The urgent need for career preview: Student expectations and graduate realities in music and dance

Abstract

Unlike the work available in many creative disciplines, musicians and dancers have the possibility of company-based employment; however, participants outweigh the number of positions. As a result, many graduates become 'enforced entrepreneurs' as they shape their work to meet personal and professional needs. The similarities between initial music and dance careers offer opportunities for research across both. This paper explores the career projections of 58 music and dance students who were surveyed in their first week of post-secondary study. It contrasts these findings with the reality of graduate careers as reported by five of that cohort four years later. In contrast with the students' focus on performance roles, the graduate cohort reported a prevalence of portfolio careers incorporating both creative and non-creative roles. The paper characterises the notion of a performing arts 'career' as a messy concept fraught with misunderstanding. Implications include the need to heighten students' career awareness and position intrinsic satisfaction as a valued career concept.

Background

Careers across the creative industries are highly distinctive. Unlike the traditional career pattern, which features a linear career trajectory and longer-term employment relationships with a single employer, creative work is likely to be undertaken on a 'portfolio' (Cawsey, 1995) and non-linear basis involving a continually unfolding, self-managed patchwork of

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concurrent and overlapping employment arrangements. These arrangements can be full or part-time, casual, and/-or undertaken as part of a creative worker's own business. It is possible for musicians and dancers to work in their artistic occupations as full-time company employees. However, there are far fewer such jobs than applicants and these opportunities represent a small minority of the employment options available to performing artists (author 1, 2008; Beeching, 2010; Burns, 2007; Perkins, 2012).

The creative portfolio career happens because much creative work is conducted on a by-project basis, with each project drawing upon the creative skills of different combinations of different people (Daskalaki, 2010). Decisions regarding creative work are much less likely than in other careers to rely on formal application processes and educational credentials; rather they are often dependent on informal contacts and the quality of previous work outputs.

Self-employed work is prevalent within the portfolio, and researchers have noted the corresponding need for entrepreneurial activities and small business skills. Whilst there are unique features in different cities and countries, difference is often a matter of scale. As Throsby and Zednik (2010) have shown, the portfolio of work in a creative worker's principal artform is often supplemented with work such as community cultural development, writing, arts administration, retailing or management (Cunningham and Higgs, 2010).

There is also statistical evidence that a significant proportion of performing artists settle in 'embedded' employment, engaging in performing arts work that is outside the arts and creative sectors entirely. Cunningham and Higgs (2010) found that as of 2006, 65.5% of people employed as dancers or choreographers and 40.5% of those employed principally as musicians, singers or composers were employed principally outside the creative industries. Higgs's later analyses of 2011 Australian census data (personal communication, 2013) established that these earlier findings were not anomalous: in 2011, for example, 42.6% of

musicians and performing artists were employed in roles outside the creative industries in divisions such as Education and Training (18.05%).

When reading these findings it is crucial to bear in mind that extant survey and census-based research tends to emphasise the creative worker's 'main occupation' and may de-emphasise or ignore completely other work within a portfolio. The creative workers captured by such surveys tend to be established or company-based artists for whom arts work is a fairly 'steady job'. Conversely, artists who are attempting to become established or have long-term portfolio careers with regular work outside the arts are likely to be underrepresented.

National university Graduate Destination data in Australia and elsewhere have been criticised for painting an artificially dismal picture of the employment outcomes of creative and performing arts graduates, because they rely on 'full-time employment' as their sole indicator of graduate success and do not acknowledge the prevalence of the portfolio career in these sectors (author 2, 2009; Brown, 2007). Whilst the graduate data may be artificially dismal, graduates are known to struggle with the transition from study into the complex creative labour market. It is to the issue of transition that we turn next.

Transitions from university to creative career

Studies of graduate transitions indicate that many students experience a significant period of personal and professional identity uncertainty as they attempt to move into the world of work (Buckham, 1998; Nyström et al., 2008). This is particularly the case for those whose courses are not associated with specific prescribed and accredited vocational career paths, such as graduates of humanities, sciences, and creative industries and arts programs.

As mentioned earlier, graduates of arts and creative industries programs consistently have the poorest graduate outcomes of the 40 broad disciplines measured in Australia's annual graduate destination statistics collection (Graduate Careers Council of Australia, 2012).

