

How do conservatoire graduates manage  
their transition into the music profession?  
Exploring the career-building process

Kate Louise Blackstone

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to investigate the career-building process for conservatoire graduates. Life transitions of any type are often anxiety-inducing, and graduation from a degree is no exception. Although conservatoires frequently return DLHE statistics suggesting that graduate employment rates approach 100%, other studies indicate that conservatoire graduates have inadequate career preview, and are consequently unprepared for the realities of a career in music. Despite conservatoires' attempts to educate their students for varied future careers, the problem persists, and some students avoid careers advice completely. Therefore, this project aims to gain a more nuanced understanding of conservatoire graduates' experiences of this transition with respect to their experiences whilst studying.

The project took a qualitative approach, to capture rich experiential data. In the first part of the project, 21 written accounts were analysed, to investigate participants' lasting memories of their transitions. The following interview study, with 19 respondents, aimed to build on the findings. Establishing and graduating musicians' perspectives were compared, to examine the ways in which graduates are (un)prepared for their future careers.

The findings suggest that a development in aspirations is central to the conservatoire-to-workplace transition. This came about as a result of enacting a wide variety of work roles during and after the conservatoire degree. Conservatoire education enabled respondents to enact orchestral and operatic roles 'as standard,' meaning that many new graduates aspired towards those job roles without considering their competencies outside of performance. Therefore, a great deal of aspirational development took place *post*-graduation. Respondents developed their aspirations through greater self-knowledge and assessment of their values, requiring many of them to shed fixed ideas and attitudes pertaining to 'ideal' musicians' careers. A wider range of musical experiences and increased opportunity to engage with values may aid conservatoire graduates to make a 'smoother' transition into the professional world.

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## Introduction to the thesis

### 1.1 Introduction

It is widely accepted that graduation from a conservatoire degree is a time of great uncertainty, and research continues to suggest that conservatoire graduates are generally unprepared for a career in music, largely as a consequence of inadequate career preview. Many career-young musicians imagine their future as a 'musotopia: 'a place where performance ambitions are realised with an international performance career,' (Bennett, 2007, p.1). However, in reality, this aim is somewhat unrealistic: performance-only careers are extremely rare and many musicians will create a portfolio career from a multitude of musical and non-musical job roles (van der Maas & Hallam, 2012). Conservatoires face a difficult task when preparing graduates for their careers, not least because ambitious musicians may choose to ignore career advice, even from trusted tutors (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012). Institutions are responding to the challenges faced by their graduates by offering a wider range of career preparation activities as part of the curriculum (Jackson & Price, 2019; Minors, Burnard, Wiffen, Shihabi & van der Walt, 2017), however the efficacy of these initiatives is as yet unknown.

It is unsurprising that graduation is a time of uncertainty, since it is a major life transition: a time that may affect an individual's role, relationships and responsibilities (Schlossberg, 1985; 2011). Schlossberg's research suggests that an individual's experience of transition is dependent on their situations both before and after this change. This thesis seeks to explore this transition by investigating the experiences of those experiencing it first-hand. What characterises the transition between conservatoire study and the music profession? How do participants' experiences of their education and their burgeoning careers affect their transitions? A deeper understanding of conservatoire graduates' career-building processes may help institutions more thoroughly prepare their students for their careers in music.

### 1.2 Rationale for the research

As a music college graduate and portfolio musician, my own experiences motivated me to undertake this research project.

In 2011, after having spent four years at a music college that boasts a 100% employment rate for its graduates six months after degree completion (DLHE statistics), I struggled to understand why I wasn't enjoying the exciting performance career I had envisaged for myself. By 2012, in the space of a year, I had all but given up on the 'exciting performance career' plan, yet had even less idea of what I might do in its place. Despite being financially comfortable, due to a busy teaching schedule and reliable work as an accompanist, I was a failure, and I certainly wasn't a musician. Years later, during my Masters degree, a chance encounter with Dawn Bennett's book, *Understanding the Classical Music Profession*, made me question my experiences as a music college graduate. Was it possible I wasn't alone in my feelings of uncertainty and failure when I first left college? If other people do find the transition from music college to employment (and significantly, self-employment) difficult, why is that?

The first part of my research began long before I even had the idea that it could be a PhD topic. I talked to friends and colleagues, and asked them about their careers and how they compared to their visions of their career whilst they were students. We talked about college: our teachers, careers advice, skills we learnt. We even covered the difficult subjects: feelings of failure, mental health issues, lack of understanding from family members, the pressure to look like you've 'got it all worked out.' It was the point at which people I didn't particularly know were starting to approach me to discuss this issue that it became clear – the difficulties that music college graduates face as they begin their careers are not well-documented in the literature, but are in desperate need of further investigation. Although the following literature review will surely highlight gaps in the literature that are investigated by my own empirical research, the research questions are ultimately influenced by my own experiences and those of others around me.

In 2012, I did not consider myself a musician. I was 'just' a teacher, and almost embarrassed of the fact. Now, in 2019, I am a musician. It is fair to say that the way that I view myself has changed drastically within the last seven years and although

this suggests that I have undergone a change in identity, I cannot say *what* in my life has changed. The work that I do is largely the same, apart from the research degree I have undertaken. I think that an important realisation for me has been that I am a good teacher, and that one of the reasons for this is that I came out of college a great player and able to share that skill with others: the opposite of ‘those who can’t, teach.’ Perhaps being able to meet musicians like me – players making the majority of their living from teaching work – made me realise that it was acceptable to call myself a musician without having the clarinet in my hands all the time. Very many role models I had whilst in education were playing full time: although interestingly I didn’t ever stop and think about how my own teacher was still teaching me alongside his role as Principal Clarinet at a major North West orchestra. Maybe it is simply my own research, and an increased awareness of the rarity of a performance-only career that made me reassess my aspirations in favour of something more realistic. In any case, my lack of understanding of my own transition spurred me on to ask those questions of others. How do music college graduates form their career aspirations? How do these aspirations compare to reality? How do graduates’ attitudes towards themselves change during this transition, and can these changes be ascribed to particular events?

Many colleges offer a careers service, a careers advisor and professional studies classes aimed at improving students’ employability, however amongst myself and my peers there was an overwhelming sense of naivety when it came to finding and keeping employment. I also remembered the time spent either mocking, dodging or ignoring professional studies classes, suggesting that career development is not a one-way street: it relies on both institutional support and proactive engagement from the students themselves. I was keen to explore graduates’ perceptions of their education to investigate the extent to which this affects their future transitions.

A colleague remarked to me once, ‘That first year out of college, it’s the worst year of your life.’ Yet, seven years after the worst year of their life, my colleague is still working as a musician. Making no assumption of levels of job satisfaction, this suggests that graduates are highly motivated to overcome obstacles and periods of

uncertainty to pursue their goal of becoming a musician. What motivates some musicians to continue despite embarking upon a challenging career path?

The above experiences drove me towards the following research questions:

- What characterises music college graduates' transitions into the music profession?
  - How do they manage this transition?
  - How do they overcome the difficulties that they face?
- What role does conservatoire education play in this transition?
  - How do conservatoire graduates link their education to their career transitions?
- What are conservatoire graduates' aspirations?
  - How do these aspirations form?
  - How do they develop?
- Could conservatoires be better preparing their graduates for their future careers, and how?

A detailed overview of thesis structure and content will follow.

### 1.3 Structure and content of thesis

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature to provide context for the research area. Although there is a considerable body of research about life transitions in general, and more specifically those that concern students leaving Higher Education, there is rather less understanding of the nature of transitions for conservatoire students. Although these studies may help to illustrate the boundaries of the research area, they may fall short somewhat in illustrating the ways in which conservatoire graduates manage their transition, given that the educational environment of the conservatoire is so different to that at a university, and the nature of employment for musicians is often difficult to define. For this reason, the literature review is in three parts. The first explores theories of transition, outlining current knowledge of transitions that may be similar to those of conservatoire graduates, as well as

discussing studies more similar to this one. Since transition and identity change tend to be interlinked, the second section discusses relevant identity concepts and identities in transition. The third section draws together what is known about conservatoire education and musicians' lives, in order to put the situation for the thesis in context.

Chapter 3 details the methodological approach taken in the first part of the empirical study. This part was investigating participants' lasting memories of graduation, aiming to open discourse around musicians' career transitions by using a novel approach to data collection. Participants wrote a letter to a younger self and posted it online on Tumblr, a social network. Accounts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

In Chapter 4 the findings from the first part of the study are presented. Participants' accounts provided insight into conservatoire graduates' memories of graduation, revealing that it is a time of uncertainty but simultaneously a time of freedom from institutional boundaries.

Chapter 5 outlines the methods employed in the second part of the study, which involved semi-structured interviews with two cohorts of musicians, half of whom were already establishing themselves in the profession and the remainder who were just leaving education. The study was seeking to investigate musicians' experiences in depth, therefore interviews were used in order that the researcher could probe for information. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used in order to analyse data from both parts of the study, due to the importance that it places on individual experience.

Chapters 6 to 8 are concerned with the findings from the interview study. There were no significant differences between the content of each cohort's interviews – establishing and graduating musicians talked *about* the same things – however it was their *attitudes* to these things that differed. For this reason, findings from both cohorts are discussed concurrently in order to characterise the 'gap' in expectations that may exist between them. Chapter 6 explores the ways in which participants talked about their careers, and in the case of the establishing musicians, how they had built their career up until the point of interview. These

experiences were compared with graduating musicians' accounts of their plans and perceived difficulties.

Chapter 7 considers respondents' perceptions of their conservatoire education, and more specifically, how they linked their education with their current careers or future plans. Establishing musicians believed that their degrees had fallen short of preparing them for a career in music, whereas graduating musicians were rather less critical. This suggests that musicians receive something of a 'reality check' after leaving education. Professional placements, however, received positive feedback from many participants, who reported uncovering new career competencies as a result of these.

Chapter 8 explores the theme of Aspirations, which were common amongst all participants. The vast majority of participants reported a change, or multiple changes, in their aspirations during their transition, suggesting that this is a key part of transition for music graduates. Changes in aspirations are discussed alongside the drivers for these changes. Establishing and graduating musicians' experiences suggest that aspirations change as a result of hands-on experiences in addition to increased self-knowledge.

Chapter 9 combines the findings from both studies in order to propose a model for conservatoire graduates' transitions. The model is evaluated to suggest how the findings may be applied within music education and amongst established musicians. An exploration of future research avenues and limitations of the study concludes the thesis.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Transition, according to Schlossberg (1985, 2011) is a major life event, which, whether planned (such as a new job) or unplanned (like illness or major surgery), changes a person's roles, relationships and routines. Studies of transition have investigated events such as career changes amongst well-established professionals (Hoyer & Streyart, 2015), job loss (Kinicki, Prussia & McKee-Ryan, 2000; Latack & Dozier, 1986; Zikic & Klehe, 2006), death of a relative (Bass & Bowman, 1990) and becoming a parent (Manzi, Vignoles & Regalia, 2010). There is a growing body of research concerning the transition that takes place when young people leave an educational institution to embark upon a professional career (Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig & Platt, 2010) whether that may be in a well-defined area, such as psychology (Nyström, 2008) or a less defined area, for example mathematics (Reid & Petocz, 2013). At present, the most detailed studies of transitions in music education occur with student participants entering tertiary-level courses (Bowles, Fisher, McPhail, Rosentreich & Dobson, 2014; Burt & Mills, 2006; Ratajczak, 2014) rather than leaving them, however there has been a relatively recent increase in studies which have investigated students leaving music education (Bennett, 2007, 2009, 2014).

