

The SuperSwell Podcast

Ep07: Vanessa Reed – New Start, New York, New Music USA

Paul Cheetham: [00:00:00] Welcome to **the SuperSwell** podcast. I'm your host, **Paul Cheetham** and each time you join me, I will be talking to guests about life, work and the human condition. This time I am joined by a very special guest who is currently locked down in **Brooklyn, New York City**.

Vanessa Reed is President and CEO of **New Music USA**, an organization that nurtures the creation, performance and the appreciation of new music in the **United States**. Before that she had a decade of astonishing success as boss of **PRS Foundation** in **London**, where she created initiatives, such as the **“Momentum Music Fund”**, **“Women Make Music”**, and the internationally acclaimed **“Keychange”** project - a pioneering, cross-border campaign to provide gender balance and equality in the music business.

Vanessa's contribution as a passionate advocate and industry leader has been widely recognized and she has received a vast array of awards and accolades as well as invitations to serve as a board member or ambassador to several leading cultural institutions. Luckily, I managed to catch **Vanessa** between board meetings, and we had a very pleasant chat about the weather, about lockdown in **New York**, about the work she's doing at **New Music USA**, about the legacy of **“Keychange”**, and about her film and music recommendations.

We had this conversation way back on **Monday, 8th of February, 2021** on a day when most of the **US** and **Europe** were under a pile of snow. Remember that?

Well, here we go. Hope you enjoy it. And remember, we made this *just for you*.....

Paul Cheetham: [00:01:45] Here I am again, talking at you from my snowbound bunker inside my house on the edge of **Berlin** in the centre of **Europe**. On a call with me now is a very special guest who I am delighted to get to talk to once again. Joining me on today's **SuperSwell** podcast is boss of **New Music USA**, founder of the **“Keychange”** project, fan of **Liverpool FC**, and all-round exceptional human being, **Vanessa Reed**.

Hi **Vanessa!** How are you and where are you?

Vanessa Reed: [00:02:14] I'm good, thank you, **Paul**. And I'm in **Brooklyn**. So, I'm looking out the window across to the Statue of Liberty on a very sunny but freezing cold day. It's -8 this morning, but it's very beautiful. And the whole city is covered in snow because we had a snowstorm yesterday.

Paul Cheetham: [00:02:35] Beautiful. We have similar weather in central **Europe** at the moment. There's more snow in **Berlin** than we've had for probably a decade, I think. Just, like, six inches or something. It's quite easy to clear.

Vanessa Reed: [00:02:46] I think that's one thing I love the most about **New York**, which has kind of surprised me, because I've lived in **Brussels**, **Amsterdam** and **London** throughout my career, and this is definitely the place where it feels like you get the most sunshine and, of course, it's colder and it's more severe. If there's a wind, there really is a wind. If there's rain,

there really is rain. But it feels a bit like **Liverpool**, it's got that sense of being a port and being on the water. So, yeah, that's one of the things that's been, kind of, getting me through this whole COVID period is just being able to go out on walks in such a beautiful climate.

Paul Cheetham: [00:03:26] And how long have you been in **New York** now? It's a couple of years, almost.

Vanessa Reed: [00:03:29] Eighteen months. I came over in August 2019. So, I had, I suppose, nine blissful months of everything being normal. So, I went to see a lot of gigs, I hit the road and traveled around the **US** quite a bit because **New Music USA** is a national organization. So, I had the opportunity to visit people from our community in **Detroit**, in **LA**, in **Miami**, in **Minneapolis**. I had a really interesting time getting feedback on what's happening on the ground and then of course, suddenly in March, when I was about to go to **Chicago** for the first time, the lockdown began and of course that was the moment when things were really dark here because **New York** was the epicenter of the epicenter and **Brooklyn** in particular was really hard hit. And I could see the hospital from our window, that was talked about in the press, where it was just kind of overflowing with sick patients and it was just a very, very difficult period. But thankfully the governor really showed very strong leadership at that point and everyone really followed the rules, and we were pretty severely locked down. Mask wearing has been very consistent and it's been applied to all contexts, really, since back then in March. So, when I go out for a walk or go for a jog, you know, I'm wearing a mask, it's not just, when you go in shops, it's really something that everyone is still doing.

So, now having come through that, we're feeling much better and I think we can see that everyone respects what the rules are and although there's still no live music, we've got galleries and museums that are open that we can visit, and we know that they're being managed very safely, and I think generally we're not in a full lockdown so they're about to bring in partial indoor dining again. All of the shops have been open and, as I said, things like museums and galleries, so it's been a lot easier since we got through that first very dark period.

Paul Cheetham: [00:05:40] That first lockdown must have been quite a severe shock then. How did you manage or what were you thinking at that point?

