Assumptions of Normality: How Three Women with a Disability Changed the Face of Music

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Abstract: *Since the last 30 years, women musicians with a disability have remodeled the laws to integrate disability in the professional musical world, changed the way music is presented, understood, and taught, and integrated music as a form of activism. In this chapter, I give three examples of women I interviewed, who transformed the musical landscape through their actions. Evelyn Glennie is the first woman to develop a career as a solo percussionist. She had to show her teachers that deafness would not prevent her from achieving her musical studies. In her TED Talk "How to truly listen" she explained the methods she used to learn music through vibrations in her whole body, that she often presents to music students today. Gaelynn Lea is an American folk singer, violinist, and public speaker, very present on musical stage since winning NPR's Tiny Desk Contest in 2016. By changing the traditional way of holding her violin, she proved that physical limitations do not mean musical limitations. Lachi is an American singer, songwriter, composer, and producer. She advocates for a better diversity, equity, inclusion, and disability awareness in the music industry. As a blind musician, she faced the lack of role model figure when she was progressing in her career. Today, she wants to hold this role for the next generation of artists with a disability. In conclusion, I situate these three artists in our society, through the lens of gender diversity in the music industry.*

Keywords: *disability, assumptions, music, activism, leadership.*

From 2020 to 2022, I interviewed musicians working in varied musical styles, all having in common a professional role in their field, and the fact that they have a disability. The study was about the impact of their disability on their musical education, progression, and career. Mostly virtual through video conferences, meetings were carried out in North America (Canada and United States of America), in Europe (United Kingdom, France, Finland) and in Cairo. Through our conversations I could also evaluate the significance of the social and local contexts, depending on the musical genres, the localities, and the societal behaviors regarding disability. I used Critical Disability theory as a framework, which defines several models of disability through cultural, political, economic, and social lenses.

Among the interviewees, three women, whose actions changed the frames and rules governing the field of classical and popular professional music, captured my attention. This chapter dives into forty years of lived experiences of Evelyn Glennie, Gaelynn Lea and Lachi, and their journey as music professionals, through contrasting situations of disabilities, personal convictions, and lessons learned. The topic of education, of teaching people how to consider life from different perspectives, is common to the three journeys. What diverges is their relation to their own disability, the way it has been perceived by themselves or by others, although this important aspect of their identity has driven their musical itinerary and their careers. Evelyn Glennie was the first student with a disability who changed the law in academy to allow students with any disability to apply. She also developed a technique of hearing sound differently through vibrations that she improved year after year, and that she teaches today. Gaelynn Lea found a new way of holding and performing her instrument. Through her touring she discovered disability activism and is now an advocate for accessibility in professional music. Her path crossed the one of Lachi, who also became a disability culture defender and who filled the need for role models and disability presence in the music industry.

The Social Model of Disability

The domain of Critical Disability Studies (CDS) offers considerations and distinctions about disability applied to different models, the two most important being the social and the medical models of disability. As opposed to the medical model, which analyzes disability from a strictly medical and functional point of view (i.e., spinal cord injury leading to the use of a wheelchair), the social model of disability states that the causes of disability are found in the way society is structured around "able" bodies, rather than individual disability in bodies. The social model also examines the entire person with their capacities, feelings, emotions, possibilities, and social interactions with others. These two models have led to the distinction between the terms "impairment" (which refers to bodily condition) and "disability" (which refers to social obstacles). Mike Oliver (2012) and Colin Barnes (2013), both pioneers in the field of Disability Studies, have written extensively on the subject. Barnes (2012: 14) points out that historically:

> In order to understand the significance of the implications of social model reasoning it is important to remember that until very recently "disability" was viewed almost exclusively as an individual medical problem or a "personal tragedy" in Western culture.

