

## TRANSCRIPT

### Sound As Ever (Australian Music Vault Podcast) Episode 5 Hear Me Roar

#### **Music:** Paul Kelly – Before Too Long

Welcome to Sound as Ever, an Australian Music Vault podcast produced by young content producers and radio makers interested in exploring stories and issues in the Australian Music scene. This episode takes a look at gender inequality in the music industry, and the ways in which it influences the work of artists and others in this creative field. This episode was produced by Elsie Bath and Shejuti Hossain.

**Miss Blanks:** Opening up the music video with two white cis bros on leashes, I'm saying this is my space, you're a guest, you're invited into this space, and by me having you on a leash, I'm saying I'm in charge and I'm dictating your movement.

#### **Music:** Miss Blanks - Clap Clap

**Miss Blanks:** My name is Miss Blanks, I'm a rapper musician based in Australia. I've been doing it for about 14 months now, and I do a lot of activism externally to my music but also a lot of my music has these undertones, of various social issues.

**Narration:** We are in 2018. The year promising leaps and bounds in the social revolution that's been brewing since the 60s. The feminist revolution. In the music industry in particular, the #MeNoMore campaign, highlighting the wide spread manifestation of gendered assault and harassment. The growing popularity of women and gender diverse individuals producing and distributing their own music, independently. Steps like these are encouraging gender diversity in the musicscape.

#### **Music:** Miss Blanks - Clap Clap

However the facts remain. Triple Js By The Numbers report found: The Australian music industry continues to be dominated by men across almost every level. My name is Elsie. I have grown up in Melbourne going to live gigs and festivals. This city, at the bottom of Australia, is often referred to as a bubble for its ideals and progressiveness. But if I can see the gender inequality in the music scene even here, how overpowering is it through the rest of the country? In the years to come I want the first release of major festival headliners to be gender diverse. I want to hear a solo woman or gender diverse person take out the top spot in the Triple J's hottest 100, just once. I want there to be a gender spread across all areas of the music scape in this wonderfully diverse country. I want all of us to have the same opportunities and rights across the board. It's simple, and yet proving difficult to reach. In the Global Gender Gap Report for 2017, it was estimated that equality between men and women won't be achieved for another 200 years - and that's just economics. This might be why there is such passion in Miss Blanks' voice when she talks about the music video for her song 'Clap Clap'. It stirred up controversy and conversations around gendered power structures with it's opening shot.

**Miss Blanks:** I don't know, the idea that like, I could really, shake men to their core, just by presenting that scene. For years, men have been socially conditioned to believe that women are there to please, and that they can be treated, like dogs, like animals, that's always been fine, because through this male gaze, that's just the norm, but as soon as you have someone trying to challenge that, or literally flip it on it's head it's like "whoa, whoa, whoa hold up a second, we're not used to seeing that, that's not ok by us!"

**Narration:** The fire in Miss Blanks' belly hasn't always been there. Before her music called out gender inequality, it started in a completely a-political way. Just based off her raw talent.

### **Music: Miss Blanks (Feat. Moonbase) - Skinny Bitches**

**Miss Blanks:** I was actually out with a friend one night at a party, and I'll never forget it. So my friend's head at Bronte, she runs this club night in Brisbane, all over, called fempress. We were at this party and there was this break down of Lil Kim 'Queen Bitch'. It's this like cool, instrumental part, and I started freestyling, I started rapping, and she kind of just turns to me, and she's like "since when? I had no idea you could do that!". And I was like "it's just like this fun little thing on the side like a little, I don't know, it's just like a special skill." You know? A lot of people have many special skills, I was like "yeah it's this thing I do" and she was like "well I have this club night, I have this event in a couple of months I'd love for you to come on board and perform" and I am like "perform what? I don't got tracks, I'm not like an artist, or a live performer, it's just I can rap, point blank, full stop". The rest was history.

**Narration:** Miss Blanks has had such rapid success since the beginning of her career, building on the foundations of hard work layed by those before her. There was such a gaping hole in the music scene that her style filled perfectly, and the world was finally ready to accept into the mainstream.