Vanessa Reed: [00:05:47] The way I responded, and maybe this is showing that I'm lucky to be working in an organization that's not a venue or a festival and I'm not a performer so our organization in itself was able to keep operating, and obviously we're all working from home, but I think what I felt immediately was our responsibility was to think; what can we try and do for our community, for the people that are suffering the most? Whilst at the same time, how can we make sure we stay above water and we survive? So, there was that combination of the practical things that everyone was dealing with, which was suddenly managing teams of staff online through **Zoom**, and not having that daily contact, and obviously the struggle of keeping people's morale up and trying to manage the different ways in which people respond to these kinds of things. But it was also thinking, what can we do for the artists out there who suddenly got months of canceled gigs ahead, and literally may not have any other income. So that's when we were approached by these brilliant

visionary artists and composers, most of whom have jobs in academia as well as being artists, and they asked us if we would help run what we call the “**New Music Solidarity Fund**” and that’s when the kind of pressure really kicked in because **New Music USA** had never done anything digitally before when it came to payments and that’s quite common in the **US**. Nonprofits are quite small and fragile and do things by cheque. Suddenly we had to transform our internal systems to manage this huge batch of applications and payments and we ended up getting through that and raising over half a million dollars so that we could give over a thousand people just small emergency grants to help them buy the groceries and get through the first few weeks of the pandemic. So, I guess my attention was very focused on that and throwing myself into my job, which was quite helpful for me personally because I didn’t have too much time to think about personal risk or what this all meant longer term or, you know, what this meant about my personal life. I think the only thing I had to address a few months later is that I was living in a one-bedroom apartment with my husband and after a few months of us both trying to do **Zoom** calls in the same room and living and working on top of each other, we realized that we needed a second bedroom to just make sure we didn’t kill each other before COVID ended! So, we’ve made that move and that’s made things much, much easier, but obviously I’m just so in awe of people who have kids and are managing to get through this because it’s so tough, you know, homeschooling and trying to, kind of, keep focused on whatever work you’re doing. Hats off to all those people out there who’re having to manage that. And particularly in the **UK** at the moment, with a third lockdown I know that my friends are finding that really hard.

Paul Cheetham: [00:08:58] So, in a way, the content of your work, wasn’t that different from what you would be normally doing? It was just highly intensified and much more serious, like, emergency funding. So, as you said, that brought on a personal added pressure, having that responsibility. What’s kept you positive and motivated? Because you’re in a position where you need to keep everybody around you positive and motivated, how do you manage to take care of your own motivation?

Vanessa Reed: [00:09:26] I guess a few different things. One, on a personal level, just making sure I go running two or three times a week down to the waterfront. So, it’s **Brooklyn Bridge Park**, which is opposite **Lower Manhattan**. Just being able to do that and still be excited and uplifted by the views and by the kind of excitement that everyone has when they’re in **New York**, you know, that’s something that just, like, lifts your soul. And, also, that’s the one time when I just, kind of, listen to all kinds of music as I run. We went to **Washington DC**, pre COVID, to explore some of the amazing museums there and when I was there, I discovered the history of the **Washington DC** Go-Go music, which is just brilliant to run to. So, I’ve been, you know, just having fun. And sometimes I listen to podcasts when I’m feeling like I want to be serious. But that’s the sort of physical, psychological thing that helps.

I think another thing is actually the creativity and innovation of the people that I’m working to support has been very uplifting. So, in spite of everything, you know, after the initial shock, you really started to see some incredible efforts to keep this community together, to make sure that new work by composers were still being presented somehow. **Bang on a Can** continued its traditional marathon concept, which is, like, 12 hours of new pieces and performances by different people, and they’ve done about three or four of them online now,

which we helped support. And that was just really great to see that people were just going for it and doing whatever they could to get through this. So that was inspiring.

I guess the third thing is the luck of being married to someone who's very funny. So, making sure you can find ways of being silly and laughing at home is important. And then of course identifying the right **Netflix** or whatever series or films and all of that shows how important arts and culture are to our very being, it's almost a form of survival, I think, for people like us in this industry.

Paul Cheetham: [00:11:44] It's really brought to the fore the importance of it, hasn't it?

You could be in worse places in the world. I like the fact that **New York** means this to you. That it's a motivating factor. I really understand that. I have to tell you there's a real **New York** envy. It's a place that I personally miss. And it's a place that if I haven't been there for a year or two, I really start to yearn for it. You know, I get the "**Friends**" boxset out and I've been listening to "**Friends**" podcasts, which is a couple of guys in their twenties that deconstruct every episode of "**Friends**". They're really seeing it with a fresh pair of eyes so very much have a different angle on it, from the point of view of; **Joey** was a bit of a pervert, for example.

And one thing we've all been watching, pretty much everybody on **Facebook** has mentioned it, is this **Fran Lebowitz** programme, which gives you everything you need. It's a real hit, a genuine hit of **New York** life. Have you seen it by the way? It's called "**Pretend It's A City**".