Their thorough vision of disability as defined by the social model led to a completely new vision of the rights of disabled people within our society. Disability activism has given means of expressions to people who want to be heard and seen, declaring their rights to politicians, and asking for a fair position in their communities. Oliver (2013: 1024) states:

> The idea behind the social model of disability stemmed from the Fundamental Principles of Disability document first published in the mid-1970s (UPIAS 1976), which argued that we were not disabled by our impairments but by the disabling barriers we faced in society.[1]

In addition to the social model, a cultural model of disability appeared in the early 1980s in the United States. Based on the idea that disabled people are an oppressed minority group with a particular culture, several movements were born from this concept. Crip Culture celebrates diversity. The term "Crip" is an identifier, reclaimed from the archaic "crippled", a derogatory term for disabled people that was used throughout the 19th and much of the 20th century. In the cultural model of disability, "crip" has been reclaimed to represent a broader range of people who are different and showing pride in these differences, and serves as a tool for disability activism. For instance, there is a distinction between being deaf (i.e., being impacted by a medically recognized deafness or hearing impairment) and being Deaf (i.e., living a life in which deafness is part of the language, the identity, and the culture).

The social model redefines the way disabled people see themselves, represent themselves, talk about themselves. Falling into the category of being disabled, I was recently involved in a conversation[2] about the manner of being addressed, i.e. a disabled person vs a person with a disability. It was argued that claiming to be disabled is acceptable, as it was bringing the idea that "it was not something that we did wrong to be disabled". The counterargument was that the image of being disabled was often associated with the idea of being made less capable of doing something. For me, there is a parallel between the term "disabled" and fashion. It changes depending on the period, and on the social trends that governs our world, politically, financially, culturally, socially, and medically. In the same conversation, it was drawn to our attention that the current tendency was to use Person-First Language,[3] recognizing that disability is one of the multiple identities of a person, that disability does not define the person. Person-First language places the person before the disability: a disabled person should be called a person with disability. However, Person-First Language does not apply to all scenarios of identities and disabilities. More generally, a distinction should be made between Identity-First Language, which is preferred by the disabled community, and Person-First Language. Although the debate is ongoing, we agreed that using a more polite way to refer to disability would not get non-disabled people to look past the person's disabilities but might bring the discourse around disability into the public arena.

People are still engaged in disability activism today. The underrepresentation of disabled artists in the field of professional music led to a rise of disability inclusion campaigns in several areas from musical education to professional musical life. Historically, it borrows from the concepts of civil rights movements. Disability rights movements,

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[1] UPAIS stands for Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, an early disability rights organization in the United Kingdom founded in 1972.

[2] The following paragraph quotes excerpts of a private conversation between people with diverse disabilities.

[3] About People-First Language, see Titchkosky 2001. A list of different mentions to disabilities is given as an example.

i.e. fighting for people to be included as individuals with identities and rights in society, has led to active protests such as the "504 Sit-in" in April 1977, protesting Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, an American legislation that guaranteed certain rights to people with disabilities. Another fight led to the amendment of the American Disability Act, or ADA, in 1992 to recognize the status of people with disabilities as a minority group. In both cases, artists, and musicians in particular, have been actively protesting, composing songs that helps us understand the movement today. Among them were Jeff Moyer,[4] dubbed the "troubadour of the 504 demonstrations", and Elaine Kolb,[5] who composed the theme song of ADAPT,[6] "We Will Ride", during the protests against inaccessible transportation.[7]

Nowadays, artists with disabilities are willing to talk and take actions, until they are heard. The three women featured in this chapter embrace leadership positions in the professional music industry, though their approaches to disability and to music are different.

Evelyn Glennie, Touch the Sound

In post-secondary music education, the rigidity of conservatories and music schools is a topic that has been well covered from the second part of the twentieth century to today.[8] After the first administrative steps of application in the process of integrating university or high school, admissions to these high-level establishments come with a series of interviews and auditions that need to be thoroughly prepared by candidates. The jury has full power in the decision-making process. The rules have not changed for many years and are closely followed by all the participants. Once a decision has been made, appeals are rarely considered. The participant will have to wait until the following round of admissions, usually once a year. When Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie[9] applied to the Royal Academy of Music in London in 1981 at the age of 16, she followed the same process as other students. The jury first refused her application because they felt it did not make any sense to admit a musician who was profoundly deaf. As Glennie explains in an article that she wrote in the early 2000s and revised in 2015, profoundly deaf means that "the quality of the sound heard is not sufficient to be able to understand the spoken word

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[4] Jeff Moyer is an American musician and disability rights activist. See https://jeffmoyer.com/about/ (accessed 29 June 2021).

