Dr Vanessa Tomlinson

Head of Percussion

My name’s Vanessa Tomlinson and since 2003, I’ve been lucky enough to be the head of percussion here at the Queensland Conservatorium. I have also been lucky enough to be wondering all of those years, what percussion is. Where most instruments have a single object which is an instrument like the violin, the trumpet, the flute, percussion changes on a daily basis. In fact when I walk into my studios every day, they are rearranged in completely differently ways. Timpani, marimba’s, vibraphones is one group of instruments, but then we might also have brake drums from cars, chains, water buckets. In fact anything that you can hit, shake, scrape, becomes a percussion instrument. Or as I like to think, anything that no one else actually wants to play.

So you can see that the fun is happening in the percussion department. We reference jazz music, world music, pop music, classical music, improvisation experimental music and the link between all of these things to me is the way in which we listen. Learning to listen is elemental to playing percussion. Once you can hear sound, hear variation in sound, interest in sound, intrigue, then you can start to get excited about making your own sounds. And once you’re on the journey, you’re not only making your own sounds, you’re making your own music.

Graduates from the percussion department are all over the country and the world studying and performing in orchestras, as session musicians, teaching and I hope they bring some of this open minded inspiration to all of their crafts that they are engaged in.

If there is one thing that defines this percussion department, I would say it's an open and accessible attitude to whatever is required of them and I hope that I can provide them with those skills during the years that they study at the conservatorium.