Much of the musical development literature within music education has focused on the ways in which children and adolescents develop musical skills, and the variables that contribute to this development (Hallam, 2002; McPherson, Davidson & Evans, 2015). For example, it is generally well accepted that a child's musical success hinges upon support from parents and teachers in an environment in which they feel socially supported and competent (McPherson, 2009; Sosniak, 1985; Sloboda & Howe, 1991). In comparison, there is rather less research into how young adults continue to develop as musicians, and what factors may be crucial in conservatoire graduates' transitions into the professional world. This is surprising, since it is well-documented that graduates from artistic disciplines, and especially music, find graduation to be a time that is fraught with uncertainty (Bennett, 2007). Further



insight into transitions for music graduates would be valuable and timely, especially given that many conservatoires market their courses based upon vocational outcomes.

In the following chapter I am going to outline some current theories of transition, in addition to reviewing the literature concerning transition in musicians' lives. The ways in which individuals negotiate transitions are dependent on a number of variables, including their characteristics, and the context and nature of the transition. Although the thesis, above all, concerns the transition from conservatoire education into the music profession, I would argue that this 'meta-transition' is, in fact, a series of smaller and more specific transitions taking place concurrently. Furthermore, the process of transition is heavily intertwined with the notion of shift in identity (Banaji & Prentice, 1994), and it is widely accepted that an individual's self-concept may comprise multiple identities: for example, a professional identity, a musical identity, a student identity – all of which may develop during transition. Thus, although the literature has been reviewed in three main parts, it has been impossible to address concepts in isolation from each other. Where the discussion makes passing mention of a concept that is otherwise discussed more comprehensively elsewhere, the reader will be directed to that section in question.

## 2.2 Transition

In 1981, Nancy Schlossberg theorised that 'a transition occurs when an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships.' (1981, p.5) In addition to considering major and obvious events such as births or house moves, for example, she includes *non-events* to represent the absence of certain events, such as a lack of an expected career break, not getting married, or not having children, for example. Non-event transitions can be equally as disruptive as anticipated transitions, since it is likely that an individual will have visions of a

future self that may become thwarted in the absence of such events. To Schlossberg, adaption to transition appeared to follow a pattern, namely one of discontinuity directly after the life event, followed by a period of reorganisation until the new reality was accepted into the individual's way of life and identity. To this day, Schlossberg's model remains one of the most well-established and widely accepted theories of transition.

Schlossberg's transition model posits that coping with transition is dependent on four factors: *Situation*, *Self*, *Supports*, and *Strategies* (2008):

The *situation* factor suggests that the way in which an individual copes with transition is dependent on what other stresses may also be occurring concurrently. In particular, musicians beginning to build a career may also expect to be transiting into adulthood, moving away from their university town or negotiating new relationships.

*Self* refers to an individual's attitude to transition: for example, a study of singers negotiating job loss found that those who reframed their musical experiences by self-identifying as musicians rather than singers experienced transition in a less disruptive way (Oakland, MacDonald and Flowers, 2013).

*Supports* suggests that in order to facilitate a smoother, faster adaption to the transition, support from others, including professional support, is key. The last factor, *Strategies*, refers to coping strategies that individuals may have at their disposal during the time of their transition. Research indicates that those who can adopt a range of flexible coping strategies adapt to transition more flexibly.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that 'the only constant in life is change.' This is especially true of the demographic presented in the forthcoming study, who might expect to be experiencing one or more transitions concurrently. Not only are music college graduates transiting from higher education, they will be moving into the labour market: whether employed, self-employed or a mixture of the two. Furthermore, they are certainly still in transition towards adulthood. It is also notable that their transition from higher education may have only taken place four years after their transition *into* higher education, and therefore an overview of

transitions into Higher Education may shed light on how career-young musicians manage earlier transitions. I will outline the transitions relevant to music college graduates below.

### 2.2.1 Transition into adulthood

It used to be widely accepted that adulthood was a life stage reached directly after adolescence, marked by leaving home and often as a consequence of marriage (Arnett & Taber, 1994). Nowadays young people's life trajectories are far more varied, with people delaying parenthood and marriage – events previously associated with adulthood – into their late twenties or early thirties. Instead, an increased percentage of young adults leave the parental home at 18 in order to attend university, and sometimes return afterwards. Because of this there is evidence of an additional stage between adolescence and adulthood, which scholars have named 'emerging adulthood.' (Arnett, 2000; Cote, 2002). Rather than representing a brief transitory phase between adolescence and adulthood, or school and marriage, emerging adulthood is considered to be a period between the ages of 18 and 25 in which the young person may explore a wide variety of life directions. This exploration is often characterised by independence from normative roles and societal expectations. The emerging adulthood period can also be viewed as a more extended version of what Erikson called the 'psychosocial moratorium' (1968). Crucially, emerging adulthood is a time where identities are explored, namely in love, work or worldviews. This exploration often takes place as a 'testing out' of different identities and working towards making more long-lasting decisions. Arnett considers that for many emerging adults this 'testing out' fulfils two functions: first to exercise a need to prepare for adult responsibilities but also to enjoy exploration for its own sake, before these duller and more limiting adult responsibilities prevail.

Consonant with Schlossberg's theory of transition, the transition through the emerging adulthood phase is made most successfully when the individual has a strong support network (Eccles & Zarrett, 2006). Additionally there is a need for specific personal assets, such as intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, optimism and

the ability to regulate one's emotions, all of which are also critical for entry into the labour market (Murnane & Levy, 1996).

A considerable portion of emerging adulthood is taken up with further and higher education, and it therefore stands to reason that a young person's degree might have a great deal of influence on the choices that are made during this phase. To Eccles & Zarrett (2006) university seems to serve 'to provide a sort of semi-autonomy to assist the transition into young adulthood,' (p.18).

### 2.2.2 Transitions into university

Previous research indicates that students transiting into higher education, in general, find the transition challenging as a result of a mismatch between their visions of university life and the reality (Tranter, 2003; Smith & Hopkins, 2005). For this reason, researchers (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001) have proposed changes in policy and curriculum delivery in order to provide a more supportive system and better manage students' expectations. They suggest that new students should be carefully informed of course aims, objectives and assessment methods, since these are aspects of university life that are often most different from school.

Furthermore, it might also be possible to aid students in this transitional period by offering social supports (as per Schlossberg's findings, above) in addition to helping them to develop adequate coping strategies. Universities' transition programmes often offer mentors to students who may find the transition to university difficult, such as those who are first-generation students or come from an under-represented ethnic group, which Briggs, Clark and Hall (2012) theorise may help students to develop a learner identity prior to course commencement. This is supported by Dweck's findings (1999) which suggest that positive peer interactions are of great importance in developing strong self-concepts of learning and achievement. A new university student will need to develop autonomy in order to flourish in the university environment: an attribute that researchers argue is a key part of the university student identity (Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Huon & Sankey, 2002; Scanlon et al., 2005). However, surveys of students have indicated that a change in

social scene, autonomous living and financial management are often considered to be more challenging than the development of an autonomous learning style (Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2009), indicating that there could be a mismatch of perspectives: whereas researchers within universities believe that the challenges of transition are one thing, students tell a different story. It may also suggest that whilst university staff prioritise the development of some competencies, students have alternative points of focus. These mismatches could also conceivably exist beyond university education, suggesting that although a certain level of understanding of graduate transitions exists, graduates' perspectives could differ from those of staff and institutions. Drawing upon the results from two transition projects, Briggs et al. (2012) propose that the central part of transition to university is the development of a learner identity, which is brought about by a number of key events:

The student imagines and aspires to be a university student and acquires higher education-related skills and knowledge. This leads to commitment to apply and take up a university place. On arrival, the student adjusts to the academic environment, develops higher education learning skills, acquires confidence and autonomy and finally achieves success and full self-identification as a higher education learner and potentially as a lifelong learner. Organisational influences [from both university and school/college] support the growth of learner identity and this study indicates that these attitudes and activities are vital elements of successful systems of support for transition.

(p.15)

The notion of autonomy is interesting here: whilst Briggs et al. assert that learner identity is supported in part by the development of autonomy, it may be rather more unclear whether conservatoire students develop autonomy in the same way. Whereas university students may expect to spend their time in lectures or small-group seminars, and undertaking independent study outside of these, conservatoire learning is underpinned by one-to-one instrumental learning, which is 'deeply embedded within its learning culture' (Perkins, 2013 in Carey, Harrison & Dwyer, 2017; p.99). Furthermore, previous studies have found that this teaching often suppresses students' autonomy, creating passive learners and a culture of dependency on the teacher (Carey, Bridgstock, Taylor, McWilliam & Grant, 2013). Although efforts are being made to encourage conservatoire tutors and students to work more collaboratively to foster independence (Carey et al., 2017) many of

these tutors are untrained – hired on their performance credentials only – and may therefore default to teaching in the way that they themselves were taught: traditionally, adhering to a more didactic, ‘master-apprentice’ model. For this reason, students may not develop a learner identity that is comparable to that in Briggs et al.’s model (2012) and may find themselves lacking in autonomy. Juuti & Littleton (2012) found that a commitment to life-long learning – no doubt, at least in part, supported by the development of autonomy – was key to musicians’ development and especially crucial for aiding a smoother transition into the music profession. It therefore may be possible that a transition *into* conservatoire that does not feature autonomy development ultimately robs students and graduates of the skills needed to facilitate a smooth transition *out of* conservatoire, whether or not into a musician’s career (Burwell, 2005; Carey, 2008; Gaunt, 2008, 2010; Gaunt et al., 2012; Mills, 2002).

### 2.2.3 Transitions into conservatoire

Studies investigating students’ transitions into conservatoire courses are generally scarce, however their findings do contribute to build a picture of the similarities and differences between students heading to conservatoire, in comparison to those undertaking university degrees in general. For example, Burt and Mills (2006) found that students in their first year of conservatoire study were, above all, concerned with musical success and development – their first performance and opportunities that it might bring – over and above more social concerns such as independent living and financial autonomy. These social concerns were still important to the conservatoire students, but their perspectives were unlike those of Briggs et al.’s respondents (2012), who were more concerned with these social challenges than their academic success. This provides a picture of the conservatoire student as driven and ambitious, which is unsurprising since conservatoires are institutions dedicated to the training of performing musicians. For that reason it is fair to expect that these students begin their degrees already focused on instrumental improvement and, ultimately, a music (if not performing) career. This may mean that although the literature goes some way towards an understanding of

students' transitions into Higher Education, conservatoire students may present something of a special case in this regard, given the difference in educational approaches between institutions. Pitts's 2002 study of university and A Level students' understanding of musicianship and musicians' identity, whilst not concerning conservatoire students directly, does shed light on how musicianship is constructed during this transition. Some of the challenges that the university undergraduates perceived were similar to those of the conservatoire students, and were centred around feelings of inadequacy, understandable when considering that many of these students will have been 'big fish in small ponds' at school. Many of the university students, when arriving as first year undergraduates, felt threatened by the amount of skilled musicians around them, leading them to question their own identities as musicians. Both Pitts (2002) and Burt & Mills (2006) assert that, in this case, assessment and feedback become important to students as they seek external validation for their musician status. This could suggest that during any musical transition, concepts of musicianship and 'musician-ness' might become fragile and dependent upon external factors.

