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Music, musicians and careers

Dawn Bennett, Angela Beeching, Rosie Burt-Perkins, Glen Carruthers, Janis Weller

What has changed?

Why do today's musicians have to work in multiple roles? What happened to all the performance jobs? What has changed? As a quick look at history will show, very little. Musicians in the Middle Ages often worked as town watchmen, warning people of impending danger or ringing the church bells as required. They trained apprentices and provided musical entertainment, working with different groups of musicians and catering for the tastes of various audiences. From the twelfth century, musicians' guilds protected the rights and incomes of their members. Despite Guild membership, however, the salaries of musicians employed at court or within the church rarely covered basic living costs and so musicians would seek freelance work performing for weddings and other social occasions. Musicians also worked as scribes, servants and teachers. Some even worked as spies, taking information from place to place and selling it to the highest bidder (admittedly, perhaps this has changed somewhat). The itinerant (travelling) musicians had the worst deal: not welcome in the musicians' Guild, they were often paid in the form of gifts rather than with money.

In the fourteenth century, much more work became available for musicians within the court system and the church. In rare cases, civic (town) musicians were lucky enough to be appointed for life and they achieved a higher social status than musicians had ever enjoyed before. Moving on to the seventeenth century, musicians often worked as school music directors, organists, scribes or performance musicians within a court or municipality, or in the military.

In the eighteenth century, ecclesiastical and court control lessened and the concert orchestra emerged. Noblemen kept their own court orchestras and provided increased employment. However, only the superstars earned significant amounts of money. Most performing musicians augmented their salaries with a variety of work including teaching and freelancing. Telemann, for example, supplemented his role as church director by producing concerts, serving on committees and composing the music for weddings and other events.

In the nineteenth century there were less court appointments and many musicians sought patronage or set up businesses in publishing or the retail trade. Concerts became commercial ventures needing to make a profit, with musicians often at the centre of the concert organisation. At the same time, virtuoso performers combined entrepreneurship with superb performance skills to create lucrative careers. Chopin, Liszt, Beethoven, Schubert, Paganini, Brahms and Berlioz all built sustainable freelance careers. Brahms earned most of his living as a freelance editor and arranger, whilst Paganini left a secure court position with the sister of Napoleon Bonaparte to freelance around Europe. And so we can see that musicians have historically been creatively forging diverse careers in order to remain ‘in business’.

This book offers an international journey complete with case studies of musicians to share with students and vivid descriptions of opportunities available in different parts of the world. Each chapter was written individually and readers may wish to turn specifically to one topic or one country; however the connections among chapters are designed to inform a broad view of music practice. Our goal is to help academic readers stimulate reflective and expansive thinking, and the communication of a holistic, inclusive view of what it is to be a successful musician.

How to use this book

What is in this for you? As you read this, you may be in a position to guide students and graduates through a variety of career options or you may be considering your own career. Perhaps both. With information and resources from around the world, the book offers a range of approaches and perspectives on essential career issues facing today's musicians. It contains practical information and tips alongside broader, more philosophical questions for readers to consider, because the 'big picture' issues are relevant to every musician.

What teachers teach and how they teach it, and what musicians study and how they study it, is very different today than even twenty years ago. Similarly, what is expected of performers—how they contribute to the musical life of their communities, how they reach larger and broader audiences, how entrepreneurial skills factor into their career success, how technology enables them to reach a worldwide public—has altered what they do on a daily basis and over the course of a lifelong career. Other than hard work, about the only constant in the lives of musicians is certain change and flux. Community, democracy and identity are three important issues that shape our careers as performers and influence our identities as musicians. These issues arise again and again throughout this book, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. Graduating students need to be aware of these issues and they need to understand their impact as their careers unfold.

Music crosses international boundaries, and technology has made it easy for musicians to find niche audiences worldwide. In response, *Life in the Real World* is a window on the world of the classically trained musician. Writing from the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London, Rosie Burt-Perkins reminds us of just how global the music profession has become. Students from over forty-five countries study at the RCM with teachers from all over the world. Teachers juggle protean careers that take them all over the world. Likewise, research takes music academics to conferences in Europe, the US and beyond. An awareness of where

the jobs are, travel opportunities and international collaboration are essential to the aspiring musician.

While many training opportunities for musicians are clustered around centres of excellence, the jobs most certainly are not. The chances are that musicians will travel either for training or for work. Hence the chapters draw from each author's location to provide expert advice on how to navigate the music profession in multiple locations. Whilst it is not possible to cover all major centres, readers will note the common elements of life as a musician, many of which can be applied well beyond the scope of our examples.

The mobility of musicians has never been higher; one has only to look at the careers of conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle or performers such as Natalie Klein to see that it really is a global market. What better way to prepare young musicians than to understand the issues, opportunities and quirks of locations from around the globe.

The structure of the book

Success as a musician is most often painted as a successful performance career, yet this is the reality for few graduates. In chapter two, Rosie Burt-Perkins rethinks 'career' for music students by describing how students carve their identities and adapt their expectations as they move towards full participation in the professional world. Indeed, identity is the pervasive theme of the volume. Alongside the characteristics and opportunities for practice in the UK, the author draws on findings from the Learning to Perform project, which tracked students for three years as they prepared for a professional career in music.

Angela Beeching considers in chapter three how the career opportunities of today's music students differ from those of their teachers. She asks what success looks and sounds like for today's musicians and what characteristics and skills are needed to succeed. Beeching's chapter offers perspective on these and other questions from an American standpoint. To

frame the issues, the chapter addresses career goals and training, arts economy, supply and demand, entrepreneurship and the size and scope of the US music industry. Written by a veteran music career counsellor at the New England Conservatory, one of the top US music schools, this chapter also provides practical information for musicians curious about study and work in the US.

