

LEARNING MUSIC IN FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTEXTS

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1. Introduction: Lifelong Learning and the Music Profession

In her research approach of the lectorate *Lifelong Learning in Music*, Rineke Smilde, head of the lectorate, makes the following remarks on the changes in the musical profession and the consequences of these changes for the education of future professional musicians:

Today's musicians face major changes in the work-place, changes that are taking place at an ever-increasing pace. This results amongst other things in a career consisting of several successive, brief and/or part-time periods of employment, in which one can encounter different disciplines as well (portfolio career). More than ever before, the future professional musician is confronted with questions of how to function in new contexts and how to function adequately in a continuously changing professional practice (Smilde, 2004, p.5).

The student/graduate is well trained as a musician, is able to reflect on his own abilities and thus knows his strengths and weaknesses. He has the skills and the flexibility to explore new roads and find new possibilities. He has a reflecting and pro-active attitude (Smilde, 2004, p. 7).

Given the many unpredictable and changeable issues arising in the music profession today, young professionals cannot be expected to have a ready made answer to everything. It is far more useful if they acquire the skills to find out the answer for themselves.

The challenge facing education and vocational training is to equip people not only with the ability to adapt to change, but also with the ability to shape the direction of change. Laying the foundation for learning later in life should be a major objective of initial education.

Developing education and training within a framework where lifelong learning is seen as the overarching concept (Wurzburg 2002). In terms of content, it would encourage the provision of key skills and a broad competence base, interdisciplinary approaches, as well as the ability for individuals to learn in an autonomous and creative manner. In terms of learning processes, it would imply adapting them to individuals' needs and reformulating the teacher/ learner relation as an active interaction promoted by support, counselling and guidance services to facilitate the creative use of knowledge. In terms of outcomes, it implies the need to develop possibilities for greater visibility, validation and mutual recognition of the learning outcomes achieved in all three learning settings: formal, non-formal and informal. (Fragoulis, 2002).

Having excellent musical performance skills is no longer a guarantee for finding a job or holding it. Generic skills are equally important because these skills enable musical professionals to be adaptive, enterprising and performative, to meet the demands of today's music business. Common elements of various listings of generic skills are:

- basic/fundamental skills - such as literacy, using numbers, using technology;
- people-related skills - such as communication, interpersonal, teamwork, customer-service skills;
- conceptual/thinking skills - such as collecting and organising information, problem-solving, planning and organising, learning-to-learn skills, thinking innovatively and creatively, systems thinking;
- personal skills and attributes - such as being responsible, resourceful, flexible, able to manage own time, having self-esteem;
- skills related to the business world - such as innovation skills, enterprise skills;
- skills related to the community - such as civic or citizenship knowledge and skills (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr2102b.pdf>).

These skills cannot be acquired solely between the walls of the conservatoire (in a formal learning context). Incorporation of learning contexts which resemble the different real professional situations is a necessity in achieving this goal; situations in which students have to learn to act adequately to the conditions at the present moment.

In this article I explore the various learning contexts (conservatoire, workplace and self initiated learning) which are relevant for the training of professional musicians as lifelong learners. The learning contexts will be distinguished from each other in terms of definition, learning and teaching tactics, and learning outcomes. Special attention is paid to the kinds of learning processes and outcomes that takes place within in these various contexts. Subsequently I will indicate how the various learning contexts can be interrelated for the benefit of the training of professional musicians.

2. Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning: a Conceptual Analysis

Before going deeper into this subject matter the following crucial terms have to be defined briefly first. *Formal*, *non-formal* and *informal learning* all deal with the question of who controls the learning process - the teacher, the student or both - and, to a lesser extent, with the question of what kind of environment the learning takes place - outside or within the conservatoire. Folkestad (2006) makes a distinction between formal and informal situations or *practices* on the one hand and formal and informal ways of *learning* on the other hand. Formal education is linked with schools and training institutions, from lower primary schools to the upper reaches of university. Non-formal learning is linked with community groups and other organizations, “covering highly contextualized, highly participatory educational activities”. Informal covers what is left, e.g. interaction with friends, family and colleagues (Rogers, 2004). The kinds of learning within these contexts are *intentional* (purposeful learning) and *incidental learning* (learning as a by-product of doing). The learning outcomes are *explicit* (the student can verbalize what he knows) and *implicit* (the student acts adequately in the situation he is in, without being able to explain why and how).