Vanessa Reed: [00:12:44] Yeah, I've seen it. I think it's, what's fascinating about it, I noticed on **Facebook**, so many people were quoting these brilliant soundbites she comes up with. What I've discovered amongst my **New York** friends is that there are mixed views on her. I think she's fairly divisive. Some people love her, other people don't, but I think she definitely has this kind of iconic status that is associated with some of those things that we love about **New York**. It's, like, a city that has attitude and she's obviously connected to a period in history when it was, like, so cool and there were so many other iconic artists here.

And what I think is interesting is that a lot of people are moving out of **Manhattan**. And **Brooklyn** is actually really booming because people want to be somewhere that feels like a neighbourhood that has more parks. We've got **Prospect Park**, **Fort Greene Park**, **Greenwood Cemetery**, they're all just in a sort of triangle around us here, and I think people feel that **Manhattan** might become a place that attracts artists again, because the prices are going down. So, it's interesting that **Fran Lebowitz** is very frustrated by things like the Disneyfication of **Times Square** and so you, kind of, almost wonder whether things are about to turn again. If you talk to some of my friends and colleagues who are committed New Yorkers, they will say **New York** will always bounce back. It will be fine. And I can see that. There is still, I think for whatever reason, there is an energy here that is really unusual. In spite of everything, I don't think that I felt, you know, "Oh, it's all over". I mean, since the initial lockdown has eased people have really been trying to do as much as they can outdoors. There's been things like, **New York Philharmonic Orchestra** has been doing performances on the back of a truck and popping up in **Brooklyn** and then other independent groups have been doing outdoor performances.

And I think the other really exciting thing, which none of us were really quite ready for, is that the joy of online is that actually it can help grow audiences. So, some of the more, as they say in the **US**, niche groups, which obviously we would say niche, but, you know, niche groups like **Third Coast Percussion**, which is a brilliant contemporary ensemble that commissions lots of new work, they're based in **Chicago**. When they started doing their **YouTube** performances from their studio quite early on, they were ahead of the curve and they were getting way more people from across the globe tuning into their performances than they would have had if they'd performed in the 400-seater in **Chicago**. So, I think the big challenge for all of us is how to work out combining live and digital in some form of hybrid in the future so that we really try and enable our various art forms to grow as a result of this pause that has affected us all so badly.

Paul Cheetham: [00:15:58] I think that's right. It seems that the online digital platform is here to stay. It's going to be interesting to see how that works in the wider cultural world, but there's massive possibilities there.

Vanessa Reed: [00:16:11] I agree. And the interesting thing about online is that, even though we're all apart and separated, what you start to notice is that people just love the chat function and actually what people want is some sense of communal experience. And obviously the ultimate is being in a crowd, listening to those musicians you love but I guess the next best thing is being able to kind of see their faces and all of that up close on a screen and be engaging in a different way. So, I do think that people will not be able to stay away from the possibility of being in a live gig, for example, but I do think there might be some hesitation in the early phase of going back to performance. So, I'm guessing that someone like me who would have been out at least probably four times a week, maybe I'm going to end up going out two times a week and then doing the rest online, you know, just to slightly limit the risk.

Paul Cheetham: [00:17:23] Yeah. It's clear that people are already working on concepts for this. Well, **Live Nation** have bought the streaming company. And I know for 20 years **Live Nation** have had plans to work out how they could do events where they could stream to a wider audience. Now is the perfect opportunity for that. I was listening to one of the heads of **UTA** saying that perhaps the online ticket for a concert could be like the equivalent of a premium balcony ticket or something, which includes some backstage virtual meet & greet or something. So, there's already thinking going into it and what's clear now is that there are people that are going to focus on making this a genuinely interesting experience. And it probably couldn't have been done without this gap that we're experiencing.

But in a more general way, do you think this COVID pause should be, or could be an opportunity for companies of all shapes and size, or governments or organizations to put their house in order, in terms of all the other social issues, which I know you're very heavily involved with, you know, the diversity issues, for example. Do you see any evidence that this has been taken seriously?

Vanessa Reed: [00:18:32] Definitely. I mean, I really believe that it's not an option to do nothing now. And I think what's happened here in the **US** has kind of triggered a global

response. I mean, some people describe the past year or so as a series of pandemics and obviously the first milestone was COVID itself.

And then, again, here where we are in **Brooklyn**, we were at the centre of the, kind of, social justice movement that was really seizing the opportunity of everyone being able to see the brutality of the murder of **George Floyd** to finally say enough is enough. And I think in the **US** there is a very particular situation of recognizing there hasn't been a reckoning with the history of slavery and **Black Lives Matter** has really taken a lead and I think it's absolutely right they've been nominated for a **Nobel Peace Prize**. And the peaceful protests that happened across the country, to me, have pushed us to a new level where, particularly if you're working for a nonprofit and, also, you're seeing it very clearly in the corporate sector, this is a time where equity, inclusion and diversity - which are the terms that are used here - are embedded, not just in what you do, but in the way you build your organization. So, there's been a lot of discussion about how this is not a quick fix. It's daily work on ensuring that staff and board really kind of can learn from what's been happening and use this as a way to develop our organizations with different power structures in the future. So, I am really optimistic about that. I mean, obviously there's the challenge of everyone putting out statements which are expressing their position as being anti-racist and anti-oppression which, you know, I think that's important. And I can understand why other people who've been working on this for decades are skeptical that suddenly people are coming out with these statements. It has to be followed by action and it has to be kind of gradual action because you can't change things overnight. But I do think this is the moment to really work towards revolution. And I think in spite of everything that's happened in the **US**, politically, which has raised the question about the future of democracy, the future of the entire country, it still has immense cultural influence as evidenced by **Black Lives Matter** and seeing how colleagues in **London** were then responding, or colleagues in **Berlin**, et cetera. So, I still feel excited by the potential impact that people here in the **US** can have if they're really working against what we all know is wrong and what we all know is actually very scary.