Whilst main occupation is a factor, in most part this is because graduates of creative industries courses such as music face distinctive challenges to employability and career building that graduates from other fields may face to a lesser extent, or not at all. These challenges include structural labour market barriers and intense competition for entry-level jobs; the highly individual self-initiated and self-managed portfolio career pattern; and non-traditional informal, networked ways of obtaining or creating work through reputation building.

Creative career identity development

In addition to the outward challenges of navigating the path from study to work, performing arts graduates are likely to experience inward transformations in personal and career identity as they start to experience the world of work. Career identity is the definition people have of themselves in terms of work or career (Meijers, 1998). It can be thought of as 'who I am', 'who I want to be' and 'what's important to me' in career. Career identity changes throughout the lifespan and reflects an individual's work-related motivations, personal meanings and individual values. Identity acts as a "cognitive compass" (Fugate et al., 2004: 17) that directs, regulates and sustains an individual's learning, job creation and acquisition actions, and career building strategies. It follows that understanding student and graduate perceptions of work, career and identity might enhance our ability to offer timely and meaningful support.

Approach and analysis

This study was situated at an Australian conservatoire and involved a survey of incoming first-year students followed by a detailed qualitative survey of five respondents after graduation. Ethics clearance was obtained in 2009 and again in 2013 for the follow-up study. The student survey was administered to 58 students in the first week of university study. Nine students were dance majors and the remaining 49 students were music students majoring in

jazz and classical performance, composition or music technology. A total of 58.6% respondents were male. The student survey first addressed students' learning experiences prior to university and asked students to express their expectations of their courses. It then asked students to project the activities they hoped and expected to undertake two and five years after graduation. Survey items included both closed and open-ended response, and repeated items for the purposes of triangulation, validity and reliability.

Four years later an Internet search revealed contact details for 15 of the participants, who by this time were early careerists 12-18 months after graduation. Invitations to participate were sent by email and followed up with a phone call, and five graduates completed an in-depth survey and phone interview. Whilst this is a very small sample, it is one of few longitudinal studies that asked graduates to comment on the thinking of their cohort as incoming students. The graduate survey included questions about the nature of the graduates' careers, including the time allocated to both paid and unpaid activities over a six-month reporting period. It also asked the graduates to reflect on their careers in relation to their studies. Finally, graduates were given aggregated findings from the student survey they had completed four years earlier, and they were asked to comment on these findings.

This paper draws as its framework the Creative Trident methodology (Higgs et al., 2007), which categorises creative work in terms of both industry and occupation, with creative occupations categorised in three distinct ways as shown below. Work outside of the trident is categorised as 'non-creative'.

1   Specialist creatives: Creative workers working in creative roles within the core creative industries (e.g. a company dancer);

2   Embedded creatives: Creative workers working in creative roles outside of the creative industries (e.g. a musician working in the health sector); and

3   Support workers: Workers undertaking 'non-creative' roles within the creative industries (e.g. administrative, managerial and retail roles. Problematically, the Trident model positions arts teaching as a non-creative role).

We employ the creative trident methodology because governments and arts councils increasingly rely on it for a more nuanced picture of work as reported within large datasets such as national census collections. As such it is important to understand the extent to which the realities of music work might be represented.

This was a transcendental phenomenological study (Creswell 2007). Textual data were transcribed, coded and analysed for emergent themes with the assistance of NVivo qualitative analysis software. Quasi-quantification was applied where appropriate. Two researchers independently conducted initial coding on a 10% sample of the survey responses, after which coding was compared and refinements applied.

Against this background, we first explore what music and dance students are hoping and expecting their careers to look like two and five years after graduation. We then introduce the graduate cohort and compare projected and actual careers in terms of the Creative Trident employment modes. Finally, we draw on the graduate profiles to explore the work experiences and reflections of the graduates 12 to 18 months after graduation.

Results and discussion

Phase 1: The incoming student survey

What do first year students hope and expect to be doing two years after graduation?
Students were asked both what they hoped and what they expected to be doing two and five years after graduation. Two years after graduation a small majority (54%) of incoming dance students *hoped* to be employed as professional dancers in dance companies. They also hoped

to travel nationally and overseas to further their careers. Less than 20% of the dance students mentioned undertaking auditions or further study, or employment security.