#### 2.2.4 Transitions from higher education

Studies investigating education-workplace transitions continue to suggest that this is a challenging time for graduates (Polach, 2004). Perrone and Vickers (2003) found that graduates described this period as 'a low time.' Some difficulties arose due to the difference between the university and workplace environment, and the pressures of assimilating oneself into a new workplace environment. This is unsurprising, since university life and workplace life are different in a multitude of ways not least in social structure, as 'interactions with fellow employees in the workplace are very different from their interactions with peers in college,' (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008, p.153). Furthermore, many graduates' experiences of the workplace rarely meet their expectations, especially with regards to feedback: disparity between feedback frequencies at university and the workplace can cause a great deal of anxiety for graduates, who may feel unsure of their attainment in their new workplace (Hettich, 2000, in Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) propose that graduates' transitions into the workplace can be delineated by three stages:

1. *Anticipation*: the individual gathers information about their proposed new role and forms expectations. A 'developed understanding of self' enables the individual to determine their career needs and wants, as they prepare to 'move out' of the familiar sphere.
2. *Adjustment*: The individual begins to adjust to their new reality, working to establish themselves as a productive part of the new workplace. This is where discrepancies between expectations and reality begin to emerge.
3. *Achievement*: The individual adopts new values, ultimately resulting in a commitment to the organisation, and establishing an altered self-image.

Exploration of predictors of adaptive transitions (Murphy et al., 2010; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger & Pancer, 2000) have found that social support is one of the most reliable predictors of an adaptive work-to-employment transition, echoing Schlossberg's 1981 theory of adaption. Furthermore, participants' career identities were very much driven by their work experiences, some gained whilst at university and others in their new roles, suggesting that transition could also be affected by training offered at work. Interestingly, participants who foresaw the transition into work as a difficult time appeared to successfully make use of adaptability strategies than participants who did not. For a detailed exploration of coping strategies, see 2.2.8.

#### 2.2.5 Transitions from music courses

Transition from higher education into the professional world is characterised by the need to cultivate a professional identity (Reid & Petocz, 2013; Nyström, 2009), and, although leaving an educational setting, an acceptance of lifelong learning (Juuti & Littleton, 2010). Some graduates have reported a need to 'find their own way' after



life at an institution (Juuti & Littleton, 2010), whilst for others life outside college presents challenges due to lack of a structured or 'safe' environment (Burland, 2005). For music graduates, especially, leaving college can be daunting, due to a difficult and competitive job market: recession and cuts to arts funding means that the number of full-time music ensembles is falling, although music graduates are still leaving colleges at the same or an increasing rate. As we have seen above, graduates in all disciplines find transitions difficult as a result of expectations not meeting reality, however it seems that music graduates present a slightly different case. For the graduates discussed above, the main challenges appeared to centre around their expectations of the workplace itself and the differences between it and university. For music students, it appears that it is their expectations of what sort of workplace they will be in that does not meet reality.

Both quantitative and qualitative investigations suggest that conservatoire graduates are largely unaware of the realities of a building a career in music (Bennett, 2007, 2009, 2015) at the point of graduation, leading to a period of uncertainty as previous beliefs about musicians' work are challenged and reframed. Longitudinal research reveals that before graduation, students hold fixed beliefs about what sort of work a musician does in 'the real world,' partially owing to a lack of detailed training that takes place in non-performance disciplines, such as teaching, workshop leading, composing and arranging (Bennett, 2007). The attitudes of students in Bennett's study (2007) mirror those observed by Pitts (2002), which suggests that younger musicians in higher education associate being a musician very closely with being a performer, specifically. To an extent, these attitudes can prevail throughout education, although hands-on, experience-driven modules in performance-adjacent disciplines such as pedagogy have been shown to broaden students' career goals, even if performance is, at this stage, still seen as the most worthy pursuit (Miller & Baker, 2007). Bennett suggests that the root of this problem may lie with conservatoires' course time allocation:

[m]usicians spend the highest average proportion of time engaged in teaching, performance, business, and ensemble direction. This is not reflective of the allocation of time within most Bachelor of Music degrees. (Bennett, 2007; p.186)

Previous research has explored the transition from conservatoire education into the professional world, by identifying the challenges that young musicians face alongside factors that facilitate a 'smoother transition' into professional life (Creech et al., 2008). Interviews with undergraduate musicians and professionals (who were reflecting on their experiences) suggested that the key challenges of transition were the management of self-doubt, and coping with time pressures. Mitigating factors for a smoother transition were found to be related to personality – for example sociability and perseverance – in addition to skills such as improvisation, musical versatility and organisation. The support of professional colleagues was also found to be valued during the transitional period. Creech et al. suggest that conservatoires have a responsibility to their students to create 'communities of practice' that develop these skills within their institution and beyond, in order to facilitate a smoother transition for their students, citing the instrumental tutor as a key player within these communities. This links strongly with research into teacher-student relationships (explored above) that infers that a teacher who acts more as a mentor, fostering collaborative relationships with their students and supporting versatility, might prepare their students better for the realities of the music profession (Bridgstock, 2012; Carey et al., 2013).

The theme of self-doubt was prevalent in another study investigating the challenges of musical development across the lifespan, where participants discussed their entire musical journeys (MacNamara, Homes and Collins, 2006). When reflecting upon their education, most agreed that their attendance at conservatoire was an important part of their musical development, describing a place of deliberate practise, networking, and competition, which echoes previous research into conservatoire culture (Perkins, 2013; Nettl, 1995; Kingsbury, 1987). All participants identified a need for strong determination and commitment despite overriding feelings of self-doubt. It is important to consider the limitations of this study, however. The 12 participants interviewed (in 2006) were all aged between 35 and 58, meaning that the youngest participant will have graduated in the early 90s. Additionally, all of these participants at the time of interview were principal players with leading orchestras, faculty heads, internationally renowned soloists, or a combination of the three. Given that the clearly very successful transitions of

these twelve musicians took place over 20 years ago, it is apparent that, although these results provide a good comparison point for current research, there needs to be more up-to-date findings on the transition process for music college graduates in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

There is a growing body of more recent research investigating Australian graduates' experiences of transition into the music profession. One such study compared incoming conservatoire undergraduates' (undertaking both music and dance courses) perceptions of their future careers with their current employment status five years later (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014). At the outset of their degrees, the majority of music and dance students saw teaching as a 'fall back' role, with only 18% of the musicians expecting to do this in their future careers. Instead, 84% hoped for a performance career, with 61% expecting this career outcome. On the other hand, there were some students who had high *hopes* for their career, but very low *expectations*, suggesting that creative students are aware of the competitive nature of their chosen field but rather less aware of how to negotiate this. Three music graduates, who took part in the survey as students, were asked to reflect on their careers after leaving the conservatoire, and all of their narratives pointed to a lack of awareness of the realities of building a career within music. Bennett and Bridgstock suggest that this lack of awareness can result from a misdirected or closed-minded career aspiration, such as aiming for a career 'just like Dave Brubeck's' (p.10). Interestingly, although it has been previously suggested that an instrumental teacher's mentoring style can contribute to students' success in transition, by fostering independence, this is something of a double-edged sword. Kingsbury (1987) found that conservatoire students often exhibit signs of real dedication, verging on idol worship, towards their tutors, socialising with other students of that tutor and promoting his or her concerts. Given that the instrumental teacher is clearly in such a position of influence within the students' life both during and after their formal musical education, this could accidentally place a burden of responsibility on the tutor to ensure that the student might fulfil their potential after graduation. For further exploration of teacher-student relationships and possible effects on transition, please see chapter 2.4.1. Additionally, although 18% of the students at the outset of Bennett and

Bridgstock's (2014) study had considered teaching as a fall-back role, the interviewees in the second part of the research described it as a valued part of their portfolio of work, affording them financial stability. The above findings suggest that both the music and dance students interviewed were largely unaware of the realities of their chosen profession post-graduation, and may have benefitted from greater career preview whilst still in education, which Bennett & Bridgstock describe as an ethical issue:

Institutions have an ethical responsibility to represent the career opportunities and challenges associated with their degrees, particularly if they are marketing their degrees based on vocational outcomes. (p.12)

It could be argued that 'ethical responsibility' is too strong a term to use with respect to employability after university education: after all, Higher Education has not always been based upon vocational outcomes, and instead these outcomes were more aesthetic (White, 2013). Indeed, conservatoires were traditionally places where students furthered their instrumental skills as performers, and nothing more – albeit for a less competitive market than exists nowadays. However, an increase in accountability has meant that conservatoires *are* now marketing their degrees based on vocational outcomes (for further exploration of this, see chapter 2.3), meaning that, a lack of career preparation could be seen as unethical, especially given rising tuition fees, the high levels of anxiety that many graduates feel upon graduation, and the subsequent threat of unemployment.

Of course, not all music graduates, whether from a conservatoire or university background, will choose to become professional musicians after graduation. Burland (2005) found that music (college and university) graduates' development of either an amateur musician or professional musician identity was dependent upon the coping strategies they had at their disposal, and their beliefs about their musical development. The graduates who ultimately took the professional music route were better at coping with setbacks: they had a wider variety of strategies to call upon in times of difficulty, for example, reframing failures as learning opportunities. They also had a *growth mindset*, believing that their skills were incremental, and that they could improve with practise, as per Dweck's self-

theories (1999). On the contrary, the less resilient musicians ultimately decided to keep their musical engagements as an amateur pursuit. They tended to be more affected by hindrances to their development, believing themselves to have reached the limits of their capabilities. Crucially, for the most part, those students who at the end of the study intended to become professional performers had trained at conservatoire, and the non-performer group consisted of mainly university students. It is unclear whether those graduates who had opted to become professional performers had always had these belief systems and coping strategies, or whether it was their conservatoire education that had helped to develop these. It is possible that these competencies are developed early in life for these musicians, and that, in order to even gain a place at music college, one must possess this 'killer instinct' (Burland, 2005, p.112) from an early age. However, to date, there is no research which directly concerns coping strategies in commencing music college students.

#### 2.2.6 Transitions into artistic careers

Given the lack of research concerning music graduates' transitions into the labour market, many researchers have used investigations with visual artists to provide context for work with musicians (Juuti & Littleton, 2012). This makes sense: artists work in similar ways to musicians, primarily on a self-employed basis. Furthermore, the creative industries as a whole are generally understood to be difficult places in which to make a living: creatives see struggle to find work as almost an inevitability (McRobbie, 2002; Taylor & Littleton, 2008). Taylor and Littleton envisage that tensions between art, money and validation form the basis of many of the psychological difficulties that creative industries workers face throughout their lives. Many workers feel as though they must choose between art and money, yet might only achieve validation by receiving money for their art. To this end, these discourses combined mean that the creative worker must choose between creating art or achieving financial success, and brings about the belief that any endeavour that has commercial success may not truly be considered 'art.'

