



Folk Education Network

Folk Education Development Day Cecil Sharp House and Online: 26 February 2022

Theme: Youth-Friendly Folk,

Review by Maddie Morris

Youth Friendly Folk was an engaging, exciting and insightful event looking into the ways folk and traditional music is becoming, and could become, further inclusive for young people exploring the tradition. The event took place on Saturday the 26th of February at Cecil Sharp House, London and offered new insight into the perspectives of people from all ages as to the ways folk music is both adaptive and resistant to change and asked important and sometimes challenging questions into the future of our scene.

After a welcome talk from Rachel Elliott (EFDSS Education Director) and Eleanor Telfer (Compere, Folk musician and EFDSS Board member) the day was started with a keynote from Ray Aggs (Musician, Writer and Diversity Champion). Ray spoke about their experiences growing up playing Appalachian fiddle music with their parents. Their keynote explored some of the history of folk music created by people of colour and the various ways that folk music can be de-colonised through the way we teach the tradition to young musicians. For me, as a queer person, it was really wonderful to see a keynote by another person who identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ Community, as for many queer people involved in folk music this can at points feel quite isolating. Ray's keynote was moving and informative and gave me (and no doubt others who attended the event) loads to think about and reflect upon on our own practice as musicians, teachers or students.

After the keynote we were given the opportunity to either attend workshops titled "Passport to Music: making music with young people in challenging circumstances," or "Nurturing the disabled dancer: a guide to meeting learning, physical and emotional needs within folk dance." I decided to attend the workshop about making music with young people in challenging circumstances, a partnership project led by People Express, alongside EFDSS and other national organisations. This session was led by Julie Batten (CEO, People Express) and Kailia Storey (Programmes Manager, People Express) from People Express, as well as Leah Wilcox (Workshop Assistant, People Express) and Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne (Folk musician and educator). To start the workshop, we were given an insight into People Express and the work they do with young people engaging them with various genres of music, we were then taken through a practical session workshop with Cohen. Cohen's approach to facilitation was warm and effective. In the session we were encouraged to pick up an instrument that we hadn't previously played and were taken through various rhythm and singing workshops. This session, I think was effective, as many of us in the room facilitate workshops and were musicians. By encouraging us to play instruments we'd not played before, with unfamiliar songs and rhythms it gave us the ability to re-experience what it feels like to be a student again, and in turn, gave the facilitators in the room the opportunity to think about their own practice.

At 1:15 when we broke for lunch, I had conversations with people who had attended the Nurturing a disabled dancer workshop with Juliet Diener (Founder & CEO of icandance), who spoke really positively about the conversations that had taken place during the session.

After lunch, a video was shown about the Intervarsity Folk Dance Festival's diversity and inclusion plans at this year's festival. It was made by Sol (IVFDF 2022 Stewards Co-Ordinator & Accessibility Officer) and Chloe (IVFDF 2022 Treasurer). IVFDF are recipients of one of EFDSS' dance mini-grants. This was followed by a presentation from The Young Folk Club. In this presentation Rowan Collinson, Elye Cuthbertson and Danny Marshall (all EFDSS Youth Forum Members) spoke about the various ways The Young Folk Club work towards the inclusion and accessibility of their folk club. I found this session really thought provoking, as it showed the ways that for young people engaging in the folk tradition, issues of accessibility are clearly at the forefront of thinking and planning. The presentation highlighted the way the folk tradition is ever changing, and it was a moving insight into the future of our scene.

The penultimate panel of the day surrounded Gender Equality and Safety in Folk and was presented in partnership with Esperance. This panel was chaired by Rosie Hood (Musician & educator) and panellists included Nicola Beazley (Freelance educator and community musician), Jennie Higgins (Folk Singer/Historian), Sarah Jones (Programme Manager, National Youth Folk Ensemble), Jenna Macrory (The BIT Collective coordinator, music producer and creative freelancer) and myself. During this panel, we discussed various aspects of safety within the folk scene, from the safety of women and those of marginalised genders, issues of trans exclusion within the folk scene, safeguarding and the protection of young people in festivals and the content of folk song and its effect on audiences. As a panellist, it felt validating to get a platform to speak about some of the issues in the folk scene and the realities of being the part of a scene as a woman or someone with a marginalised gender identity. As well as this, it was wonderful to speak alongside such intelligent, reflective and passionate women about a scene we all care so deeply about.

The final panel of the day was hosted by Keynote Speaker Ray Aggs, with panellists Theo Alade (Freelance Dance Artist), Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne, Krupa Chavda (Freelance Dance Artist) and Mahaliah Edwards (Violinist, Educator and Social Change Advocate), and was titled 'Cultural Diversity, Young People and Folk.' This panel felt important to end the day on, and explored the panellists' various routes into, and experiences within the folk and traditional scene, as well as the various ways that racism exists in our scene. The panel spoke eloquently and clearly about how at times, our scene is exclusionary and how people of colour can feel tokenised or marginalised due to disproportionately white line-ups at gigs and festivals, or outdated language and song content in folk clubs. It felt important to hear these stories, and gave me and others who were listening an opportunity to reflect on the scene and the things we can do to acknowledge and value cultural diversity within our scene.

We ended the day with a Plenary from Rachel Elliott and Eleanor Telfer, and were all asked to sit at a table with people we didn't know to speak about our reflections from the day. It was interesting to see what other people's reflections were, and how different parts of the day had left each of us individually thinking about different things.

To me as an attendee, Youth Friendly Folk felt like a really important moment for the folk and traditional scene. As someone who is queer, neurodivergent and speaking up about the inequalities in the scene it can sometimes feel as if people *don't care* or as if these issues aren't being heard or validated. The Folk Education Network created a space where people were able to

speak openly and freely about the issues in the scene, and this felt revolutionary in a climate that is often accused of being resistant to change. I hope that from Youth Friendly Folk people are able to continue discussions about race, gender, disability inclusion, diversity and safety within our scene, and that these conversations become a more common practice for teachers, students, musicians and listeners.

"Folk Music is about the preservation of fire, not the worshiping of ashes." Gustav Mahler

MADDIE MORRIS (they/she) - Songwriter and Activist

Maddie Morris is a Leeds based folk musician and activist and was the recipient of the BBC Radio 2 young folk award in 2019. Maddie is a freelancer and whilst touring works facilitating music sessions for adults with learning disabilities and teaches song writing to members of the LGBTQ Community. Maddie graduated with a first-class honours degree in folk music from Leeds Conservatoire, and is currently completing an internship with the BIT collective looking at safeguarding in the traditional music scene.

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