The *expectations* of this cohort were fairly similar in that 60% expected to be employed as professional company dancers; however, almost twice as many students (35% compared to 18%) expected still to be training. Far fewer students (30% compared to 54%) expected to be travelling nationally and internationally. Short-term contract work, auditions, choreography, and 'non-creative' work including teaching, featured in 56% of the responses.

For (40%) of the music cohort the *hope* two years after graduation was to have secured performance work as a "professional musician". A large minority (45%) hoped to be establishing their careers in large national and international destinations. The *expectations* of the music students were somewhat different. For one student, career success was dependent on "*Being marginally competent*" as a performer. Whilst 42% of the musicians expected to be working professionally, only 36% expected to travel nationally and internationally. Similarly, 10% specifically mentioned establishing their careers locally rather than (as hoped) pursuing opportunities elsewhere, although working towards international recognition still featured in 5% of those responses. Teaching arose as an expected activity for 12% of the music students, none of whom mentioned teaching in their hoped-for career projections. Contemporary music students tended to report entrepreneurial activities as both expected and desired activities.

What do incoming students hope and expect to be doing five years after graduation? Students were next asked to think about their hoped-for and expected career activities five years after graduation. Five years after graduation, 60% of the incoming dance students *hoped* to be employed as professional dancers in a national or international dance company. Of this number, over half (60%) specified that the dance company would be in another location. Only

12% or less of the students made mention of another role such as choreography, teaching and artistic direction, although some students noted they may be still seeking secure employment.

Whilst the responses did not reveal much difference between hoped and expected futures, students' responses highlighted the desire for performance work that is secure and in high-profile companies. Students positioned teaching as a fall back activity and they desired work in national or international centres of activity. These themes are illustrated at Table 1.

Table 1: Hoped for and expected activities five years after graduation (sample quotes)

Respondent	Hoped for activities	Expected activities
D1	Still dancing in a company in Australia.	In Australia may be teaching
D2	Have danced for at least 10 different Companies throughout the world.	Been in at least 1 Company and coming back to help teach the youth.
D4	Still Dancing! In a Company or Teaching.	Teaching and Working.
D8	Be employed permanently with a contemporary Dance Company.	Longer term rolling contracts with Companies.

Five years after graduation the music students *hoped* to be performing as professional musicians (82%) and/or recording artists (20%), with 76% indicating a desire to travel and perform nationally and internationally. While some students (10%) hoped to have an established reputation, others hoped to have enjoyed "*Moderate international success*". For 8% this involved international experience with artists in an established company. The *expectations* of the music cohort were markedly different from what they had hoped to be doing. While 30% of the students expected to travel and a further 32% expected to travel internationally, 15% of students aligned their travel expectations with further training, 15% expected to be pursuing a career as an original artist, 12% expected to be studying or establishing their own bands, and 26% expected to include teaching.

Eighty-four per cent of the music students desired a career in performance or composition. Of these students 61% *expected* to perform or compose, mostly in combination with other roles including further study. As with the dance cohort there was a significant focus on

teaching as a fall-back career, with only 18% of music students mentioning teaching as a hoped-for career activity, mostly in combination with performance or composition roles. Two students specified that teaching would be at the tertiary level.

The students' narratives raise similar themes to those of the dance cohort: for example, teaching positioned as a fall back and (often) temporary role. Of particular concern were 11 of the music students shown at Table 2. When describing their expected career activities, none of these students included the performance or composition roles to which they aspired. The responses suggest that some students enter their degree programs not expecting to succeed in their major study area. Moreover, the students who did not expect to achieve their ambitions appeared to have little idea of alternative pathways within and beyond the creative industries. Similarly, 'non-creative' work was limited to teaching. These were incoming students, and their responses strongly suggest that admissions processes and course-related marketing should alert potential music students to the realities of the profession and the need to develop broad musician selves in order to emerge as prepared, resilient and employable graduates.