‘Luck favors the prepared mind’, said Louis Pasteur. As music students approach the end of formal schooling and the beginning of professional life there are numerous ways in which graduates can enhance their chances for good luck. The *Life in the Real World* chapters illustrate that successful professional life requires a wide range of integrated skills beyond the purely musical to include an entrepreneurial mindset. Of course, there is no magic formula for getting started or sustaining a rewarding career over time. Clear-headed self-awareness, a flexible and adaptable outlook, a developing savvy for the music world as a whole and the interpersonal skills to pull it all together are vital for musicians to build a sustainable practice.

In chapter four, Janis Weller addresses some strategies for creating Pasteur’s prepared luck. Weller focuses on ways young musicians can prepare for this exciting but perhaps undefined transition from a virtually life-long identity as ‘student’ to the emerging identity of ‘professional’. It addresses both reflective and practical methods to help prepare students for the move from the comfortable familiarity of student life where structure is provided, expectations are clear and efforts are rewarded directly, to the vast, uncertain world of musicians’ work. Like the musicians of the past, new graduates need to generate many work opportunities for themselves. They must create both short term and long term strategies and implement them on the fly, often with little outside guidance. The good news is that there are tremendous opportunities and room for growth for the aspiring professional who is aware, prepared, curious, hard working and, yes, a little lucky.

A recurring theme throughout this book is that a clear self-image and an emerging professional identity are essential attributes for graduates seeking to apply their knowledge to the development of a sustainable career. Underpinning this are the core skills and attributes that make graduates career ready, and these form the focus of chapter five. Writing from Australia, Dawn Bennett illustrates that roles beyond performance and beyond music can be valuable and satisfying aspects of musicians' careers: aspects that would often not be traded for additional performance work. Ultimately, intrinsic satisfaction and both personal and professional goals frame the decision-making process for musicians, most of whom engage in protean careers such as those featured throughout the book.

Protean careerists, so-named after the mythical sea-god Proteus who could change form at will, self-manage their careers and measure their success on intrinsic career satisfaction and the achievement of personal and professional goals. The adjective 'protean' has come to mean versatile, flexible and adaptable. Accordingly, the protean musician is one who does not limit his or her activities, but rather forges a career from diverse activities in music and is able to take advantage of new opportunities when they appear. For a musician, Bennett argues, the skills essential for sustaining such a career in music include those in performance, teaching, communication, technology and small business. Aligned with these skills, a most important attribute is a willingness to keep learning.

A musician cannot be defined as simply a performer; a musician is someone who works within the profession of music in one or more specialist fields. The perception of a musician as a multi-skilled professional working within a protean career exposes the considerable potential for diverse rewards. And it is this element that is exposed in the five musician case studies that accompany the chapter. Far from being a fallback option, the musicians demonstrate that protean careers in music are both normal and desired.

Glen Carruthers, writing from a Canadian perspective, places musicians in a wide social context. As he demonstrates in chapter six, the roles and responsibilities associated with this have changed regularly, but did so most dramatically as we approached the end of the twentieth century. Once society expects something different from its musicians, music students and the institutions that teach them need to respond. This chapter invites consideration of some of these changes. Carruthers surveys education and training trends in Canada, gives an overview of music consumption and production and provides a picture of the Canadian job market. He also discusses traditional careers for classically trained performers—playing in orchestras and teaching in universities—from the standpoint of career expectations. The chapter ends with an example of a ‘post-modern’ career in music.

Despite the size and density of the European music sector, musicians in Europe face all of the changes discussed so far and they are witnessing change at an ever-increasing pace. As Rineke Smilde explains in chapter seven, professional musicians in Europe are confronted with questions of how to function flexibly in order to exploit opportunities in new and rapidly changing cultural contexts. The chapter gives an overview of trends and changes in the European music profession and what these mean for professional musicians. The chapter explores ways in which European higher music education reflects the challenges of these realities in light of new European educational policies and musicians’ international mobility. The author addresses the impact of these changes for future professional musicians, drawing on examples of biographical research into musicians’ lifelong learning skills and attitudes. The emphasis of the chapter is on the different roles of musicians within protean careers that demand musicians to function as entrepreneurs, managing overlapping activities in myriad areas of practice.

In the final chapter, Michael Hannan conveys a serious message with an often light-hearted and personal account of life as a protean careerist in music. The chapter charts a career

involving piano accompanying, music copying, composing for advertising, playing in rock bands, studying musicology, teaching music in a variety of contexts, writing for an arts magazine, working as a music lexicographer, playing in ensembles from other musical cultures and, finally, developing a degree program that trains contemporary musicians for the music industry. Hannan reflects on the formal and informal learning processes that enable the development of new skills, and outlines the development of business and communication skills essential for career progression.

The outstanding harpsichordist Wanda Landowska once said: “the most beautiful thing in the world ... is precisely the conjunction of learning and inspiration” (in Sachs, p. 144). One of the difficulties facing educators and mentors is encouraging students to consider what inspires them, and the role this could play within their futures – to plan lives, not just careers, in music. We hope that the many musician profiles, reflections, exercises and questions prove thought provoking and inspiring to our readers, and we welcome your contributions and feedback for inclusion in our future work.

Sachs, H. (1982). *Virtuoso*. Bath: The Pitman Press.