**Miss Blanks:** Most of the times I have such tunnel vision with my work and what I'm doing, so it's like I realised at the time, I need to make a, I need to you know make music that I can put out. And if I'm gonna make music that I put out, it has to be music that I like, and once I looked at my musical influences and also my I guess just what interested me, at the time of creating and also to now, I'm like no one's really doing this and that's cute. The kind of music I'm creating is like of a very particular experience, it's of my experience.

**Narration:** This kind of creative style, charged with female and gender diverse experience, seems to be trickling into the popular music landscape. From Stella Donnelly's 'Boys will be Boys' to Camp Cope injecting new lyrics into their song 'The Opener'.

### **Music: Camp Cope - The Opener**

**Narration:** The band changed the lyrics for their Falls Festival appearance over the 2018 New Year to: "It's another man telling us we can't fill up a tent, it's another f--king festival

booking only nine women.” Broadcaster Tracee Hutchison believes this new approach is not only paying off as a way to forge a music career, but it’s also creating space for new experiences and stories in the industry.

**Tracee:** The role of women in the creative sector has been a huge issue for me for my entire career. I’ve watched several waves of, I guess fashionability, around this particular issue, but I’ve never seen momentum like we have now for real and lasting change and I’m really confident that we are in that moment where we actually see real change happen.

**Tracee:** I’m Tracee Hutchison. I’m a career broadcaster, now academic. So started my career at Triple J and worked for a whole bunch of people between now and then.

**Narration:** And *that* whole bunch has meant that Tracee has seen and heard it all.

**Tracee:** This is a nano second in time, if you think about the 60s, you know, women couldn’t go into pubs, 70s we’ve got Helen Reddy, I Am Woman, the punk explosion. The 80s was an incredibly political era in Australian music, not just for women but the politics of the 80s was significant. And what’s happening now is this response, largely by young women performers who are looking at the framework of the industry and thinking “this doesn’t serve me, I’m not, I’m not even interested in being part of that, because it’s not the kind of art or music I want to create. There is nothing there for me. So I’m actually just going to create my own models.”

**Elsie (in interview):** So why are we seeing this shift in history? What’s driving it?

**Tracee:** I think it’s driven by a great, a profound sense of assuredness about “I deserve to be here, I am going to take my place, I’m not going to ask permission, I don’t need to to ask permission.” And I think to a certain extent I would like to think, that it’s also come out of a generation of women who are their mothers, who’ve actually raised young women to take their place.

### **Music: Meg Mac - Roll Up Your Sleeve**

**Tracee:** His-story. I think that even on itself tells us a lot about what version of past events we actually end up celebrating and remembering, often at the expense of some incredible women who have done great things. So hopefully you know, we can start holding a whole lot of women up and celebrating them.

**Narration:** Recognising achievements by women is something Tracee has taken seriously. Most recently through the new award ceremony, the Australian Women’s Music Awards. After a massive 30 years of planning. The first ceremony will be held this year.

**Tracee:** The Australian Women in Music Awards is happening because there has been a historic underrepresentation and undervaluing of the contribution of women in their chosen profession in a range of roles in the industry. Women in Music Awards is absolutely about recognising that we have to start rewriting and redressing history with a little bit of herstory.

**Narration:** You might be thinking that having awards specifically to celebrate women is an outdated concept. But since 2012 when the Grammys became non-gendered, not one female solo artist has walked away with the top prize.

~pause~

**Narration:** Although the Australian Women's Music Awards is giving female musicians a platform to honour and celebrate the amazing work of their peers. The only issue with the awards, and most award ceremonies still to this day, is that they're gendered.

**Elsie (in interview):** How does an award system ensure women are lifted up but also validate the work done by gender diverse people?