This last weekend, I went to the **Jewish Heritage Museum** in **Lower Manhattan** because they've got an exhibition on about **Auschwitz** and the title is something like "**Not Long Ago, Not Far Away**" and everything that's been happening because of **Trump** and the threat to democracy, I think people have become seriously concerned that we're not seeing the signs of what's already happened to us as a civilization and not realizing how fatally dangerous this could be. So, I think there's a lot of very interesting discussion, debate, political movement, action, activism happening here and I'm kind of proud that that's clearly having a ripple effect in other countries. And I just hope that now we've got new leadership, which is actually leadership, we can, you know, move to a different period in the history of this country.

Paul Cheetham: [00:22:48] You're quite right. Just the change of personnel in the **White House** immediately gives out a more positive message. I also agree that the strength of argument and the amount of people fighting or following this cause for change that we're seeing, that's stronger than ever and it feels closer than ever but to me it still feels like it's on a knife edge because as strong as **Black Lives Matter** is and an amazing movement it's become, we've seen at the same time, an increase in polarization. So, the bigger or more

important a cause like **Black Lives Matter** becomes, the louder the argument against it becomes. So, are you optimistic that we'll continue to follow it in the right direction or is it still too scary to kind of feel positive about it?

Vanessa Reed: [00:23:40] Yeah, I think you're right. I think we're all concerned about what's effectively been four years of stirring up trouble, but I suppose it's trying not to get, as you're saying, get into this complete polarization so that it's some kind of cancel culture or replacement culture, so that there's no place on the stage for people from different political persuasions, for example. We've all been through that, I'm sure at some point, with friends or family or people you went to school with, or whatever. People are not always going to vote for the same Party. The problem we've had here is that the leader has just been so toxic that it's created, or it's given permission to the alt-right or the far right to suddenly feel justified in the way they behave.

The moment when **Amanda Gorman** was speaking incredible prose was just one of those moments where you feel like anything is possible. And that's also, again, demonstrating the power of art and the power of culture. And within that ceremony, obviously there was some brilliant music performances as well. And, things you wouldn't know behind the scenes, is that two of the composers who wrote music for the marine bands were women, and that's the first time that's happened. So, there are things that are subtly changing all around us. And of course, **Kamala Harris** is the first person of colour and the first woman to be in that position, so I think we have a lot to be hopeful for, but I think we have to be always trying to think about why people who don't agree with you feel as they do and start from that position and that's a really hard thing to do but I think we can't just be "you're wrong and I'm right". You know, that's just not how we're going to move forward.

Paul Cheetham: [00:25:33] How important is it to your life and work that you have these meaningful causes to support? I know you work on a lot of projects that address these issues and these causes, how important is that to have it as a meaningful experience?

Vanessa Reed: [00:25:47] For me, it's essential. And I'm guessing that most people who choose a career in the nonprofit sector have some kind of motivation that is clearly not financial and it's not really about status. It's about trying to make a difference because we're all only here for a certain number of years - I think I've only just come to terms with that - and so how do you want to use your time on this planet? I guess, I just want to make some kind of contribution to the world that I've always been passionate about, which is music. I think, closely aligned with wanting to make a difference and feeling motivated by how that difference could benefit everyone, is also the personal point about just wanting to be involved with something I really enjoy. I always knew that, really, I wanted to have the opportunity to be connecting and communicating, and that's where my, kind of, passion for languages and exploring other cultures comes in. So, I guess that's why I've lived in different places and I've played this role in an administrative or supportive context rather than actually trying to be an artist myself. I think that would have been too isolating for me. I guess that's a sort of selfish thing about doing something you love, because I think that's what you're going to be best at as well.

Paul Cheetham: [00:27:08] You have been very instrumental in a lot of the changes to a lot of these issues. I got to know you the first time, I think it was 2015, at **South by Southwest** we met, where you introduced me, as a representative of **Reeperbahn Festival**, to the concept of “**Keychange**”, which is where I worked with you for a while, which was an amazing experience and a very successful project.

But it was clear that this project came out of, not just a need for change, but almost like a personal pursuit for change that you had. So, what is your own personal experience that made this such an important project for you?

