

Born into Music, Locked out of Power
Exploring the structural barriers blocking Global Majority young people from progressing in the music industry – despite a deep-rooted connection to music

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Music isn't just influenced by the Global Majority - **modern music exists *because of it***. From gospel, jazz and reggae to R&B, grime and Bollywood, the sounds of diaspora communities shape the very foundation of what we listen to today. Even the most iconic British bands - The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin - owe their sound to Black American music pioneers like Little Richard, Nina Simone, Chuck Berry, and Muddy Waters. There would be no disco without Chicago House. No jungle or UK garage without reggae and dancehall. Grime's explosive rise put the UK back on the map as a global force in music innovation. The UK's music identity is woven by the creativity of Global Majority, and yet many continue to face exclusion from the industry.

This musical inheritance often begins at home, passed down through families, communities and culture. For Global Majority young people, music is often more than a hobby; it's a lifeline. But while they grow up steeped in rhythm, melody and expression, their path to industry power remains blocked.

The Youth Music SONG Report¹, a 2024 research report that explores young people's relationship with music, found that **77% of parents from the Global Majority** agree it's very or quite important to listen to music that is part of their family's culture/heritage, compared to 60% of White parents.

It is not surprising then, that over a third (36%) of early career starters from the Global Majority (aged 18-25) can imagine themselves in a music industry job in the next 10 years, compared to 24% of White young people.

But passion alone can't open doors. Young people from the Global Majority are being systematically shut out from prospective careers in the music industry. New research from Youth Music, the UK's leading charity helping marginalised young people make and monetise music, found that **those from a Global Majority background are significantly less likely to feel that people from their cultural background are fully represented in leadership positions in the music industry (29%) compared to those from a White background (53%)**.

UK Music's Diversity report reinforces this. Its research shows respondents from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds in the UK are underrepresented at the senior (22.1%) and mid-level (23.0%) positions, but overrepresented at all other levels². Black,

¹ [Youth Music Sound of the Next Generation Report 2024](#)

² [UK Music Diversity Report 2024](#)

Asian and ethnically diverse representation increases at lower career levels, peaking at the apprentice/intern level, and decreases at senior levels.

Why is it that despite the overrepresentation of Global Majority in junior roles, this trend doesn't translate into management or c-suite levels? Why is the progression of young people from the Global Majority stunted, despite their clear musicality, ambition and passion?

Through this piece, Youth Music is shining a light on young people's current feelings towards representation in the music industries, and outlining recommended solutions to support young people from the Global Majority to feel that a sustainable, successful career in the music industries is an achievable ambition.

Through interviews with young creatives, grassroots youth music project leaders, academic experts like **Dr Pauline Muir** and industry professionals such as **George the Poet**, Youth Music is both celebrating the essential role that music plays in Global Majority communities and outlining practical steps for achieving equitable representation in the music industries.

SECTION ONE

The powerful role music plays in shaping the upbringing of the Global Majority

Research from Youth Music's SONG Report found that music plays a significant role in Global Majority households, as two out of three parents say they are musical, compared to half of White parents. Also, on average, Global Majority children maintain their musical identity during school to a stronger extent than their White counterparts.

Interviewees that grew up in these households talked to Youth Music about how their parents nurtured their love for music, and how cultural music helped them celebrate and connect with their identity and community.

Musician, actor, singer, songwriter and producer Anandita, who is based in London, told Youth Music about her family upbringing and connection to classical Indian music: "My dad has a harmonium, which is an Indian instrument. He's very passionate about Indian classical music and enrolled me in classes. In India, music is definitely very community based. In the classes I attended, there was a teacher on the harmonium, and around five or six students, all singing together. So that culture is very dominant."

Music artist, Serena (23, Rugby) explained how music helped her to connect with her South Asian community. She said, "To me, music was definitely a sense of community and that's also how I think of my culture as well. It really did play a big part in gathering people together. That's the beauty of music. I really love the aspect that you can just bring people into a room and you're all focused on that one thing at that time, and it can make you feel different things. When I was younger, my dad and my grandma used to take me to the Sikh temple and there was always music being played there."

Further supporting this point, **spoken-word artist, poet, rapper, George the Poet**, commented: "It's a big part of our Ugandan diaspora. Music carries so much experience, and for many of our people who grew up in a different society and have all of their life and memories and friends somewhere else, music has been that connector. And it then

becomes a gateway for many of us to tap into parts of the culture that we missed out on not being back home.”

These stories all highlight the importance of dedicated spaces - at home or in the community - for young people from the Global Majority to explore music, connect with culture, connect with others from similar backgrounds, and find belonging.

The founder of Rap Club, a Youth Music funded project based in London, Benjamin Turner, said: “Ultimately it's not just about the community aspect. It's also about how it can really empower young people in their own cultures and in their own self, a sense of what they can do and their role in society.”