Table 2: Music students (11) who omitted their major study area from their expected careers

Respondent	Hoped for activities	Expected activities	Notes on expected activities
M1	Be travelling and playing my music for audiences	I will be travelling	Performance is absent
M14	A recording – CD	Travelled around getting experience from international musicians	Recording replaced by further training
M15	Be on recording in Australia and have gigged with some international artists (American)	Dip Ed. [Graduate Diploma of Education: teaching qualification]	Recording and performance replaced by teacher training
M26	To work in studios and accompany well-known musicians	Thinking about teaching	Performance replaced by teaching
M29	Ability to tour or teach abroad	School teaching	Performance is absent
M30	Travelling and performing regularly	I don't know!	Unknown
M33	Performing professionally, in open choruses, oratorio, etc.	Studying a 'real' degree, searching for professional performance opportunities, looking	Performance ambitions not realised and possibly reconsidered

		into further study o/seas	
M40	Be a part of a company, and be making a living from performing	Teaching	Performance replaced by teaching
M45	Performing a lead role in an opera house anywhere in the world	To have a degree. To maybe have a Masters as well. Also a larger repertoire, either opera or recital and oratorio!	Performance ambitions retained whilst further training is undertaken
M46	Steady income from playing/ making music	Nowhere near as much as I hope	Performance ambitions retained
M52	Be touring (maybe cruise ships)	Teaching	Performance replaced by teaching

Phase 2: The graduate survey

Twelve to 18 months after graduation, five of the participants (two males and three females) from the student survey responded to a graduate survey that asked about the nature of the graduates' careers including the allocation of time over a six-month period. The survey also asked the graduates to reflect on their careers in relation to their studies. Finally, it shared aggregated findings from the incoming student survey completed four years earlier and asked for comment. Two respondents had graduated from dance and three from music (one composition and two performance). The two dance graduates were aged 23 (Laura) and 25 (Adrian) and the music graduates were aged 33 (Sarah), 34 (Martyn) and 22 (Amanda). As incoming students they had described their hopes and expectations of graduate life as shown at Table 3. Also included at Table 3 is an overview of their careers at the time of the graduate survey, which is the subject we address in the final section of the paper. The chart at Table 3 illustrates the weighting of each employment mode in responses from each phase of the study.

Graduate profiles

Adrian, dance graduate

Adrian (25) described his arts practice as contemporary dance. He was working full-time in an unrelated role outside of the creative industries and had not generated an income from dance during the past twelve months. He did not expect to continue working as a creative

Table 3: Career activities as expressed by the graduates when incoming 1st year students and, later, as graduates

	Student				Graduate
	Hoped for	**Expected**	**Hoped for**	**Expected**	**Actual**
	After two years		**After five years**		
Adrian	Be employed permanently with a contemporary Dance Company.	Short term, sporadic, casual project work for independent artists.	Employed permanently with a contemporary Dance Company.	Longer term rolling contracts with Companies.	Full-time unrelated work. No income from dance. No dance activities reported.
Laura	Dancing in a professional Australian Contemporary Company.	Same [as hoped-for activities]	Dancing in a professional Australian Contemporary Company. Or in an overseas company.	Dancing in a professional Australian Contemporary company. Or in an overseas company.	Freelance/contracted dance work with multiple companies. Non-creative work added as required.
Sarah	Working professionally as a full time musician – performing and teaching.	Same [as hoped-for activities].	Touring nationally with my own group, recording albums of mostly original tunes and touring internationally.	As above but not sure about touring internationally.	Music work replaced with full-time unrelated work. Active as a performer and composer (unpaid).
Amanda	Start writing music for films.	Same [as hoped-for activities].	Start a production company for composing music for films.	Same as 6a [hoped-for activities].	Freelance composer, performer, teacher, conductor and researcher. Permanent part-time non-creative work.
Martyn	To be employed performing music at a high level.	Doing a few gigs.	To work in studios and accompany well-known musicians.	Thinking about teaching.	Three part-time teaching jobs, self-employed. Performance work – weddings, corporate events

worker, despite wanting work full-time within dance. When asked to define his professional identity he replied, "Human resources".

Reflecting on his tertiary level dance training, Adrian felt he was best prepared for *"the variety of skills required to be a successful artist, within music and business skills".* However, he was least prepared for:

> *... learning how to manage your time between non-dance work and practical training. Because there can be large gaps between either paid or unpaid dance projects, it can become difficult to maintain your level of training while still being able to support yourself financially.*

The impact of employment gaps on physical and technical ability relates to the elite level of technical skill and physical fitness needed to maintain professional-level performance skills (Annett, Wilson & Piech, 1981). As such, gaps in employment can be difficult for musicians and dancers to overcome in terms of career progression and opportunities.

