

Today's Musician: a Chameleon

The world is changing, rapidly changing. We are all aware of it and it has major implications for our work as professional musicians.

We have to function in different cultural contexts and in varying roles. We don't have 'jobs for life' anymore, but we have flexible career patterns. We are increasingly self-employed and therefore need to be entrepreneurs.

We are challenged to collaborate with practitioners in other arts and societal cross-sector settings (like business, health care, young offenders, educational projects, etc.). This is a challenge but it also gives us important opportunities to generate new kinds of artistic work.

It is not an easy task to function successfully as a professional musician within the various demands of today. Being talented and having many artistic skills is no longer enough. We need transferable skills, like self-management, decision-making skills and business skills.

If we take a look into today's music profession it is clear that by far the most important development is the emergence of the *portfolio career*, where we combine several forms of professional activities. The most common combination in a portfolio career is that of a performer and a teacher.

Another important feature of today's music profession, often within the setting of a portfolio career is the rise of the community musician (I don't like the word by the way, because every musician is a community musician. I use the word here, because then we know what we speak about in any case). Especially in countries like the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, we have seen in the last decade an increase in work in the wider community. The cradle of this is based in the UK, and goes back to more than just one decade.

'Community musicians' devise and lead creative workshops in health care, social care, in prisons and the like. Creative workshops are developed 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 shared ownership and responsibility both in the *process* and in the final *product* of the workshop (Gregory 2005). Exchange of ideas and skills among the participants ('participatory learning') is an integral part of the process.

Holding a portfolio career with overlapping activities in the multi coloured professional practice requires the musician to have many roles at the same time. The British report 'Creating a Land with Music' (Youth Music 2002) details a research project on the work, education and training of present day professional musicians in the UK and addresses their changing career patterns. The 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 determined by the nature of the art form itself, they 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 her role may require elements of being a composer through improvisation and or leadership as a bandleader (Youth Music, p. 5).

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);
- collaborator (dialoguing with for instance professional arts practitioners, students and teachers);
- connector (in relation to contexts musician are involved in);
- entrepreneur (and job creator

It is clear: today's musicians need to be chameleons. As musicians we are thus definitely confronted with questions of 'how can I function in a flexible way and exploit opportunities in new and rapidly changing cultural contexts'? Here the concept of lifelong learning can be of help, which we can describe as *a dynamic concept that responds to the needs generated by continuous change*. Lifelong learning should enable us to function in a flexible, responsive and pro-active way.

What is lifelong learning? It can be defined as a concept spanning an entire lifetime in a process of "transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and the senses" (Jarvis 2002, p. 60). Lifelong learning includes all knowledge, skills and attitudes which extend beyond the formal education system, so beyond the conservatoire. The lifelong learning concept goes further than 'permanent education'; the innovative dimension lies in a new approach to the *process* and *context* of learning (Fragoulis 2002).

Characteristic for the concept of lifelong learning is in a nutshell that there can be *different approaches to learning*, and, very important, *the interconnection of professional and personal development*.

It is clear that musicians need to become 'lifelong learners' in order to be able to adapt to continuous change and be chameleons. How can young professional musicians strengthen their professional role and awareness as entrepreneurial and reflective musicians of today and tomorrow? Let us have a look at what musicians tell us themselves.

In a study on 'musicians as lifelong learners', which I carried out I tried to find out through biographical research how musicians learn and in relation to this how their career developed (Smilde 2009 and 2009a). After holding interviews with 32 European musicians with different musical professions and from various age categories, three 'key areas' in their personal and professional development emerged. They can be described as musicians' different forms of leadership; the interconnection between musicians' varied learning styles and their need for an adaptive and responsive learning

environment. It showed that musicians' *leadership* is underpinned by different ways of learning and critical reflection. What do we mean by musicians' leadership?

The word 'leadership' reminds us of an institution like a school or an orchestra, with a head of the school or the conductor leading it. However leadership can have meaning on an individual level as well, and that is what we are addressing here. Leadership is dependent on authority and the ability to exercise authority. Within musicianship we can speak of *shared authority* through collaborative artistic practice, which is underpinned by qualities like informed decision making (sometimes in an implicit way), adaptability, flexibility and committed values and attitudes. The musicians I investigated showed various forms of *artistic*, *generic* and *educational* leadership. These three types of leadership are of course closely interconnected.