However, these spaces are now under threat. The current cost-of-living crisis, lack of funding and the resulting impact on maintaining essential community music spaces has meant that **two in five (41%) grassroots youth music projects are at risk of closure** - an increase of 17% v 2024 (24%).

To provide crucial support for these spaces, Youth Music has launched its Rescue the Roots campaign, a £2 million fundraiser to help address the current crisis and sustain the ecosystem for the long term. Youth Music will match every pound raised up to £1 million, creating a total of £2 million to quickly distribute to youth organisations and emerging young creatives who are in urgent need of support. **This will provide crucial support for over 18,000 young people in 2025.**

Places of worship as a place for community and music to intersect

Senior Lecturer in Arts Management at Goldsmiths University, Dr Pauline Muir, who specialises in music in Black Majority Churches, emphasised how music-making in Black Majority Churches helps young people connect with their culture through worship.

As part of a previous publication entitled Place, People and Pentecostal Habitus in Black Music in Britain in the 21st Century, (ed. M.Charles)³ she interviewed young men who had grown up in Black Majority Churches. Drawing on this research, **Dr Pauline Muir** explained, “Those youngsters growing up in worship settings, pointed out that their cultural identity was very much related to the type of music that they're engaged in and making.”

Youth Music’s SONG Report found that Global Majority households are more likely to engage with community-based musical experiences such as festivals and in places of worship.

Independent music artist, Laura, 24, who is based in Bristol and hails from a Nigerian background, said: “In my home life, culture was related to church. In terms of Christian gospel music, that's where my culture really came in and my parents wanted my family to have a connection to our culture in that aspect.”

Music artist, producer and songwriter, Kasim, (23, based in Oxford) who has Caribbean heritage, told Youth Music about how he incorporates Caribbean beats into

³ [Place, People and Pentecostal Habitus in Black Music in Britain in the 21st Century](#)

the rap he makes in the UK: “I feel like it played a big role in how I approach music, the kind of music I like, mainly from a rhythm standpoint, there's a lot of syncopation and percussive elements in Caribbean music. And that's [been] incorporated into what I do now, especially for UK rap.”

This is reflected within Youth Music’s SONG Report, which found that children and young people from Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British ethnic groups are 20% more likely to make music than any other ethnic group.

Despite this deep cultural connection to music, many young people find that mainstream education fails to reflect or nurture it.

Benjamin Turner said: “Generally, I would say my experience across schools is that there is a strong hesitancy to embrace the cultures of young people. There is quite a lot of bias towards the music of the educators, which in many ways is not aligned with what the young people's interests are.”

He also pointed to the misunderstandings associated with genres popular with those from Global Majority backgrounds, saying: “There is a strong hesitancy, or almost reluctance, to embrace other cultures. And I think that comes from cultural misunderstanding.

“It's a foreign culture [rap music] to a lot of people who work in education. And the way that is presented means that it is deemed to be negative, deemed to not be conducive to a school environment.”

When it comes to celebrating the rich and vibrant music that is culturally relevant to those from the Global Majority, education settings are still missing the mark. Given all this, it’s no surprise that even though school children from the Global Majority are more likely to enjoy going to school than their White counterparts (70% v 56%) and enjoy music lessons (61% vs 50%), they’re less likely to feel that school makes music feel important (58% vs 64%).

Chief Executive & Artistic Director of South Asian Arts UK Keranjeet Kaur Virdee MBE said: “It’s still something that is a tick box exercise that takes place [within school settings]. They haven’t creatively thought about how the music that is synonymous with, or heritage linked, or culturally relevant to South Asian young people, how that can be played on any instrument and experimented on within education settings.”

On this point, **Kasim** added: “There was quite a difference between what I was listening to at home and what we are learning at school. There weren't a lot of comparisons that could have been drawn between the two. We didn't learn too much about the music I was listening to at home, so I guess I felt a bit disconnected from the music we learned about in school.”

He continued to say: “[having access to a varied curriculum] probably would have made me get into making music a bit earlier on, pursuing it a bit earlier.”

Singer, multi-instrumentalist and poet, Lauren (24, Leeds) who comes from an African and British background, commented: I think it would have made a big difference, being able to experiment and explore different music during education, a time when you're

meant to be supported and encouraged to learn what you like doing and what you're passionate about, to have that chance to explore that through school.”

The current requirement for classical set works on the GCSE syllabus places colonial-era Western art music at the top of a musical hierarchy, implicitly valuing it above other traditions. This offers a vital chance for the curriculum to explore how colonialism, patriarchy, and class have shaped current musical values — and how they still influence learning today.

