Inside, Outside, Downside Up

Conservatoire Training and Musicians' Work

Edited by
Dawn Bennett and Michael Hannan

Inside, outside, upside down : conservatoire training and musicians' work

Published in 2008 by Black Swan Press
Curtin University of Technology
GPO Box U1987
Perth WA 6845

Bibliography:

The National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Title: Inside, outside, upside down : conservatoire training and musicians' work / editors, Dawn Bennett and Michael Hannan.

Publisher: Perth, W.A. : Black Swan Press, 2008.

ISBN: 9780975751961 (pbk.)

Notes: Bibliography.

Subjects: Music--Congresses.
Music--Instruction and study--Congresses.

Other Authors/Contributors:
Bennett, Dawn.
Hannan, Michael.
ISME Commission for the Education of the Professional Musician. International Seminar (16th : 2006 : Hanoi, Vietnam)

Dewey Number: 780.7

CONTENTS

PART THREE: MUSIC THEORY INFORMING MUSICAL PRACTICE

PART FOUR: NEW APPROACHES TO TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

PORTFOLIO CAREERS AND THE CONSERVATOIRE

Dawn Bennett

Background

Little is known about the working lives of classical musicians, and it is somewhat ironic that specialist music dictionaries including *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians* (Sadie & Tyrrell 2003) don't include the word 'musician'. General English dictionaries provide definitions that indicate a traditional view of a musician as one who performs: for example, *The Oxford English reference dictionary* (1996) defines a musician as "a person who plays a musical instrument, esp. professionally, or is otherwise musically gifted" (Pearsall & Trumble, p. 953). Career guides are often more realistic: Salter's 1963 guide to careers in music suggests that the term musician incorporates multiple fields including interpretative, creative, educative and "various other activities" (p. 8). More recent career guides such as Hannan's *Australian guide to careers in music* (2003) reflect a similarly broad view of the diverse opportunities available within the music profession.

Classical music performance is a specialist field that demands exceptionally high levels of skill and commitment in preparation for a career that is unlikely to offer participants rewards commensurate with effort (Ellis 1999). Professional musicians historically have engaged in multi-skilling in order to remain financially viable or for increased job satisfaction, and the requirement for musicians to have a broad base of skills appears to have been widely accepted for some time (Passman 1997; Weissman 1990). Defining the composition of such a base of skills, however, requires understanding of the performance and non-performance roles of musicians and the extent to which music-related activities occur or are supported within the wider cultural environment. Without this fundamental understanding of musicians' careers, writing vocationally relevant curricula has been an unenviable task.

Procedure

This paper reports findings from a survey within a doctoral study. The survey comprised an in-depth questionnaire followed by two sets of interviews. Musicians (*N*=165) reflected upon their music education and training, and considered their professional practice in terms of the skills and attributes employed in the pursuit of sustainable careers. For the purposes of the study, the term musician referred to an individual directly or indirectly involved in the performance of music and included performers, instructors, directors and composers.

Musicians located in Australia, the United States and Europe were sourced through the use of 'snowball sampling' (Patton 1990). Analysis incorporated the use of a database within SPSS Version 11.5 (1997), and quasi-quantification was applied to some questions to summarise qualitative data. Initial findings from the survey and a previous pilot study provided the basis for two sets of interviews during which the key emerging themes were further explored. Quotes shown in this chapter include the prefix R for survey respondent, PS for pilot study participants, and I for interview participant.

Results and discussion

Musicians describe the music profession as a "tough business" (R45), and results suggest that musicians change the extent of their performance roles for five key reasons: insufficient performance opportunities, lack of financial security, unsociable hours, injury, and lack of practitioner diversity. Irregularity of income is a major contributing factor prompting change: "[p]erformance engagements [were] never assured or regular - [there was] little financial security" (R28). The findings also reveal that many music educators operate in isolation from peers, and that mentors and networks are "something very important" (I3) for teachers and for performers. Non-industry roles were cited by 37% of survey respondents and include restaurant work (5%), engagement in other professions (9%), school-based teaching (8%) and studies in the arts or in non-arts subjects (16%).

Respondents were asked: “Is it your preference to work entirely within the music industry?” Only 39% (*N*=40) of the 68% (*N*=103) of musicians working full-time within the music industry at the time of the survey responded to the question, and 13% of those stated that they would prefer not to be employed full time within the music industry. The remaining 32% of the sample worked part time and, of the 65% who replied to the question, only 33% aspired to work full time in the profession. This suggests that roles held outside of the music industry are not necessarily held due to insufficient opportunities within music and indicate a wide range of strengths and interests. Questions relating to performance patterns and employment preferences were the only ones to attract a low response rate, and imply reluctance on the part of musicians to consider possibly enforced changes to their performance aspirations.