**Tracee:** This is where we get into I think probably the the the greater challenge now for us in terms of how we create platforms and create opportunities that are truly inclusive because even speaking in gendered terms, I recognise that that is a particular perspective informed by my experience. I think it's really challenging, because you want to, you want to be mindful that you're not othering people, Uh you want to be mindful that in creating an opportunity or an award or some kind of recognition that you're not doing the opposite of including people. And you want to make sure that you, in any kind of situation that might require perhaps quotas or something like that, that you're not requiring, you're not gender profiling people.

**Elsie (in interview):** Yeah it's one of those things that I feel you just kind of go round and round thinking of the best framework that would be inclusive and also solve representation issues.

**Tracee:** And it's a challenging one, it's a really challenging one.

**Narration:** Working with gender quotas and awards are a way to seek representation and recognition across the board, but they don't come without their pitfalls. It's a step in the right direction of course, towards lasting change. But can we see it? Is it palpable? It's not just about supporting those wanting to make a change, it needs to come with a universal shift in our perspective. That women and gender diverse people have every right to take up this space and feel like they belong.

### **Music: Cleopatra Wong - Thank You**

**Lindy:** Some things may have changed but women are still not being allowed to headline and they are still overlooked when it comes to putting them on the bills for festivals.

**Lindy:** My names Lindy Morrison and I'm probably best known for being the drummer in The Go Betweens but I have played in a number of bands, Cleopatra Wong with Amanda Brown and presently I'm playing drums with Alex the Astronaut.

**Narration:** Lindy has been around the Australian music scene since her first gig in 1977. A lot has changed in this time. In the past, it was the norm to go to a music event and not see any woman on the line up. Now stations like 'Triple J' and festivals such as 'By The Meadow' are enforcing quotas to create a gender diverse spread. But Lindy has been dealt first hand the ingrained prejudice working as a woman in the music industry. Not just in the 70's and 80's, but to this day.

**Music: Stella Donnelly - Boys Will Be Boys**

**Elsie (in interview):** I think you mentioned in a very early interview that you got mistaken for a groupie, is that right?

**Lindy:** Oh I think that's happened quite a few times actually. Look just the other day, I'm playing with Alex the Astronaut at the moment, we're doing this festival circuit. And the band had was finished, so we'd finished playing, and I'm on stage taking down my cymbals and my snare, it's a festival stage, big stage. I'm taking down my symbols and snare and some guy comes over and he takes the stand with the symbols on, and I'm just standing there like watching him walk away, and this guy walks up and he yells at me "what the hell are you doing on the stage, get off the stage! We've got to clear the stage." He had no idea why I was there, none whatsoever. He had no idea I was the drummer. And he, it never occurred to him in a million years that I was the drummer. And I just told him where to go in no uncertain terms. In fact, I told him where to go a couple of times. I soon had a whole group of friends standing around me, and I was I was just letting fly. I was so angry, he then apologised to me.

**Music: Stella Donnelly - Boys Will Be Boys**

**Elsie (in interview):** Yeah it comes up again and again. So why do you think not enough has changed? Is the industry listening?

**Lindy:** I think they are listening, I think people are definitely listening, but they just, they just fall back on traditional behaviour without even being conscious of it. They just don't know.

**Narration:** It's a good point, but also a bit of a cop out. They just don't know. They don't know what exactly? That women and gender diverse people can play music? That they're talented, strong and passionate? That they train and excel in their fields without the recognition and fanfare. It is not just these everyday assumptions that can be damaging, that can be blown off as "they just don't know". Morrisons skill as a drummer has been questioned time and time again throughout her career.

**Lindy:** I've heard that a few times you know. "Oh, it was a drum machine that played those parts" like as if those 5 other albums never ever took place, and all that live work, so much on youtube or so many tv shows where I wasn't playing? And I think that was sexism but then again, it's one of those things where your just not sure what's going on and so you're, you're careful not to call it out.

**Elsie (in interview):** But I always think in those cases would they be saying those things if they were speaking to a cis male?

**Lindy:** Well they didn't say those things about the male players at those times, who were in similar sorts of bands, where drum machines have been used. I've just never heard it said about any of them, I've never heard it said...