[5] Elaine Kolb is an American disability rights activist, singer, songwriter, and performer. https://www1.nyc.gov/site/mopd/events/pride-parade-music.page (accessed 29 June 2021).

[6] ADAPT stands for American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today. It is a non-violent disability justice group.

[7] For more about music as a tool for Disability Activism, see Kolin 2021.

[8] As an example, see two recent studies, the first one by Tim Palmer and David Baker (2021) about the experience of four classical musicians in conservatoires in the United Kingdom, and the second one by Lotte Latukefu and Jessica Pollard (2022) about the professional perspectives of conservatoire students in Australia. The references to the application rules to such institutions are also covered in these articles.

[9] Contents of this part come from Evelyn Glennie's interview by Diane Kolin, 29 October 2020. When more resource is available (articles or books written by Glennie), the reference is also given.

from sound alone" (Glennie 2015). She relies on lip-reading, an art she masters as she combines it with face-reading and body-reading. Developing her own technique of feeling, rather than only hearing, the music, with her percussion teacher when she was 12, the importance of the vibration produced by the instruments became the central point of her musical progress, pushing her to remove her hearing aids as the sonic amplification the devices involved was depriving her from focusing on the vibrations. Her method constantly improved, as did her willingness to become a professional musician, particularly a solo percussionist. In the 1980s there were no women holding this position. There were no obstacles on her road until she applied to the Royal Academy of Music. The jury thought that there would be no future for a deaf musician who might be unemployable after three years in the academy, if she could manage to stay for three years. But Glennie did not want to work with orchestras, her aim was to become a solo percussionist, which was even more inconceivable to them. The assumption that deafness meant silence, and that silence meant that music was inaccessible, was driving their decision. Glennie decided to prove them wrong. She appealed, asking for another chance to demonstrate her abilities. Furthermore, a person should not be judged on presumptions, or differences. She was determined to get a second chance. The jury accepted, and the rest is history. After she entered the Royal Academy of Music, which made her their first student with a hearing impairment, not only did the admission policies change to add non-discriminatory admission rules, but these rules were also adopted in all music academies and conservatories in the UK, soon followed by other countries. She also fulfilled her objective to become the first woman solo percussionist, a major commissioner of new compositions for solo percussion, and sought after by the most famous orchestras.

Her discography is impressive: her first recording was Bartók and Brahms in 1988, and she has since then released more than 40 CDs, two of them being rewarded by a Grammy award in 1989 and 2014. She has been awarded many honorary doctorates from universities around the world, became an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1993, was promoted to Dame Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (DBE) in 2007, and appointed to the Order of the Companions of Honour (CH) in the 2017 New Year Honours.[10] Not only has she commissioned over 200 compositions for solo percussion during her career, thus expanding the existing repertoire, she also catalogues percussions from all over the world. She owns more than 3500 percussive instruments. Her idea is to create the largest digital percussion database with an educational purpose, recording the sound of her instruments one after the other. Her office in Huntingdon, in the suburbs of Cambridge, hosts one of the most impressive collections of percussion instruments in the world. Her series of videos published on her YouTube Channel, entitled "The Evelyn Glennie Collection",[11] shows how she connects to each instrument and draws all the sound possibilities from it. This collection adds to her tireless exploration of sound and its multiple angles.

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[10] See: https://www.evelyn.co.uk/about/biography/(accessed 21 January 2022).

[11] See: "The Evelyn Glennie Collection" at: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMI2RgJjeg7CmLON5Ezj_kr36NV-yaRgl (accessed 21 January 2022).