Related to this issue of definition Rogers makes the following interesting remarks:

Lifelong learning/education sees learning as taking place not simply in schools and colleges but throughout the Whole of life, in many different locations and times. Lifelong learning speaks of education (formal and non-formal¹). With the increasing diversity of formal education it is no longer clear what is not included under the rubric of formal education. What about distance learning, e-learning, or private commercial educational learning? Where does formal end and non-formal begin? (Rogers, 2004)

In this article I will try to refine the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal learning, adjusted to the question of who controls the learning process, in what kind of learning environment the learning takes place, and what learning outcomes are valued.

2.1 *Formal Learning*

Formal Learning is learning that:

- occurs within an organized and structured context (within the conservatoire), that is explicitly designated as learning;
- is curriculum-bound, teacher-driven or at least teacher-initiated: ‘what’ and ‘how’ to learn and teach is pre-described (Boeckaerts and Minnaert, 1999);
- expects students to remain on-task regardless of the value they attach to the task, their motivation or interest;
- relates to intentional learning and explicit knowledge (knowledge that can be verbalized and skills that can be demonstrated at request). Incidental learning and implicit knowledge (unintended learning results) are not formally recognized;
- regards the teacher as all-knowing and students as ignorant (empty vessels that have to be filled with knowledge);
- aims at the acquisition of relevant musical competencies that are specific for the core business of the musical profession;
- is structured in 1st cycle studies (e.g. Bachelor) and 2nd cycle studies (Master) programme, which include major/minor components;
- is credential-based and leads to a formal recognition;
- requires specific entry competencies from students.

Learning and teaching

Learning is primarily intentional: the aims (what to learn), the learning tactics (how to learn) and the performance levels (when is it sufficient) are specified. The learning process is, especially in the first cycle, primarily teacher-directed, and the instruction is given by qualified teachers or mentors.

Outcomes

Assessment is related to intentional learning and explicit knowledge. Incidental learning and implicit knowledge are not formally recognized.

¹ In Roger’s definition non-formal learning includes informal learning.

2.2 *Informal learning*

Informal Learning is learning that:

- is described as active, voluntary, self-discovering, self-determined, open-ended, non-threatening, enjoyable and explorative;
- relates to a number of self-regulated processes spontaneously, such as self-initiating learning and self-monitoring their progress;
- makes an explicit appeal to intrinsic motivation (which in itself facilitates self-regulatory processes);
- is mostly embedded in a social context, meaning that social cues are highly relevant and that students engage in cooperative learning activities (Bjornavold, 2002);
- is directed, and mediated by peers who often share the same values, interests and beliefs;
- utilizes (realistic) objects, materials or settings that are highly contextualized;
- is more qualitative than quantitative, more process-oriented than product-oriented, more synthetic than analytic, and more flow-driven;
- is unhurried in nature, self-paced and open-ended with relatively few time constraints;
- is not compulsory, lacks individual testing- or assessment procedure, but is based on a collective, informal type of assessment or self-assessment, based on feedback;
- is not curriculum based: learning that is not structured in terms of formally described learning objectives;
- goals which tend to be broader, resulting in considerable variability in what is learned (Boekaerts & Minnaert, 1999).

Learning and teaching

‘By ‘informal music learning’ I mean a variety of approaches to acquiring musical skills and knowledge outside formal educational settings. I will in general terms refer to informal music learning as a set of ‘practices’, rather than ‘methods’. Informal music practices may be both conscious and unconscious. They include encountering unsought learning experiences through enculturation in the musical environment; learning through interaction with others such as peers, family, or other musicians who are not acting as teachers in formal capacities; and developing independent learning methods through self-teaching techniques (Green, 2002, p. 16).

Musicians working in the field of classical music learn a lot from talking and working with colleagues in the professional field. The culture of the professions that classical musicians are traditionally working in (orchestras, music schools) is often very directive and has strong implicit standards about how to behave (Price, 2002).