**Narration:** So where do these gendered ideas in music come from?

**Elsbeth:** I think it's really important and interesting to think about gender roles, and implicit bias and unconscious bias that goes on and enables the participation of different gendered identities to kind of flourish in certain roles.

**Elsbeth:** My name is Elspeth Scrine. I am one of the coordinators for Listen, which is a collective that explores visibility of marginalised communities in uh the music industry from a feminist perspective. The fact that it starts so young, the way that we are gendered begins so early that we we could live our whole lives unconsciously believing certain things about what women are meant to do and what men are meant to do.

**Narration:** As Elspeth says, how we are socialised, what we grow up looking at and experiencing, eventually turns into our world view. This then influences those around us through our choices. It's just a continuous cycle. Tracee believes this has a trickle down effect on the music industry.

**Tracee:** There is a gender blindness and a tone deafness and a particular skewing around sensibility if your worldview is male. So you really have to ask questions about how pervasive has that been. It comes back to the pointy end structure, who is at the top of the pointy end structure? And what is their worldview? And what is their skew around how they see gender? You've really gotta kind of ask those questions because this is actually our cultural language, music is the most powerful form of contemporary cultural language. What stories are we telling? What stories are we not telling or not giving room for?

**Narration:** We've heard it said time and time before. A cultural language. A universal language. Music is what makes us human and a form in which we tell our stories and experiences. What a huge loss when we only tell and hear these stories from one perspective, and quite frankly, how boring. Who wouldn't prefer to hear something new, from an unfamiliar experience. This movement to create an accurate representation of our world in the music we champion, is extending not just to artists but to all corners of the music industry. Elspeth, Coordinator from Listen, says their organisation exists to promote the marginalised folk of Australia, particularly in the music scene.

**Elsbeth:** We run a conference, we run panel discussions, there's an offshoot record label called Listen Records and also live music events. Essentially we've just been trying to respond to whatever is part of the current discourse around feminist, queer, conversations around accessibility, these types of conversations in the music industry we've just been basically responding to whatever's coming up. At the moment we are focussing on a project

called Listen Lists, where we are creating live databases for different areas of the music industry which are particularly male dominated. So that women and gender non-conforming people can add their details and experience and their kind of professional profile to a, a live database that we then distribute and make known in the wider music community.

### **Music: Miss Blanks (Feat. Dugong Jr) - Fantasy**

**Narration:** These Listen Lists are one way that this chronic under-representation of women and gender diverse people in the music industry is being addressed. Within the first week they had over 70 people register for the online database. Showing how much this is really needed. Listen also calls out under-representation and the cop outs that usually come with it.

**Multiple unidentified voices:** “There are some women coming on the second lineup announcement”, “We asked but they weren’t available”, “We book bands who sell tickets”, “We book on talent, not gender”, “We are in discussion with female artists for next years event”.

**Elsbeth:** This is essentially a project about trying to really confront these excuses that are made in the music industry, “well we couldn’t find a woman, we don’t know any or this one wasn’t available”. So this is like a very grassroots, DIY approach to challenging that and saying “well, cool, we made a list here you go.”

**Narration:** The Listen List is not just about recruiting and hiring women and gender diverse people, adding them to the music landscape of Australia. It’s about inspiring the next generation. If all you ever see, as a young woman, when you go to a bar or a club is a cis male behind the DJ deck, why would you ever see this as an inviting place to explore as a career? Miss Blanks also believes representation is important.

**Miss Blanks:** I think it’s really exciting to see more positive visibility and seeing people like myself reflected in music, on stages, just in everyday life. You don’t have to be famous, you don’t have to be a celebrity or anything to be a trans person and to feel valued and to be valued and respected. Seeing someone that looks like you, and offers the same kind of intersection that you offer, whether you be a trans person, whether you be a woman of colour, non-binary, so on and so forth. I think that’s also super important. That kind of representation and visibility can’t be there unless opportunities are there. This year really is for women, femmes, non-binary folk - it’s for the matriarch. You know? Everyone that I know that are pushing in music, that are doing big things are women, or femme, or non-binary. They’re like really changing culture and shifting things. I’m like creating and my focus has always been me and my community. So it’s like, as long as my community are cool, as long as I’m cool. If you don’t like my music, you can go find some other white boy rapper that you fuck with. That’s fine, that’s so fine, because I’m not here for complacency, just not, not in 2018 not ever.

