

The music profession and the professional musician; a reflection

Rineke Smilde (Speech held at the AEC Conference Strasbourg 2007)

The European thematic network 'Polifonia' was developed between 2004 and 2007 and was initiated and coordinated by the European Association of Conservatories (AEC). Within this project four working groups were engaged with the Tuning process (issues of transparency within the Bologna process), pre-college education, the third cycle (doctorate programmes) and 'Trends and changes in the European music profession'.

The reflections below were given during the annual conference of the AEC, which took place in Strasbourg, France, in November 2007. During this conference the outcomes of the Polifonia project were presented by the chairs of the working group. Rineke Smilde, co-chair of the working group on the Profession, gave on this occasion a qualitative portrait of the trends and changes in the current music profession, as one of the outcomes of the working group.

In March 07 a seminar took place in Groningen at the Prince Claus Conservatoire in Groningen under the title "Trends and Changes in the European Music Profession; Lifelong Learning and Employability". This was a joint seminar of the Polifonia working group on the profession and the international research project on Lifelong Learning in Music which I am currently leading on behalf of the Prince Claus Conservatoire and the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague.

The work of both is closely interconnected. Hence the joint seminar and hence the fact that together we brought out a hybrid DVD. On this DVD all the work of the Polifonia profession group can be found, as well as a number of publications from the research group on Lifelong Learning in Music, the proceedings of the seminar and a film which was made during the seminar and through which the whole issue of trends and changes in the European Music Profession and its implications become alive, just by people speaking about it. The main thread throughout is not so much a quantitative summing up of all the things we see, but the question of: what does this change imply and how do we deal with it?

I will first go more into the issue of the music profession and the professional musician. This reflection will happen through findings of the group and literature research that was carried out. First some background will be given, after that I will address three types of careers that are either emerging or changing and finally I would like shortly to go into the issue of what we might call the 'professional identity' within these careers.

Background

The music industry shows a complex picture. There is an increasing number of unstable jobs in the music profession. The music profession 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. Also in regular (symphony) orchestras the number of freelancers is increasing. Musicians produce their performances more and more themselves, and the small amount of independent producers is increasing. There is a growth of small enterprises in Europe and although this leads to employability the pay and conditions of work are below the minimum standards of the countries in question. We see several types of careers which are emerging and or changing.

Portfolio careers

A major and ongoing change is to be seen in the *portfolio careers*. The musician is rarely employed in one job for life, but increasingly an entrepreneur having such a portfolio career, which comprises having simultaneous or successive, brief and/or part-time periods of employment in different areas of the music profession. The most common combination in a portfolio career is that of a performer and a teacher. Having a portfolio career does *not* mean that a musician is not employable; rather this reality reflects societal change and also creates challenges. David Myers, who was one of the keynote speakers at the March seminar, said some interesting things about this:

The role of portfolio careers in sustaining the professional lives and energies of musicians carries important implications for lifelong musician education and learning. Moreover, the fact that at least a portion of these successful musicians has grown to see themselves as adding value to the larger society, rather than expecting society to sustain their isolated and detached musical prowess, indicates the need for early grappling with the question of what it means to be a musician in contemporary society. Structured opportunities for students to think analytically about this question is a positive way to consider that careers will likely involve a complex of intentional and complementary initiatives supported by lifelong learning for a cross-section of knowledge and skills. That's a very different message from the frequently unspoken subtext that if one expects to survive as a musician, he or she will necessarily piece together a potentially random group of jobs that have the cumulative effects of compromising lofty ambitions and perpetuating the view that one is undervalued (Myers 2007).

Within portfolio careers we see all sorts of combinations of professional activities. A type of professional activity that sees a lot of change is that of the *music teacher*.

Music teacher

Teaching in music schools has changed considerably in recent years. Goal-oriented music education values make place for broader educational values that stress the importance of establishing a good relationship between children and music. The master-apprentice approach is still at the core of music education, but the importance of playing with others and on-line pedagogy is growing steadily. The varied backgrounds and origins present in European society provide valuable cultural perspectives and present challenges for music education.