Vanessa Reed: [00:27:46] So it all began, I think, when I was in my very first couple of years at **PRS Foundation**. It was my first leadership role. I was 34, I think. I was working quite closely with the board on, again, developing what this organization could do, which is what I'm doing now with **New Music USA**. And I just started to realize that what we were receiving in terms of applications just featured hardly any women at all. There were just hardly any female composers. I had the joy of working with a female Chair who was very feisty and strong willed, and she picked up on it as well. And, so, I just started to think, well, like, what can we do about this? This is totally bizarre. I just couldn't understand why it would be like that because I knew that there were talented women out there, even though this is 2011 and this was very early on in that whole, kind of, awareness of the gender gap. So, at that point, I just, kind of, proposed to the board that we should just do something really bold and just, kind of, point it out straight away and launch this fund called “**Women Make Music**” which was the, kind of, starting point for “**Keychange**”, which came later on and, I think what I experienced is, once you start noticing something that feels unjust, you just can't stop noticing it. And the interesting story for me, and it's similar for other women I know in the music industry who were older than me, in my first role in the late nineties, I was working for an organization called **British Music Information Centre**, which was mainly working for unpublished, mainly classical composers, a similar organization funnily enough to the one I'm at now. And looking back on that there was still, the majority of composers I was coming into contact with were men, there were some brilliant women, but most of the people that were in touch wanting information for part of our “**New Voices**” scheme, et cetera, it was mainly white men. But for whatever reason, maybe it's just because it was my first job, I was just out of university, I just didn't see it. It wasn't something that I was really conscious of even though I was a woman in that scene, and I think when you've got something a bit more tangible, like looking at, whatever it was, a hundred applications and seeing that only, like, five have women in them, you suddenly start joining the dots and realizing that you've been blind to this and I think that possibly drove me even more because I was, like, well, this has been going on for my whole career, but I've just not really done anything about it or just somehow ignored it. So, I think that's why I was really driven to start making the change. And then as soon as we did it, it was just very rewarding to see how many women appreciated that. And at the same time, it was also interesting to see that there were some women who didn't appreciate it because they felt it was diminishing them to a statistic or a label. So, all of that became very fascinating, but it made me convinced when I realized that we were actually the only people who were doing anything very deliberate at that point in 2011, it made me feel that I wanted to build a bigger movement that would also go beyond the **UK** because I knew that we would be able to learn things

from partners in **Sweden** and **Iceland**, for example, and **Estonia**, where women have much more visible, strong public roles in politics, for example, or where there have been more progressive governmental policies around maternity leave or gender equity in general. So, that's where it all came from.

I think the other thing that I then started to notice in my role as leader at **PRS Foundation**, was just the, kind of, pure domination of white guys in the more commercial side of the industry. So, the more that I started to develop schemes for artists in pop music, the more I saw what the board table looks like in the collecting society, you know; twenty-five board members, twenty-two men. And that was pretty consistent across a lot of the collecting societies. This is not what it should be like. The industry is just so much stronger if it's got more perspectives and is promoting all of the talent that's out there, you know. We know that through the women that come through "**Keychange**" and others beyond that. So, yeah, I guess that those are the two starting points I had.

Paul Cheetham: [00:32:51] I think the argument against it comes from a really, kind of ludicrous, point of view that if there are more women, it means there'd be fewer men.

What I liked about the "**Keychange**" project was this double pronged approach. The part I particularly liked was looking at the makeup of the business. I think the project was quite successful in getting this together so that it supported artists immediately to try to make an immediate difference but at the same time, encouraging or promoting or looking for new platforms for people who wanted to be behind the scenes. As you've said, if you don't have a good mixture of people organizing events or working as booking agents or promoters or managers, then it won't make any long-term difference really. So, I liked that about it. You had this pledge for 50/50, I mean, it's outrageous there are over 300 festivals around the world involved now.....

Vanessa Reed: [00:33:47] Yeah! Isn't that great!

Paul Cheetham: [00:33:49] It's unbelievable. Um, you'll remember probably that I was a little bit, uh, skeptical about that. Not, not skeptical, that's not the right word. I was a little bit worried that it might not have the impact we wanted, and my priority was the business side. I wanted managers and record label people and more people in positions of leadership, and I thought there's a chance that focusing on the 50/50 split of festivals might be just too lightweight of a headline that could be dismissed. I was at **ILMC** at the time, which is a bit of a closed shop, but I remember a panel where it was brought up. I was in the room with a couple of hundred bookers and promoters, and they mentioned that there's this "**Keychange**" pledge and everybody's eyes rolled. And that was my point. It was like, this is going to get thrown away as a, kind of, "Oh, another bunch of do-gooders". So, I was a little bit worried about that, but I'm really happy to say that I didn't need to worry. It took off immediately.

But I think what's really essential here is, the timing was so important to that. I don't know if we can say this, but we actually failed in the first attempt for funding, didn't we?

