

## **Let's Change the Record: Report on the Studio Lock-in May 2016**

*“Let's Change the Record was one of the most inspiring music workshops I've attended - and I've attended dozens. Hearing the stories and advice from the speakers and more experienced participants gave me a lot of clarity and invaluable direction in how I want to move forward in my music career. It was great to meet so many talented artists and “talk shop” with them as well. I left feeling like I'd made connections that will be friends, collaborators, and a general network of support for many years to come.”*

*Amanda Mayo, Goldsmiths student.*

*“By making this event happen, Sally has given us all hope that we can 'Change the Record' because we actually did it for 48 hours!”*

*Rachel H, Radio Producer*

On the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, twenty-two women of different ages and backgrounds took over Westminster University's world-class D9 studio as part of Sally Gross and Denise Humphrey's 'Let's Change the Record' initiative. The aim of the initiative is to directly address the critical underrepresentation of women in all aspects of the music industry, and the Studio Lock-In focused on production, which at 95% male by far the area of least female representation. As Sally highlighted on the opening morning of the weekend,

studio production is the 'base line of everything that happens in the music industry, we should be a part of it and we should have control of it'.

Originally Sally Gross's concept, the MA Music Business Management course leader was joined by her student Denise Humphreys, who herself teaches Audio Production at City of Westminster College, and the pair enlisted the help of two women currently studying on Westminster's MA Audio Production, Bettina Cassar and Mariana Botero as audio technicians and teachers. Sally then invited a host of inspiring industry professionals to share their experience and skills. These included sound engineer and producer Yvonne Ellis, who toured with and recorded Simply Red; and Hannah V, who started her career as a session musician, toured with Rihanna and Jessie Jay before giving it up to pursue her own production career as an artist signed to Sony BMG; DJ Paulette, who started as a resident of the Hacienda and has since had residencies in multiple top Parisian and Ibiza clubs as well as French national radio stations Virgin France. Acid jazz and electro house music pioneer, Sally Rodgers of the band A Man Called Adam fame, also joined us; Sally Rodgers is now a senior lecturer of music business management and audio production at the Leeds College of Music. The BBC radio 1xtra producer and dance music manager and promoter ex-DJ Rachel Hiscock (p.k.a. Raechill) and Caroline Adcock, sound engineer and tour manager. Participants included girls from Leeds College of Music, City of Westminster College, Westminster's MA Music Business Management and respondents from an open Facebook advert who had a range of experience and ability, from Goldsmiths College post-graduate audio production students with a high skill level to absolute beginners who don't know how to get started. Studio workshop sessions were punctuated by guest lectures, all of whom told their stories, shared their anecdotes and advice and shared their skills.

Many participants had never been in a professional music studio, and those who had significant studio experience had never seen so many women in a studio before, and there was a tangible atmosphere of excitement around this. As Rachel H said in interview,

Being in the studio as an all female group felt like a groundbreaking experience and we mentioned that we thought may have even broken a Guinness Book of Records for having the most female producers in a studio at one time.

The atmosphere was also markedly comfortable and supportive, which numerous participants said felt both liberating and conducive to learning. One participant remarked that they felt in an all female environment 'meant we could relax and be more open with our questions and queries to the teachers and mentors without feeling judged', and Chrissie said on the day that she was trying to remember all the questions she'd always been too afraid to ask men and take the opportunity to freely ask them. A more experienced music student also said she 'felt more confident' in the studio, because the atmosphere 'was supportive and open in a way that I'd never previously experienced in mixed-gender studio sessions, workshops and lessons'.

Industry professionals freely shared the frustrations they experience when working with dominating over overpowering men in production processes, shared some of their coping strategies and advice, and expressed a desire to work with more women. Sally Rodgers, for example, said that she refused to work with men she found to be sexist very early in her career and now she only works with men who she knows respect her equally. Many said that they had better experiences working with women in the past, including Yvonne Ellis, who said that women were 'generous' with writing credits, and suggested that men often don't credit women for the work they've contributed. Lots of other industry professionals said they'd also experienced this, as well as sexual harassment and being made to feel uncomfortable and unworthy. All of these were also echoed in participants' feedback. As one interviewee stated candidly, 'I've felt the need to "prove myself" in these situations in the past, instead of it being a given that I'm serious about my work'. All of the guest speakers were openly overjoyed to spend time with women in the studio and build up a positive energy around their potential and the possibility of a change which will also improve the working conditions of women who

have been putting up with things they shouldn't have had to for their entire careers. Over the course of the weekend, various studio skills were transferred, and all participants even started to co-write and record a track, but overall there was not enough time and this really served as a 'taster'.

In sum, we found that the exclusion of men, (despite the fact that everybody involved felt this was a real 'issue' that led to several interesting discussion) was in fact incredibly conducive to real learning, which was the main aim of our experiment, as well as exciting and inspiring. However, we also discovered that there is much work to be done in terms of offering significant, meaningful, music production education to women and supporting their entry into industry. We found, for example, that the participants' diverse levels of ability and experience made it difficult for the lower levels to access basic information, and for higher levels to feel that they were being challenged. This came out especially when working on one project together, and we might have done better to split into smaller groups before attempting such a task. We found in feedback interviews that as a taster, however, the Studio Lock-in inspired a greater taste for learning and creating as well as hope in for the future of women in music – as is reflected in the opening quotations.

