

# Career story: Using opportunities to grow

This career story features a musician who has been part of the music industry for a long time working in many different contexts. The account is a great resource for understanding the importance of exploring different roles within the area you are passionate about. When reading the account, reflect on what you have learned in your degree and the different ways you can be a part of your industry.

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

## Jason Cleary's story

A passion for music is at the heart of musician and arts manager Jason Cleary. As a long-time lover of the music industry, Jason says his most rewarding experience as an artist is making records.

*I love the studio and have had the opportunity to do everything from playing on a record to producing, and although it sounds cliché, when you are playing music and you have those moments where everything clicks and all the band knows it, that's hard to put into words. I think that is why you can't help but keep going – to try and recreate those moments.*

## Using where you are from to your advantage

As the guitarist and vocalist for local country/garage band [The Coal Miners Sect](#)—who released their debut album in late 2010—Jason says that being a musician in Perth (Western Australia) has both advantages and disadvantages. Having spent time living in London and Melbourne, he returned to Perth to pursue music.



*I think that we are getting more and more opportunities in W.A and certainly things are becoming much better. But, having lived on the East Coast, it is still significantly easier to tour [and] get around than W.A and I think that will always be the case. I also think the isolation of Perth and the vast landscape has created some of the best artists with very unique ways of thinking and going about their work.*

Arts consultant Vicki Caulfield echoes a similar sentiment to Jason, but she emphasises two of the major challenges:

*For the established muso or band with career aspirations, WA [Western Australia] holds few advantages and many challenges. Firstly, is the tyranny of distance: the cost and hassle of touring makes it almost impossible to reach a wider audience. Second is the lack of a local industry of active record labels, promoters, agents and managers with an international reach. To overcome these hurdles, the only option for a talented original band is a good dose of luck and a move over East or overseas.*

With some of his band members living in Perth and others living Bunbury, Jason maintains strong connections to regional WA. He also generously gives his time to community arts projects, saying that one of his most rewarding experiences was working at a festival in the Wheatbelt town of Coolgardie. The festival presented a unique challenge and typifies the resourceful nature of Western Australian creative artists.

*Having the Coonana Dancers perform on a piece of land in Coolgardie for Rock Hole Long Pipe, which they had not performed on in around 40 years, was pretty amazing and you could see how significant this was to them. Trying to fix a diesel generator for two hours at a festival in the Wheatbelt was probably not such a highlight, but is still remembered fondly as ‘one of those moments’.*

### Using opportunities to grow

From a commercial perspective, Jason says some of his most rewarding experiences have been his involvement both as a performer and ‘behind the scenes’ at events such as the Big Day Out and the [Perth International Arts Festival](#). Events such as these are where “you feel the artistic and commercial sit together pretty well.”

Jason reflects that as these events and opportunities grow, so does recognition of the role played by local music in creating a viable entertainment option for nightspots. This also helps lift the profile of some more ‘underground’ genres of locally created music.

*Artistically these types of events are a great opportunity to get your work - music in my case - out to an audience who would not normally hear it or be very familiar with it. ... It seems like people have a much wider ear for different sounds these days, or have been exposed to so much more that it allows your music to connect to many more people through such experiences. It still seems like there are struggles to engage larger audiences at smaller shows but I think that over time it is becoming more acceptable, and even in the last six months or so in Perth we have seen an infiltration of original music into our major nightspots, which is great for the scene.*

With this growth of such events, the role of arts and culture in broader society starts to gain traction. From Jason's perspective, the contribution of artists extends well beyond pure entertainment:

*Artists contribute a huge amount to our society, showing often the things people don't want to see or think about and in a way acting as historians of contemporary life and how they interpret that. Society would be very boring without them.*

Jason's career story highlights the many successful artists whose work extends beyond creation or performance to encompass a portfolio of roles within multiple contexts. The same can be said for graduates in most disciplines, so keep an open mind about where the skills and knowledge of your discipline can be applied and valued.

## Make it count!

Think about your dream work. Like Jason and the music events he has been involved with, are there new opportunities you can take advantage of? Even working or volunteering at local events connected with your discipline can help you build your networks and become a part of the industry.

For more information on building connections and networks, take a look at the ['How to network'](#) resource.

## 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, Mili Chongwe and Kate Farrell.