Laura, dance graduate

Laura (23) was a contemporary dance graduate who worked full-time in the dance sector, fulfilling consecutive projects with multiple companies on a fixed-term or hourly-paid basis. Laura expected to work as a dance artist throughout her working life and described herself as a contemporary dancer. Despite regular contracts with little time between them during the six-month reporting period, Laura reported supplementing her income as required with skilled and unskilled creative work and with non-creative work.

Laura described the value of physical disciplines such as martial arts, yoga, meditation and surfing, which informed and enhanced her own bodily understanding and awareness. Yoga, which she described as "*a physical discipline very much aligned with dance*", also provided additional income in the form of a regular yoga class taught for one of the dance companies. Laura included the administration of her dance practice as an integral component of her

creative work, explaining: "*opportunities to work in the arts often come to fruition when you are on top of your own administration*".

As a new graduate, Laura felt best prepared for "*Many styles of work, versatility, ability and/or openness to work with all kinds of bodies and personalities*"; however, felt underprepared for the precarious nature of dance work: "*The ups and downs. The unpredictable, ever-changing nature of freelance/project work. Fleeting employment and un-employment, a gypsy travelling (following the work) lifestyle*". Whilst Laura had created a career within the dance sector, these reflections align with Adrian's concerns about managing gaps in employment. A range of physical activities helped Laura maintain her level of fitness when dance work was scarce.

Sarah, jazz performance graduate

Sarah (33) expected to practice as a musician throughout her working life and held part-time roles in music, but she did not derive an income from her music activities during the survey period and worked instead as a full-time local government officer. Asked what she did, Sarah first referred to her day job but would sometimes add: "*and I play in a band. If I know they are an artist of some sort, and I feel chatty, I would add this*". Sarah reported irregular composition work including concert music and musicals. She no longer desired full-time creative work, having created secure non-creative work to compensate for the fluctuations in her arts income.

Sarah held a double degree in multimedia and sustainability in addition to her jazz performance studies. As a music graduate she felt best prepared "*to work as a music teacher or a performer*", and least prepared for "*organising gigs, making a living as a musician*". Again, the difficulty appears to relate to creating and managing a career, rather than the level of specialist skill acquired during training.

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Amanda, composition graduate

At the time of the study, Amanda (22) was working full-time as a composer, arranger and teacher. She supplemented her income with non-creative skilled and non-skilled work and she described herself as follows:

"I am a composer. My career is a 'portfolio career', meaning I work within many fields in the same area. As a composer I write music (and research papers), I perform, I conduct, I teach and I study."

When describing herself, Amanda would change her response according to "*target audience and the amount of time I have to describe what I do*".

In line with her portfolio career, Amanda's activities were "*based on what is available at the time and whether I have the time and skills to do the job*". As a graduate, Amanda felt she was best prepared for "*the variety of skills required to be a successful artist*". She struggled, however, with the need to identify her "*own artistic voice*", acknowledging that this is necessary in order to "*create a 'brand' for your art*". In Amanda's case the explicit mention of a portfolio career in which multiple activities were housed suggests an entrepreneurial attitude alongside intrinsic satisfaction with a complex and flexible career. Her permanent, part-time position with a bakery was valued as a role that supported her creative practice.

Martyn, jazz performance graduate

Martyn (34) was the oldest of the graduate respondents. He graduated with a degree in jazz performance, and at the time of the survey he held part-time work as a performer and teacher. He anticipated working as a musician throughout his working life and did not supplement his arts income with other activities. Martyn described himself as "a musician and a music teacher", and 71.4% of his paid hours were spent as an instrumental teacher. Although teaching was reported as a single role, analysis revealed three different teaching positions including two school-based positions and teaching work at a music school, all on a self-

employed basis. Whilst performance was his focus, Martyn reflected that teaching had prompted him "*to think of wider applications for my art, making me review the steps I have taken in my career*". Performance work largely consisted of band engagements for weddings and corporate events, which required standard repertoire rather than the music he preferred to perform.

As a new graduate, Martyn felt he was best prepared "*to teach, play easy music [and] to keep learning*". The high standards required to attract high-level work, however, came as something of a shock, and he wrote that he was least prepared "*to join the tight and exclusive ranks of performing jazz artists*". Martyn was the only graduate to mention inadequate technical skills as the major barrier to securing work.

