

Diversity: The Need for Change. It's a very strong title. I like it. I completely agree with it, and it's a notion to which I'm fully committed. However, and I hope the conference organisers don't mind; I'd like to suggest an alternative title: Inclusion: What am *I* willing to change? What am *I* willing to change? And this will be the main question that I would like us to ask ourselves not only throughout the duration of this talk, or the conference, but also throughout our working lives. What am *I* willing to change?

Anyone who knows me, or anyone who's read my website, and articles I've written, will know that I am as deeply passionate about encouraging those who wouldn't ordinarily engage in classical music to do so, as I am to writing music. I even describe myself as an Inclusion Ambassador on my Twitter page, and if it's on Twitter, it must be true! I love the term inclusion, because whilst diversity is a reality; we live in a society, in communities, in a world made-up of such a huge variety of people; but, inclusion is a choice. It is the act of including. It's making the active decision to include and involve the widest possible audience with our work.

I make it my business to speak to and work with scholars who research into why imbalances exist in our industry, I read reports, I go to conferences, so that I can be as informed as possible when I ask myself what am I willing to change? And still, I found it incredibly difficult writing this provocation. Something wasn't connecting. As an Inclusion Ambassador, I was armed with all the knowledge. In my head I knew; I know, why it's right to aim for parity and equality. But it wasn't until I read 'The Good Immigrant', a collection of essays written by 21 black, Asian, and ethnic minority writers on living as a minority in the UK that it truly clicked into place as to why it's absolutely vital for us to aim for programming and

commissioning works by the widest possible group of composers and music creators. More specifically it was a quote from the Actor Himish Patel's essay that really hammered this home:

*'Storytelling is the most powerful way to promote our understanding of the world in which we live...Britain is filled with people from all corners of the earth, each with a wealth of stories to tell...'*

Composers are storytellers! Through our music we're communicating the stories of our lives; events that affect us; things that move us. But, current statistics show that we're only hearing the stories of a very specific group of people, and as a result, I don't think we are gaining a deeper understanding of the world in which we live through classical music. According to research conducted by BASCA (British Academy of Songwriters Composers & Authors), we're mostly being given opportunities to better understand the worlds of white men in their 30s, with PhDs, living in London. Which makes the world seem like a much smaller place than it is. Of the commissioned works for orchestra submitted to the British Composer Awards in 2015, 93% were written by men, and in general, the proportion of commissioned composers who are black, Asian or minority ethnic was 7%.

The natural argument would be that there are fewer women and minority ethnic composers writing classical music, reflected in commissioning figures. However, the overall commissioned works by female composers, for example, was 21%, and I think orchestras should at the very least be aiming for these percentages, or we're in such great danger of perpetuating a single story, and this isn't right because art, culture, and creativity in all forms, including classical music, belongs to everybody. What am *I* willing to change to ensure that this happens?

‘The Good Immigrant’ is probably one of the most powerful books that I’ve ever read because it presents a variety of voices, a diversity of stories, and most importantly we get to hear the thoughts, values, and experiences of a group of people that we don’t regularly get to hear through art, music, literature, film and the media.

So, why does this happen? In classical music, this can be attributed to inequalities at school age. Children from black, Asian, and minority ethnic, and lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to engage in classical music. However, it’s important to note that gender imbalances don’t apply at this age, and in fact, a bit further down the line at conservatoire level, women have been overrepresented for over 100 years, but don’t seem to make it through to the industry. And we think this is due to a combination of factors including unconscious bias and the informal structures on which our industry is based. And I think it’s these two things that we really need to recognise, we really need to accept, and tackle. And it’s really hard, because it’s admitting to ourselves, that on the whole, we feel most comfortable associating with people like ourselves. As humans, we have natural tendencies to draw towards others just like us. And because in classical music the decision makers are from a certain demographic, which is mostly white, middle-class men, those decision makers are most likely to give opportunities to other people like themselves, no matter how open-minded they think they are. And this, in hand with the informal nature of how we get work; through networking and knowing the ‘right’ people, the cycle continues, unless we put measures, including positive action, in place. We probably all know of the infamous example of the number of women in American orchestras increasing by 25% after blind auditions were introduced, because the potential to unconsciously form bias against the women had been

removed. An incredible change. And so, I ask you to ask yourselves: What am *I* willing to change?

I'm a great believer in the fact that if we actively work towards diversifying composers, music creators, and ensembles, we'll see a changes in our audiences too. If we broaden the range of stories that are being told, that are relevant and have meaning to a wider group of people, then we will see those people at our concerts and in our venues. As the incredible Nina Simon says: "Relevance is the key that unlocks meaning". I'll say that again: "Relevance is the key that unlocks meaning". How do we make our work matter in a changing world? What am *I* willing to change to make that happen?

I'm not excluding myself from this question in any way! And a couple of years ago I decided that I was willing to change the way that I approach all of my compositional projects, making the commitment to always actively seek a wider audience through my work. Last year I produced and wrote an opera that would specifically create a role for a signer of African-Caribbean decent, I actively sought to have an inclusive ensemble, a female conductor, and for it to be presented in a venue not traditionally associated with classical music, The Roundhouse. As a result, the audience very much reflected the diversity on stage, with about 45% of the audience being black, Asian, and minority ethnic. About 150 of the audience were teenagers from inner-city London schools, largely from minority backgrounds. And one of my most memorable moments was the question-and-answer session overrunning by 40 minutes because those young people were so engaged in the story that was relevant to them and their lives, it unlocked a meaning and an understanding that sparked something in their minds and imaginations.

So, let's get back to the question. What am *I* willing to change? The two words that interest me most are 'I' and 'willing'. 'I' suggests that one is making a personal commitment to inclusion. If you're the Chief Executive of an organisation, it's saying that I am completely committed to making change, it's saying that Inclusion and Diversity isn't just for the work of my Learning and Participation department, and that I will blaze a trail in my organisation for the rest of my team.

If you're the entry-level Assistant, it's saying that I am completely committed to making change, it's saying that I have a voice, I will use it to share my thoughts, and influence colleagues, so that by the time I become a senior member of an organisation; a decision-maker, I will be comfortable in having these discussions, and well-practised in implementing change. The word 'willing' suggests that there is a desire to act. And this is important, because if there isn't a true will or a desire in all of us, at every level of an organisation, nothing will change at all, and we'll still be having the same conversations in another generation's time.

I'd like to end by reminding ourselves of the second half of Himish Patel's quote: '*...Britain is filled with people from all corners of the earth, each with a wealth of stories to tell...*' Let's remember that Britain is also filled with people from all corners of the earth who want to hear those stories. And so, hopefully not for the last time, let's ask ourselves: What am *I* willing to change to make that happen?

Thank You.