The present music school infrastructure is very different throughout Europe. Many schools are still funded by government or through city grants, but in some countries music schools are suffering from a lack of public funding and other financial resources, and more private music schools are appearing. Compared to the recent past, music schools have to be more accountable and connected to society, and they need to produce

services that clients expect. The media and entertainment society make traditional music teaching more and more challenging. In some countries efforts are being made to develop art schools that encourage cooperation among different art forms (music, visual arts, dance etc.). This development implies new requirements but also opportunities for music teachers and management of music schools.

Community musician

Musical niches are emerging, providing opportunities for generating new work. A third type of profession that is emerging is that of the *community musician*.

Especially in countries like the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, the last decade has seen an increase in work in the wider community. 'Community musicians' devise and lead creative workshops in health care, social care, in prisons and the like. This trend points to the pervasive social and economic influence that music has on individuals and groups in contemporary society (Youth Music 2002). Creative workshops are given by music leaders in very diverse venues and are underpinned by the notion that the improvisational nature of collaborative approaches in workshops can lead to people expressing themselves creatively, instilling a sense of ownership and responsibility both in the process and in the final product. Exchange of ideas and skills among the participants is an integral part of the process (Gregory 2005).

Cross-arts and cross-genre collaboration

Interaction with other art forms provides openings for *cross-arts and cross-genre collaboration*, many of which have had a visible impact on music education.

The growing interest in adding a visual or theatrical component to performance and the development of new media have led to numerous interdisciplinary collaborations involving musicians, actors, dancers, and visual artists of all sorts. This in turn means that the musician integrates his work into a broader artistic vision which encompasses these different art forms. Thus there is a steady growth of new types of performance and production.

Can the profession be categorized?

In order to try and give a structured and comprehensive overview of the highly diverse music profession, the Polifonia Tuning working group identified a number of typical professional destinations for higher music education graduates, including three main areas, 'core music professions'; 'professions requiring music as a principal skill' and 'professions requiring music as an adjunct to another principal skill'. Examples of the first category are performer, conductor, composer, music teacher, community musician and church musician. Examples of professions requiring music as a principal skill include those of musicologist, music manager, music therapist, sound engineer, music publisher, while the third category encompasses e.g. the music critic, presenter, or instrument maker (AEC 2007). This overview makes a lot of sense, but it is not the whole story. The question relating to what musicians *themselves* perceive as their main area of engagement, what we might call their professional identity, is of importance as well, especially within portfolio careers.

Another approach is taken in the British report 'Creating a Land with Music' (Youth Music 2002), which details a research project on the work, education and training of present day professional musicians. This research looked at the *roles* musicians have within their portfolio careers. The report argues that, "Being a musician today involves having the opportunity to take on a series of roles, different from and broader than the act of performing and composing" (p. 4).

The report gives an interesting overview of the broadening cultural landscape and the changing career patterns for musicians in the UK. The roles or areas of engagement for the present day 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. 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 e.g. being a composer through improvisation or leadership as an ensemble leader.

Different roles in different contexts

Summarizing, musicians have to function in different contexts, with roles that include those of performer, composer, teacher, mentor, coach, leader and many more. These diverse roles require the musician to be a(n) innovator (explorer, creator and risk taker), identifier (of missing skills, and means to refresh them), partner/co-operator (within formal partnerships), reflective practitioner (engaged in research and evaluative processes and able to contextualize experiences), collaborator (working in partnership with professional arts practitioners, students, teachers etc.), connector (in relation to conceptual frameworks) and entrepreneur. These manifold roles can be applied to all kind of practitioners in the music profession. Musicians will thus need to learn to respond to the variables within different cultural contexts. This makes the concept of lifelong learning underpinning music education highly relevant. It presents a major challenge to the profession and to conservatoires.

References

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