Outcomes

Learning can be *intentional* (but not teacher-directed) as well as *incidental*.

Young popular musicians largely teach themselves to play music, through processes of skill and knowledge acquisition that are both conscious and unconscious. One central early learning

practice is solitary and involves purposive and attentive listening linked to the close copying of recordings, as well as more distracted listening leading to close imitation and improvisatory adaptation. The written is always secondary to the aural. Another central practice involves learning from each other in pairs and groups, through casual encounters and organized sessions, both aside from and during music-making. Through such interaction they copy and exchange ideas, knowledge and techniques, learn to play together, including making covers, improvisations and compositions, of original music (Green, 2002, p. 97).

The learning results can be implicit as well as explicit. It doesn't lead to a qualification but it can be recognised within a formal context (see under definition of informal learning). Musicians working in the field of classical music are constantly expanding their repertoire by choosing and practicing new pieces of music by themselves. By this they not only learn new repertoire but they also improve their practice routines (by learning to cope with deadlines for instance).

2.3 *Non-Formal Learning*

Non-formal Learning is learning that:

- is embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning but that contain an important learning element, what is sometimes described as semi-structured learning (Collardyn, 2002);
- refers to any organised educational activity that takes place outside the established formal education system (outside of the conservatoire);
- is highly contextualised, intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and objectives (www.infed.org);
- is based on a curriculum that is tailor-made, adapted to the needs of the learner group (Rogers, 2004);
- is based on a curriculum that is flexible signifying that the structure is non-linear and bottom up;
- can be characterized as 'learning by doing' and 'learning on the job';
- depends strongly on reflection ('in' and 'on' action) fostered by an expert in the field, acting as a mentor: helping students/apprentices to transform experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and convictions;
- is fostered by self assessment and peer assessment.

Learning and teaching

Learning is intentional as well as incidental. The focus here is on learning by doing. Learning from fellow students/participants is as important as learning from a teacher or mentor. Coaching is the dominant teaching tactic in this context. Coaches don't always have to be qualified music teachers; musical experts and other experts related to the professional field (staff members of orchestras and music schools etc.) can be involved too. First and foremost they have to be very good reflective practitioners.

Outcomes

Incidental learning outcomes are as much valued as intentional learning outcomes. Reflection is a powerful means to learn from experience, to make explicit what is acquired implicit, to transform experiences into knowledge, skills, attitudes, emotions, beliefs and the senses.

3. Learning Context and the Training of Professional Musicians

In a *formal learning context* learning is abstracted from real life contexts (de-contextualized). The learning results are skills and knowledge which are meant to be applicable in various life/professional contexts. The curriculum is hierarchic: elementary skills and knowledge are acquired first on which more complex forms are built. In universities of higher vocational education emphasis in formal training is put on the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are directly related to mastering the trade (e.g. mastering the violin). The kind of learning that is focused on is highly intentional. The student knows what to learn and how to learn (study routines), and what will be assessed (and how). Motivation often drops if students don't see the connection between what has to be learned and the personal or professional benefit of that learning. The learning results that are assessed and formally recognized are of an explicit nature. Assessment is more focused on a product than on a process. Qualified teachers are responsible for the training process. Formal learning is related to initial education in higher vocational education contexts, a long (more than one year) and intensive (mostly full time) training, preparing students for entering the profession.

In an *informal learning context* the learning context is 'real life' without interference of any kind of educational authority. It involves all learning without a (qualified) teacher. All aspects of learning – what to learn, how to learn and for how long – are controlled by the individual learner. Learning is strongly motivated and directed by personal needs.

In music informal learning takes place when musicians work together. Preparing the performance is the central objective of working together, learning is secondary. Listening to each other, imitating others and asking questions are important learning tactics in such a context. Learning itself can be highly intentional (the individual wants to master a particular song or technique) as well as incidental (becoming familiar with a particular style of music by playing examples of this style). The learning outcomes are often more implicit than explicit. Reflection on what is learned is optional and often limited. The acquired knowledge and skills are highly applicable to the context in which they have been learned, transference to less similar contexts is often problematic and requires intensive practice. Popular musicians who are highly skilful in playing within a particular style of music, have great difficulty in making use of their knowledge and skills in performing music of a not-familiar style. Recordings, peers and experts (not in a teaching role) act as models for learning. Assessment of learning is highly personal and mostly product related (fitting the purpose of learning within the specific context). Learning outcomes in an informal learning context need not lead to a diploma or a certificate.

