



MUSIC RESOURCES - CAREER STORY

Career Story: Finding the sparkle

This story comes from European pianist Dominik Falenski. At the time of the interview Dominik was based in Denmark, where he was finishing his Masters degree. He began by talking about how he came to be a pianist and then described different experiences that had shaped how he viewed his career both then and into the future.

DOMINIK'S STORY

I chose music because I love it. I chose music because it was more of a challenge and my teacher was very demanding. I still love it very much. Very much. I started late— quite late—and when I got into the conservatoire I wasn't the best who came in, but I developed very well. I'm doing my Masters now. I have completed my fourth year—I have one left—and right now I'm just practising and teaching.

I have not the ambition to be as great as Vladimir Ashkenazy but I want to be a very good pianist. The young ones starting always want to be at the top. I wanted it myself. I don't know what changes. I want to practice very much but I want to, you know, develop in other directions as well. I don't need to be at the top. Who knows where one is going to be. There's a lot of business in my life and I chose it. I just practised seven hours a day for the first two years. It didn't make me happy because I felt excluded. You have to participate in social life and you have to be a part of the system – to feel like you're a part of it. Now I can do something that the others won't. So I can do something that makes a difference. I enjoy it.

I'm teaching in the music school. Teaching is very important to my professor and she emphasises it very much. When you do it very well then you can enjoy it, but when you're not good at it, it's not fun. Recently I was assistant teacher to my professor. It was one weekend and there were 32 pianists and there I was, 'assistant professor'!

The [Pianorama](#) program comes from my professor. She's a wonderful professor: she's very engaged with the students and we have activities that we are all engaged in. We played all Etudes Tableaux of Rachmaninov in Copenhagen, Berlin and nine other places, and this developed a team spirit. We are always playing concerts together, so it was just logical to create a society so that people from the outside can see – I mean we know how great music is, but many people outside don't know! We write newsletters to the audience and they come to every one of our concerts and they are fans. They are people who come every time, and it's really wonderful because at some concerts at the conservatoire there are not many people. But when we play, it's full. Always. It's so wonderful. It's because a lot of people are very interested and they can follow us – our lives. It's a lot of work. Good fun though.

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We thought about a study tour and we thought Berlin would be good. I come from Berlin so I said I would organise it. Then after Berlin I said maybe somebody else would like a go, but nobody did so it was my turn again with Moscow. I like it! Each time we decide where we want to go (the last tour was Holland – the Netherlands). Then I plan everything with my professor. She says we should do this and that and then I organise the trip.

We write applications for funding if we have to. Mostly we get a bit from the conservatoire and a bit from another company that we know very well, but when we went to Moscow we wrote a lot of applications and received a lot of money. We followed a plan: we played some works of Carl Nielsen, a Danish composer, in Moscow. Because of this the Carl Nielsen Foundation gave us a lot of money for the trip. You can always do these things.

My favourite tour was Moscow. We visited the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire and for me it was life-changing because I wished to study in Russia. We gave two concerts and we attended concerts. They were good concerts. We looked at the city and we watched classes at the conservatoire. But it's a sad place because it's so worn down. When I came back I decided I would stay here.

Now we are organising a [new international competition](#) and this is huge! Right now it's a bit in the way of my wish to practice, but it started with the last study trip, which was to Holland. We visited a competition and I asked my professor why we shouldn't have a competition here. She said it would be nice and she would help and her name would be on it. We have made the brochure, the program is finished and we have the conservatoire on board. The music house gave us their concert halls and we have the pianos tuned for free. But what we need now is money: prize money, money to pay participants for sleeping accommodation, things like that. I think I will spend one or two months just practising and then I'll see how we'll go and get the money.

I have no idea where I want to be in ten years' time. I have thought about it so much, but it doesn't really matter. I mean, I know that I will never have problems earning money. I'll have to see. It's easy just to work at the music school, but you have to make something special to be happy. I wouldn't be happy being the 'normal' teacher. There are so many normal teachers—you know they walk like this—they walk very sad! I don't know. It will be many things at one time. I will always teach—this I know—and always play.

Reading and reflecting on musician biographies and profiles

When working with biographies and career stories, it is useful to refer to questions that will guide your reading. These questions can be developed utilising some of the other resources, particularly those focused on identity, preferences, and goals. However, the questions overleaf will give you a head start.

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 you can continue to learn throughout your 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 you can strengthen your 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 Developing EmployABILITY educator resources feature many [biographies and profiles](#), and still more will be created through activities such as holding a [careers panel](#). The following reflections refer to the musician biographies included. 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](#).



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](#).

This resource was contributed by Dawn Bennett (Curtin University).

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

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