Figure 1: Evelyn Glennie. Roto Toms and Octobans © Philipp Rathmer/Brigitte.

In the TED Talk conference she gave in 2003, entitled "How to truly listen", she offers the key concepts of the technique she developed to listen to music differently.[12] In this conference, she explains how music can come with a range of emotions that can be perceived in different ways by the performer and the audience. When she works on a piece of music, she reads the notes, which she calls "the instructions", but she also needs to tell her own story of the music, and this is what makes her a musician. Since she feels the music instead of hearing it with the ears, the story is built around what her body perceives. In her conference, her aim is to make the audience react. When she asks them to participate, she does not hear the audience, but she can see and sense the feedback and the applause. This is the same way she conveys her own feelings to the audience when she plays.

In order to feel the oscillations of the instruments through the stage, Glennie performs barefoot, stressing the importance of the combination of eyes and body experiences. This method reminds me what I have observed with deaf dancers. The entire body feels and reacts to the vibrations, that is, the rhythm and the dynamics of a piece of music. Nowadays we also find wearable pieces of equipment that converts music to vibration,

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[12] Evelyn Glennie, "How to truly listen", TED Talk, 2007, https://youtu.be/IU3V6zNER4g (accessed 21 January 2022).

such as the Woojer,[13] a little device that can be worn around the waist and that vibrates according to the sound frequencies of the musical source connected to it.

Glennie's world is surrounded by sounds that can be touched, felt, and lived. What she tries to demonstrate in her many talks, masterclasses and interviews is that everybody can experience sound the same way, one just needs to extend the listening beyond the hearing. The documentary *Touch The Sound: A Sound Journey with Evelyn Glennie*, directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer (2009) illustrates this approach to sound, showing her in action in diverse periods of her life, creating new compositions, performing on different types of instruments including some percussions she never tried before, in various kinds of spaces including places that were not designed for music, and in the city full of urban noises that can become music when one feels them and listens to them differently.

However, if she is recognized as the person who changed the admissions policy regarding disabilities, and deafness in particular, in music institutions, she refuses to self-identify as deaf or disabled. Her deafness is not so important to her. In the conclusion of her "Hearing Essay" she affirms:

> My hearing is something that bothers other people far more than it bothers me. There are a couple of inconveniences but in general it doesn't affect my life much. For me, my deafness is no more important than the fact I am female with brown eyes. Sure, I sometimes have to find solutions to problems regarding my hearing and its relation to music, but so do all musicians. (Glennie 2015)

It has indeed bothered other people. I will not risk saying that her relation to deafness is driven by a fear of judgment or of categorization. She simply wants the audience to think of her as a musician, not as a "deaf musician". By redefining hearing, Glennie distances herself from the society's misconceptions of hearing loss. Thus, she also pulls herself away from the Deaf community (with an uppercase D), constituted of people who are deaf and who do not consider deafness medically, but socially, with its own language (sign language) and its own culture. Rather than trying to correct deafness with hearing aids or cochlear implants, the Deaf community embraces new forms of communicating and experimenting with artistic practices. Movements such as Dip-Hop, or Deaf Hip-Hop, were born with the idea of a connection between languages, a communion of spoken or sung words and a body language, almost like a dance, with signed words, based on a full sensory experience.[14] Glennie wants her deafness to be considered as "normal", arguing that the sound can be received in many ways and that everyone's hearing is different, even if we compare two persons who do not have any particular issues with the ears.[15] It is true, but I still believe that her deafness and her technique of hearing differently gives her something positively different, which we can feel as an audience member:

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[13] The technology used by the Woojer is called haptic technology, which uses tactile sensations to stimulate the sense of touch in a user experience. More information on their website: https://www.woojer.com/pages/technology (accessed 21 January 2022).

[14] On the d/Deaf communities and sensory experiences, see Holmes 2017: 171–220. Her article mentions Evelyn Glennie and her complex relation to disability, but also examines in detail the definitions of deafness through the lens of the d/Deaf communities, and the history of sign languages in different parts of the world.