In a *non-formal learning context* learning is related to, and often situated in, a real life (professional) context. The skills, knowledge and attitudes that are learned have a high

practical value and can only be acquired on the working spot or directly applied in the working situation. The context in which the student has to act and to learn is complex and requires not only knowing *that* (facts, skills) but also knowing *how* to act (decision making). The focus here is more on learning by doing than learning from books or instructions. Performativity (utility) will be a major criterion in the legitimation of knowledge, which is experimental, practical and pragmatic. Reflection is a powerful means for operating successfully in these complex situations and learning from it. Schön (1983) makes a distinction between 'reflection-on-action' and 'reflection-in-action'. 'Reflection-on-action' entails adopting a critical perspective about the reasons and consequences of what we do in different contexts. It functions to help practitioners evaluate, research and improve practice at the same time. 'Reflection-in-action' focuses on the quality of listening, attention and awareness that enables processes and performance to be monitored and modified from the inside in the moment of action. 'Our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing' (Schön, 1987, p. 26). Implicit knowledge as a result of learning by doing is conditional for reflecting on these real life experiences and for making this kind of knowledge explicit. This making explicit is conditional for transferring this knowledge to other more or less similar instances. Assessment is focused as much on the product (what did the student learn) as on the process (how did the student learn) of learning. In non-formal learning contexts the teacher is not always a qualified teacher. Because not only musical knowledge and skills are relevant in a professional situation, the teacher in a non-formal musical learning context can be a musical as well as another expert in the working field. Learning from fellow students is an important aspect too. Motivation is less of a problem because learning itself takes place within the context of the musical profession. In the context of training (future) professional musicians non-formal learning is related to programmes of professional integration (work placement) and to programmes of continuing professional development. The training takes less than one year (often much shorter) and often can be attended part time. The outcomes can lead to the acquisition of a formally recognised diploma, but often a certificate is handed over as well.

4. Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning and the Training of Professional Musicians

Earlier in this article I stated that the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal learning are primarily related to ways of learning (teacher regulated or student regulated) and secondary to the context in which learning takes place (in the conservatoire or outside the conservatoire). In figure 1 the ways of learning are depicted in a frame which is formed by these dimensions. To be clear, I speak about formal, non-formal and informal learning in the context of training (future) professional musicians with whom the conservatoire is involved. Formal, non-formal and informal learning in music can take place as well outside the conservatoire and/or the workplace.

Figure 1 *Two dimensional frame of organising learning*

	Teacher regulated Learning		
Within the Conservatoire	Formal Learning	Non-formal Learning	Outside the Conservatoire
	Informal Learning	Informal Learning	
	Student regulated Learning		

As can be read from this figure, informal learning can take place outside as well as within the context of the school (conservatoire). Formal and non-formal learning are more related to context (within the conservatoire and outside the conservatoire) than informal learning, which can happen in both contexts. However clear boundaries between formal, non-formal and informal learning are difficult to draw. Rogers made the remark: *Where does formal end and non-formal (read informal) begin?* (Rogers, 2004.) In their report on non-formal learning Collison, Hodkins and Malcolm observe that boundaries or relationships between informal, non-formal and formal learning can only be understood within particular contexts (Collison, Hodkins & Malcolm, 2002). In all or nearly all situations where learning takes place, elements of both formal and informal learning are present. They conclude that it is often more helpful to examine dimensions of formality and informality, and ways in which they inter-relate with each other. In figure 2 the interrelations become clear when we focus on learning outcomes and activities.

