

Career story: Trying things out

This career story comes from a university graduate who decided to create a portfolio career – a career that features several different concurrent roles. The account is a great resource for understanding how lifestyle decisions and interests can drive career decisions and how the flexibility of self-employment can for some people be a perfect fit. When reading the account, reflect on what you have learned in your degree and how can this might 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.

Jeppé's story

This is the story of Danish freelance trumpeter Jeppe Uggerhøj, who graduated with his Bachelor degree one year prior to the interview. He talks about how he is building a career in music, the need to be able to perform in different genres and trying different things to work out what he might want to do in the long term.

“I filled in the University forms for Biology and filled in the forms for Music, just to make sure I had something to do. When I got in here at the conservatoire, it was great. I thought I'd do the conservatoire for one year, to see what it's like and I never got out again. It was quite fun when I started to do it, luckily it is still fun to play.

There was no system of Bachelor degrees at the conservatoire and I thought I should have a degree. In my last year I started doing studying music as well. Then when I finished at the conservatoire I started doing economics. I'm supposed to be doing that now, but I haven't got time!

Eventually I will get a Masters in Economics, which will go along with my administrative skills. It's a new area, the same as music academic studies was about ten years ago.

You have loads of possibilities when you have done economics, compared to music on its own. When you finish at the conservatoire you really have to see what possibilities you have. But if you have music and economics there's a wider range.

Right now, I play the trumpet and I try to do as many different things as possible. That's why I freelance: I get to play in bands, symphony orchestras, musicals and small ensembles.

That's mainly it, playing-wise. I had concerts all year in a military band when I was studying, and for another year after that.

I've been lucky so far: I haven't had any gaps in performance work yet. It's pure luck and reputation.

I thought I would try to do some more administrative work. Three months ago, I became a leader of a talent school on a small island in Denmark. There are maybe a million people there. The talent school is for people from about 11 years up to approximately 20 years old. You take all the best students you have on that island, and they receive tutoring six times a year on a Saturday from teachers who are principal players in Danish symphony orchestras. Besides the teaching on Saturdays, the students get to play with a professional symphony orchestra, so they get some kind of idea what it is to be a musician.

The talent school has existed for four years. At the moment I am trying to profile the school a lot more because I think it needs to expand to secure the ongoing work.”

Eventually, Jeppe would like to see the school located not just on the island, but in the south of Denmark.

“It's quite interesting work because you've got the teachers of the school, who as I said before are solo players in the orchestras, and at the same time the students have a usual teacher at their music school. The music school teachers have to follow the student to the talent school to observe the tuition, so the teachers see the tuition by the talent school teachers. Hopefully there is an exchange both ways, and talent school teachers also learn from the other teachers.

Besides the talent school, I'm chairman of an organisation called DAO, which stands for Danish Amateur Orchestral Association. DAO consists of brass bands and wind bands and quite recently we took in big bands as well. The work in DAO is mainly about arranging national contests and courses, taking care of national agreements concerning copyrights and securing the ongoing work in the national youth bands.

More and more musicians in Denmark are able to do both classical and jazz. In some places you have the possibility to take lessons with jazz musicians or classical musicians, or to study folk music. I studied in the US three years ago, at the Eastman School of Music. Mostly the students there started playing jazz and later on they started doing classical. I think it would be really fun to do improvisation: it would evolve you as a musician.

I had conducting lessons at the conservatoire as part of my course. I'm now doing a bit of conducting for a wind band, and at the moment I've got a brass band. Actually, my wind band just won the Danish title, last weekend. The wind band is called the APO and it's sponsored by the mail in Denmark. I quite enjoy conducting because you meet a lot of different people, and the people you meet in the band are doctors, factory workers, whatever. I've conducted since I was in my second year, so right now I'm conducting two bands and playing full-time, and doing DAO and doing the talent school. Too much, way too much!

I'm just at the moment seeing what it's like to do organisational work because I'm not quite certain that I want to be a trumpet player full-time, which I am now, or if I'd like to do more organisation.

So if I do both playing and organisational work for two or three years, I think I'll be able to make up my mind. Doing both means a lot of work at the moment though. I sometimes play in the local symphony, and in other symphony. I also play in a military band, and I play in some musicals. It is a lot, but it fits well with my organisational job so that's nice. I also have two children aged three and two months. I will find performing harder when my children go to school because when I am not working, in the day, they will be at school. That will be harder. So then I have to find ways around that, but that's the benefit of freelancing: you do what you want to do.

The most fun thing I do is playing with groups where the passion is really strong. I really don't care if it's a professional group or an amateur group. I've sometimes been out playing with an amateur band just for one concert, but being in that band you can feel the enthusiasm for music and the enthusiasm for getting this right. That's great. At the same time, the thing I hate the most in the music business is when you see the passion die—you see this 'factory work' instead of just making music.

So I really don't care if it's playing or conducting, or organising. As long as there's passion, as long as there is a will to keep performing, it keeps getting better and better."

A Amatørmusikkonsulenten: The National Adviser for Amateur Music: www.daos.dk

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 was developed by Dawn Bennett.