Generic leadership can be described as the ability to lead by example and attitude, while developing and using life skills (transferable skills) and social skills. Let us have a look at the leadership of three musicians with portfolio careers, two of them were by the time of the interview in the period of professional integration, which within five years after graduation and one was a bit older.

The two youngest ones are Daniel, an improvising cross-genre musician working in a range of ensembles, and Wendy, an entrepreneurial musician that teaches, performs and conducts. The older one is Simon, a 'community musician'.

Daniel

Daniel graduated on master's level in both saxophone and clarinet and turned into an improvising musician. He describes himself as a *Jack-of-all-trades*. He had an abundance of artistic and creative impulses during the period at the music academy and in the year after graduating which he spent in New York. That was an amazing experience:

From a classical teacher to Andy Statman, a *klezmer* clarinetist who actually started as a *blue grass* mandolin player and then got deeply into his Jewish roots, becoming the protégé of Dave Tarras, who was *the* klezmer immigrant clarinetist, and thus learned his style and subsequently used it

as Coltrane played his jazz, very driven and with passion. This resulted in fabulous music with both Coltrane and Andy Statman, and that sound is in my baggage as well.

For Daniel musical worlds are not separated, even Statman and Coltrane's atmosphere can influence his classical performance; "Music is a *vibe* of the moment, a musical expression of and in that particular moment." He feels that thus far his career has developed organically, "I have never had to overstrain myself." He realises however that now, five years after graduation, he has entered a phase of his life in which he will have to make an effort in order to keep his career developing organically. "I know that I will not play in a series of 'Young Talents' for the rest of my life. Until now everything went relaxed, I have always been broadly interested and able to get along easily. That may not always be the case. I know now that I'll have to organise a lot in order to get things going."

He realises that he will have to take initiatives, go after subsidies and write to concert halls. In the music academy Daniel had no tuition on aspects of public relations, marketing and organisational issues. After graduation at first this was not a problem because he got a lot of invitations. But he now wishes that entrepreneurship had been an issue at school, "in a flexible way, adapted to the wishes of the students." Daniel thinks that if he had learned about it, entrepreneurship might have already played a more important role in his career development.

Nevertheless Daniel was lucky that his teacher took him to gigs and brought him into contact with the world of ensembles. He felt challenged by the many gigs that came along, "where I could sound my own voice and could determine the programmes myself." Until this very moment he chooses to be a freelance musician, and not to be a regular member of an orchestra ("it has never been part of my world, so I never had that ambition") or ensemble ("unless something very interesting comes by").

For some time Daniel has assisted his former teacher in the conservatoire. He likes teaching very much, especially the aspect of sharing his enthusiasm; "I will never be a

teacher who preaches the absolute truth, but I'll be stimulating my student to engage in his or her own thing." He finds that he learns much from teaching:

In the first place I learn 'to practice what you preach'. I enjoy the art of teaching: building things up together, having patience, being creative in finding the right words. I want to stimulate students to find their own material and vocabulary and explore the references that contribute to their artistic development as a musician.

Wendy

Wendy (22) had at the time of the interview just graduated in two principal studies, wind band conducting and trumpet. Currently she is very active within a real portfolio career, where she combines playing in two wind bands, conducting an orchestra and teaching groups of young children, whilst preparing them to play in the wind band. In addition she started a little company which takes on assignments from music publishing houses. "I find it important to do different things; I am not someone who conducts five orchestras, I think my enthusiasm would diminish if I would have to go out every evening to a different orchestra. The same goes for teaching. I couldn't teach the same songs to children four days a week."

Social learning is of great importance in Wendy's profession:

First thing is to keep your ears wide open. Listen to people and talk to them. I find it important to be on the same page as the administration of the orchestra, so the last meeting of the year I will be there to talk things through. Having chats in the intervals of the rehearsals with band members and with newcomers is also important. I find it important that people feel at ease and confident. I am open to criticism, but I want other people to be open as well and not talk behind each other's backs. I don't care that I am younger than the average member; I stick to those things.