Musicians were asked to identify and discuss the skills that they utilised in the maintenance of their careers, and six suggested skills were given: administration, marketing, teaching, management, performance, and music technology. The following sections reveal findings relating to each of these skills.

Business and music technology skills

A recurring theme was the need for musicians to be entrepreneurial in their outlook, and to possess effective business skills in order to create and manage opportunities for employment and career development. In a previous study with musicians, participants referred to business administration, marketing and management as three distinct activities (Bennett 2004). Likewise within this study, the term ‘business’ was used by respondents with reference to the administrative side of their practice: “I have tried to develop some business skills largely to survive materially in a very unstable industry. These include fee negotiation, account keeping, tax considerations, etc." (R97). Marketing referred to the promotion of products and services: "I had to develop marketing as a way of getting my name out there, and for the 'networking' to be able to start" (R30); and management was used most commonly to describe aspects of human management: "[o]rganising people for different ensembles for chamber music concerts and 'gigs', also rehearsal and concert scheduling and logistics" (R14). Combined as business practices, these skills were used by 72.7% of study participants.

Data confirm that information communications technology (ICT) skills are used extensively by musicians for marketing and business practices. In addition, almost half of the study participants used music technologies in a variety of applications including composition, arrangement, the production of teaching resources, and recording.

Communication skills

Musicians are ideally placed to communicate their musical experience to a wider audience; however, participants reported being initially ill-equipped with the requisite communication skills. Participants stressed that communication skills are imperative to a musician's ability to create and sustain professional networks, and are essential to a musician's practice whether in an orchestral or teaching role, or in running a freelance business: "[l]earning to network effectively is a learned skill useful in virtually every field" (I1). The findings concur with Rogers' study (2002), in which 62% of musicians reported communication skills to be the skills most important to their professional practice.

Musicians are less likely than other kinds of artists to apply for funding (Throsby & Hollister 2003), and the necessity for skills in grant and submission writing was stressed by participants throughout the study. Although community cultural development (CCD) involvement is increasingly a pre-requisite for funding, study participants believed that they did not possess the skills to make such applications: "[f]unding is now related to community arts activities; CCD workshops. Money is often available, but artists don't know how to access it" (PS14). Musicians desired to be conversant with elements of CCD such as giving workshops, and their comments highlight the essential need for experiential learning and relevant community skills in musicians' training. Participants lamented the pressure for artists to demonstrate prior CCD experience, which was considered crucial to the success of many applications: "CCD should be included in courses and is increasingly important" (I4).

Performance skills in multiple genres

Discussion concerning performance skills centred on the difficulty of achieving and sustaining a performance role. A key theme was the requirement for diversity. The work of musicians in multiple genres and settings appears to increase not only the opportunities for performance, but the enjoyment derived from it: "trying new styles and genres has contributed greatly to my life as a musician" (R49); "[i]n opening to other genres, my classical performances have increased" (R60); "I practise and perform classical music because I love the discipline; I practise and perform my own and contemporary music because I love the freedom of it" (R54). Musicians made strong recommendations for the inclusion of multiple genres within conservatorium education and training: "A broader understanding of many types of music and styles should be incorporated into the course … one should be a well-rounded musician, not just a clone" (R117).

Teaching skills

Teaching emerged as the most common activity for musicians; consequently it is not surprising that participants emphasised the need for musicians to possess pedagogical skills. Participants stressed the difficulties faced by musicians when teaching is undertaken as a result of insufficient performance opportunities, or as “bread and butter work” (R49). “Musicians at all levels teach. The notion that pedagogy is not an essential part of the curriculum I find very bizarre” (I3).

Summary of skills

Data suggest that musicians use an average of 3.9 skills in the maintenance of their careers, and that sustainable practice as a musician necessitates skills in pedagogy, business, communication, performance in multiple genres, and grant writing. These skills are indicative of the dominance of portfolio careers in which performance, teaching, ensemble direction and business are the most common activities. In describing their use of different skills, musicians note a wide variety of roles such as orchestral, freelance and chamber performance, retail and hire businesses, studio and school-based teaching, professional management, art administration roles, community work, and formal membership on boards and committees. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of participants who used each of the six given skills.