[15] She talks about her relation to deafness in her recent book, *Listen World!* (Glennie 2019).

when she is on stage, one can see visually the range of emotions that she transmits, along with her skills as a solo percussionist.

As we have seen in this section, Glennie's leadership has many facets, from the moment she proved that musicianship is more important than disability in music education, to the demonstration of the power of vibration in music that led to a redefinition of listening. She holds a prominent position in performing, growing the percussion repertoire, and instructing different ways of experiencing music.

Gaelynn Lea, Live Music is for Everyone

Gaelynn Lea,[16] an American singer and violinist, was born with a physical disability called Osteogenesis Imperfecta, or Brittle Bones Disease. She grew up with bent arms and legs and has used an electric wheelchair since early childhood. In fifth grade she became interested in the school orchestra. After hitting a perfect score at the listening test, she joined the ensemble. The teacher suggested that she start with the cello, but the instrument was too big for her to use it in a conventional way. She then switched to the violin. With the help of her teacher, she developed a technique of playing her instrument that still applies today, 27 years later: she holds the violin upright as she would a cello, and holds her bow – which is a half-size smaller than a traditional bow – like a double bass player. This ingenious adaptation has proven wrong anyone who wouldn't allow a child with disability to learn an instrument because of the impossibility of playing it as it has usually been taught. The problem unfortunately still exists. If the teacher would not have been open enough to go against conventions to consider adaptations and other options for her student to perform, Lea would probably never have learned music. Lea was classically trained in this orchestra but could only use three fingers for her fingering, and had limited range for bowing. With the help of her teacher, she practiced a different bowing style and positioning, but most importantly, she re-fingered the scores of the pieces she played. This is a complex and time-consuming task.

Growing up, Lea knew that she wanted to go one step further in music, but because of the limitations described above, she would not picture herself as a professional classical musician. She decided to explore other genres and discovered Celtic music and folk music. In 2006 she joined her first band, playing and singing Celtic Fiddle Tunes. Lea has a very distinct mezzo-soprano voice, which was described as "ethereal" in a local newspaper.[17] In 2011 she was introduced to the looping pedal, which transformed her performance practice. Since then, she would play a theme with her violin and make it loop, then sing over it. The same year, she composed her first song. In 2016, she entered the American radio NPR's Tiny Desk Contest, receiving over 6,000 applications every year, and won.[18] Since her music was promoted all over the United States, Lea and her husband

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[16] Contents of this part come from Gaelynn Lea's interview by Diane Kolin, 1 February 2021.

[17] Denny Dyroff, "On Stage: Maurice Hines 'Tappin' Thru Life" in *Unionville Times* (Brandywine New Media, 20 October 2016). https://www.unionvilletimes.com/?p=32224 (accessed 6 February 2022).

[18] NPR, Tiny Desk Contest, https://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2016/03/03/468923804/and-the-winner-of-the-2016-tiny-desk-contest-is (accessed 6 February 2022).

embarked in a tour that led them to take the decision to quit their jobs (Lea was teaching the violin), sell their house and travel the world for a tour. To date, she performed in forty-five states and nine countries.

During her tour she embraced the concept of disability pride, which consists of seeing disability as an ordinary component of our society and of our identity, of which one should be proud. Disability should not be associated with negative wording or feeling. Everybody who ages becomes disabled at some point. Disability is part of an identity, along with gender, race, and anything that makes someone special. Disability pride originates in these values. Seeing the world with the perspective of disability pride means acknowledging the barriers of the society, but also defending and celebrating open doors. Lea's approach of performing has evolved with her experience of touring. Being in a power wheelchair, she faced many occurrences of non-accessible venues, for a diversity of reasons ranging from the stairs in front of the building, requiring ramps that were far from secure, to a lack of access to the stage itself, forcing her to perform in front of the stage instead of on stage, or to the dressing room, or worse, to the toilets. Lea is pushing more venues to apply accessibility standards, but also all artists, with or without accessibility, to give their priority to accessible venues.