## **Recommendations**

Now that Westminster has hosted such an event, we would like to present a number of strong recommendations on how the University of Westminster can be at the **forefront of changing the gender dynamics** of the creative industries. As a leading media institution, we also feel that the University of Westminster has a responsibility to do so. Given that to date no university or college in the UK has made any special provisions for welcoming women into their departments, or supporting them in complete courses and going on to secure successful careers, the University of Westminster now has an opportunity to be the first institution to take this issue seriously, and we have

concrete proposals on how this would be done.

Seeing that women are critically underrepresented in every aspect of the music industry, including teaching, technical support, research, business and production and less so, but still even in performance, we feel that the industry is in dire need of a dedicated research unit which would pioneer new ways of **creating diversity and make real impact by integrating practical audio education in our world-class studios with rigorous interdisciplinary research** focused on understanding the issue and creating innovative solutions. We also feel that the introduction of diversity would have exciting effects on the industry as a whole, giving way to new markets and new models.

In 2003, Terri Winston, the City College of San Francisco's then director of the recording arts programme launched Women's Audio Mission, the first and still the only organisation in the world that is providing specialised training for women, and their recording studio is the only studio in the world run entirely by women. They offer training for women, peer mentoring, affordable studio access, provide 20 studio jobs in their studio, a youth programme based in high-schools and youth centres, artist development, career placement, recording residencies and their recently launched an online international training curriculum which has already trained 6,500 students in 127 countries. They have received significant attention from both the White House and the media, but most importantly, since the founding of Women's Audio Mission, female enrolment on the City College's recording arts program has gone from 12% to 43%, which is now the highest percentage of female enrolment in any recording arts institution in the U.S. Unfortunately, because of the dearth of research being done on this, we don't have figures to compare in the UK, but certainly Westminster has never reached 43% female enrolment on our audio production courses.

In 2010, **The University of Huddersfield launched their Centre for Music, Gender and Identity (MuGI) within their Music & Music Technology Research Department.** As their website states, 'activities and research

projects deal not only with the theoretical exploration of music's relationship with aspects of identity, but also with the performative and creative contexts of music-making'. They offer Master of Arts by Research degrees as well as PhDs which allow students to combine creative practice with research or to focus solely on research. From here they also launched Yorkshire Sound Women, which is network of experts and learners who conduct a range of rigorous technical workshops. MuGI part funds the network but they are independent and source outside funding as well. The Centre does not however, offer any special support to undergraduate students, and while it does attract women working in the field, it does **not offer pre-degree courses which could prepare or invite less confident women.**

We believe that a **new Gender & The Creative Industries Research Unit (GCIU) at Westminster University** could fill these gaps, providing absolute beginner and confidence-boosting courses to women who would progress onto audio production and other creative industries courses at Westminster, while providing mentoring and career support to women both on the production and the business side of the creative industries, as well as building cross-disciplinary bridges between the creative industries from fashion, to film to music. As a leading creative industries institution, Westminster is uniquely equipped to host such a centre. We also believe that we could stimulate research in this area, along similar lines to the Black Music Research Unit (BMRU), which already exists at Westminster under the CAMRI umbrella. Furthermore, the Music & Gender Research Unit would compliment the Black Music Research Unit, opening opportunities for exciting collaborative research into the intersections of race and gender. Like the BMRU, the GCIU could bring together doctoral students with leading specialists to work on the unanswered questions which plague this industry, such as simply 'why are women so underrepresented in the music industry?' and 'How can the music industry diversify its participants?' as well as investing scholarship into the reclamation of women's music histories that women have been written out of, and to question the ways that gender may affect creative process and sound. We also find that sexual violence is extremely prevalent in the music industry, and that research needs to be done into how this can be prevented. The

research unit could also provide **MA in Gender & Creative Industries Research, which would attract the sporadic international community of scholars working in this field**, as well as hosting international conferences and seminars which would focus the rising energy for this subject into a shared agenda based at Westminster. **The research unit would not exclude the participation of men**, besides certain specialised women's services similar to those at Women's Audio Mission, but would always be focused on gender as an industry problem. Male, female and non-binary students may also wish to research how masculinity affects various aspects of the creative industries, including art itself, or how gender is constructed through creative cultures and industries. The unit could also collaborate with The University of Huddersfield's MuGI, bringing together their arts expertise with our industry expertise and innovating new models for creative industries which address the needs of underrepresented artists. Of course the unit would also dramatically affect the university's diversity profile immediately, as it would increase the employment and enrolment of women without the need for quotas.

In conclusion, we believe that such a centre for research into the interrelationship between music and the creative industries has been long awaited and is long overdue, has the potential to create major impact and reflects the research aims and values of Westminster University.