is both uncomfortable for many and and for many also dangerous.

I think they feel like it's dangerous even though it's not uh So I feel like getting all of us to realise that we need to share in a more responsible way and we like all the research versus in in our world but like moving moving away from individualized societies. I mean I live in Norway. It's a very privileged rich country and you can tell how the individualization of society is pushing us away from each other. It's making us like we have a welfare system that takes care of our elders when they grow old, which is awesome, because it ensures that everyone gets help, but at the same time the community fades from it, you know?

Like taking care of each other and feeling like it's our respon common responsibility that we all are at good health or that we're all taking care of.

I think that is so important because we need to feel this common sense of responsibility in order for us to move forward, and I feel like Yeah, when when the more you get the more individualized you get and the less you care for each other and like if you zoom out big, I think that is one of the biggest challenges. Um, I hope it makes sense.

I know and when you think about because I think another thing that could be said about what's the biggest challenge is like are young boys feeling left out and feeling like um that that that this is not the fight for them that that feminism or gender equality doesn't really apply to them.

which is so sad and it's really not true and I think exactly what you're saying now is kind of the problem, the lack of feeling that you are supported and that you have someone around you supporting you and then you look for it somewhere else, maybe on the internet and then you get to be part of communities that are that feel healthy for you at the time, but they're not really because they're spreading dangerous ideologies.

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Um, so yeah, I think I think this is really like we need each other and we need to belong to a group and we need to belong to a pack. It's kind of like premit primal in a way. Thank you.

Can you name three women who in your opinion have made feminist history but maybe also the history of music.

Yeah, that's a good one. Oh, I didn't I didn't think of any uh I'm gonna say um musician after all.

But the first one I thought about was uh Kimberly Crenshaw. I I talked about intersectional feminism, but she was the one who pinned it. And I feel like that was such a big moment for fem If we're talking about feminism as a movement because that made the made the movement and us people realized that um like I said no one is free until all of us are free and we need to take into consideration that some women experience more discrimination and barriers than others. So yeah, I think that's that that's a big one for me.

I think also uh I mean there are so many women who have who should have made it to our history books.

So, the second one that I want to mention is sister Rosetta Tharpe. Um, because she is kind of the first uh electric guitarist that played electric guitar the way it's played today. She's a black woman from the States and she was a blues guitarist and she really is like the foundation for all modern electric guitar and no one really knows her name. So she's up there.

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There are so many that I could mention. I mean also within the queer and trans movement, Marsha P. Johnson, everyone fighting for a better world for queer and trans people because that's really fighting for all of us.

And I also just want to mention like all the women who are constantly moving the world forward. If we're talking about community, I feel women are like the biggest community makers ever like who is the one inviting all the family over for this and who is the one like that's always been women. So I think to all like the mothers and grandmothers who are keeping it together and working and and struggling and I mean giving birth and just keeping the earth moving um yeah, I feel like they need to be mentioned too. But there are so many that were walked before me that I I couldn't mention

Is there anything you would like to say that we haven't ask you about?

Yeah, maybe I can say two small things and one thing is like don't underestimate the power of joy. I mean working with with arts and music but in Any field really, like joy. We say that in the girls rock camp alliance that joy is revolutionary. Because if we're just like doing all the things we love, being happy, it's really hard to be mad at it. And yeah. So don't underestimate the power of joy. And don't underestimate the power of small steps. Like that one meeting you had with that one kid where they got to talk about some something that meant something to them. That's important and Yeah, like take time to listen to kids. Uh, they have a lot of smart things to say.

And yeah, keep caring for that we need to keep caring for each other and keep showing each other love and and building relationships. I think is so important.

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