The perception one has of disability in society is constantly disrupted by biases and preconceptions that are often wrong. Lea became a public speaker, building awareness on what being disabled means, and how details such as the language used to speak about disability can make a difference. For instance, terms such "victim of a stroke", "suffering from a disability" or "confined to a wheelchair" are often heard. Disability activism offers alternative options to the pessimistic appellations often heard today. These terms can be simple: a person uses a wheelchair, experienced a stoke, is disabled, or has a disability. Lea highlights the emotional impacts of the current labels on members of a community who do not recognize themselves in the negative denominations. Moreover, these words support the medical model of disability as opposed to the social model explored earlier in this chapter: the medical model endorses the idea of disability as being broken and needed to be repaired. Disability can be associated to a range of positive words such as innovative, creative, flexible, and powerful. Terms used can affect self-confidence and self-esteem.

Finally, Lea emphasizes the importance of teachers for apprentice musicians with disabilities. Accessibility in music institutions is not only about accessing the building, the classrooms, and the toilets. It is about music instruments adaptations or bodily adaptations. The task requires the educators to think beyond what is considered as a limitation, and perhaps to make multiple tries together until the adaptation suits the student. What is important is to give the pupil enough confidence to pursue their musical studies. To go further, young musicians with disabilities often lack a model. There are many musicians who are happy to share their experiences. Children are usually curious, and the earlier they have access to other forms of music-making, the more they will be willing to think out of the box.

Lea's leadership comes with her ability of expressing her strong positions about disability in professional music, either with her compositions or with her public talks. Her presence on the field has opened conversations about the accessibility of performance venues and music education.

Lachi, Full Disclosure

The American singer Lachi[19] was born in Maryland. She is legally blind, which means that her visual acuity is less than 20/200 (or 6/60) in both eyes. From birth, she has a disease called Keratoconus, causing the retina to develop only partially, thus she grew up with low visual acuity. She started being interested in music at an early age, around three or four. As a child, she struggled at school because of her blindness, however others around her put her hassles on the account of daydreaming. As a result, she was not very social at school and spent hours writing poetry, composing, and singing songs. It changed in college where she joined musical clubs, and played the piano and sang on Saturday evenings in her dorm. Rapidly, she was noticed, and was asked to play more. Supported by her friends, her audience, and her teachers, she met with her counselor at school who encouraged her to go to New York University (NYU). Climbing steps of the music industry through her studies was full of challenges. As her disease affects her optic nerves and her retina, glasses were useless. After she graduated, in 2010, she got signed to a record deal under the label EMI. It was a very exciting time but also somewhat frustrating: the label used the fact that among the band were some musicians who were legally blind or visually impaired, portraying them in a manner which Lachi's group did not feel appropriate. When the label was sending the band on tour to promote the album, there was no accommodation regarding their disabilities. Although the 2010 contract was originally an attractive deal, the band resigned. This decision gave Lachi enough confidence to appreciate and value her position as a musician, as a woman, and as leader in her own business choices. She never denied being a musician with a disability, on the opposite, she embraced disability pride: her disability is a strength, not a weakness. She embarked on a journey that would change her image, as an artist and as a disability advocate. Since then, she became an award-winning recording artist, working with major producers and labels (among which Sony and Universal), being featured on TV, radio, and print (among which *The New York Times* and *The Huffington Post*).

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[19] Contents of this part come from Lachi's interviews by Diane Kolin, 23 October 2020 and 17 January 2022.

Figure 2: Lachi. © Lachi.