### 2.2.7 Adaption to transition:

The idea that individuals somehow 'complete' transition by resolving identity discrepancies may not be entirely applicable to a freelance workforce (Ashford, Caza & Reid, 2018; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzeniewski, 2018). For further information about the intersection of identity concepts and transition, please see 2.3. Despite this, previous research has suggested that individuals adapt to transition in a variety of ways, regardless of whether 'resolution' is the aim. Recalling Schlossberg's theory (1985) people may adapt to transition using coping strategies, and by calling upon others around them as social supports. These social supports may encompass friends and family, but research has also suggested that professional supports are equally important to those in work-related transition (Ibarra, 1999, Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2015). Schlossberg posits that, ultimately, ease of adaption hinges on the discrepancy between resources and deficits that the individual may have at that time. For example, a musician who graduates from college and must immediately move back into their rural family home to look after a sick relative is likely to find adaption difficult: their social supports are no longer close by, and a great deal of their time and energy is devoted to their relative. Furthermore, the paucity of jobs in a rural setting means that this graduate may be economically threatened. If resources and deficits are not balanced, transition can become more difficult. In the following section I will provide examples of the resources that conservatoire graduates may have available to them at transition, including coping strategies and career preparation, as well as considering the circumstances that may bring about resource deficits.

### 2.2.8 Coping Strategies

Outside of the more environmental factors detailed above, a person's ability to adapt to transition may depend on their repertoire of coping strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). Lazarus and Folkman (1984, in Baker & Berenbaum, 2003) distinguished between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused coping usually involves efforts to modify the situation at hand, solving the problem by evaluating options and implementing solutions. On the

other hand, emotion-focused coping strategies aim to mitigate the stress arising from the challenging situation. Example of these emotion-focused strategies are venting about the situation, reframing the situation to find a positive perspective, and finding social supports. There is no general consensus about the efficacy of these types of coping strategies when compared to one another per se, however research does suggest that individuals who are already clear and attentive to their emotions have little to gain from using these emotion-based strategies and instead find greater effectiveness when using more problem-based strategies.

Furthermore, emotion-based strategies are less effective when the problem is clear (Baker & Berenbaum, 2003). Research which intends to investigate musicians' coping strategies from the outset tends to centre arounds students' strategies for coping with performance anxiety, as opposed to those undergoing transitions, specifically. However an investigation of singers coping with job loss indicated that the use of problem-focused strategies – predominantly redefining what being a singer meant to them in the absence of full-time employment – assisted the redundant singers in adapting to their new reality (Oakland, MacDonald and Flowers, 2013). Furthermore, Burland (2005) found that graduate musicians who had a wider range of coping strategies at their disposal tended to be more suited to becoming a professional musician than those that did not.

#### 2.2.9 Preparing for transition: career preparation

Schlossberg notes that it may be easier for an individual to cope with a transition that is expected rather than unexpected, since they may have had the opportunity to prepare themselves with strategies and support (1985, 2011). Graduation is certainly a transition that is expected, yet, as discussed above, it remains a time of anxiety and uncertainty for many. According to Bennett and Bridgstock (2014), a lack of career preview plays a large part in contributing to the difficulties that music students face upon graduation, since it is a time when expectations rarely meet reality. Although scholars are increasingly investigating the career transitions of music graduates, there is only a small amount of literature concerning the nature of careers advice received by these students, and its effects, if any, on their career

transitions. In the following section, I will summarise conservatoires' descriptions of the career preparation offered to students. I will outline the empirical research surrounding careers advice for music performance students, and students in general, in addition to considering the threats to musicians' career development.

#### 2.2.10 Careers advice in the conservatoire:

There is very little scholarly research that specifically deals with the nature of careers advice in the conservatoire, however there are related studies that make passing reference to careers education. For example, conservatoire graduates in a longitudinal study of conservatoire and university graduates' transitions (Burland, 2005) expressed disappointment that their institution had not prepared them for the practical elements of making a living in music: self-promotion, managing finances and so on. This could suggest that, at least in 2005 at this particular institution, careers education for students was minimal, perhaps due to an assumption that the development of musical ability was enough to forge a successful career. This attitude prevails in more recent studies: Ford (2010) found that students' discourses of employability 'focussed on the accrual of skills,' (p.207), and furthermore when questioned about these skills that may enable them to obtain work, they made reference to personal qualities and technical skills over and above more work-related skills mentioned above. Although these two references cannot necessarily account for wider trends in the sector, they do highlight how assumptions about career preparation – whether the assumptions of institutions or students – may affect graduates' transitions further down the line.

A review of UK conservatoires' online prospectuses indicates that careers education has moved on since 2005. At the very least, conservatoires now appear to offer the career development opportunities that participants in Burland's study claim to have missed out on: self-promotion, financial management, CV preparation and networking, for example (2005). Curiously, information about these elements of the course was somewhat 'buried' in the prospectus, which could suggest that institutions do not see this as a particular selling point for the degree. It may also imply that, at this time, this sort of career preparation may be taken as read.



Instead, conservatoire websites and prospectuses promote career preparation with respect to opportunities: opportunities to participate in side-by-side schemes with professional orchestras, undertake professional experience schemes, and do work placements in a variety of settings both inside and outside of the performance sphere. One institution uses the term 'proto-professional opportunities,' implying that the completion of the degree is professional preparation in itself. This is understandable: whereas many students commencing university degrees in other subjects may not begin with a specific career aim, it can be assumed that the vast majority of students at music college will aspire to be a professional performer in some respect, meaning that, for them, these opportunities can be counted as career preparation. This form of career preparation is likely to be well-established within conservatoire courses. Outside of performance opportunities, many websites make reference to optional seminars and panel discussions with industry leaders. Strikingly, *opportunity* is central to the discourse in all of these promotional materials – whether the opportunity is taken or won – meaning that there is no one way that a conservatoire student may experience career preparation. In some ways this may be no different than in any university environment, for any subject: many opportunities for career development are optional in Higher Education. However, it is important to note that there is likely to be a high level of competition for many of these proto-professional opportunities, whether internal (Symphony Orchestra) or external (a professional experience scheme). Is it possible, then, that a proportion of students miss out on professional experiences, and thus career preparation, as a result of this competition? Davies (2004) observed that conservatoire students perceived these professional experiences as the 'most effective preparation for the realities of the music profession,' (p.814) however noted that a significant subsection of the student body was repeatedly denied these opportunities following an unsatisfactory initial audition. This caused many students to feel that the conservatoire's promise of a 'professional education' had been contradicted, since it was only available to a small number of students. Similarly, conservatoire students have accused their institution of favouritism when selecting students for participation in performance projects (Burland, 2005). Despite the lack of empirical research around careers education in conservatoires, the issues outlined above

suggest that careers preparation – and students' career preparation *beliefs* – are largely centred around the undertaking of the degree itself. This supports subsequent research that suggests that music college students (in comparison to university students) take a professional and dedicated approach to their music college degree (Burland, 2005). Furthermore, it is unclear how this ultimately impacts graduates' transitions into the profession, but it may be hypothesised that without these professional experiences, a graduate may feel less prepared for the first steps in their career.

#### 2.2.11 Orchestral training

As detailed above, orchestral training frequently falls under the broader remit of career preparation for conservatoire students, by way of participation in conservatoire ensembles rather than any dedicated programme in particular. There are a handful of studies which explore the nature of orchestral training for aspiring orchestral musicians, some of which seek to evaluate this training from the point of view of orchestras themselves, however this is a research area which is still somewhat lacking, as noted by Calissendorf and Hannesson (2016). Corkhill (2005) investigated conservatoire students' and teachers' perspectives on the preparation of orchestral players, and concluded that although many students were determined to become orchestral musicians, they did not have much understanding of the profession. This conclusion, however, was mainly reached following participants' low scores in a quiz about UK orchestras and prominent figures, which, although telling, may not be an adequate measure of career preparation. Additionally, the use of a quiz to determine students' understanding of the music profession and draw inferences about their readiness for an orchestral career may be somewhat misguided or simplistic. Perhaps the most striking of Corkhill's findings was that many conservatoire principal study tutors did not believe career preparation, orchestral or otherwise, to be their job, with one tutor saying: 'My job is to prepare them as an instrumentalist... There's plenty to do, and you've only got an hour to do it.' This perspective, which mirrors Ford's assertion that career preparation in the conservatoire is often skills-based (2015), is potentially problematic.

Given that, as discussed above, the closest some students will get to orchestral training is participation with the conservatoire orchestras, and that these opportunities are not guaranteed on account of them being won (as detailed in Davies, 2004), a teacher who does not engage with career preparation may result in a student not receiving this preparation at all. The above-mentioned situation, however (im)probable, implies that there could be considerable differences between how each student might experience career preparation over the course of their degree. Since the publication of Corkhill's study, undertaken in 2005, aspiring musicians can now undertake more specialised orchestral training, in the form of specific postgraduate degrees, such as the Orchestral Artistry course at the Guildhall School of Music, or as training courses delivered by orchestras themselves, such as the Hallé String Leadership Scheme. To date, no evaluations of these UK programmes appear to have taken place, however Jonsson and Hager (2008) investigated a similar orchestra-initiated programme for music students in Australia. Graduates on the programme (called 'Fellows') were assigned professional mentors, participated in lessons and masterclasses with orchestral players, took part in education and outreach work, whilst undertaking a number of modestly-paid engagements with the host orchestra – broadly comparable to the Hallé String Leadership Scheme. The authors found that participants' experiences of the orchestral environment were at odds with that of the music college: whereas music colleges can be seen as selfishly competitive as a result of a focus on technical improvement and the winning of opportunity, an new orchestral player must ultimately relinquish some of their need to be seen to play better than others in order to focus on a unity of sound. Graduates found that this was something that had to be experienced first-hand to be appreciated. This could imply that work experiences outside of the conservatoire environment are key to aspiring musicians' development. Furthermore, it could indicate that institutions may benefit from changing practices within curricula in order to better prepare their graduates for the change in surroundings that will undoubtedly come after graduation, in addition to skills or knowledge development.

### 2.2.12 Preparation for teaching:

Although students do not necessarily attend conservatoire courses to become instrumental tutors (Burt & Mills, 2006), the fact remains that teaching features heavily in the graduate musicians' portfolio of work: in 2001, it was found that 77% of musicians earn over half their income from teaching (Metier, 2001, in Bennett, 2007). Although it is unclear from the literature exactly how much course time is given over to instrumental pedagogy in the UK, Bennett (2009) estimated, in her study of Australian musicians, that whilst 87% of musicians' work time was spent teaching, only 1.1% of course time was devoted to this at conservatoire level, indicating a certain disparity between education and professional realities. Evaluations of pedagogical training in the conservatoire are generally scarce, however Miller and Baker (2007) undertook a small-scale study of wind, brass and percussion students at a UK conservatoire, tracking their career aspirations as they participated in a pedagogy module delivered over the course of their degree. The results indicated that music teaching, especially peripatetic instrumental teaching, was – at least at first – viewed as a 'lower status' job than performing music, which mirrors more recent research which suggests that a perceived 'hierarchy' of jobs exists for musicians (Help Musicians UK, 2018). However, students' career aspirations shifted during their degrees, primarily as a result of shadowing and mentoring as part of the pedagogy module, suggesting that real world, workplace opportunities may be key to developing broader aspirations for conservatoire students. It is unclear whether students' perspectives regarding the value of teaching work changed, or whether this change in aspiration was some form of 'acceptance' of reality as time went on. It has been documented elsewhere that attitudes to teaching can 'soften' over the musician's lifespan: Juuti and Littleton (2010) found that 'teaching emerges as one of the most challenging things to negotiate in respect of professional musicianship in the context of transition to working life,' (p.15). This challenge mainly came from a need to overcome previous beliefs that teaching was 'second-best' in some way. These participants integrated teaching into their career as a musician by taking a 'broader, more holistic view of their lives,' (ibid): for example one participant, Kati, was realistic about teaching, deciding that it would bring her a much-needed 'clarity'

about her financial position, since she was a ‘worrier.’ This could suggest that attitudes to teaching change, in part, as a result of growing up and factoring in other life aspirations. Whether or not individuals’ perspectives of the *prestige* of teaching change during transition remains unknown, however Juuti and Littleton’s research (2010) does suggest that musicians see personal, albeit non-musical value in teaching work.

