



ROLE MODELS FOR THE FUTURE

A.

In 2020, Spanish singer-songwriter Rosalía Vila Tobella won a GRAMMY® award for her second album, *El Mal Querer* (translated as 'Toxic Love'). Her fusion of flamenco with urban styles, including pop, hip hop and trap, showcased something refreshingly different in the music industry, gaining her not only an adoring international fan base but also collaborations with established recording artists such as Billie Eilish, who she won an MTV award with in 2021 for *Lo Vas a Olvidar* ('You'll Forget It'). Composing, writing, arranging and producing all of her own songs are some of the ways that Rosalía hasn't stopped innovating. Another point of difference from some of her contemporaries is that the message of female empowerment in her song lyrics helps to inspire women to take control of their lives and to seek healthy, non-toxic relationships. This is reinforced by the fact that she works with a women-led team – something that is rare in the male-dominated music world. She is also breaking down language barriers by recording almost all her songs in her native Spanish and Catalan. Although Rosalía's powerful music is now played around the world, her beginnings were much humbler, starting from scratch and singing without a mic in weddings and restaurants, but she has retained both a hard-edged reality and a floral element in her video clips and imagery which reminds her of the industrialised town in the countryside where she grew up.

B.

With over 30 World and Olympic medals, gymnastics superstar Simone Biles is the most-decorated US female gymnast ever. Although she is accustomed to breaking records, Simone made headlines for a different reason following her decision to withdraw from several event finals in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. After winning

four gold medals and a bronze in the Rio Games, Simone had been expected to bag several more medals in Tokyo. Her shock announcement came after she had difficulty performing a vault, usually one of her best events. She explained that she had suffered a mental block, temporarily losing her sense of where she was while in the air – something that can cause a gymnast to lose their sense of spatial awareness, making the manoeuvre extremely dangerous. In a statement, Simone explained that she was pulling out because she needed to stop to protect her physical and mental well-being. Although some labelled her a 'failure', surprisingly, Simone was widely praised for her openness. However, when it was then announced that Simone was to take part in the beam event (in which she went on to win a bronze medal), the true extent of her bravery became apparent. By highlighting the pressures that athletes face, promoting safe and healthy training conditions for sportsmen and women and shining a light on the topic of mental health, Simone Biles has, arguably, achieved more than winning medals, providing a lesson in leadership and courage that shows why she is a role model for so many.

C.

One inspirational figure acknowledged for his remarkable humanitarian work is Ugandan Brian Gitta. As Gitta explains in a recent TEDx Talk, although malaria is treatable, many deaths still occur because obtaining a fast diagnosis is easy to say but hard to get. In many countries, clinics do not have sufficient numbers of specialist staff nor the equipment necessary to carry out detailed analysis of blood samples on large numbers of patients in a timely manner. It may involve waiting in long queues, and a full microscopic analysis is not a quick process. Brian felt there must be a more effective way to carry out the diagnosis and applied his software engineering training to streamline the process and started experimenting with various prototypes to design an invention that uses light and magnetism to test for malaria, and would not require a specialist to operate.

It would be a mistake to assume this was straightforward, however. Finding a working solution took Gitta back to the drawing board several times, but Brian refused to give up and finally managed to build a device that could quickly and inexpensively provide an accurate diagnosis for malaria. Brian went on to win a prize for his invention, and trials in hospitals are already proving that the device may be a game-changer when it comes to saving lives.

D.

American musician and activist Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, sometimes known as 'X', is a powerful voice in the campaign for climate action who, inspired by his mother Tamara Roske, began campaigning at the age of six. At 15, he addressed world leaders at the United Nations in English, Spanish, and his native language, Nahuatl. Since becoming the global youth director of the organisation Earth Guardians, he regularly speaks at rallies and university campuses across the US, and shares his experiences on social media. As a hip-hop artist, he uses rap, music and storytelling to get his message across, including joining forces with Jaden Smith to record a song about the power of music to promote action against climate change. As well as using his music to highlight environmental issues and inspire young people to take part in environmental activism, Xiuhtezcatl has directly campaigned against key figures who, he feels, have fallen short in tackling climate change. He and other young environmentalists even used the justice system to try to change legislation that they believe threatened sound environmental policies. His work was recognised when he won a 'Generation Change Award' at the MTV Europe Music Awards and appeared as a panelist at the *Inspiring and Defining Everyday Activism* event. Undoubtedly a name to remember, Xiuhtezcatl's drive and self-belief make him a substantial figure in a cause worth fighting for.