Vanessa Reed: [00:34:56] Yeah. I mean, it was such a blessing in the end, and it reconfirms that point, it's so complicated to pull together a bid for **EU** funding. So, we know that that's true. What was so helpful for us is that in between that application and the next one, **#MeToo** happened. And suddenly again, as with what we were saying earlier about **Black Lives Matter**, it became impossible not to have a view on this subject and leaders across the industry were just beginning to be interrogated. It was still quite slow, I think. It's really only sort of in the past two years that there's been real obvious action and change. **#MeToo** is kind of pulling on the film industry stories and then of course it became clear that in the music industry, there's a lot going on that is not being talked about because somewhere people are being held back to actually speak their truths. And I think that's clear.

And we have to make sure that this whole debate about 50/50, I mean, it was initially set for the lineup on festival stages but actually what we said with the pledge, for anyone who, kind of, looked into it in more detail, is that you can apply some kind of target to whichever bit of your business you feel is most important. There are some orchestras who signed up who would have signed up to commissioning 50/50 composers, but then some of them went further and were talking about senior management and players, or whatever. And I think the same with some of the bigger companies, they were looking at their actual organization so, I mean, to anyone rolling their eyes, I just think the times are moving and audiences are more demanding than they were about questions to do with equity and social justice. And that became clear as the debate around “**Keychange**” unfolded.

Paul Cheetham: [00:37:03] Yeah, I have to say, that was in the very early days. A lot has changed. The whole mood has changed, I think, in the industry since then. But “**Keychange**” was something that really did lead the way.

I know that when we went to do the funding for the second time, we had a very different approach. I think all the partners that you brought in, I have to say this, I think everyone took it more seriously. It was really meaningful for everybody that was involved. From a personal point of view, I lost my mother and my grandmother in that period so that was added significance, in a way, for me as well. So, it became something that we really wanted to succeed, but I think the key to it was the fact that we decided that this had to have a meaningful legacy. That it has to mean something, otherwise the people rolling their eyes are probably quite right to do so because we don't really have meaningful reasons for doing this.

And it seemed that the **EU**, the Commission, the funding bodies were suddenly looking for something that you provided them with perfectly. But it's gone from strength to strength and I'm just really, really, kind of, privileged to be part of that. It was great experience and I'm happy to see it do well.

Vanessa Reed: [00:38:11] Well, I'm really grateful for the role you played. I think talking about legacy in that second iteration, one of the things that was so crucial is that we really got into the depth of what we were doing. And what that really meant is that we were all getting to know each other as partners. I still feel incredibly grateful and inspired by the fact that you and **Ragnar** in **Sweden** and **Alex** at **Reeperbahn** were as passionate as the female partners. And going back to what we said earlier about, kind of, binary arguments, I

personally feel that to get anywhere on advancing gender equity, men and women need to be working together on it. And, you know, the kind of feedback you got from that **ILMC** experience or the feedback that **Alex** might get from his contact with the heads of the major labels or whatever, I think you have a unique way of bringing intelligence into the mix that I wouldn't necessarily be able to access because I was running a nonprofit and leading the campaign, so to speak. So, I think there was an amazing mix of very committed people and I think that you should all be taking credit for it because it was something that couldn't have happened without all of you being totally engaged. And obviously it's still continuing now, which is really great to see.

Paul Cheetham: [00:39:43] It is, yeah.

How do you see the biggest differences for you where you are now in terms of the challenges ahead? Did you feel like you needed a change, a new challenge?

Vanessa Reed: [00:39:54] I think I could've continued to be challenged in that role because fortunately, you know, we were really in a position where, and the organization still is, where we could be flexible and keep evolving and keep responding to the changing landscape and that's what I also want to do here at **New Music USA**. But I think for anyone thinking about the arc of your life, I felt, like, you could get to a moment where you think, okay, so I've gone past, like, a decade, am I going to be one of the people who get an award because I've done twenty years? It's like an award for long service, you know, and everyone's hoping you're going to retire. So, I thought I should think about wanting to keep challenging myself and keep learning new things. I think when I realized this vacancy was being promoted, I thought this would tie in with what I did before, which is, you know, I had a job in the **UK** and then I refreshed my perspective by moving to the continent in **Europe**, moving to **Amsterdam** and, sort of, learning from the way they do things. And I've never spent a long time in the **US** so I felt like it could be a really great opportunity to learn about how the nonprofit sector works here, how fundraising is done here, and of course there are all the other things I wasn't really expecting, which is how organizations are approaching equity and inclusion and the huge impact of everything that's happened in the past year on the way that people are thinking. And I suppose also how to operate in such a huge country as a national organization. So, I'm trying to find a way for us to play a role in that, on the ground, in different places and to be more of a convener that's building community.

Paul Cheetham: [00:41:44] Very good. You're connected quite strongly with the city of **Liverpool**. And I think everybody who listens to this by now knows that I spend most of my time there when I'm not at home. But what's your connection to the city?