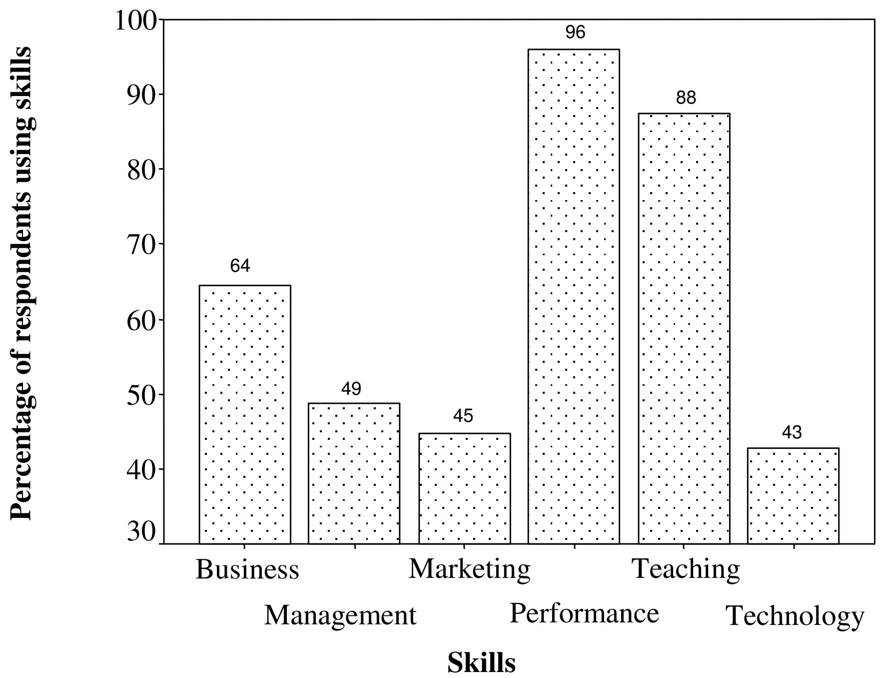

Figure 1: Skills used in the maintenance of music careers (multiple response)

Personal attributes

In 1752, Quantz published a treatise that began with a chapter about personal attributes. The three key qualities listed in the text were physical strength, a natural talent without vanity, and passion: a “perpetual and untiring love for music, a willingness and eagerness to spare neither industry nor pains, and to bear steadfastly all the difficulties that present themselves in this mode of life” (Quantz 1966/1752, p. 15). In addition to necessary skills and knowledge, musicians in this study were asked to identify personal attributes that they perceived crucial to the achievement of a sustainable career. Participants placed passion at the core of personal attributes; passion drives motivation, confidence, resilience and determination, and openness or adaptability to change.

The passion that appears to drive determination has commonly been described as a ‘labour of love’ (Freidson 1990), or a ‘calling’ (Kris & Kurz, in Menger 1999). The personal attributes cited by study participants align with advice given by the American Conservatory of Music (ACM): those who succeed in the music profession are not necessarily the ones with the highest technical mastery; they are those who have the determination and the self-confidence to implement creative and time-consuming strategies to promote career opportunities (in Poklemba 1995). The ACM advice closely resembles a comment made by one of the musicians in the study: “It isn’t necessarily the best ones who make it; it’s the ones with the know-how to keep going until they get what they want” (PS14).

Although there are innate elements in all of the personal attributes, they can be developed through effective training programs and they are a crucial consideration in the training of musicians. A matrix was developed to illustrate personal attributes without hierarchical inference: focussing rather on interaction and process. The matrix, shown at Figure 2, is based upon a conditional/consequential matrix model described by Strauss and

Corbin (1998) as representing "constant interplay inter/action [process] with conditions/consequences [structure] and the dynamic evolving nature of events" (p. 184).