Imagining a career

The graduates were asked how their career related to what they had imagined as students. Their responses were summarised at Table 3, and an excerpt from their narratives (Table 4) suggests a lack of career preview (career awareness) as graduating students.

Table 4: 'How does your career relate to what you imagined as a student?'

How does your career relate to what you imagined as a student?	
Adrian	My career does not relate to my field of study.
Laura	I did not imagine being a freelance artist. But I think this is because I didn't gain a very good understanding of freelance/project-based work. Whilst I was [studying] I was headstrong on finding a full-time position in a dance company. These positions are so rare! But I would not change anything in my career thus far - because I am a freelance artist, I am exposed to so many different choreographers and experiences so I've learnt such a wide range of skills and met such amazing artists. Travelling and performing all over Australia is a dream come true.
Sarah	Not what I imagined at all, as a music student.
Amanda	[No response]
Martyn	I never knew there would still be so much to learn. I didn't know then that to be an artist is to keep learning forever.

A common goal for many of the incoming students was to become a company artist. In fact, these positions are rarely the secure, full time positions imagined by students. The profile of

the company artist is changing to reflect the growing number of 'ensemble companies' that interchange instrumentalists, vocalists or dancers on a by-project basis. Alongside the ensemble companies are project-based companies offering short term, full time or part-time contracts, many of which demand a wide range of skills such as teaching, rehearsal direction, education or community work. Still more companies are artist-led initiatives that are partly or wholly self-funded. As Siddall has noted (2001), even year-long contracts are often contract-based work with no certainty of renewal. This was illustrated by the work of dance graduate Laura, whose full time work as a company dancer was undertaken on a contractual basis across multiple companies and locations.

Whilst it is hoped that students develop an understanding of work and career (career preview) as they progress through their studies, the graduates' comments suggest this is still lacking within some tertiary programs. In fact the experience of the graduates resonate with Ballantyne's (2007) description of the 'praxis shock' and isolation experienced by graduate music teachers. With most courses concentrating on imparting the skills and knowledge required for specialist practice in the target discipline (author 2, 2009), many tertiary institutions are only beginning to address professional practice issues in capstone work experience and internship programs. They are also beginning to realise that the (re)negotiation of professional identity is often highly troublesome for students (Burland & Pitts, 2007).

The matter of identity

Many students engage in higher education courses with only a vague notion of what they might do afterwards or how their intended industry works. In Marcia's (1987) classic identity status model this is known as a "diffused" career identity. Perhaps guided by unrealistic, media-influenced ideas about the world of work, other students develop a rigid, overly specific "foreclosed" career identity (e.g. aspiring to a performance career just like that of

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Maria Tallchief or Dave Brubeck). This was evident in the student responses, many of which focused on company roles and performance positions without consideration (or perhaps awareness) of the changing nature of company positions or of potential complementary or alternative pathways within and beyond the creative industries. This issue becomes particularly important when considering that the inconsistent nature of performance work can result in a loss of technical ability unless the physical regime of daily practice is maintained even whilst other work is being undertaken.

Career identity foreclosure is a particular risk in creative industries careers, where in the absence of better information the existence of highly visible, successful star individuals and companies can skew students' views of what a creative career involves (Bridgstock et al., 2013). The incoming music and dance students reported here were surveyed in their first week of tertiary study. Given that students were asked to consider both desired and expected career activities, the focus on specialist roles was striking and reflects the performance identities with which most music students commence higher education study (Bennett, Reid & Petocz, forthcoming). From an educational standpoint this suggests that either students are choosing not to consider a variety of different roles, or that these broader career options are simply not known to them. Perhaps to some extent it is both of these factors, which emphasises the need for educators to encourage students to redefine what might be successful and desirable to them as performing arts graduates. The influence of one-to-one teachers is particularly important in this respect (Gaunt, 2008).