Figure 2: *Learning outcomes and activities specified within a two dimensional frame of learning environments*

	Teacher regulated Learning		
W I T H I N T H E C O N S E R V A T O I R E	I Formal Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - musical (performance, teaching and entrepreneurial) skills and knowledge - practice skills - learning from books/by imitation - planned and structured (by the teacher) - predominantly individual - intentional - explicit knowledge - internship (with teacher) - school concerts - school projects - summative assessment - learning is applicable in a range of contexts 	II Non-formal Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - context specific musical skills and knowledge - generic skills - learning by doing, experiential learning (learning is primary) - reflecting in and on practice (with a coach or mentor and peers) - semi planned and structured - predominantly communal - intentional - implicit knowledge and (emerging) explicit knowledge - internship (with coach) - concerts (with coach) - community projects (with coach) - predominantly professional integration - formative and summative assessment - learning is applicable in a limited range of contexts 	O U T S I D E T H E C O N S E R V A T O I R E
	III Informal Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - writing papers, giving lectures, organising (school) concerts and projects - performance or teaching based research - planned and structured (by the student) and unplanned - explicit and implicit knowledge - predominantly individual - predominantly professional development - summative and formative assessment - learning is applicable in a limited range of contexts 	IV Informal Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learning by doing (learning is secondary) - unplanned and planned - organic and evolving - predominantly collaborative and collegial - taking the lead in one's professional and personal development - no assessment / self assessment - learning is context specific 	
	Student regulated Learning		

In formal learning (section I) learning situations are predominantly controlled by the curriculum of the conservatoire and regulated by the teacher. The student follows the teacher's instructions. In non-formal learning situations (section II) the student's learning is planned too, but less by the teacher and more by the coach (someone from the working place). So an internship can be a formal learning activity when it is predominantly controlled by the conservatoire (objectives, content, assessment). If the conservatoire makes an agreement with the working place institution on the objectives, the contents, the coaching and the assessment of the internship, we speak about a non-formal learning situation. The non-formal character of

the internship increases if the conservatoire and workplace organisations share responsibility for the education of the student. In section III (informal learning within the conservatoire) the learning is predominantly regulated by the student. In this context it is the student who plans his own learning. The formal learning tactics handed over in formal learning situations are spontaneously applied by the student and related to the context of the task.

An important task of the conservatoire is making their students independent (informal) learners, who are able to control their own learning. To assess the learning outcomes related to independent learning, students have to perform informal learning tasks within a formal setting (as part of the formal curriculum). The outcomes of the learning activities in this section vary from independent application of appropriate learning tactics in tasks more or less similar to previous learned ones, to expanding the knowledge base of the profession. An example of the first is the student who is able to write independently (and correctly) the bowing indications in a new score he has to practice. To write a paper on how to teach young children a bowing technique, based on literature research and own teaching experiences, is an example of the second. In section IV (informal learning outside the conservatoire) students, the conservatoire and the (involved) working partners are at least equal partners in learning. In this section the focus is on the further development of the profession. Research questions can be formulated by working place partners, the conservatoire and students. Here the conservatoire functions as a knowledge- and (artistic) research institute, together with partners from the workplace. Students from the first and second cycle take part in a learning community, together with teachers and professionals from the workplace. Wenger and Lave highlight the importance of situated learning (in all kinds of learning contexts), which is based on the notion that the context in which learning takes place is an integral part of what is learned. Meaning is socially constructed arising from active participation in 'a community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Earlier I stated that professional musicians of today and in the future have to be excellent Musicians. They have to be able to adapt their skills to various working contexts and be able to take the lead in their professional development. To provide the professional musician with these competencies, formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts can be beneficial. To summarize: in a formal learning context the purpose, the tactics and the outcomes are well specified. Fundamental musical knowledge and skills are effectively and efficiently transferred and learned in a formal learning context in which qualified teachers help the student in guiding his learning process. Mistakes are prevented where they might harm the further development of the musician.

A problem can be the experienced relevance of what is learned. In non-formal learning contexts students learn how and when to use their musical skills and knowledge, adapted to the purposes of the particular context in which they work and learn. Metacognition and generic skills are trained to adapt the present musical knowledge and skills to the context in which they are used and to learn (new skills) from practice. The learning is fostered by reflecting on the learning experience by the student himself and other persons who are present in the learning situation (experts, fellow students). In addition to these skills relevant attitudes like openness to other people and working ethos are moulded in non-formal learning contexts.

