

RESOURCES FOR STUDENT MUSICIANS

Career Story: Filling in the gaps

This career story comes from an Australian musician who describes the excitement found in continually developing and combining new goals and interests to create her career. She talks of the passion that underpins her activities.

When I left school, I had an audition at university and I felt that I was too young to go, so I didn't. I decided to go when I felt that I could do it justice, and I wanted to be really sure that I was going to want to be a musician. So I decided to go travelling for ten years and do all kinds of things, and at the end of ten years I'd decide, which is exactly what I did. And that's when I chose to become the very best piano teacher I could be, after seeing some absolutely monstrous piano teaching.

The reality of studying is that as much as you want to play—which was all I ever really took pleasure in—you don't actually get a lot of time to play what you want to play because you have to do all the written work and then you have to do accompanying. Your practice sort of goes out 'with the morning fairies'! I always felt from my degree that I didn't get to show the practical skills I have in performance, so I decided that I would continue to perform. And then I got interested in all these other things. I was out there teaching and it was all just a little bit ho-hum, and it wasn't creative enough for me. So I started to research different methods of teaching, which then led into classroom teaching, lecturing at university and lots of other things like travelling overseas and writing papers.

My interests have developed along the way. My core principle of being the very best piano teacher I can be has broadened during my learning because I've found that having knowledge of learning principles that you get in general classroom education (and that we didn't get as music students) has been an absolute godsend. I didn't learn this at university; I learned it a lot later. I learned most about teaching through studying Orff-Schulwerk and Suzuki with a music education lecturer at another university. So I did all my music education through that avenue rather than formal learning, and that led to my Masters degree. I feel as though I've come in the 'back door', but I've had some really good teachers and really good grounding. I think it's really important to know a lot about different methodologies because everybody learns differently and you should be teaching the learner, not the method.

And then, because I still wasn't very satisfied with the standard of piano teachers who were coming to me for lessons, I decided to do a PhD. I just do so many things every day. I'm now designing courses in music for other people, I lecture, I perform, I examine piano, and I examine music education students going out to their practicum experience in primary and high schools. I've finished my PhD. I have travelled the world extensively going to wonderful, wonderful conferences and I've made some really great friends along the way. I have such a diverse role and I can run it all from home and choose when to work and when not to work.

But in the goal of still trying to fill in the gaps, now I feel I've done 20 years on writing and research and you can't really go much higher than a PhD, so I've decided to backtrack and do more work on my performing skills. Paris is coming up this July and I hope Paris is ready for me! I was invited to an international piano workshop in Paris by the keynote speaker at one of the conferences I went to last year. I didn't think I'd ever go, and it was a dream come true so I accepted within about 90 seconds. And I've spent the last six months in an absolute panic because now I actually have to perform again at that level, so I've got to build up that stamina and everything again. But I'll do it and I can't wait to go.

I would definitely let young and intending musicians know that they're not going to be performing their entire lives and all their careers unless they're very, very lucky.

And while a lot of the young graduates I talk to don't even want to think they're going to be teaching in any shape or form, because they feel it's the lowest of the low, I think when they realise what you can do with that now, and where you can travel, and where you can go, I think that's what I'd bring to it: the joy of, the excitement of teaching; the joy of learning in different areas than just playing the piano, and that it's all associated.

To me, a musician is somebody who absolutely adores what they do, and in that context wants to know as much about it as possible in all of its realms, then apply it really well in lots of different ways. The most important attribute is flexibility: having an open mind and knowing that everything counts. When you've done your training, don't just stop. Don't get stuck in a box. You should always be going to bigger boxes and don't get frightened by what people tell you. Just go with your passion and where it leads you, and you'll end up in the right spot.