



Musical Care in Dialogue

Hearing, Disability, and Musical Care

18th March 2025 14:00 – 15:00 GMT

Online with Juanita Eslava (Orquesta Filarmónica de Medellín, Colombia)

Kjetil Falkenberg (KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden)

Ailsa Lipscombe (University of Cincinnati, USA)

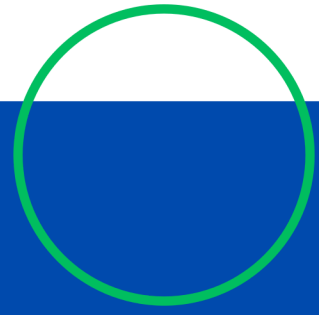
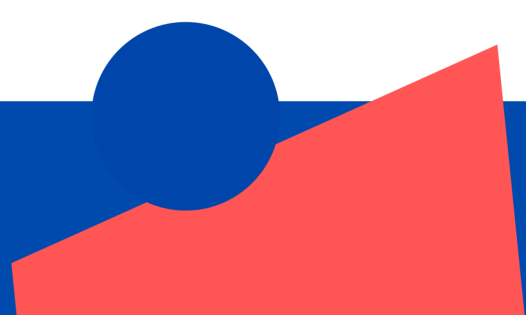
This session of Music Care in Dialogue featured Juanita Eslava, Kjetil Falkenberg, and Ailsa Lipscombe, explored the relationship between hearing disability and musical care, with speakers sharing insights from their research and lived experiences.

Juanita Eslava discussed her work with the Orquesta Filarmónica de Medellín, where she leads accessibility initiatives for individuals with hearing disabilities. Through workshops designed to foster inclusive musical spaces, the project moves beyond assumptions about accessibility, instead centering exploration and self-discovery. Participants emphasized the role of closed captioning, especially on YouTube, as a key tool for engaging with music, yet many expressed that traditional musical spaces still felt unwelcoming. Juanita highlighted the importance of active listening and co-creating environments where individuals with hearing disabilities can fully participate in musical life.

Kjetil Falkenberg spoke about the role of active listening and expressive communication in accessibility research. His work, initially centered on DJ scratching and its application for children with cochlear implants, expanded to consider broader questions of inclusion—beyond instrument adaptation to address technical solutions, resource sustainability, and the role of all personnel, including personal assistants, in fostering accessible musical experiences and underscored the need for research frameworks that better document and disseminate insights into music and health.

Ailsa Lipscombe discussed how disabled and chronically ill communities engage with medicalized soundscapes, emphasizing trust-building and relationality in research. Acknowledging the history of medical distrust within these communities, she reflected on the role of researcher disclosure in creating safe and empathetic spaces. By sharing her own experiences with chronic illness and disability, Ailsa illustrated the complexities of listening as a practice of care, raising critical questions about how musical engagement can support well-being while also carrying risks of vicarious trauma.

The discussion after the presentations emphasized the complexities of creating truly inclusive musical spaces. Participants struggled with the tension between unrealistic expectations of immediate improvement and the despair of hopelessness. Key themes included the importance of individual needs, universal design, and multiple engagement methods. The session concluded with an appreciation for the value of diverse perspectives in fostering effective musical care.



Speaker biographies

Juanita Eslava

Outreach programs coordinator Orquesta Filarmónica de Medellín (FILARMED. Medellín, Colombia). Head of the team awarded with the Emerging Leader in Accessibility in the Arts award by the Kennedy Center, 2024. Music therapist with experience both in community and clinical practices.

Musical experiences of people with hearing disabilities. Identification of musical habits, adaptive needs and accessibility recommendations

In 2023 thanks to a Musical Care network grant, FILARMED launched a series of workshops for deaf people interested in music making and feeling. We gathered data regarding musical habits, adaptive needs and accessibility recommendations.

Kjetil Falkenberg

Kjetil Falkenberg is an associate professor at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, specializing in sound and music computing. He focuses on the intersection of music, interaction, and health, exploring how music technology can be integrated into everyday life, play, training, and rehabilitation. His cross-disciplinary background in pedagogy, music science, and music technology allows him to approach health-related research with a broad perspective on accessible design.

Ailsa Lipscombe

Ailsa Lipscombe is Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Cincinnati. Her research explores intersectional experiences of medicalization, with a focus on reimagining listening through embodiment, relationality, and trauma. She earned her doctorate from the University of Chicago and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Te Herenga Waka in Aotearoa New Zealand, where she collaborated on an interdisciplinary project to establish culturally responsible and responsive praxes of Indigenous digital stewardship.