### 2.2.13 Employability

Institutions are turning their focus toward notions of employability and employability skills when designing their degrees. Hillage and Pollard (1998, cited in Moore, 2017) conceptualise employability as ‘the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if desired.’ (p.1) Whereas employability skills might be seen to be practical: i.e. searching for jobs, attending and succeeding in interviews etc., ‘softer’ skills also fall under their remit, for example communication and teamwork skills. Rather than being offered as either standalone modules or optional careers events, these softer skills are often embedded into university curricula. More recently, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland have been seeking to develop students’ employability skills by introducing a module in *critical artistry* (Minors et al., 2017). By encouraging students to collaborate across disciplines (music, drama and dance), the *critical artistry* module sought to develop skills such as collaborative working and networking, which are skills considered crucial for the maintenance of musical employment (Creech et al., 2008). This initiative appears similar in philosophy to Trinity Laban’s *CoLab* project, which is a fortnight-long collaborative festival run by students in both the music and dance programmes. A recent evaluation of this project suggested that *CoLab* facilitates informal peer mentoring, on account of its cross-school nature (Jackson & Price, 2019). This peer mentoring enabled students to develop valuable networking skills and broadened their perspectives on music student trajectories.

Whilst these examples suggest that music college students are encouraged to develop their employability skills, at present there is a lack of scholarly

evaluation of these programmes' continuing impact on transition, indicating that further, more robust research of students' experiences is needed.

#### 2.2.14 Threats to engagement with careers advice

Career calling literature suggests that those students who feel more of an affinity to their subject – a greater 'calling' to their career – are more likely to reject career advice, even when delivered by a trusted tutor (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012). The authors define career calling as 'a consuming, meaningful passion people experience towards a domain' (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p.1) and whilst this calling can act as a motivator in many cases, it is something of a double-edged sword in that it might also cloud young musicians' judgement when building their careers. Crucially, this perspective was lasting: individuals who reported being likely to ignore careers advice at the outset of their careers or before, were similarly likely to do so seven years later, which suggests this resistance may continue throughout a musicians' conservatoire degree. Although at present there is not research which specifically investigates the likelihood of conservatoire musicians dismissing careers advice, it stands to reason that it could be the case amongst this population. Since research implies that graduates of conservatoire degrees are underprepared for the realities of the music profession, and it is without question that many conservatoire students will feel a strong calling towards a career as a musician, it is possible that, to an extent, this might be due to a lack of receptivity to careers advice. As discussed above, students may feel as though engagement with the proto-professional aspects of their degree is sufficient career preparation. This may present another barrier to engagement with careers advice: at time of study, they simply believe that they do not need it.

The previous section has outlined current discourse around transitions that may be relevant to conservatoire graduates. Whilst directly comparable research is not wide-ranging, studies of other life transitions provide context for the research objectives of this thesis. As is clear from the above, identity change is widely

accepted to be a key part of any life transition. The following section will discuss identity theory and changes in identity in more detail.

## 2.3 Identity

Theories of transition are very much underpinned by notions of identity. The following section firstly deals with the theories of identity which are relevant to transitions more generally. Afterwards follows an exploration of more specific identity constructs, such as student identities, and professional and musical identities. A significant proportion of research concerning workplace identities focuses on individuals' experiences of transiting into companies, and their associated socialisation. For this reason, much of the current discourse around workplace identity falls short of defining musicians' working lives: many musicians do not work for a company, instead working as freelancers for part of, if not their entire lives (Armstrong, 2013). As will become apparent, there is a dearth of research exploring professional identities amongst boundaryless workers, which includes musicians. Furthermore, whilst in many other subject areas there is a relatively robust body of research concerning graduates' professional identity development, music education research appears to lag behind in this regard. The following section will review current understanding regarding identities in transition and identify knowledge that may be relevant in conceptualising musicians' working lives.

### 2.3.1 Identity and self-concept

There is considerable variation between usages and definitions of *identity* across the sciences. Stryker & Burke (2000) distinguish between three usages. The first is the use of identity to refer to a culture, almost interchangeably with the word ethnicity. Social identity theory uses identity to refer to group commonalities, such as social categories. The third definition of identity is the most in line with the way that it has been conceptualised in this paper:

[Identity refers] to parts of a self, composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies. (p.284)

Although some scholars use self and identity interchangeably, the above model distinguishes between the two by intimating that a person's self may be composed of multiple identities. Of these multiple identities, some may be more salient, or central, than the others to an individual's self-concept (Callero, 1985). Furthermore, identity structure is widely accepted to be dynamic, meaning that the salience of these identities may be changeable across the lifespan in accordance with an individual's experiences, values and priorities at any given time. These changes, explored below, may consist of smoother 'transformations:' identity changes that take place over time, during more exploratory phases of 'finding oneself.' On the other hand these changes may be active restructurings, where, for example, an individual may re-assess and reprioritise identity roles in order to protect their self-concept to cope with unplanned changes such as redundancy or illness (Oakland, MacDonald & Flowers, 2012, 2013, 2014).

### 2.3.2 Professional Identity

Professional identity is what individuals believe themselves to be professionally, that is to say, the role that they play in the workplace. Mills (2004) argues that musicians have a complex relationship with their own professional identity since their objective career – others' perception of their career role – may not necessarily match their professional identity outright, or the person they believe themselves to be:

For many individuals, their 'professional identity' takes the same form of words as their job title, which is a facet of their objective career. For example, an individual who is employed as an accountant may feel that this is also their professional identity. However, within the field of music the situation is often more complex. An individual who derives most of their income from instrumental teaching, for example, may have a professional identity of musician or performer or composer. An individual who is director of a conservatoire, for example, may have retained the professional identity of musician or composer. (p.245)



Although the above quotation is in reference to performer-teachers, it could certainly be applied to many musicians, whose career may be described as either 'protean' or 'portfolio' – consisting of many different job roles underneath the umbrella of 'musician.'

Many studies of transition from higher education investigate students' cultivation of a professional identity whilst in education and how this develops post-graduation (Juuti, 2012; Nyström, 2009, Jackson, 2016). In general, studies of professional identity development tend to come from the field of healthcare education, as the development of a professional identity widely accepted as being key to graduate employability in this field (Clouder, 2005). Although the cultivation of a professional identity is coming to the fore in discourses of musicians' employability, the focus remains mainly on music teachers' identity development over and above musicians more generally (Ballantyne & Zhukov, 2017; Draves, 2014; Tryantafyllaki, 2010). As noted by Trede, Macklin & Bridges (2012), the concept of professional identity is presented in a variety of ways throughout the literature. Paterson (2002) simply conceptualises professional identity as 'the sense of being a professional,' and that in order to develop a professional identity one must combine several different areas of professionalism such as professional judgement, reasoning and self-directed learning. Other scholars make reference to practice, or communities of practice: Pettifer and Clouder (2008) suggested that professional identity was doing and being in practice, which indicates that repeated enactment of work roles may be key to professional identity development. This is corroborated by Trede et al. (2012), who posit that 'professional identity development is fostered by the authentic experiences of students in the workplace' (p. 379). Trede et al. describe professional identity and its development, in three parts:

1. Individuals develop values, skills and and knowledge specific to the target profession, and identical to those of the current members of the profession
2. Individuals' new competencies and values mean they become distanced from those not in the profession (the 'out-group')
3. The individual identifies themselves as a member of the profession.

They conclude that higher education institutions seeking to foster a strong sense of professional identity in their students might 'focus on building in students a sense of being part of or belonging to a community of a certain type of professional,' (p.380). Although it is not yet clear whether conservatoires are explicitly designing courses that aim to foster this 'strong sense of professional identity,' conservatoire prospectuses do make reference to professional, and 'proto-professional' experiences for their students (see also: 2.2.10). If these experiences are interpreted by students to be 'authentic workplace experiences,' as discussed above, it is hypothesised that the vocational nature of the conservatoire degree may already be helping students to build a strong professional identity. What is still unclear, currently, is how these identities develop during the transitional period out of conservatoire and into the music profession.

### 2.3.3 Professional identities in transition: from student to professional

Nyström (2009), in a longitudinal study of psychology and business students, compared the way in which students form their professional identities during their degrees and how these identities were renegotiated both soon after graduating, and later once settled in employment. The results suggested that the transition into work is not smooth, and, instead, professional identities interact with other aspects of the self differently at different stages. Participants' identities appeared to be structured as a relationship between personal and professional aspects of life, which the author describes as 'spheres.' At each life stage investigated, these 'spheres' of life interacted with each other differently, with the boundaries between personal and professional life being rather blurred at the interview stage that took place whilst participants were students. This was because the student identity seemed to be the overriding factor: students felt that their courses had contributed to their own personal development and they were not yet explicitly separating their occupations from their personal lives. At the novice professional stage, respondents separated occupation and personal life to the greatest extent, leading to a Compartmentalised Identity, where graduates concentrated on becoming professionals above all. For some participants this was also represented

by a 'standing back' of the personal sphere, whilst professional development takes priority. As graduates became more settled within their professions, their identity became more integrated, accepting that the personal sphere can, and will, influence the professional sphere, whilst still differentiating between the two and separating them when necessary. Respondents in the above study were either psychology or politics graduates, and although they followed a largely similar trajectory in terms of professional identity formation, there were some subtle but important differences. When comparing the possible occupations for both sets of students, one can argue that whereas psychology graduates have a clearer career trajectory (towards a role of psychologist), politics students do not. Psychology students did appear have begun separating their professional and personal spheres or envisaged doing so in the near future. However, politics students tended to view their degree in terms of the skills it developed (critical thinking, analytical ability, knowledge of politics and economics) rather than in terms of a clear-cut future job role. For this reason, these respondents held a different perspective of their own identity whilst students, perhaps owing to the nature of their social circle: the strong identification with their practice meant that they would often discuss politics and economics in leisure time. In subsequent stages these differences appeared to level out, but further research into the differences between graduates of varied subject areas could shed more light on the transitional experience into diffuse career areas.

