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*Response to: How do individuals and communities navigate gendered spaces in these [music and sound technology] practices?*

Ingrid Plum

As an individual navigating gendered spaces in music and sound practices I found myself as a performing sound artist, often the only female artist in the line up at many events I was booked to play. I began to wonder “where are all the women?” This question became a refrain when I was performing or present at many different types of events, from discussion panels at academic conferences to underground scene gigs.

My response to this gendering of the performance space was to create Bechdel. Bechdel started life as a deliberate provocation by inverting the scenario I had found myself in too many times. I inverted this scenario I found myself in repetitively, and started Bechdel: a night promoted by women, staffed by women, with female performers or performers identifying as female... apart from one token male performer in one act at each event. This inversion is apparently shocking. It should not be. It is sometimes considered humourous. It should not be. If the original scenario I first described to you is not shocking or humourous, the inversion should not be. Bechdel is a deliberate provocation created within the community of a strong and supportive experimental music scene in Brighton.

It was born out of frustration and was nurtured by the experimental underground music scene in Brighton. Bechdel is a bi-monthly DIY platform focused on promoting female experimental/noise/spoken word/improv/free folk/free jazz/folk/Neo classical acts.

It began with venting on social media, to the realisation that something must be done by someone and that would, in this instance, be me. A few questions thrown out into the echo chamber of my social media world confirmed the need and so I set up a page, and an inbox, which instantly filled with requests to play.

Our overtly inclusive agenda has encouraged many artists to perform and we were honoured to have Verity Spott as our first performer at the first ever Bechdel event. Verity told me she had been waiting for the right space in which to launch her “Trans-Manifesto” which was 5 years in the making.

Through creating a space that I would want to perform in, an open space for artists to be free of the time consuming nature of gendered spaces and creative constraints these unconsciously enforce, a space where artists could do whatever they needed to do to further their creativity in front of a supportive and attentive audience, we found space within a community that wanted these same things, the LGBT community within the experimental community.

Many artists playing their earliest gigs and artists who are going solo after the security of mixed gender bands or experimenting with their format and in need of a safe, accepting space have approached Bechdel to perform. Electric Elizabeth played her second gig at Bechdel after years playing a supporting role photographing and recording other artists. At the end of the night she thanked me for ignoring her suggestion she cancel performing when she ran into difficulties in soundcheck. For me that moment summed up Bechdel, we sat together and worked through the tech, element by element, unfettered or delayed by mansplainers, and she performed one of the most exciting sets we’ve had at Bechdel.

I was asked recently if there is a need for Bechdel and where will it go in future during an interview on Resonance FM. Until it is no longer shocking, it is needed. Until there is no uncomfortable silence in response to the premise of Bechdel, it is needed. Artists identifying as female not only need to be represented within male dominated spaces but also given a space to explore and develop, to build their art and their careers within spaces where they are not only represented but the norm.

“Now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is ‘herself?’ I mean, what is a woman? ... I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill.”

Woolf, Virginia, *Killing The Angel In The House: Seven Essays*, p.5, Penguin, London, 1993.