

RESOURCES FOR STUDENT MUSICIANS - EDUCATOR GUIDE

Career Story: Orchestral life

This profile comes from a young brass player. The musician secured his first principal position in 2002, while he was in his third year of undergraduate study, and he later moved to a major European orchestra. At the time of the interview he had yet to commence the new position. He describes life in an orchestra, the 'sparkle' that makes orchestral work enjoyable, getting ahead, and his future career plans. His identity has been hidden at his request, as have the names of the orchestras.

I'm a trombone player. Right now I am the principal of a symphony orchestra. I got my job here in my third year at the Academy and now I am ready for a change. Now I spend half the time in the [major] orchestra. I was very close to winning the audition as second trombone last January and I've been there 10 or 15 times this season to play with them and to go on tour and to record. They never hire people they don't know, so now I've been playing with them a lot and they know me and I know them.

Next year there will be a new audition and I will just have to do my best and hope I get the job. When they call I go to my boss here and say, 'Is it possible for me to take time off, or can I pay for a substitute?' 'Yes, of course', he says. He's very supportive.

The 'sparkle' is a way I describe orchestral musicians where there is the sparkle of being excited and passionate about music. Actually, yesterday I was feeling down, you know. We have seven orchestras here and we are in the same union, so when I go to work we have so many meetings about whether we need a trash can right here and, you know, do I wish to vote for that if we need a trash can right here? And that's not the point of our job. Yeah I want to do some more. People just complain about little things and I'm really fed up with it. Also if I'm in rehearsals that finish at 2pm, you know, if we have half a page left of a whole symphony and we know when we're done with that we will be off, and it maybe takes five minutes, people will finish at 2pm anyway, you know - come on!

In the major orchestra there is sparkle in all the players. Also I think it's a matter of taste - if you like the conductor or if you like the music or something. But overall you just need to sparkle, you just need to enjoy your work and be in charge of your instrument and the group and everything to make it work.

It is true that when you are in an orchestra you're not in charge. And that's why people get so, I think, they lose their creativity. But you are in charge because you are in charge of your instrument. That's a very important job and you are creative in that.

We play three opera productions a year and this year the conductor is amazing. He's a very young Swedish guy and he's now in the semi-big orchestras in Germany. He makes that sparkle, but we need to get it without a conductor like him. Everything is: 'Monday morning and it's raining'. And if the management of the orchestra don't keep up the beat with life outside then the whole thing can malfunction, they're lost.

Learning languages is really important. As a youngster we don't think we will need a language like German. But now I see why I need German because I'm sitting in a section where they are speaking together in German and I can't get it. I went on tour with the orchestra this summer to France, where there is an opera festival, and we played Siegfried. It was fantastic, but I couldn't remember any French from school. I went to a store and I wanted to buy a ham sandwich, and I said, 'Je suis un jambon', and that means: 'I am a ham'!

This year I teach all of the trombone students at the Academy for one hour. I like teaching. I like to make them sparkle. Actually, it's a great feeling for me to solve their problems. I like that. It's becoming a challenge for me to be the best in the world to analyse their problems and fix them. I like that. I didn't think I would be interested in teaching when I was a student. Not at all. I went to Chicago in 2002 and I've been there once a year ever since to take lessons with Michael Mulcahy, who's from Sydney. He's brilliant. The season before last I took one year's leave from the orchestra to go to Chicago all year and take a performance certificate. To watch Michael Mulcahy teach me I was convinced that I could do it as well. I didn't have the tools before, but after Michael I have a whole toolbox.

To be in music you have to trust in yourself. And also you have to get inspired and be inspired and really do anything – if you hear a piece of music, get the music and learn it and always be inspired. In my practice rooms I always have ten or fifteen sheets with quotes that Michael said or I learned, and I just hang them on the wall. And even though I know them and I listened to them so many times, I still can sustain more. Also you need to do some aggressive things to make your practice sessions fun: enjoy your practice. And that's very hard, especially when you are placed where there is no sparkle. Then you have to do it even more. Sometimes the orchestra zaps my energy, and when I'm done playing I can't do anything. I have a mental coach and she is not a musician so she has some other ideas of how you prepare and it's really nice just to do something else.

Ten years from now in my dreams I will be playing with the major orchestra full-time. I don't know. I don't think I want to do this for the rest of my life. Of course if I'm in the major orchestra I will be the happiest man on earth and of course I will do my best – but for the rest of my life, I don't think so, I don't know. I want to own my own café or own a hotel. I want to be a waiter actually. It's very strange!

READING AND REFLECTING ON MUSICIAN BIOGRAPHIES AND PROFILES

When working with career stories, it is useful for students to refer to questions that will guide their reading. These questions can be developed utilising some of the other resources, particularly those focused on identity, preferences and goals. However, the questions on the next page will give students a head start. These questions are also included on the final page of the student resource. Lifelong learning can be described 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). This learning includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes that extend well beyond formal education. In a world of rapid change, people come under the influence of circumstances that create new experiences and challenges from which they can continue to learn throughout their lives. The lifelong learning concept goes further than ‘permanent education;’ its innovative dimension lies in a new approach to the process and context of learning. Graduates need to be lifelong learners in order to adapt to continuous change. This encompasses more than just taking courses in the framework of continuing professional development. It is important to establish how new graduates can strengthen their identities as entrepreneurial and reflective professionals. One of the most powerful ways of illustrating this is with the narratives of professionals with diverse career paths.

Activity

The following reflections refer to the musician biographies. When asking students to critically reflect on biographical accounts, it is a good idea to encourage responses based on questions such as the ones below.

A consistent feature of the musician biographies is the need for lifelong learning. Discuss what students might need to do in order to keep learning once they have graduated.

- The biographical accounts of musicians are very different, but they have issues in common. Reflect on these differences and common issues and make links to your own ‘biographical account’.
- Identify and reflect on the crossroads—key decision points—in your personal and professional development. Who played a significant role at these times? To whom did you go for advice? What can you put in place now for the next time you face a major decision?
- Biographical accounts raise a number of challenges and opportunities within the music profession: for example, creative workshops in the health sector or prisons, or innovative cross-arts collaborations. Look for examples of these and reflect on what might be of interest to you. You might also pose the questions below.
 - What, specifically, interests you, and what will you need to make it a reality?
 - What is the first step, and when will you begin?
 - What is the relationship between your performing and your teaching?
 - What might your personal educational leadership look like, now and in the future?
 - For broader advice on learning from career stories and biographies, click [here](#).

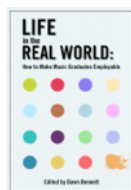
Student resource

The student resource for this guide can be found on the [Developing EmployABILITY student website](#) and in the [music toolkit on our educator website](#).

References

Bennett, D. (Ed.). (2012). *Life in the real world: How to make music graduates employable*.

Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing. Jarvis, P. (2002). Lifelong learning: Which way forward for higher education? In D. Colardyn (Ed.), *Lifelong learning: Which ways forward?* Utrecht: Lemma.



This tool comes from *Life in the Real World: How to Make Music Graduates Employable*, published by Common Ground in 2012. You can order it [here](#).

'Reading and reflecting on Musician Biographies and Profiles' was contributed by Rineke Smilde.

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