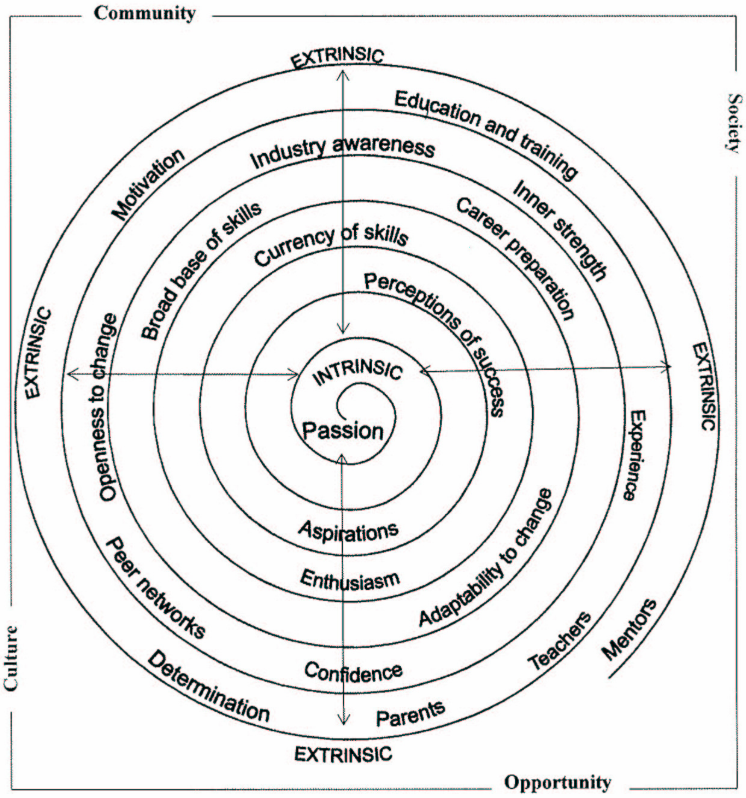

Figure 2: Personal attributes of musicians

Reflections on musicians' education and training

Respondents were asked what changes they would make to their education and training. Responses embraced numerous themes, the three most common curriculum areas being the inclusion of: (1) career education and industry experience (20%); (2) instrumental pedagogy (18%); and (3) business skills (15%). Referring to business practices, participants lamented that "[p]reparation for a career in classical music as a performer is often too focussed on the art and not enough on the business, social and cultural conditions that performers must be a part of" (R75); "I needed to learn how to run a small business from scratch" (R123).

Experience within the profession was viewed by participants as an important way for student musicians to become aware of the potential for engagement in a variety of roles, and to understand the skills that they would need to take advantage of available opportunities. In particular, participants stressed that students should be made aware of the potential for them to realise their career goals, and suggested that students should be guided at the commencement of their programs towards realistic streams of study. Participants advocated the need for effective curriculum that includes foundation skills in teaching and business together with career preparation and planning. Entry requirements for undergraduate performance degrees were criticised by musicians, who also suggested that undergraduate degrees need to be longer in order to effectively equip graduates for the profession.

Concluding comments

Musicians work within portfolio careers and tend not to be paid for all of the work that they undertake. The most common role for musicians is teaching, and very few musicians practice solely in performance. Musicians' roles change throughout their careers as they adapt their practice to reflect personal circumstances and employment opportunities, and significant influences in that respect are stability of employment, level of job satisfaction and family responsibilities.

Entry into performance degree programs based solely on performance skill is not germane to the destinations of graduates, and educators need to consider training for the profession rather than for the field of performance; students should be made aware of the realities of the music profession at the start of their studies and through a continual process of goal-setting and career preparation. Barriers to incorporating a broader range of skills are not limited to a lack of time, resources or credit points; meaningful and effective change necessitates a total review of teaching and learning strategies as well as content. Educators need to work with the profession to incorporate real and simulated workplace experience and industry based mentors into musicians' training. Students have to understand the need for the non-performance elements within their programs, and should be encouraged to apply their learning from an early stage. It is neither possible nor desirable for any degree program to try and equip graduates with all of the skills and knowledge needed for their professional lives; however, it is imperative that students graduate with a relevant portfolio of skills and materials, and with the business savvy required to use them effectively.

Given that a degree of lifelong learning is a certainty for musicians, it is illogical that students leave university with their degrees and never return: universities are ideally placed to offer a lifelong learning relationship with students, and should be the first place to which graduates come for professional development. The findings of this study provide a basis for the development of formal and informal courses that will involve universities not only in initial training, but in the lives of their graduates throughout their careers. Perhaps the inclusion of the word musician within music dictionaries, followed by a more realistic description than 'one who performs', would be a notable move towards recognising the realities of life in music.

References

Bennett, D. (2004). Peas in a cultural pod? A comparison of the skills and personal attributes of artists and musicians. *Australian Journal of Music Education, 2004*(1), 22-25.

Ellis, H. M. (1999). *The escalation of commitment: How conservatory students form the notion of a career and sustain the pursuit of their professional ambition in the face of career uncertainty.* Unpublished PhD, Northwestern University, Chicago.

Freidson, E. (1990). Labors of love: A prospectus. In Erikson, K. & Vallas, S. (Eds), *The nature of work: Sociological perspectives*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Hannan, M. (2003). *The Australian guide to careers in music*. Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press Ltd.

Menger, P. (1999). Artistic labor markets and careers. *Annual Review of Sociology, 25*(1), 541-574.

Passman, D. (1997). *All you need to know about the music business*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc.

Pearsall, J., & Trumble, B. (Eds). (1996). *The Oxford English reference dictionary* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Poklemba, J. L. (1995). *Career education: An integral part of the education of the undergraduate music performance student?* Unpublished Master's thesis, The American University, Washington.

Quantz, J. J. (1966). *On playing the flute* (E. R. Reilly, Trans.). New York: The Free Press. (Original work published 1752)

Rogers, R. (2002). *Creating a land with music*. London: Youth Music.

Sadie, S., & Tyrrell, J. (Eds). (2003). *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians* (3rd ed.). London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

Salter, L. (1963). *The musician and his world*. London: The Garden City Press Limited.

SPSS. (1997). (Version 7.5) [Computer software]. New York.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Throsby, D., & Hollister, V. (2003). *Don't give up your day job: An economic study of professional artists in Australia* (No. 331.7617). Sydney, NSW: Australia Council.

Weissman, D. (1990). *The music business: Career opportunities and self-defence* (2nd ed.). New York: Crom Publishers Incorporated.