

Diva Diversity

Women and the Media: a Scary Little Girls workshop.

This workshop aims to look at the way the media fosters, promotes and portrays women in music. It will also look at how much control artists have within the media and whether the media influences society's perception of artists, events or issues.

- i) The session will start with a quick introduction from the three actors about their background and the aims of the workshop.
- ii) The first exercise will be *Mememe!* This game starts with one student adopting a position in the acting area which they feel pulls most focus and freezing in that position. One at a time other students join the tableau, each one trying to adopt a position that pulls more focus than the last student. The purpose of this game is to breakdown inhibitions in the group and to suggest how the media can promote the artist and how the artist can play on this possibility of promotion.
- iii) The next part of the session is about the power of the image and is based on a theatrical staging exercise called *Black Box*. The group is asked to comment first on a glamorous, high-heeled shoe placed alone in the acting area, and then on a funky, urban boot. Students will be encouraged think about what is different about the styles, what they represent and what they say about the sort of celebrities that might wear them. By the end of the exercise, the students will have formed some contrasting ideas about the two celebrities and their different images in the media. The purpose of this is to build a perception of the possible diverse role-models within media for women: as the arena of music demonstrates, within the media there are women like Kylie or women like Ms Dynamite.
- iv) Using the ideas of the two sorts of celebrities that have come out of the image of the two shoes, students are put in groups of about 8-10 with one actor in each group and told to come up with a situation involving one of the celebrities. These situations could be the celebrity shopping, on holiday, meeting autograph hunters etc. The groups then take it in turn to present the rest of the students with their story in the form of a tableau. The other students see how much of the story they can discern from the

picture created. The students then walk around the tableau viewing it from different angles, seeing if this affects their interpretation of the story. For example, if viewed from one side a tableau may be a celebrity bending over to pick up their luggage but the same tableau viewed from the back may look like the celebrity is showing the viewers her bottom. This exercise shows how bias can come into media reporting and the difficulty in remaining objective for both the media and the audience. It also develops understanding about how media stories are tailored to an audience; the broad-sheet might show the celebrity going on holiday but the tabloid would gain more sales by showing the picture of the celebrity's bottom.

- v) For the culmination of this work, two volunteers will take on the roles of the two celebrities and the other students will become a press conference. One actor will go with each "celebrity" and talk to them about how they might want to present themselves, what issues, if any, they might want to promote and how they might handle the members of the media present. For example the Kylie-like "celebrity" might want to make sure she was looking her best, might want to answer questions about her good works for charity or anti-aging programme and might try to be charming and smiling for the media. The Ms Dynamite-like "celebrity" might be more informal about her look, might want to answer questions about current affairs or human rights issues and might be more imposing and less eager to please the media present. The remaining actor separates the "press conference" into those representing television news, those representing the music press and those representing the tabloid press. This actor talks through with each group what kind of questions they might want to ask, which celebrity they might be more interested in and whether they like both equally.
- vi) The "press conference" is then held two ways. The first way is with the "press" all trying to ask their questions at once. When one of the actors signal, the "press" freeze and the "celebrity" answers the question that they think the real life celebrity would be most comfortable with. The second way is that the "press" ask a few questions one at a time and the "celebrity" has to answer each as they think the real life celebrity would. As well as using drama techniques to explore issues and interests in role-play, this exercise shows the different approaches taken by different sorts of media, both to stories and to celebrities. It also demonstrates the ways in

which celebrities can promote themselves and certain causes or concerns through the media and how the media can influence our perception of an artist through its reporting, whether biased or objective.

- vii) The session ends with a short discussion reviewing the workshop, tying in the purpose of each exercise as outlined above and hearing comments and questions from the students.

After the session, the students should have some understanding of the different types of media and how and why their coverage, audience, styles and language can differ. They will also be aware that a range of opinions and interpretations exist and that this affects the media as well as individuals. As we will discuss with the students, this can mean that not all coverage of an artist, issue or event will offer a balance of views and that the media can be biased. This fact will be used to stress, however, how important a role the media has in objectivity and in raising awareness of diversity and equality, not just in music but in society as a whole.