

Career story: Following your passion

This career story comes from a music graduate who followed her passion to create a diverse and successful career in music. The account is a great resource for understanding the myriad of opportunities available to graduates. When reading the account, reflect on what you have learned in your degree and how this may position you to follow your passion.

At the back of this resource, you will find more information as well as sample questions on learning from biographies and career stories.

Angie's story

Angie is a violinist who trained and worked in Europe before returning to Australia to raise her young family. Her work in Europe and Australia spans orchestral and chamber music performance, teaching and a quartet which combines poetry, stories and music to provide innovative concerts and workshops for children and adults. Her career has been underpinned by an overwhelming passion for music, and she has explored her interests in diverse ways.

"I don't think you really discover that passion, what your strengths are, until you've been through a whole lot. Performing was what I loved doing most. I'd always seen teaching as something that would happen alongside the performing, not ever take front seat because I have too much fun performing.

But you have to fix what you're doing around where you are, which you can always do as a musician because there's always work for you, wherever you are. You have to go out and make it.

I knew at the age of twelve that this was what I was going to do. That was the first time I sat in a really big symphony orchestra and I was so in love with the feeling of being part of something so great and that has never, ever left me. It never occurred to me for a single moment after then, what else can I do with my life? I just knew. I didn't think I was particularly madly talented. It was just what I loved and that was what I was going to do. I had a complete, single-minded passion for what I was doing.

I feel very, very lucky and privileged that I had wonderful teachers right from a very young age who instilled a love of music and the need to learn to value that creativity. That to me is most important.

I came to realise, when I started working exclusively in small groups in a chamber orchestra or a string quartet in Hamburg, that I didn't have to deal with that whole orchestra hierarchy and structure and the frustrations you have with not being able to use every minute of every rehearsal constructively. I worked with just the string quartet and we were single-minded about what we did and the music was absolutely paramount.

I chose to come back to Australia and I discovered within a very short time that I wasn't going to have enough performing to keep myself happy, so I knew I was going to have to create it. So I did. I'd always made up stories with music, read stories and recorded them with suitable music, sort of illustrating them to make it really fun to listen to, colourful music. Kids used to love it and somebody said, 'You should do this for a living.' But by the time I realised it was really good, there were a lot of commercial things like that on the market and so I missed the boat. But the idea was good. I always had great ideas but never really followed them through.

So I thought, 'if I'm going to follow this idea through, this is my last chance. I'm gonna give it a go.'

I could see how wonderful it was for my kids to be read to and to listen to poems and stories. I saw children who were hardly ever read to. It's such a wonderful thing to be able to lose yourself in a story, or in words, poems or music. We have such a duty to give back what we can to children, especially those not in privileged places, where you can find the most creative, wonderful people. We decided to see how we'd go with performing poetry and string quartets. Sounds pretty dorky, but it's amazing when you do it in a fun, visual way and turn it into stories.

I combined my passions of words, poetry, music and working with children into the one thing. I could have a lot of fun by dressing up, playing barefoot on hot days, which is fantastic. I mean where else can you play the Shostakovich string quartets barefoot on a hot day? It just develops all the time.

We do workshops with children. If they want to commit to doing a project over a month or two months we do a performance, then two of us go in, our actor and myself and while he's working with one class I'm working with another. At the end of the project we weave a whole story together. We work like maniacs in between. The last show we did was within five weeks with eight classes and about 160 children all performing. We are teaching them the whole caboodle, which is what we had to learn the hard way!

Then, seeing how much the teachers and adults love it, we've developed programs for adults, which is the icing on the cake because it's a difficult market to break into. Putting on concerts or performances you have to go into the whole entrepreneurial thing of finding venues and getting an audience together. Grant applications, story of my life, writing a million grant applications.

I found myself doing things that I never thought in a million years I would be doing.

But I do get very upset when people ask when they first meet you, 'What do you do? Oh, you're a musician, oh that's lovely'. Well it is lovely because you're doing what you love and it's a way that you can earn a living. But it's bloody hard work, bloody hard work. And so much of that work does go unpaid, and you just have to take that into account. But the thing is we will do it whether we get paid or not because we have to do it to exist. That's what it boils down to in the end.

For me, well I got to the stage where I knew I didn't want to be in an orchestra. I just had to create something where I thought I could make a difference.

I had more than 20 years working in really good orchestras with great conductors and great people, so I had a lot to draw on. I can look back and say, 'Oh wasn't that great!' But I don't have the real desire to do that sort of work anymore. I don't need that any more. I'm really happy to see other people going there. Social networking and inspiring kids with crazy ideas, that seems to be what I'm best at and it's what I love doing. I've worked out a way to make it my life."

Learning from biographies and career stories

What do you see when you meet a professional?

Most of the time, we see only the role someone holds now. It is likely, however, that the person has experienced a career with lots of twists and turns.

Get the most out of reading career stories or biographies by asking yourself some of the questions to the right.

1. What do you expect you will have to learn during your career?
2. What might you need to do in order to keep learning?
3. What differences, common issues, and links can you make to your own career journey?
4. Identify and reflect on key decision points in your personal and professional development, and then consider:
 - a. Who played a significant role at these times?
 - b. To whom did you go to for advice?
 - c. What can you put in place for the next time you face a major decision?
5. Biographical accounts raise a number of challenges and opportunities. These include innovative collaborations, work within other sectors, diverse locations, and different modes of work. Look for examples of these in your discipline and reflect on what might be of interest to you:
 - a. What interests you, and what can you do to make this a reality?
 - b. What challenges do you foresee, and how will you prepare for these?
6. Biographical accounts often tell us something about the interests, passions, and motivations of the people involved. Can you think of ways to combine your interests and your future work?
7. What would you like to achieve as a professional?

This resource comes from [Life in the Real World: How to Make Music Graduates Employable](#), published by Common Ground in 2012.