Talking on what a diverse curriculum could have meant for his musical progression, **George the Poet** explained: “On a collective level, on a community level, I think it would have raised the esteem, and it would have raised the bar for our understanding of our own music. Because we developed our music scene in a DIY fashion in a local environment and a lot of it was contending with criminal elements and poverty.”

Youth Music’s 2024 SONG report found that music is the favourite pastime of children and young people - ranking above gaming, sport, television, and social media - and plays a significant role in shaping their social and cultural identities. Music offers substantial opportunities to engage young people in education. However, the limited choice and autonomy within the current curriculum means that this potential is not being fully harnessed.

The Department for Education in England has announced a curriculum review⁴, set to be published this year, which aims to explore how education can better reflect 'the issues and diversities of our society' across the UK. As Benjamin Turner aptly puts it, a successful curriculum wouldn’t “mean they have to leave their culture at the school gates, but actually it's welcome there” - a sentiment that emphasises the importance of creating inclusive learning environments where all cultural identities are recognised and valued.

SECTION TWO

Diversity drives the future of music. So why isn’t the industry embracing it?

Global Majority young people face challenges learning and exploring culturally relevant music in education settings. Yet, 36% of 18–25-year-olds from these backgrounds see a future career in music - higher than the 28% average.⁵

However, the data suggests they become more aware of inequalities at this age, as they are less likely to think they have the same opportunities as everyone else.

Recent polling by Youth Music, completed in March 2025, reveals that young people from the Global Majority are significantly less likely to say they feel that people from their cultural background are fully represented in leadership positions in the music industry (29%) compared to those from a White background (53%).

When asked about her feelings towards current representation in the music industries, **Serena** shared: “When you don’t see yourself as much in other people that are making

⁴ [Government launches Curriculum and Assessment Review](#)

⁵ [Youth Music Sound of the Next Generation Report 2024](#)

music, I think it does subconsciously make you doubt yourself or doubt your capabilities. I didn't see many people doing what I wanted to do with my culture or my background.”

Laura echoed this, saying that: “Something that I've had insecurity or uncertainty about myself in is music production. As an African Black woman, I don't see much of that [in the music industries].”

The representation of women in the music industry has seen improvement across various levels. UK Music's Workforce Diversity Survey found that at the senior level, women now occupy 48.3% of roles, up from 40.4% in 2020, which is also the case for ethnic diversity, as Global Majority groups at senior levels in the music industries grew from 18.2% in 2022 to 22.1% in 2024.⁶ Yet austerity, limited funding, job access, and shrinking grassroots music spaces create many systemic barriers for women and young people starting music careers.

Drawing on experiences from his community, **Kasim** commented: “Friends and women talk about colourism and what it means having darker skin. Women who feel like, no matter how talented they are, they can't really break through because they face colourism and things like that.”

Due to this, having role models from a similar background is important for young people from Global Majority backgrounds, to help them see music as a viable career – particularly in behind-the-scenes roles.

Kasim emphasised this by sharing: “In senior and more corporate high-level roles, you see fewer Black people, at least, I've seen that myself. And I guess we are overrepresented in other areas – performers, backing vocalists, instrumentalists.”

On this point, **Laura** explained: “There is a fear surrounding not growing up with the knowledge or not coming from a family background that has knowledge of pathways in the music industry, or connections and networking, which is such a big part of a music career.”

“Seeing people [in these positions], when I was really young, people that were from my background would have been beneficial.”

Dr Pauline Muir shared her opinion on the topic, saying: “For the amount of time that Global Majority musicians have been in the industry, I think that it's disappointing that there aren't more Black musicians in senior roles.”

Being able to see Global Majority people in leadership positions in the music industries is crucial in inspiring young people's own feelings towards their careers.

Youth Music research found that nearly half **(44%) of respondents from the Global Majority deem 'lack of representation by role models' to be a barrier**, which is over double the level among those from a White background (21%).

Having people in leadership positions where they can be role models, will lead to young people from the Global Majority being able to aspire towards a career in music, taking

⁶ [UK Music's Workforce Diversity Survey](#)

the necessary steps towards a music industry that is more diverse, more equitable and more inclusive.

Serena said: “When I think about representation, especially when you're in your younger mindset, or you're embarking on a new journey, having that validation that someone that looks like you, or someone that's been through what you've been through, has been able to make it, is quite a big deal breaker. For young people, it's really vital for them to know that nothing is impossible.”

Drawing from his personal experience, **George the Poet** commented “When you're in proximity to success, it becomes demystified. And when you're able to see people like yourselves in certain positions, it becomes relatable. Not everyone needs that, but when I find certain people in certain positions, I'm like, oh, you're just one of us, from a world that I actually understand. It does make a big difference, and it has a psychological impact.”