Similar research took place, comparing students from different subjects (Reid & Petocz, 2013), focused on experiences in clear and diffuse fields. In an interview study comparing music graduates and mathematics graduates, results suggested that mathematics graduates were more uncertain about their professional futures than music graduates, on account of the field being 'diffuse.' The authors define music as a 'clear field of study,' since it appears to lead to the role of 'professional musician' upon graduation. On the other hand, they argue that mathematics is a 'diffuse field of study' because the role of a professional mathematician or mathematical scientist is less clear. Interviews appear to support this suggestion, with participants from the mathematics department demonstrating a lack of role

knowledge as regards employment opportunities. Music students, however, seemed fairly confident in their knowledge of the role of a professional musician, which the authors ascribe to the learning environment at the conservatorium at which they study, where “students’ range of experiences during their studies is closely related to the professional reality,” (p.45). In fact, this study raises more questions than it answers. Previous and subsequent research exploring students’ attitudes whilst at conservatoire, in addition to their experiences after graduating suggests that music is far from a ‘clear field of study.’ The title of ‘professional musician’ may seem clear, however the reality of a musician’s working life is rather less so. For a more detailed exploration of the nature of musicians’ careers please see 2.4.2.

In summary, the term ‘portfolio career’ is often used to describe musicians’ careers, because a professional musician can expect to have many different professional roles, making up a portfolio of work. Music careers tend to follow a non-traditional trajectory, where, rather than working for an institution and measuring career success through rank ascension and salary increase, a musician may expect to combine roles on a self-employed basis, measuring success psychologically, through cultivation of an artistic identity. Whereas music graduates have been found to be aware of the notion of a ‘portfolio career,’ with 97% of respondents in a 2013 study hoping for this career outcome, the same respondents were unaware of the details of what this would truly entail (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014). Reid & Petocz (2013), do return to their original categorisation of the music field as ‘clear,’ instead labelling musicians’ *working lives* as diffuse based upon the notion of portfolio career, but do not then explore their participants’ experiences based upon these career realities. Simplistic conclusions like those exhibited in this study may create a false sense of security to providers of musical education that their courses are adequately preparing their graduates for a fulfilling working life, meaning more detailed and individualistic enquiry into musicians’ working lives may aid understanding of the way in which a musician’s professional identity develops.

The two studies above raise questions about the nature of transitions for music graduates. Despite Reid and Petocz’s (2013) possible mis-categorisation of the

music profession as a clear career field, it is still apparent that transitions into the professional world are complex and subject-dependent. Nyström's picture of the politics student as skills-centred and identifying strongly with their practice in both social and work situations seems to align well with music students at conservatoire-level.

#### 2.3.4 Musician identities in transition

Perhaps one of the most detailed investigations of musicians' professional identities in transition to date concerns singers' professional identities following redundancy (Oakland et al., 2013). As discussed in Chapter 2.2., much of the careers advice offered by conservatoires centres around proto-professional opportunities: in other words, many music students will be living a 'mini-professional' life whilst studying, in order to prepare them for the music profession. If students consider themselves to be professionals, or becoming professionals at this point, the act of graduation may be something of a redundancy, since these professional-aligning activities will cease at that point. Although findings concerning singers may not be applicable to all musicians, they may offer additional perspectives on how performers might construct and maintain their professional identities, especially when these performance opportunities are removed. First and foremost, Oakland et al. found that the opera singer identity was driven in part by the voice itself. The voice therefore acted as a constant in this time of change, echoing Baumeister's findings (1986) which imply that individuals seek continuity in order to maintain sense of self during periods of change. One participant broadened his identity perspective and viewed himself as a musician rather than a singer in order to cope with the challenges of his change in role: it is therefore possible that a broadening of identity may serve as a coping strategy when one more specific part of the professional identity (e.g. 'singer') is threatened by redundancy. It is possible to draw comparisons between Oakland et al.'s findings with singers (2013) and Nyström's study with students (2008). Nyström found that as students' and graduates' professional identities developed, the way in which their 'spheres' of life interacted changed, and for Oakland et al.'s singers this also rang true, albeit differently.

Individuals with a weaker identification with their practice tended to separate their personal and professional life more easily, which is the coping mechanism that some singers used after redundancy. This may suggest that the repeated action of performing – and receiving money for performing – cultivates a stronger identification with a musician's practice. Likewise, this may also mean that professional identity for musicians is more complex than for those in other areas, as the boundaries between the personal and professional are frequently unclear.

### 2.3.5 Transitions into freelance musician life

When investigating musicians' career paths there are a number of 'sticking points' where the existing literature does not yet offer adequate theory. One of these concerns students' transitions into freelance careers. Recalling the literature above, many of the studies which investigate career transitions of graduates focus on professions in which there is a clear path into a company, and as such there is mention of socialisation into an organisation (Reid & Petocz, 2013, etc.) and its resulting identity work. Likewise, many studies which seek to investigate professional musicians' careers in general are centred around organisations, e.g. orchestras (Carpos, 2017; Ascenso, Perkins & Williamon, 2017). Research into music students' transitions tend to centre around those who are preparing for a career in teaching (Austin, Isbell & Russell, 2010), or the experiences of students in orchestral professional experience schemes whilst still in education (Hager & Jonsson, 2009), meaning that these, too, have something of an 'organisational bias.'

Although scholars over the last two decades have lamented that many theories of work remain focused on 'petrified images' (Barley & Kunda, 2001, p.82) and have failed to keep up with changes in ways of working (Ashford, George & Blatt, 2007; Weiss & Rupp, 2011), there is now a new and increasing body of research investigating the experiences of those who operate in 'the gig economy,' which can be described as long- and short-term contract workers who work with organisations or sell directly to the market (Petriglieri, Ashford and Wrzeniewski, 2019; Ashford, Caza and Reid, 2018). In many ways, freelance musicians can be seen to be

operating on these terms, however Petriglieri et al. noted that those in the 'gig economy' work with 'high degrees of autonomy in the absence of membership in organisations or established professions,' (p.129). Here, the 'gig economy' label fails to stick: it can be argued that music is a profession which has been establishing itself for centuries. Furthermore, a freelance musician might expect to undertake a short- or medium-term contract with an organisation, and, during that time, affiliate themselves with the organisation as if they were a full-time member, for example during an employment as an 'extra' in an orchestra (Carpos, 2017) or a 'dep' player with a function band (Umney, 2017). Despite this, current discourse surrounding gig economy workers and their experiences may shed more light on musicians' experiences by comparing and contrasting accounts.

Petriglieri et al. found that in the absence of an organisation and the anchors it provides, work identities become 'precarious and personalised,' (p. 152) hinging on productivity and self-expression rather than being driven by a sense of loyalty to a company. This is concurrent with previous research that asserts that those in portfolio or protean careers gain job satisfaction through self-expression rather than the more traditional motivations such as rank ascension or salary increase (Bennett, 2012). Above all, these workers saw emotional tension as something that was never conquered, rather something to be constantly reckoned with. Many reframed it in a positive light, seeing it as valuable for their creativity and continued motivation. This goes against more established theory that suggests that resolution of this emotional tension is the 'end-point' of successful identity work (Winkler, 2018; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2015; Creed, DeJordy & Lok, 2010), providing evidence that independent workers may experience identity tensions in their work differently to workers within organisations. This suggests that care must be taken when studying the transitions of freelance and independent workers: the assumption that 'successful' transition hinges on some sort of identity resolution puts us in danger of misrepresenting transitions of this type. On the contrary, recalling chapter 2.2.8, reframing negative emotions as positive motivations are examples of coping strategies that are used by many individuals who are undergoing a transition (Schlossberg, 2011 etc.). This may suggest that the anxiety that music graduates face upon graduation is as much about precarity and a

continued lack of anchor points as it is about the transition itself. Further understanding of the transitions of independent workers, musicians included, would provide higher education institutions with more detailed insight into how to prepare their students for this brave new world of work.

In the context of a freelance career, Juuti and Littleton (2012) found that graduating musicians based their professional identities on narrower work roles, for example on solo work or the role of chamber musician, rather than a broader definition of musician. It is possible to compare this more role-focused state to workers within the gig economy who were found to define their work identities by the 'doing' of the job itself: for example, the writer, who only felt like a writer whilst writing, found that the more 'admin' and self-promotion work outside of that was at odds with their craft, and therefore their identity as a writer (Petriglieri et al., 2019). Perhaps, to less experienced musicians, anything that is not performance is also at odds with their craft, and therefore their identity as musicians. However, as these career-young musicians established themselves they 'embraced plurality' as they broadened their music-making practices. The crucial process for these musicians was a 'letting go' of the 'shoulds of the Academy,' suggesting that the nature of performance-based training at conservatoires is in part responsible for the earlier fixed views that the graduates held (Juuti & Littleton, 2012). This recalls Bennett's research that revealed a clear mismatch between musicians' professional activities and course time percentage at conservatoires (2007), which may indicate that some messages about future career paths are implicit and assumed. Juuti and Littleton's (2012) findings also mirror those of Oakland et al., (2013) who found that musicians' identity construction (and reconstruction) during transition is an active process: in other words, these individuals *choose* to present themselves anew, renegotiating their identity in a new context:

By emphasizing freedom, the fulfilment of her [Kati's] dreams after her studies, and the accompanying experiences of fun and joy, she implicitly highlights her musician's identity as self-made, voluntarily, based on her own feelings, and re-constructed without the influence of the Academy. (p. 14)



Juuti and Littleton (2012) also highlighted how musicians' non-musical identities enabled them to make decisions about their future working lives and legitimise a more holistic working life. For example, a piano graduate who identifies as a 'worrier' and a 'realist' chooses to take a full-time teaching job in order to make ends meet and relax about her own financial stability. Instead of seeing this teaching as being at odds with her identity as a musician, she places music as being the centre of her working life. This is comparable with Burland's (2005) finding that overriding concerns about financial stability may lead music graduates to give up the plan of being a professional performer altogether, which might suggest that lack of a holistic view of their own identity can cause potential professional musicians to 'fall at the first hurdle.' Creech et al. (2008) found that individuals may experience tensions between their musical identities and other identities throughout the lifespan – for example, one participant felt 'out of place' at a jam session as both a musician and a mother. This could indicate that even if music is central to an individual's identity, certain situations can put this identity under threat, or perhaps diminish its salience at certain times.

The above literature suggests musicians' identity in times of transition is dynamic and complex. Above all, regardless of the sort of work undertaken (performance or performance-adjacent), musicians undergo transition by placing music and the concept of 'musician' centrally within their identity structure, rather than basing it around specific job roles, such as 'solo pianist' or orchestral clarinettist.'

#### 2.3.6 Motivation and Possible Selves:

Researchers have attempted to examine identity change during transition through the lens of *possible selves* (Bennett, 2012; Burland, 2005; Ibarra 1999; Schnare, McIntyre & Doucette, 2011). Markus and Nurius (1984) assert that possible selves are an individual's visions of what or who they may become, that serve as powerful incentives for behaviour. Possible selves represent more than just goals for the future, in that they are concerned about what achievement of these goals may represent about their future self. For example, a student may have a possible self of

'solo pianist,' which motivates them to practise hard to achieve a high mark in their final recital. In short, an individual's possible selves can be seen to serve as a connection between their motives and their actions. These possible selves are both positive and negative, probable and more far-fetched: Markus and Nurius distinguish between individuals' hoped-for selves (a hope regardless of likelihood), expected selves (what an individual believes will happen to them) and feared selves (what an individual fears becoming) in order to further explore their motivations. These possible selves may be constructed as a result of repeated experiences: a student who has won many chamber music prizes during their degree may construct a possible self of 'chamber musician,' suggesting that an individual's experiences can influence their perspective on who they may become in the future. In addition to providing incentives for behaviour, possible selves may also provide evaluative context for the 'now' self, meaning that their interpretation of current events may be affected by those possible selves. For example, if a student has a feared self of 'sad piano teacher and a failed musician,' then lack of success at an audition may conceivably be interpreted as more catastrophic to them than to somebody who does not have this feared self. For this reason, investigation of these possible selves may provide more than just context for individuals' motivations, it may also shed more light upon how and why people maintain motivation during difficult life transitions, such as changes in jobs and graduating from degrees.