Vanessa Reed: [00:41:56] It's a kind of family story, I suppose. You know I support **Liverpool FC** and so do both my brothers and that's because my dad, even though we were from the southwest, my mum and dad were born and bred in **Devon** and lived in **Cornwall**, so we're not from **Liverpool**, but my dad went to university there. So, he was actually there when **the Beatles** were really taking off. So, we've always, I think, as kids known about **Liverpool** as this other place that dad would tell us stories about. And, of course, we listened to the music of **the Beatles** through my parents. So, I've always been fascinated. And then in 2008, because of my experience of living in **Amsterdam** and **Brussels** and my passion as a young

European at the time, I was really thrilled that **Liverpool** became **European Capital of Culture**. Fortunately, I was able to do a bit of work. I spent a couple of years at one point in between my role in **Amsterdam** and **PRS Foundation** being an independent consultant. I worked for **Liverpool** city council on their cultural strategy at the time and I got to meet a lot of the people who lead arts organizations there, I was just so inspired by how a city that is now relatively small, has such iconic cultural institutions. And then of course I met my now husband as part of that whole experience so, because I was working on the strategy, I interviewed him about how he founded **FACT**, which is the first purpose-built cultural art center after the **TATE Liverpool**, I think, so, you know, he was a big part of that. And I guess I also, yeah, I just love the creativity in the humour and the attitude of the people in the city. So, that was my personal story. And then leading on from there, I joined the board of **Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**. So, I really enjoyed having a kind of insider view on how the cultural institutions in **Liverpool** work together and how they connect with the audiences. And again, I was just so inspired by the way that the **Liverpool Phil** is so adored and loved and cherished by a really broad range of people from the city that there's this, kind of, pride in the orchestra that cuts across class in a way that I don't think you see, for example, in **London**. So, I was really inspired by that and you can see on my wall actually that I've got, um.....

Paul Cheetham: [00:44:31] that's the cathedral, right?

Vanessa Reed: [00:44:33] That's a "**Paddy's Wigwam**" cathedral image, which was where they had an event with music by **Pierre Henry**, and the **Yoko Ono** poster is actually from **Café OTO** in **Dalston**, which is very close to where I lived in **London** and I saw **Yoko** collaborating with **Talvin Singh** in this tiny gig in 2014 when I think she was about eighty-three or something. So, yeah, I've just always had this kind of fascination. And, of course, the football team, I liked that when I was younger that they won a lot.

Paul Cheetham: [00:45:04] You just became an ambassador. You said that your father was at **Liverpool University**, you just became an ambassador there, right?

Vanessa Reed: [00:45:11] Yeah. I mean, the reason I agreed to do that is they're building a new venue as part of **Liverpool University**. I want to make sure I do what I can to support any new developments that I think are important to the infrastructure. I think it's really important for students to have a place where they can experiment and perform. And, also, there's the intention that it will be a sort of training opportunity for people who want to go into the backstage side of things, when it comes to running events, so I think it's going to be a great resource. I just think it's a city, that inspires so many people. And I think I just want to make sure it's got all the facilities it needs. I think it's just going to be a great, great addition to the city.

Paul Cheetham: [00:45:59] I couldn't agree more.

One of the things I like about the great work that you do is that you get recognized for it quite a lot. You've received quite a few awards, quite rightly, of course.

The most significant one I remember reading when we were working with you was that you were voted, was it **Radio 4**?

Vanessa Reed: [00:46:18] Yeah, "**Woman's Hour**" on **Radio 4**. Yeah.

Paul Cheetham: [00:46:22] Was it the 3rd most influential woman in the music industry, behind who?

Vanessa Reed: [00:46:27] **Taylor Swift** and **Beyoncé**.

Paul Cheetham: [00:46:30] I can't believe you didn't come 2nd! But 3rd's pretty good.

Vanessa Reed: [00:46:36] Yeah. I mean, it's nice when those things happen. Obviously, they're always tricky because any list, whether it's a power list or an award or whatever, you know, there are always just as many women who could be on it who aren't, that should be recognized. So, I'm very grateful for those kinds of acknowledgement, but I, that was kind of, in a way, that was a fun opportunity to keep shining a light on the "**Keychange**" movement. It's a nice story to tell my nephews and nieces when they're older or something, if they know who **Beyoncé** and **Taylor Swift** are at that point, I don't know. But, um, but yeah, but I think it's really important as well to not take all of those things too seriously, because I know so many amazing women and I wish they could all be acknowledged. I think one thing that is important about some of those lists and awards is that on the one hand, okay, we shouldn't have to have, for example, "**Women in Music**" awards because they should just be awarded alongside their male counterparts in whatever industry awards exist, but for as long as they continue to be sidelined and marginalized, then I'm totally supportive of having these events that are built to raise the profile of people who should be known by more people.

Paul Cheetham: [00:47:59] Um, we have to go, but just very, very quickly before you go. I know you're very busy today, so thank you for taking this time. It's amazing. We talked about **Fran Lebowitz** a little bit earlier. You brought up **Netflix** and podcasts and music, but what are your current favorite things that you think you could recommend? It could be artists or albums, films, anything that you want to "big up"?