SECTION THREE

Rewriting the record: How the music industries can better uplift and support the Global Majority in the workplace

The importance of the transformation needed in the music industries when it comes to representation cannot be overstated. 85% of those from a Global Majority background who feel represented believe that a career in music is either fully or somewhat achievable, compared to only 59% among those who feel unrepresented - a significant difference.

Taking steps to combat systemic issues across the industries is of vital importance to support, recognise and celebrate the significant impact that the Global Majority has on the country's musical landscape, helping to transform the industries for the better.

George the Poet discussed the systemic issues that young people from the Global Majority are currently dealing with when it comes to starting out in the music industries. He said: “The structural inequality that you bring to the table is already tripping you up before you've even got a foot in the door. And this is where representation has its limits. Because it's not enough just to have people that look like you in the boardroom or in the exec room if they're just going to make the same decisions as people that don't look like you. If these people are just put there to attract more people that look like you, but those people are now going to be fed into a pernicious system, that's not progress.”

Interviewees expressed the importance of providing robust education on career progression, recognising culturally relevant music within this, as an important method to addressing inequalities.

With an emphasis on South Asian musicians in education settings, **Keranjeet** explained: “Education [is needed] about the various career paths. A portfolio career for a musician [consists of being] an educator, a performer, a composer, and an arranger. They [musicians from South Asian backgrounds] don't know this because they're all in one when it comes to Indian classical music - they are the composer, the improviser, and the arranger. So, it's that terminology of the Western categorisation of music world that

doesn't exist within our world, and therefore it's about educating them to understand. Organisations like ours can educate them about the career paths in music, and how to connect them up.”

As well as this, increasing access and breaking down knowledge on pathways into the industries was also shared as a key factor to increasing representation in the music industries.

Laura commented: “It starts in schools. Supporting music in schools and prioritising that. If it is more funding, or whatever is needed, to encourage the experience of learning music in school needs to be better.

“It all comes back to schools, because what other ways can people come into contact with this information, if their parents don't have that information? School is where everyone is, so even if it is just more information about career pathways and music as well, and opening up those conversations in schools, then maybe kids, who you know more creative, feel like they have music as an option.”

Serena agreed, saying: “Exposure and acknowledgement and making spaces comfortable is vital for progression. Education, as well, to acknowledge that this is something that we need to work on as a whole community, not just within ethnic minority communities – an educational moment to move forward and create more of those spaces where more voices are heard.”

On what can be done to address inequality in the music industries, **George the Poet** shared: “The music industry needs an ethical framework. It doesn't have one. You need to attract people that don't just look like [someone from a Global Majority background], but have demonstrated some kind of understanding of all the inequality that has led to the point of an artist coming to the industry.”

Kasim echoed this: “We're in a new era. Now, more than ever, people are deciding what they want to listen to, and you've just got to move with that and accept that. Start embracing the change, embracing the fact there's new faces, new cultures and new perspectives, and allowing everyone to have a voice.”

When it comes to increasing diversity in the music industries, **Benjamin Turner** suggests that the most effective solutions won't come from top-down messaging, but from direct exposure to the talent. He explained: “I don't think a message would be the way to do it. I think it would be that they just witness what is possible. And by that, I don't mean just go to a youth club and see how great the impact is there. I think it is a case where as soon as they can see the potential of what a young person can do, that ultimately is what will shift it.

“Because whether it is that they're looking at the future of the industry, or their current position in the industry, or any of those aspects - so much wealth of creativity, of ideas, of energy, of drive, of all of these different elements, that it just needs to be exposed to people in those positions. But I would ultimately say that it's about them witnessing what can happen and genuinely being confronted with the reality, rather than a lecture from me about what they should do.”

In conclusion

Youth Music CEO Matt Griffiths said:

“Young people from the Global Majority are born into music. It’s in their homes, their communities, their cultures. Our research shows that representation behind the scenes is still miles behind. Innovators from the Global Majority have shaped – and continue to shape – the UK’s sound, yet too often, they’re locked out of the very industry they help define.

“This isn’t a pathway issue; it’s a systemic one. Youth Music is unwavering in our commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and access through our IDEA approach, and why our [Industry Connect](#) report lays out clear actions to drive real, long-term change. Other organisations must take note. Commitments to representation can’t be symbolic, they must be sustained, structural, and backed by action.

“If we want a future-facing music industry, we must dismantle structural barriers, invest in grassroots youth music spaces, and ensure young people from all backgrounds can not only see but seize a future in music. The next generation is already making the music – it’s time the industry and education caught up.”

Research credit

The research was conducted by ClearView Research with 1293 young people aged 16-24 (a nationally representative sample with a booster of at least 250 young people from ethnic minority backgrounds) between 10.03.25 to 12.03.25. ClearView Research are an MRS company partner that upholds and acts in a manner compliant with the strict ethical and rigorous rules contained in the MRS Code of Conduct.