### 2.3.7 Possible selves in the lives of musicians:

In an investigation of possible selves in the lives of musicians, Schnare et al., (2011) found that the *feared self* provided a considerable amount of motivation – e.g. for some musicians, the thought of losing their technical ability or falling into obscurity inspired them to practise more. This indicates that in addition to hope, fear plays an important role in maintaining motivation for musicians. The author posits that, by remaining mindful of the risks associated with their *feared self*, the musician remains grounded, which suggests that focusing on possible selves (and the *feared self* in particular) might serve as a form of coping strategy for musicians entering a

difficult job market. Furthermore, many musicians in this study did not distinguish between a *hoped-for self* and an *expected self*, and although previous researchers have intimated that there is little need to separate the two (Quinlan, Jaccard & Blanton, 2006) this could also suggest that musicians construct their future selves with either optimism or pragmatism: the musician 'downgrades' the hopeful self into a more realistic expected self, by way of identity protection, or elevates the expected self into a more optimistic vision characteristic of the hopeful self in order to further motivate themselves. This certainly mirrors previous findings that suggest that individuals may form realistic and achievable possible selves during life transitions (Manzi, Vignoles & Regalia, 2010).

#### 2.3.8 Provisional selves and role modelling

Ibarra (1999) builds upon Markus and Nurius's (1984) theory of possible selves by suggesting that 'provisional selves' play a motivational role during adaption to transition. Provisional selves are understood to be the temporary roles that an individual may test, improve or discard during a period of identity change that accompanies transition. To an extent, this can be seen as a theoretical representation of the popular piece of advice, 'fake it till you make it:' individuals may create these provisional selves by way of presenting a certain image before it has been internalised into their professional identity structure. Role models are key to the formation of these provisional selves. Very often, individuals who are transiting into a new work role will 'try on' traits assimilated from those whom are already doing their future job roles, either wholesale or more selectively. Previous research continues to assert that role models are an important source of motivation for musicians at all stages of their development (Burland & Davidson, 2010) and that lack of relatable role models can cause graduates and establishing musicians to feel 'lost' during transition (Bennett, MacArthur, Hope, Goh & Hennekam, 2018).

Although the influence of role models is generally portrayed in a positive light, the motivation that role models provide can become problematic if these roles turn out to be unattainable, for example if the individual in transition feels as

though they are being inauthentic by modelling their role on another's. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2015) found that women transiting into traditionally male-oriented roles struggled with what the researchers termed 'impossible selves,' as a result of them feeling as though they could not relate to their male role models. Because these women had a narrowly-held example of what a successful management professional looks and acts like (male, tenacious, impactful), their transition into their new job role was accompanied by an identity threat resulting from the gap between the professional image they would like to create and that which they felt they had to create in order to be successful. This research provides important insight into the effects of a narrowly-held view of a profession during transition. As discussed in [x], much of the anxiety that new music graduates face during their transition is caused by a lack of career preview (Bennett, 2007; 2009; Bennett and Bridgstock, 2014; Freer & Bennett, 2012): namely, new music graduates have a narrow-minded view of what it means to be a musician in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This could suggest that music graduates have created 'impossible selves' of their own, by mythologising the role of a musician, or having incongruent or unattainable role models. Further research into establishing musicians' perspectives of musicians' careers and their own career goals could verify this: it is hypothesised that many of the participants in this study will have reassessed their own expectations of their future career as they go into the music profession.

This section set out to explore the link between identity and transition, and discuss what is currently known about musicians' identities in transition. Schlossberg (1985; 2011) asserts that transition is dependent on an individual's situation: that is to say, their pre-and post- transition environments. The final part of the literature review will draw together current discourse around musicians' working lives and conservatoire education, in order to provide a frame of reference for the empirical study.

## 2.4 The Problem

In the previous two sections, I explored the current knowledge and discourse surrounding conservatoire graduates' career transitions. Although there is a growing body of research in this subject area, the fact remains that the findings only go so far to explain the challenges that these graduates face, either through lack of follow-up study or detailed qualitative enquiry. Despite researchers' widespread agreement that conservatoire graduates are unprepared for the realities of working in music, UK conservatoires' Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) results frequently return figures approaching 100%, meaning that six months after graduation, almost all respondents reported themselves as working or undertaking further study. To many stakeholders, these figures are certainly impressive: a prospective student and their concerned parents may feel reassured of their future career after reading these statistics in a prospectus. One conservatoire asserts a complete lack of attainment gaps amongst groups targeted for increased access (for example those from lower income backgrounds, disabled people or those with caring responsibilities), based upon a four-year-old DLHE score of 100% (Access and Participation Plan, Royal Academy of Music, 2019-2020). It is tempting to interpret these results too favourably: another conservatoire website claims that their DLHE results mean that their students have '100% employability.' Recalling Hillage and Pollard (1998) above, employability is conceptualised as 'the ability to find and maintain work,' rather than being a quality that can be objectively measured, meaning that results such as these should be interpreted with care. It is also important to remember that these surveys are based on participant self-report: for example, the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) own definition of the field 'employment basis' is:

'This describes the HE leaver's own assessment of the basis of their employment in the work they were doing on the census date. The information captured relates to the employment activity the HE leaver considers to be their main job.' (HESA. "Definitions" (n.d.))

As explored in the previous section, music graduates' 'own assessment' of their job might vary. Some musicians may consider their main job to be 'musician' in the broadest sense and deem themselves to be doing this job 100% of the time,

regardless of specific job role, or amount of time working. Mills (2004) found that musicians engaged in teaching described themselves in a multitude of ways, including 'performer-teacher,' 'teacher' and 'educator,' whereas some of the singers in Oakland et al.'s study (2012) ceased to describe themselves as singers in the absence of paid singing work. Regardless of the effect that the spread of interpretation might have on survey results, this does suggest that the DLHE survey may be too blunt an instrument for conservatoires hoping to evaluate the employment prospects of their graduates.

It is especially telling that the results these institutions *choose* to publish are the percentage of respondents who report being employed in the most general sense, saying nothing about whether this is on a part- or full-time basis, or even in their target profession, meaning that more detailed investigation of the statistics may paint a different picture. Additionally, although HESA does collect data about graduate and non-graduate level jobs, these results are rarely published alongside the high statistics that are given pride of place.

Aside from making effective publicity material, statistics of this type, when used as an exclusive measure of graduate destinations or prospects, may prevent conservatoires from doing their best job in preparing graduates for their transition into the music profession. At the very least, they may offer too optimistic a picture of these transitions and give conservatoires a false sense of security of the effectiveness of their provision. Minors et al. (2017) describe difficulty in reconciling these promising statistics with reality:

Taking as an example the programme for which van der Walt has responsibility at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, as the prospectus proudly states, '89% of MMus students are in employment or further study' and '100% of MMus Opera graduates are in employment or further study' (Royal Conservatoire, 2016: 37–46). Both these claims are based on Higher Education Statistics Agency figures and are doubtless accurate in so far as they go. Statistics mask individual stories: when it became known that one of the graduates from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland MMus Repetiteur programme had reported being unemployed, it was difficult to reconcile. How could it be that a student who had the talent and tenacity to survive such a specialized programme was unable to find work at all, and in a field where only one or two graduates would be produced in Scotland in any one year? (p. 461)

The above quote acknowledges that these statistics are only accurate to a point. It also suggests that graduates may need more than just 'talent and tenacity' in order to successfully infiltrate the music profession. Additional research into the lived experiences of career-young musicians may offer a more nuanced perspective on conservatoire graduates' transitions and investigate which attributes beyond 'talent and tenacity' may be key in building a career as a musician.

It is widely accepted that an individual's experience of transition will be influenced, at least in part, by their pre- and post-transition environments (Schlossberg, 1985; 2011; Baumeister, 1986). This makes sense, since, as already discussed, predictors of a smooth adaptation to transition include social supports and coping strategies: the participants in this study are likely to have formed strong relationships whilst at conservatoire, some of which will be sustained throughout this transitional period, and their educational experiences may have helped them to develop coping strategies and resilience to take into the transition with them. In order to contextualise the transition that conservatoire graduates will be undertaking, summaries of research into conservatoire education and musicians' lives will follow.

#### 2.4.1 Conservatoire education

The vast majority of aspiring professional musicians will, at some point, enter the conservatoire education system, either after finishing compulsory schooling, or as a postgraduate as a second degree. Attempts have been made to explain what characterises the conservatoire as an institution, through ethnographic explorations (Nettl, 1995; Kingsbury, 1988) including those focused on learning environments (Perkins, 2013). Additionally, research has shed light on students' experiences of meritocracy in a conservatoire (Davies, 2004) and experiences of one-to-one teaching and learning (Carey, Bridgstock & Taylor, 2014; Gaunt, 2008, 2010; Presland, 2005; Zhukov, 2006, 2007). Conservatoire professors' retrospective accounts of their experiences as learners have also been used to map the apprentice-to-master journey that many musicians undertake (Daniel & Parkes, 2015). With a focus on performance, one-to-one instrumental tuition and the expectation of hours spent practising, all spent in a competitive environment, there

are clearly marked differences between university music and conservatoire courses, and it therefore stands to reason that the students on these courses have different priorities to those who opt to study music at university (Burland, 2005).

Perkins (2013) conducted an ethnographic case study of a UK conservatoire, in order to build upon Kingsbury's 1985 ethnography and Nettl's more recent 1995 study of a university music school in the US. Whereas this previous research had focused on the cultures of these institutions in general terms, Perkins aimed to explore the educational implications of ethnographic research by focusing on 'learning cultures' within the conservatoire. The author investigates these 'learning cultures' by exploring the practices in which students and staff repeatedly participate, intimating that 'it is through participating in these practices... that conservatoire students learn.' (p.199). The findings illustrated that the learning cultures in the conservatoire fell into four main, intertwining categories: *performing specialism*, *social networking*, *musical hierarchies* and *vocational position taking*. The culture of performing specialism came out of the way in which the conservatoire degree is structured around a focus on performance: the prioritisation of private practice and the majority of regular contact time taking place with the principal study tutor. This notion is corroborated by Presland (2005) in her interview study of 12 piano students, where respondents perceived the one-to-one lesson as the degree component most key to their development as professional musicians. Participants in Perkins's study, which comprised students, teaching staff and support staff, reported a tension between performance and all of the other learning taking place in the conservatoire, which highlighted the importance placed upon performance within the institution. The *performing specialism* and *vocational position taking* threads seemed to have an especially interesting relationship. *Vocational position taking*, the learning culture in which students are prepared for the music profession as a whole rather than simply becoming accomplished performers is a culture directly at odds with the institution's focus on performance, and students seem to feel this to different degrees depending on their position within the hierarchy. Although students acknowledged a need for flexibility, owing to a lack of full-time professional



performance positions available, this need was in opposition with the *performance specialism* culture, where students reported being at the conservatoire to 'be a performer' and 'just' do as well as they can with 'the other stuff.' Furthermore, this opposition seemed to be largely driven by the culture of *musical hierarchy*: those who self-reported as not being one of the conservatoire's top performers were also more likely to mention a need for breadth of skill and flexibility in order to secure work.