Vanessa Reed: [00:48:21] Films and TV: So, in the opposite to what you were saying about really missing **New York**, what's really interesting is when you live here, of course you then appreciate, you know, the continent you've left. So, I have absolutely adored the TV series "**Call My Agent**", which is set in **Paris**. It's brilliant. It's about an agency that represents actors and it's... and they have cameos and famous actors in each episode, but the cast is just adorable and it's very sharp and funny. So, that would be my **Netflix** recommendation.

A film that I saw only this weekend, "**A Promising Young Woman**", it's kind of dark and scary in some ways and, thinking about that whole polarization thing, it does show that in terms of gender and abuse of male power amongst young people, but it's really, really powerful. So, I would definitely recommend that. It's a kind of macabre feminism experiment. I think it's brilliant. And it's directed by a woman, stars **Carey Mulligan**....

Paul Cheetham: [00:49:27] It's **Emerald Fennell**. And she wrote and directed that film, right?

Yeah. She was also the writer or the runner on "**Killing Eve**", but people will know her from playing **Camilla Parker-Bowles** in "**The Crown**". Yep. and nominated for a **Golden Globe**.

Vanessa Reed: [00:49:42] Yeah. Yeah. There have been so many incredible female-directed things, like "**I Hate Susie**" with **Billie Piper** who worked on it with **Lucy Prebble** who wrote "**Enron**", the theatre hit. I've just been really impressed with that.

And then, music: I'm just really into just trying to explore as many new things as possible. We've launched a fund here since I've been here, which is for women and people of colour writing film music and through that experience, I've met the composer, **Tamar-kali**, who is brilliant, and I think she has got one of the most distinctive voices in film music. She wrote the score to "**Shirley**" and "**The Assistant**", again, really strong indie films with strong female protagonists. She's really interesting. And then I've also really enjoyed kind of meeting a range of composers. Young women who are writing for orchestra, but also have their own bands and are, kind of, really in demand. So, two people that we've been supporting or working with include **Angelica Negrón**, who's originally from **Puerto Rico**, and **Shelley Washington**. So, they're two really interesting female talents that I've been inspired by.

There's also this amazing drummer, improviser, and composer called **Tyshawn Sorey**. There's an article in the **New York Times** that, kind of, talks about how he was the most wanted composer of 2020. So, he's definitely worth checking out. And another album I discovered, partly thanks to the fact I still listen to **Gilles Peterson** on Saturdays because it's on when I'm, kind of, having brunch, but **Angel Bat Dawid** is this incredible woman who plays clarinet amongst other things, which is what I learned when I was younger. So, her last two albums, one of them is a live album, and they're both wild. They're both brilliant.

Paul Cheetham: [00:51:43] Brilliant. Plenty of recommendations for very interesting stuff. Very interested to hear about "**A Promising Young Woman**". I read a review of this. I'm interested in that. There's a great scene at the moment, female writers and directors, a very non sentimental look at romance, which I like. Yeah.

You're going to be late for your board meeting if I don't let you go. But once again, thanks ever so much for joining us and talking to us. I wish we could have talked longer. There was loads more, but it was great to see you again and talk to you.

I hope you carry on enjoying living in **New York** and we'll carry on being jealous of you over here.

Vanessa Reed: [00:52:18] I hope you can come over though at some point.

Paul Cheetham: [00:52:21] As soon as possible.

Vanessa Reed: [00:52:22] Yeah. Just, just let me know when you're here.

Paul Cheetham: [00:52:25] Don't worry about that. Alright, **Vanessa**. Thanks a lot.

Vanessa Reed: [00:52:29] See you! Thanks **Paul**.

Paul Cheetham: [00:52:31] So, there you go. How nice of **Vanessa** to join us and sorry I made her a bit late for her next board meeting. Ah well, it was worth it. She really is quite a remarkable person, a real leader, and a brilliant person to work with.

Sorry to everyone that it took a bit longer than usual to publish this episode. Some of you may have noticed that I've also started producing a podcast for **VIP Booking.Com** called "**WE TALK: LIVE MUSIC**". The first episode came out at the end of February and was obviously a wild success! On that, I spoke with **Jon Ollier**, who's the agent for **Ed Sheeran**, and **Natasha Gregory**, who works with **Idles**, **Amy McDonald**, **Cate Le Bon**, and many other great artists. Seriously, check it out. The link is in the episode description.

Remember, you can contact us with comments, ideas, feedback, and trivia on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram**, or by email. You can find the details how to reach us in the description or on our website, which is **thesuperswell.com**.

So that's all for now. Thanks again to **Vanessa Reed**. Thanks to you for listening until next time. Ciao.

Episode 7: Vanessa Reed – New Start, New York, New Music USA

Recorded: Monday 8th February, 2021

Published: Thursday 11th March, 2021

The SuperSwell Podcast: www.thesuperswell.com

Please send corrections, comments, feedback to podcast@thesuperswell.com