

Expanding career options

1. Changes in Europe: the portfolio career

The musical landscape in Europe shows a complex picture. Societal change leads to change in the careers of artists. We see an increasing number of unstable jobs in the music profession. It no longer offers many opportunities for full-time, long-term contract work, but is often more project-based, calling on musicians to contribute on a sporadic basis or for specific activities. Many graduates employ themselves as freelance artists.

Rarely employed in one job for life, the musician is increasingly an entrepreneur having a *portfolio career*; comprising simultaneous or successive, brief or part-time periods of employment in different areas of the music profession. Having a portfolio career does not mean that a musician is not employable; rather this reality reflects societal change and also creates, sometimes exciting, challenges. Exact figures of musicians holding a portfolio career are not known. We may assume that the increase of portfolio careers is substantial through contacts held with alumni and alumni research carried out by a number of European conservatories.

Holding a portfolio career with overlapping activities in the broad professional practice requires the musician to have many roles at the same time. A British research project on the work, education and training of present day professional musicians in the UK was carried out in 2002 and addressed their changing career patterns. The areas of engagement of musicians were looked at, and more than 50 multi-related roles or skills were identified. These were divided into related areas, and from there four central roles were defined; those of *composer*, *performer*, *leader* and *teacher*. These roles are overlapping and relevant to all genres of music. This approach is certainly applicable to the whole European situation.

It is clear that musicians today must take up various interrelated roles, like those of a(n):

- innovator (explorer, creator and risk taker);
- identifier (of missing skills, and of means to refresh them);
- partner/co-operator (within formal partnerships);
- reflective practitioner (engaged in research and evaluative processes; able to contextualize experiences);
- collaborator (dialoguing with professional arts practitioners, students, teachers etc.);
- connector, in relation to conceptual frameworks a musician deals with;
- entrepreneur; job creator.

To fulfil a particular role, the composer may be a songwriter, orchestrator or arranger, while displaying the qualities of visionary, innovator, risk-taker or explorer. A performer may sing or play an instrument, and his role may require elements of being a composer through improvisation or leadership as an ensemble or bandleader.

All in all, musicians need to respond to a changing musical landscape and to the many challenges and opportunities within different cultural contexts.

2. How conservatories respond – international opportunities

How successful are European conservatories in preparing their students for a future professional life, which is so complex and multi-dimensional? How responsive are they? In 2001 the AEC carried out a research project which encompassed amongst many other things looking into the needs of recent graduates of European conservatories. It showed that graduates encounter a variety of problems, nearly all of which related to finding (or generating) work. Former students mentioned the fact that they had not gained enough experience in the professional world before graduation. The top skills that they had missed *during* training at the conservatoire were health-related skills, improvisation and participation in larger ensembles. The top skills that, according to them, should be offered *after* graduation were further instrumental skills, marketing and further teaching

skills, skills in management and for leading cross-arts workshops. The main thrust in the response was a strong need for *life skills*

We also looked what provision for continuing education existed, and whether there was a match between needs of graduates and this provision. The outcomes were striking: the highest priority in needs felt by the students, namely life skills, was the lowest priority of the conservatories. It showed that low value was given by the schools to the opinion of former students whereas they gave priority to their *own perception* of their former students' needs. New, smaller-scale research in 2007 showed that still graduates (and their employers!) feel that they need better teaching skills, skills of improvisation and entrepreneurial skills.

International mobility and the Bologna process

There is improvement of professional opportunities for graduating students through the increasing possibility for mobility of students and teachers in European conservatories.

Music students can spend a period ranging from a minimum of 3 months to a maximum of one year at another European conservatoire, where the home institution and the host institution make a 'learning agreement' including the credits which will be earned. This means that students can, without risking delays in their studies, spend a period abroad. These exchanges are financially supported by the European Erasmus programme for student and teacher exchanges.

The international mobility of music students is made easier through an important educational reform that is taking place in European Higher Education, which is the Bologna Process, currently worked out by 45 countries. The aim is to create more transparency in European systems of higher education in order to ease the mobility of students and to make sure that diplomas are recognized in all countries, which is of course of major importance for musicians' future employability. One of the results of the Bologna process is the establishment of a Europe-wide bachelor-master system and a joint use of European credits. The implementation of the Bologna process can open a lot

of opportunities, while responding to the fact that the music profession is increasingly international.

3. How to expand career options? We must start in the schools. Change is required!

Dealing with change, requires among many other things a reflective and reflexive attitude of learners and new learning environments in the music schools. Lifelong learning becomes imperative. It has to be organically connected and interwoven at all levels of the school. Let us explore the impact of that a bit more.

A dynamic synergy between the conservatory and the outside world is clearly needed. Often conservatories still act in an isolated way, but could instead be part of a wider network of professional training and development, challenged to build up a more informed perspective which impinges upon developments in the profession, including e.g. cross-arts, music technology and the cross-cultural and cross-sectoral world. Maintaining a strong relationship with the professional field and an effective network of relevant partners is fundamental. The conservatory needs to constantly fine tune and adjust itself to the needs of the profession, and vice versa. This requires a reorientation by the school, where a shift in culture has to be accompanied by a reappraisal of what actually counts in today's world. Portfolio careers are the result of the big changes in the music profession and should not remain on the periphery of the schools, but instead become part of core business. Teaching and learning in the conservatory should encompass creating space for musicians' own self-identity in a learning culture where students experience self-worth, excitement and challenge. Therefore transitions are required in which conservatories become real 'holistic learning laboratories' which are supported by a learning culture in a lifelong and lifewide context.

This requires flexible curricula, with ample space for experiential learning, individualised learning pathways, a continuous exploration of new technologies, study of unexplored areas and a reappraisal of existing knowledge. This curriculum values both tradition and change and is reflective of the outside world. Such a curriculum

includes the development of one's portfolio, context-related assessment and peer learning.

As implementing change that leads to an open and learning culture has to take place at both an institutional level and individual level, this is highly dependant on teachers' competences and mind-set. Without the good examples of their teachers, students are not likely to be motivated to become lifelong learners. Balancing between tradition and change in the curricula need not mean that schools have to abandon master-apprentice schemes, but the 'master' should invite, encourage curiosity, discovery, and the ability to question. Teachers are encouraged to become 'enablers' rather than transmitters of knowledge. They need to be *knowledgeable* for life skills. Moreover teachers must also be able to take on a mentoring role. This includes qualities like having credibility and experience; being empathic and asking the appropriate questions.

Mentoring students is very important in this context; a mentor can be a key person for the student, connecting the external world with the internal world of the conservatory through a reflective dialogue with students, helping them with a relevant personal and professional development. Self-management of students should be encouraged and *questions of identity* should be addressed.

Last but not least it is clear that a strong alumni programme is important for provision of continuous information about the relevance of the curricula and changing needs in the profession to which students and alumni will need to respond and adapt.