



Koninklijke Nederlandse
Toonkunstenaars Vereniging

Research on professional musician's portfolio careers in The Netherlands

Summary

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Introduction

My name is Laura Hölzenspies and I work for the KNTV, the Royal Dutch Musician's Union. The KNTV is based in Amsterdam and represents approximately 3000 professional Dutch musicians.

1. Research has been done, because...

Last year I conducted research on professional musician's portfolio careers in The Netherlands.

The KNTV wanted to know how professional musicians are doing nowadays, taking into account that permanent jobs are diminishing. We had the feeling that an increasing number of musicians are having portfolio careers and we were curious about their Best Practices and specific problems. Except for the HBO-monitor, which takes place 1,5 years after graduation, no researches provide figures concerning this topic.

Being a professional musician myself, I can acknowledge the outcome of this research by experience.

2. What has been examined?

The research focused on different aspects of musician's lives: their education, their roles in music, their experiences, their problems and Best Practices, their income and their needs.

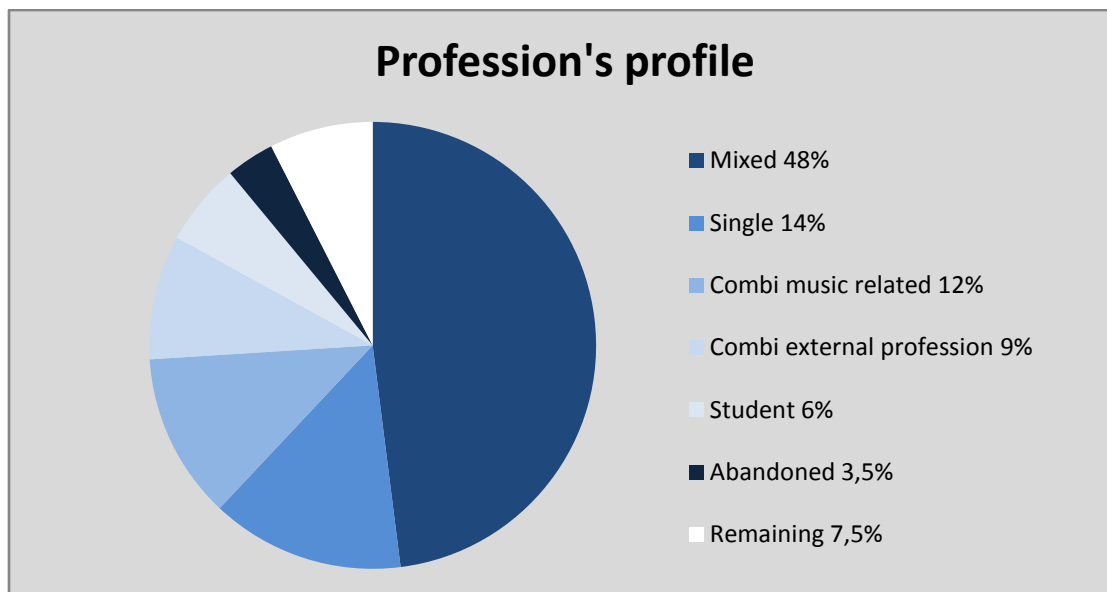
3. How and who?

A questionnaire was developed to ask professional musicians about these things. The target group for this questionnaire was wider than just the members of our union. Still the group of qualified classical musicians was overrepresented.

Almost 500 musicians, aged 20 to 75, filled in the questionnaire and many of them underlined the importance of this research.

4. Results

The results show that, as expected, many people do have a portfolio career.



As you can see in the graph, almost 50% of the respondents have a portfolio career or mixed practice. This means that these musicians have different work inside the music area. 14% of the respondents focus on one aspect of the music business, like teaching or performing. 12% combine their music work with a music related job, for example as a sound engineer in a recording studio, as a director of a music school, or (as myself) doing research in the field of music. Other groups represented here are combining their work as a musician with an external job, are still student, or abandoned the job completely. We don't see this last figure as representative, because the majority of the responses came from our own members, who are all more or less active as a musician.

Let's focus on some problems and Best Practices now.

Major problem is the imbalance between the amount of work and the payment for it. Weeks of 60 to 70 hours are not uncommon. Yet some 60% of the respondents have a below average income. The reason for this lies in the fact that preparation hours are normally not included in fees and that all acquisition work is done without payment.

Concerning performance, respondents state on a large scale that there are not enough opportunities to play concerts. The amount of small stages is diminishing and concert organizations tend to book who they know already. Professional musicians feel this as unfair competition. An additional problem in this respect is the fact that concert organizations regularly don't have sufficient budget to pay professional musicians.

Another issue is the image of the profession. Non-musicians tend to see the musician's profession as a glorified hobby. Musicians feel they are not taken seriously. They also find it difficult to defend their high standards concerning performance level.

The focus needed to excel, contrasts sharply with entrepreneurial activities. Also, musicians feel they lack entrepreneurial and marketing skills. Especially musicians in their 40's blame conservatoires for that.

Now it seems that there are only problems. That is not true! Almost 65% state they are satisfied with their work.

The fact that musicians are creative people, finding their ways, is best shown by the next example of a Best Practice:

A Dutch pianist noticed that the audience in concert halls was shrinking and aging. He thought about reaching a new and younger audience. Since many of these people travel by train, he decided to organize a concert for 4 grand pianos in the station hall of Utrecht Central Station. Although he didn't get a fee, he suddenly had an audience of 10.000 people and a lot of media attention. This resulted in an increase of audience at his later concerts and an increase of CD sales.

5. Final statement

The findings of this research may not seem surprising to you. Still the importance of it lies in the fact that assumptions have been confirmed and put into figures. I would love to know if anyone has similar findings.

The KNTV will continue its useful and vital work in supporting musicians.

Those who are interested can find the research report, the summary and a compilation of quotes on the website of the KNTV: www.kntv.nl. This information is only in Dutch.

Please, feel free to contact me!

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