Informal learning contexts are relevant too for the education of professional musicians. In such a context students learn to take responsibility for their own learning and to learn together with other members of the profession.

Figure 3: *The conservatoire and the work place as partners in professional integration and professional development of musicians*

I Formal Learning	II Non-formal Learning Professional Integration: - learning by doing - reflecting in and on practice - internship - coaching on the job - reflective practicum	
CONSERVATOIRE		WORK PLACE
III Informal Learning	Involved Partner Educational Institutions IV Informal Learning Professional Development (Artistic Laboratory): - mono disciplinary - interdisciplinary - new audiences - new practices - action learning - action research	

Conservatoires have to make use of the various learning contexts for educating professional musicians as lifelong learners. Changes of context make the student able to master the various competencies that are necessary to engage in the music profession of today. Offering students a solid musical base, teaching them to adapt their skills to differing contexts and to shape their own professional development means alternation between learning within the environment of the school building and learning outside the school building: in guided work settings or in a setting chosen by the student. The connecting features between learning in these various contexts is reflection and reflexivity. Even in a formal learning context knowledge shall never be transmitted without being questioned and taken for granted. Reflective practice has to be an integral part of learning in all contexts. Asking questions about what and how to learn has

to become a second habit of conservatoire students as well as conservatoire teachers. Reflexivity is closely related to learning and the development of the 'self-identity', described by Giddens as "the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography. Reflexivity entails "constantly putting what one learns in relation to oneself, to one's understanding of oneself and what meaning the influences one faces have for oneself "(see Smilde, 2006, p. 5).

To provide music students with the competencies they need to become lifelong learners has serious consequences for the conservatoire as an organization. Teachers have to learn their role as a coach, to engage in a reflective conversation with their students. A second aspect concerns developing deeper and more integrated collaborations with workplace partners (see figure 3). The conservatoire and partners from outside the conservatoire share responsibility for educating future musical professionals. In order to share this responsibility, the conservatoire has to invest in this relation. The workplace has to be more strongly involved in the development of the curriculum. To enable the workplace partners to coach and mentor the students adequately, the conservatoire has to equip these partners with the necessary competencies. Coaching, for instance, as described by Schön (1987) as a 'reflective practicum' can be beneficial here.

The main features of a reflective practicum are: learning by doing, coaching rather than teaching, and a dialogue of reciprocal reflection-in-action between coach and student. The task of the coach is threefold: setting and solving the substantive problems of performance, tailoring demonstration or description to a student's particular needs, and creating a relationship conducive to learning. In a good reflective practicum the coach helps students to perceive risk taking intervention and resulting error as a source of psychological success and stimulated reflection on underlying patterns of reasoning. He also helps students to fragment their learning task.

Peter Renshaw's excellent paper on mentoring (Renshaw, 2006) elaborates on this theme in more detail. In one case the lectorate *Lifelong Learning in Music* performed a pilot, together with partners from outside the conservatoire. Inadequate coaching and mentoring within the cooperation with outside partners proved to be a serious problem for the students (Kors & Mak, 2006). We learned that the role of the conservatoire as a partner in expanding the knowledge base of the profession needs to be pro-active in this (figure 3, section IV). New approaches in the profession can be developed in partnership with the conservatoire. The conservatoire is an interesting partner for workplace partners to shape professional development projects. First of all the conservatoire is a centre of expertise in music learning and the training of future professional musicians. Learning is a central aspect of professional development and expanding the profession. Giving shape to learning and assessing learning (process and product) are in good hands within the context of the conservatoire. To fulfill this role adequately, the conservatoire has to invest more in acquiring the necessary research expertise to manage innovative artistic and educational music projects. Second, the conservatoire needs teachers with all kinds of expertise who are highly qualified in their subjects and innovative in their practice. Third, the music students who are about to enter the profession, open minded and full of aspirations as they are, are excellent partners in

innovative projects, working together with professionals who are working in the profession already.

Lifelong learning has much to do with finding your own voice in the profession. The conservatoire as an artistic laboratory offers students possibilities to develop their own voice. When exploring new roads and finding new possibilities are an integral part of the training of musicians, change and adapting to change are no longer perceived as a threat but as a challenge, and as an inextricable part of the profession.

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