

# Bass in the Attic

## Empowering communities to research and record themselves

'Bass in the Attic' in 2017 was an experiment – the creation and communication of two events, one targeting a younger age group and one aimed at an older demographic, to bring the story, aims and ideas of the Black Music Research Unit to new audiences.

Collaborating with the Black Cultural Archives, the project team at the Black Music Research Unit wanted to explore the concept of a living archive and find the best way to attract community audiences to explore existing collections, facilitate conversations about past and present musical experiences, and encourage them to contribute and share material.

Conversations at both events proved fruitful in developing a methodology using language and images, and the project team used this in the marketing and curation of their exhibition in 2018. 'Bass Culture Expo 2018: The Culture' was a multi-media experience of photography, painting, music, and film that ran for four weeks in London and explored the impact of Jamaican and Jamaican-influenced music on British culture. Marking 70 years since Windrush and 50 years of reggae music, the exhibition also featured 60 oral testimonies recorded on film, live performances, and a collaborative catwalk that reflected on five decades of music-inspired fashion.

The exhibition was a huge success, and project team discovered that spontaneous community-led tours of the exhibition were taking place, creating a sense of ownership and engagement that they could not have predicted. 'Bass Culture' was shortlisted in the 'Research Project of the Year: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences' category of the Times Higher Education Awards 2021, and the audio from the testimonies in the exhibition forms part of the Bass Culture UK podcast, listed in the Guardian in 2021 as one of the top five great Black British podcasts.

Mykaell Riley then used the methodology developed through the Being Human events in his role as Consultant on the Brent Borough of Culture programme in 2020, training the community to use their mobile phones to capture over 100 interviews and oral testimonies that are now part of the 'No Bass Like Home' resource.

The project team is now working with the British Library and National Sound archive to develop the first national exhibition about Black British Music, which will draw from 12 collections within the library and is scheduled for 2024. The exhibition will be part of the Living Knowledge Network, a UK-wide partnership of 650 national and public libraries, and will engage international students through the Eccles Centre in the British Library. Part of the project development will include educating the AI for searches, thinking about how searching and indexing works and how technology is helping and hindering the archive and profile process.



### People:

- [Mykaell Riley](#), Director for the Black Music Research Unit and Principal Investigator for Bass Culture Research, University of Westminster

### Institution:

- [University of Westminster](#)

### Partners:

- [Black Cultural Archives](#)
- [The British Library](#)
- National Sound Archive

### Area:

- London

### Being Human Festival year:

- Lost and Found, 2017

### Learn more:

- [Black Music Research Unit](#)
- [No Bass Like Home](#)

“ The Being Human event allowed us to explore, develop, and confirm our methodology which was then used within the delivery of key components of the Bass Culture Project... success with Being Human resonates around the project and helps galvanise support, interest, curiosity and profile.

– Mykaell Riley