Wendy is outspoken about her professional identity: "In the first place I am a conductor. Someone who likes guiding people in their hobby, and stimulating them in a

positive way. To make sure that they enjoy what they are doing, but also see to it that there is progress. In the second place I am a teacher. I like to teach children and make them enthusiastic about continuing to make music. See to it that they take it seriously and practise at home as well, and stimulate their parents to help them. And in the third place I am a performing musician, mainly with amateur orchestras, happy to make a wonderful concert with each other. Never against each other, but always together and giving each other something. I am happy in what I am doing. I really think that I went to the music academy with ideals which, right now, I am trying to make come true. “

Musicians' various roles revisited

Daniel, Wendy and Simon have a portfolio career, encompassing differing areas of engagement and holding a number of roles at the same time. We can now explore the different roles they have.

Daniel holds roles of a performer, teacher, leader, composer, improviser and entrepreneur; Wendy of a performer, teacher, leader, conductor, administrator, and manager. All these three young musicians show that they require *generic skills* in addition, with roles of an innovator, explorer and risk taker (Isaac, Daniel); of an identifier of missing skills and of means to refresh them (all three of them) and of a partner and co-operator within formal partnerships (Wendy). All three young musicians are reflective practitioners, collaborators, connectors and entrepreneurs.

Isaac, Daniel and Wendy show various forms of leadership. They all show artistic and generic leadership. Isaac shows artistic and generic leadership in his choice for repertoire, through ensuring upon critical reflection that the 'niche' he addresses fits his artistic identity; Daniel shows artistic leadership through his professional choice-making, which is completely underpinned by his identity as an improviser:

I like to step on a stage and to start improvising without having prepared anything. I just hope then to bring something as compelling as can be the case with written music. I'm in pursuit of

beautiful moments, searching for the moments that strike a right chord for me.

Wendy shows a kind of leadership that is often underestimated in the professional music world, where there is a lot of work to generate, and that is educational leadership. Educational leadership is closely connected to both other forms of leadership and addresses learning and teaching, learning from one's own teaching and mentoring processes.

Concluding, I would like to share some thoughts on using the concept of lifelong learning in the music academy. What strategies could be considered by educators? This is not a matter of simply giving recipes, because it starts with considering the mind set.

To begin with, the learning environment in the music academy could be seen as an artistic, generic and educational laboratory that reflects the workplace, and encompasses informal learning in non-formal learning contexts, and with a strong commitment to quality and knowledgeability. This would require a learning culture which is inviting and non-judgemental, leading to increased self-confidence of the student. Training could then take place in a learning environment in which ideas can be transformed entrepreneurially and where the concept of leadership in a variety of contexts is valued and woven organically into the curriculum.

It is however of critical importance to ensure that the institutions' definition of quality is *not* a narrow one, limited to quality of performance, and failing to take into account the contextual variables when making qualitative judgements arising from various processes, projects and performances in different contexts.

Furthermore, if in the music academy we want to prepare students for their future career, enabling them to be open-minded, acting as reflective practitioners in an ever-more challenging and interesting professional music practice, it is important to capture their interest from their own starting point when they enter the music academy, which is their professional identity as a performer. We are reminded of Isaac's and Daniel's

narratives: both acknowledged the fact that *life skills* are of critical importance for a successful career in music. They found this out after graduation. Both musicians mentioned the fact that, although formal courses had been offered in the music academy, it did not appeal to them at that time. By nature musicians feel themselves performers, and as their performing is at the basis of their intrinsic motivation, much can be achieved if career preparation in the music academy also takes place through action learning in a laboratory setting, taking this given as point of departure. If teaching and learning start from there and focus at some point in the educational process on entrepreneurship in an integrated and relevant (experiential) way, informed by artistic values, this then can have an impact.

When we approach the education of future musicians in this way, this can lead to increased personal development emerging from an awareness of one's identity as a musician, fostered by self-exploration and self-management and last but not least, to the integration of continuing professional development into all aspects of life in the music academy.