Eventually, her role in disability advocacy grew bigger. Working in the music and entertainment industry made her realize that there was a lack of artists with disability in her field. In a society where Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is frequently mentioned, disability should be part of the Diversity category. She is very vocal about her own disability, and she would like to see more artists disclosing their disability as part of their identity, being proud of being a musician as much as being disabled. Artists with disabilities grew up without role models. There were no known singers with blindness Lachi could reach to ask for advice when she was studying. Today, she wants to be a model for young artists, and she wants her peers to do the same, affirming that disability disclosure should be part of music education. More discussions about disability in the arts need to happen. She remembers the first event that made her become aware of this gap. The organization *Women in Music*, helping to propel women and those who identify as female in the music and entertainment industry, organized an online Diversity and Inclusion panel, that Lachi attended with enthusiasm, as these talks were still rarely happening. Subjects such as race, sexual orientation and religion were discussed. Lachi sent them comments, inquiring whether disability could also be considered. Her reflections were ignored, until one of the organizers finally mentioned the topic, agreeing that "we don't talk enough about disability", but the conversation ended there. However, after the panel concluded, someone from the organization contacted her and proposed her to moderate a panel for disability awareness, which she did. The event was successful and well attended. Following up, musical and non-musical organizations requested their own talks: the Grammy Awards, Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI), the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), some record labels, the White House Office of Public Engagement, the Kennedy Center (where she also performed). She was approached by non-profit organizations to become their ambassador. She became the co-chair of the Advocacy committee for the Grammys Awards Recording Academy in New York, allowing her to connect them with more artists with disabilities. She was invited to attend the Foundation Fighting Blindness Gala, which led to collaborations with artists such as the Filipino American rapper apl.de.ap, member of the Black-Eyed Peas, who also has a visual impairment. This project was uplifting since it was about education and disability, as the title suggests: "Dis Education". The song was premiered at a Foundation Fighting Blindness event in September 2021. Lachi's point was that songs about disability are usually sad, and in 2021 we should be able to change that, which was the case for this song, carrying the idea that people with disabilities do not have to feel sorry for themselves, that they can be confident about their lives and what drives them to be who they are.

Since her first experiences of moderating panels, she has learned about disability activism through Critical Disability Studies and the social model of disability. Of course, she has crossed paths with Gaelynn Lea several times, until they eventually contacted each other to put ideas in common. They both believed that disability awareness talks, if helpful, could be complemented with something more significant. Lea participated in the Grammy Disability Panel moderated by Lachi,[20] after which the Recording Academy told Lachi that they would "come back to them". There was no "them", the participants invited were individual musicians. Lachi and Lea realized that what was needed was an organization. Thus, they created a coalition of music professionals called RAMPD (Recording Artists and Music Professionals with Disabilities),[21] of which Lachi is the president and Lea the vice president. The concept behind the name is that ramps are needed for concert venues and awards shows. But for her, it goes a step further:

> One of the biggest things about me that I really wanted to do as a leader as it pertains to music, but also as a leader in disability, is to fight for disability culture. I want to elevate disability culture in my own way. I believe that if we amplify disability culture, we will start getting people to fall in love with disability, not just as a charity, but socially as something they envy or appreciate.[22]

The organization is still in its early stages, in the process of actively recruiting professional members, calling for worldwide applications.

Recently, Lachi became aware of an issue closely related to Critical Disability Studies: the vast problematic of intersectionality. As a disabled black woman, she realized that many studies in CDS are led by white researchers, and the mainstream is portraying wheelchairs when thinking of disability. As we have seen, she is involved in disability awareness and education, but she feels that public representation of disability, race and gender needs to evolve. Since then, she added a component about intersectionality to her disability awareness talks, reminding that Disability Justice has been developed by

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[20] Grammy Awards, "Grammy Disability Panel: Music, Purpose, Community with Lachi", 27 April 2021. https://youtu.be/Ux5SDPBxpqw (accessed 12 February 2022).

[21] RAMPD, launched on 21 January 2022. http://www.rampd.org/ (accessed 12 February 2022).

[22] Lachi, interviewed by Diane Kolin, 17 January 2022.

black, queer and trans people, such as Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, and Stacey Milbern, who were women of color who identified differently, and other women who have contributed to the disability visibility and advocacy movements, in mainstream and academics conversations. As per Lachi, intersectionality should be included in the discussions about disability, as much as disclosure, visibility, and pride.