**Narration:** Like so many others, Tracee feels that this, 2018, is a time where we’re seeing *real* change.

**Tracee:** I do feel, that in terms of the timing of it, it almost feels like next year would have been too late. 2018 just feels like it's the year. It's the year of women taking her place in a whole range of ways, but certainly in music it just feels like the mood is there. I think what those social media campaigns, the MeToo, the MeNoMore, the range of hashtag campaigns or movements that actually came up as a result of them, told other women that there was a much bigger community there for us. It actually gave us permission actually, we each gave each other permission to honour our experiences and recognise that we were part of something that was universal, that we all shared on various levels. Some empathy and understanding, if not experience, of the issues that were being raised through those campaigns. And I think what it told us was, that in numbers and united we, we are a pretty powerful force, this is the golden moment. Those social media campaigns have actually almost created this momentum for change, it's actually created a bit of a juggernaut. And I do feel like it's a juggernaut that isn't gonna turn around any time soon. But I do think that we, we are at a point where that tipping point is happening, where if you are an organisation that isn't being more inclusive and representative in your outward facing, you know, how you speak to the world, young people are not going to want to be involved. You're going to lose a generation there, you're going to kind of really get left behind.

**Narration:** Despite what Tracee sees as a time of rapid change. It's important to remember we need to not only be fighting for diversity, but to be conscious of our own privilege, however big or small it may be. Give space and platforms to people that need it more than we do. Listen to stories. Learn. Stuff up from time to time. Sit with our own discomfort when we make mistakes. It's bound to happen; we all have unconscious bias but it's learning how to question it, as Elspeth explains, that's the most important thing of all.

**Elspeth:** I think having that level of critical awareness and challenging notions of equality is really important, yeah particularly asking the question of "well who who is equal? Who is feeling like we've we've made it?" Those who have more structural privilege and structural power are kind of feeling like we've made it, like queer people are able to get married, white women are seen in more CEO positions. Looking at "ok well who is it whose made it into positions of power?", and just kind of consistently challenging what equality really is?

**Narration:** It's not just the harassment in the industry towards women and gender diverse individuals. It's not just boardrooms of men deciding which song will win an award or who will be signed to a label. It's not just fighting for gender representation on a festival bill. We have all grown up in a world that favours cis men. Giving them more space to be music producers, sound designers, managers or musicians. It would be great to get to a place where we don't need to talk about quotas, or gendered awards, or lists of women and gender diverse people who are qualified and ready to work in the industry. But for now we do, because we need to be aware of where we still need to improve. All of us. Even you and me. Lindy, Elspeth and Tracee are filled with hope. They can all see a creative landscape in the future that is richer, more diverse from all the people that will be allowed through the door that has been flung open.

**Music:** Meg Mac - Roll Up Your Sleeve



**Lindy:** I think the conversation will have changed in 10-20 years, and I think this wave that we are seeing now will become a tsunami and there will be no stopping it this time. You know there was an attempt in the late 70s, there was an attempt in the early 80s, there was an attempt in the early 90s. But not much happened and that's why it's built up to where it's got now where more and more women are demanding access to the stage and demanding the right to be heard.

**Elsbeth:** I think in the shorter term I would hope that people begin to like develop that questioning perspective of like seeing a line up and not just seeing it as "yeah cool, these are the successful bands" but looking and being like "huh, it's only white people, or it's only men". I hope that people begin to notice and call it out and confront it and that bands and bookers and festival and all the people in the music industry begin to like listen.

**Tracee:** I really hope that 2018 is a, is a red letter year for people to think that was the year that we saw some really significant shifts around representation and visibility. I really hope that what we are seeing is a moment in time where we started to get the balance right.

**Music: Paul Kelly – Before Too Long**

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