Specialist, embedded and non-creative work is likely to feature throughout the portfolio of a performer's work and to be an important component of professional identity. One of the anomalies of the Trident model is that teaching in all its domains is deemed a 'non-creative' activity, which positions this most obvious and primary use of performance skills outside of a creative worker's creative portfolio of work. Whilst teaching was positioned as a fall back

position by the incoming students, it emerged as a central and valued component of the music graduates' portfolios and is known to be a central component of musicians' work (Bennett, 2007; Rogers, 2002). As Martyn explained:

Most of the professional musicians I know or have met combine some combination of performance and teaching work, so that is very achievable, and common. I found during and following my music studies that my impression of what the music industry is and what place I could make for myself in it changed considerably from how I originally perceived it. I had big dreams of performing internationally, and being a paid professional musician; but found it hard to get paid gigs, and a very uncertain insecure way to make a living.

Sarah agreed that teaching offers regular income for musicians, adding that financial security can also mean artistic compromise:

I have a measure of financial security as a teacher and by playing music that other people like. To play the music I like requires giving up some of that security … A negative assessment of my career at this point could be that little of my work is really art, for art's sake. And that I am really doing the same things now that I was doing before my degree. I am definitely doing them a lot better ... I now a lot more about my art and have far greater prospects.

None of the graduates reported 'embedded' creative work (the creative trident term for creative work undertaken in another economic sector). It is possible that studying a larger sample of graduates from the cohort might reveal embedded work. It might also be that embedded work is less common among performing artists, who have completed highly specialised programs designed to prepare them for specialist performance careers. Recent studies of Australian creative graduate career outcomes appear to support this suggestion (Bridgstock & Cunningham, in press). Further empirical investigation into embedded cultural production roles including their characteristics, frequency in different geographical locations and industries, and education/training requirements, is warranted.

Concluding comments

As outlined earlier we employed the creative trident methodology because governments and arts councils increasingly employ it to produce more nuanced data on creative work. Consistent with other creative workforce studies (cf. Bennett et al 2014), however, none of the cases analysed in this study could be reported against a single trident mode. As Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi (2008, 34–5) and Bridgstock & Cunningham (in press) have acknowledged, it is not possible for the Creative Trident model to capture the complexities of portfolio work when categorizing individual workers: its efforts are inhibited by a weak metrics culture and data sets that are insufficiently nuanced for finer analysis to be undertaken. It is important, therefore, for educators to be aware that in-depth studies are an important inclusion when seeking to understand musicians' work.

Complex intersections between specialist, support and non-creative work emerge variously as a reactive strategy for offsetting individualised risk, as the elements that combine to form a musician's professional practice, and as pro-active, strategic moves to enable a degree of artistic autonomy. In both the organisation and character of creative work exists the creative and the mundane, and not all creative workers will undertake work that is recognised as equally creative; indeed, creative work as non-standard, non-repeatable, innovative and newly imagined is rare, and most labour has its routine or familiar component (Caves, 2000). These aspects of creative work are important inclusions when encouraging students to consider their future lives in music.

In terms of graduate experiences, only one of the graduates in this study complained of an initial skills deficit. Rather, graduates struggled with the realities of enforced entrepreneurship, multiple roles, the need to build and run a small business, finding their niche, and the need to retain and refine their technical skills even when undertaking other work. These realities are typical of the distinctive challenges to employability and career

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building faced by graduates of music and dance programs. They are exacerbated by poor career preview, which was evident in the responses of both students and graduates.

In both policy and academic discourse, post-secondary education is tasked with delivering specialist disciplinary education and training whilst also equipping students for their professional lives (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013; UNESCO, 1998). As seen from this study, this task is not always adequately addressed. It is with respect to developing broad career previews that higher music educators have an important role to play. Extended education-to-work transitions resulting from mismatches between educational provision and sectoral requirements are costly in a number of ways. These include graduate unemployment and underemployment, reliance on social security, distress, sectoral attrition, and expensive retraining (Bridgstock & Hearn, 2011). Institutions have an ethical responsibility to represent the career opportunities and challenges associated with their degrees, particularly if they are marketing their degrees based on vocational outcomes. If initial education better addressed the learning needs of emerging performing artists, many of these issues and costs could be forestalled.

Strategies to address the lack of career preview might include examination of the realities of music and dance careers incorporating guest lectures, class discussion, site visits, interviews with professionals, and industry-based projects. Whilst there are notable examples of innovative practice, more widespread use of such practices is recommended. Further research into the troublesome and transformative impact of these interventions is also merited in order to maximise the support available to students as they 'learn how to become' a performing arts professional.

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