Like Gaelynn Lea, Lachi's ideas of using her acquired knowledge in CDS to create an alliance between professional musicians has strengthened her leadership position. She seeks other partnerships in order to offer more opportunities and advocate for more accessibility in the music industry.

Conclusion

Gender diversity in the music industry has been discussed since many years. In the main dictionaries and historical musical references, such as the *Concise Oxford History of Music* (Abraham 1980), and online encyclopedias such as the *Grove Musical Online,*[23] very few women are mentioned in comparison to men. A parallel can be done with disabled artists. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2002, 2005), a prominent figure of CDS in the study of the intersection between Feminist theories and Disability studies, made a thorough analysis of the existing and possible theoretical frameworks, arguing that Feminist disability studies challenges stereotypes about disability, gender, bodies, and identities, in the context of rights and exclusions, through the lens of disability representations in society. Her writings were followed by many issues of authors covering Feminist disability studies as viewed by Garland-Thomson and derived from her thoughts.[24] The attempt of adding more discussion about Feminist theories in disability studies have been ongoing in the field of Disability Justice. Disability Justice is about looking at social justice, crossing work with intersectional systems of oppressions such as ableism, supremacies, patriarchy, transphobia, capitalism, and racial justice. Many disabled people come to Disability Justice because they do not see themselves reflected in the more mainstream disability rights movement.

From the first discoveries of music to their actions in their communities, Glennie, Lea and Lachi have climbed various stages of growth in their identities, as a musician, as a woman, and as a leader. Whether they disclose it publicly or not, the three artists see disability through the lens of the social model, as defined by Critical Disability Studies. Although Glennie lived and grew up in a different period than Lea and Lachi, they all faced the difficulties of social biases and decided to make it part of their lived experience of music. Glennie's disability advocacy started with her fight against a system that was not recognizing disability in the spheres of music education. As the first student with a disability in her academic institution, her arguments in considering music before disability in the admission process made a significant difference, pushing the institution to revisit their past and change their own rules. This event places Glennie as a pioneer

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[23] Grove Music Online. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic (accessed 21 January 2022).

[24] For more about the history of Intersectionality of gender, race, and disability, see Naples, Mauldin, and Dillaway 2019.

and leader in disability justice, though she does not consider herself as such. However, she became the first woman solo percussionist, role that she recognizes with pride. It is rare enough to be mentioned since she was able to belie two preconceived ideas: a deaf musician cannot become professional, and a woman cannot become a prominent professional percussionist. She did not only become the first woman solo percussionist; she also grew the percussion repertoire. Her efforts were recognized, and she was named Dame Evelyn Glennie in 2007. Thus, she became a role model for many students, with and without disability. As for Lea, she was the first artist with a disability to win NPR's Tiny Desk contest. The role model figure is important in disability justice and in the social model of disability. The topic interested both Lachi and Lea, whose views about the importance of having a strong public appearance converged. Growing in a world without role models, they both struggled to find their marks in the music industry, having no disabled figures toward which to turn in their musical genres, when they were training. It goes back to the role of education, important in CDS. Only by sensitizing the audience but also the education system itself can preconceived notions about disability disappear, in favor of ability, accessibility and inclusion. The three artists agree on this point. Glennie teaches musicians and audiences how to hear music differently, not only through the ears but through the rest of the body thanks to vibrations. Lea addresses musical venues and offers them advice on how to make their place more accessible to the audience and the performers. She also sustains changes in instructional methods, based on teaching adaptive instruments and having disabled musicians as guests. Lachi is a proponent of educating preponderant institutions, such as the Grammy Awards, arguing that the lack of disabled artists representation in the musical professional world stops young musicians from envisioning a musical career. By continuously and actively engaging in these conversations with their respective public, they sustain their leadership and role model position in music, as women, as musicians, and, whether recognized or not, as disability activists.

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