Findings like this highlight the complexity of the conservatoire learning environment, but also acknowledge that the conservatoire student experience is very individual, dependent firstly on the students' perceived skill. This echoes findings from Davies's 2004 study investigating students' perceptions of the learning experience at another UK conservatoire. Those students who entered the conservatoire and played well in first-year informal auditions received performance opportunities straight away and frequently thereafter, therefore affording them more performance opportunities than their peers. These students were also more likely to believe themselves capable of obtaining a performing job easily, with one respondent reporting 'I hope in the next two years... I can walk into the profession.' (p.814). Furthermore, it was found that students placed lower in the performance hierarchy were those who were more likely to have received fewer opportunities before music college, owing to their having had less financial support, which may have contributed to them being less skilled as performers. Whereas those middle-class students at the top of the performance hierarchy viewed the meritocratic system at the conservatoire as fair, that opinion was not echoed by the remainder of the students. This suggests that the transition experience may not solely be linked to graduates' playing ability at the point of leaving the conservatoire, but may be affected by the students' experiences of their entire degree. These findings echo the experiences of a number of conservatoire students investigated by Burland (2005) who found that the frustrations of a lack of opportunity can ultimately demotivate potential professional musicians, on account of them feeling as though they do not have the same chances to improve their playing.

Much previous research has explored the nature of student-teacher relationships in conservatoires, since the high amount of one-on-one contact time

that these degrees entail is considered to be of great importance (Duffy, 2013; Gaunt, 2010; Kingsbury, 1987; Nettle, 1995; Presland, 2005). A greater understanding of the way in which teaching and learning take place in a conservatoire can help put young musicians' experiences of transition in context. An interview study of 12 piano students at a UK conservatoire (Presland, 2005) sought to examine students' perceptions of and relationships with their teachers. Mirroring previous findings from Howe & Sloboda, (1991), students perceived their teachers' expertise in performance as a key part of the teacher-student relationship, since their performing experience gave them credibility and experience of the world in which the students aspired to enter. Although students placed a great deal of importance on having a close relationship with their tutor, they were divided on the subject of their tutors' attendance at performances: whereas some considered this attendance imperative, some reported feeling more comfortable to make personal artistic decisions when out of earshot of their tutor. This suggests that students' experiences of their relationships with their tutors are strong but varied. Furthermore, this could indicate that a situation where a tutor's input might be removed, such as graduation, may be 'sink or swim' depending on a graduate's attitude towards a tutor and their guidance. Therefore, further investigation of the extent to which a student feels beholden to his or her tutor's advice, and the effect of this upon transition into the profession may prove illuminating.

Scrutiny of tutors' teaching styles is already beginning to shed light on conservatoire tutors' teaching methods and suggesting consequences for students' transitions. By undertaking an observation study of six teachers, Carey et al. (2013) concluded that conservatoire teachers tended to teach either transformatively or didactically. The 'transformative' teaching approach was characterised by a focus on process rather than outcome, consisting of teacher and student collaborating to make sense of the music and develop skills which the student would be able to apply independently. The teachers who taught more didactically, using a transfer approach, tended to focus on the production of a product (in this case, a specific musical performance) through structure, mimicry, and a stronger orientation towards assessment. The majority of participants taught with a transfer approach,

rather than transformatively, which Carey et al. argue has implications for students' future careers. Students taught using a more instructive transfer approach may become dependent on a certain level of input from a teacher, which could ultimately hinder their ability to make musical decisions when lessons end upon graduation. On the other hand, a more transformative and holistic approach to learning music may render a conservatoire student more open-minded and resilient when building a future career, a finding echoed by Carey et al. (2013). Gaunt's study of teachers' perspectives of one-to-one tuition illuminates alternative evaluations, in that respondents did not necessarily think that passing on musical heritage (potentially more didactic) and promoting autonomous learning (more transformative) were mutually exclusive. However, strikingly, some teachers were of the opinion that autonomy was a trait of the student rather than something that could be taught, meaning that some tutors may be less inclined to teach transformatively if they believe that it will make little difference to the student's development or future. Furthermore, many tutors appeared to be rather slow on the uptake of new technologies in lessons, leading Gaunt to suggest that 'it did not seem that one-to-one teaching was predominantly perceived as an environment in which to explore 'outside the box'' (p.228). Although this may not necessarily apply to the conservatoire as a whole, studies of one-to-one tuition may indicate that there is a certain level of 'stagnation' in teaching styles, which is unsurprising since many conservatoire tutors are unqualified (in Gaunt's 2008 study, one tutor had begun a teaching qualification but had not yet completed it) and may therefore default to teaching in a similar way to how they were taught, especially when considering that in the same study, some tutors 'referred to fulfilling a debt of gratitude for the knowledge and skills they had gained themselves by 'transmitting' them to the next generation.' (p.221).

Gaunt's complementary interview study of students at a London conservatoire (2010) offers both teachers' *and* students' perspectives of autonomy within music lessons, with some teachers reporting that their students became demotivated when they tried to step back and allow them to make more musical decisions in lessons. Some students viewed this 'stepping back' of their teacher as a sign of their teacher's diminishing opinion of them, rather than their

teacher attempting to give them more artistic control. Gaunt suggests that this 'dependency' on a teacher's approval could be a result of years of one-on-one lessons, normalised since before college. It appears that it could be the combination of both a strict 'transfer' teaching style, and the students' habitual leaning on a teacher's opinion that ultimately might create a situation of dependency on the student's part. Whether this dependency might be borne of insecurity or laziness is as yet unclear, however Gaunt posits that conservatoire learning cultures could put a focus on the immediate self, which could ultimately demotivate students to focus on their wider professional development. In other words, students' prioritisation of immediate demands, such as the achievement of good marks in recitals and technical exams, meant that less importance was placed on other activities within the degree, which which has been further supported by Perkins's findings amongst students at another London conservatoire (2012). This issue is potentially exacerbated by tutors' often scarce knowledge of their students' degree demands outside of the principal study lesson (Gaunt, 2010).

When investigating Australian students' perceptions of the one-on-one relationship they have with their instrumental tutor, Carey & Grant (2015) found that students place a high value on their teachers' role as a mentor. Although students did mention the necessity for a teacher to instruct – as regards technique, repertoire choices etc. – they also regarded their teacher as a professional mentor, advisor or role model, which corroborates Gaunt's 2010 study of UK students. However, Corkhill (2005) found that some conservatoire tutors refute the notion that giving advice, particularly careers advice, falls under their remit, which could mean that for some students there is a mismatch between theirs and their tutor's expectations of their relationship. The above studies of student-teacher relationships in the conservatoire suggest that students' career prospects, and consequently their experiences of transition, may be directly influenced by the nature of teaching in the conservatoire, and this link certainly merits further study.

#### 2.4.2 Musicians' lives

Research continues to indicate that musicians' lives are varied and complex. Unlike other occupations, music work is not a 9-to-5 job and many musicians will work

antisocial hours (Teague & Smith, 2015) combining a number of job roles to form a 'portfolio' of work (Bennett, 2007; 2008; 2013; Gembris, 2006; van der Maas & Hallam, 2012). This 'portfolio' of work may comprise work strands including, but not limited to, performing, arranging, teaching, composition, and sound engineering work. The prevalence of self-employed work within a portfolio career means that, in addition to utilising musical skills, musicians are also required to have entrepreneurial competencies associated with the running of a small business, such as market awareness, experience of raising contracts and self-managing finances. Although 'portfolio career' is, and has been, the generally accepted label for musicians' work patterns, Bennett (2009) asserts that musicians' careers would be more accurately labelled as 'protean:'

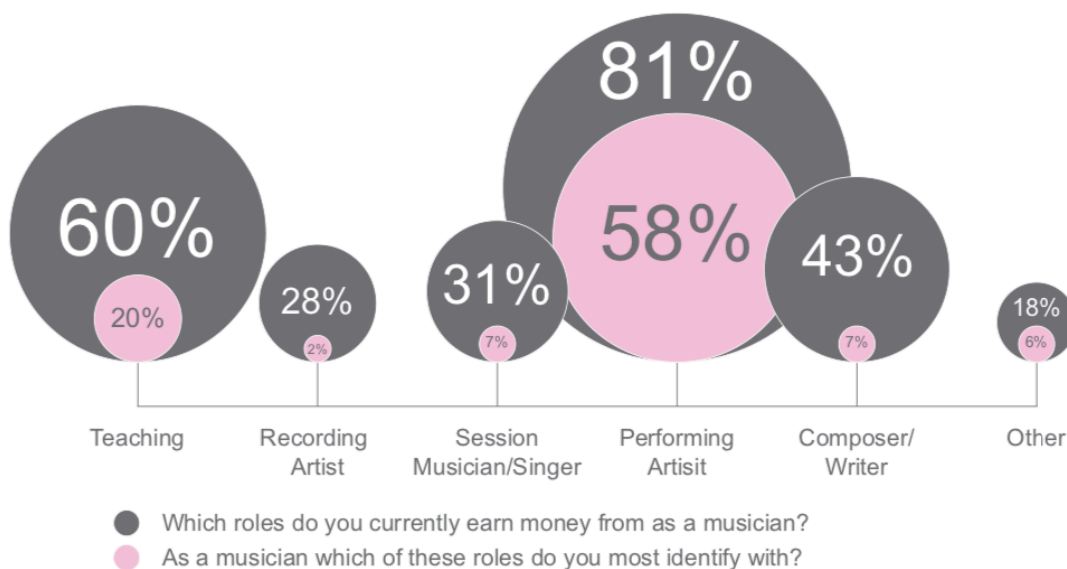
Protean careers are at the extreme end of portfolio careers and are named after the mythological Greek sea god Proteus who was able to change form at will in order to avoid danger: something that increasing numbers of people need to do in order to remain employable. The creative industries workforce has long engaged in protean careers, which necessitate the continual development of new opportunities and the attainment of the corresponding skills required to meet each new challenge. (p.311)

Portfolio and protean careers are both similar in that workers create opportunities from a wide variety of sources, undertaking shorter- and longer-term contracts in order to build their own work life. Portfolio and protean careers are sometimes referred to as boundaryless, since they subvert traditionally rigid organisational structures. Boundaryless workers are commonly less motivated by more traditional values such as salary increases, and instead work with different employers, 'ignoring traditional hierarchies and career progression [and] validating achievements from outside of the employment situation,' (Bennett, 2012, p.7)

The crucial difference between a portfolio and a protean career is the necessity for the protean worker to engage with continual development in order to maintain work. One of the key competencies for successful transitions in music graduates was found to be an acceptance of lifelong learning (Juuti & Littleton, 2012): given that the protean careerist will have to continually update their skills even outside of

education it is understandable why tutors feel the need to develop autonomy in their students (Gaunt, 2008; Carey et al., 2018).

Figure 1: Diagram to show spread of musicians' money-earning activities vs. job titles with which they identify (reproduced from van der Maas & Hallam, 2012)



A survey conducted by the Musicians Union in the UK revealed the wide variety of jobs roles that musicians of all genres combine within their careers (see fig.1) (van der Mass & Hallam, 2012). Although the provided figure does not illustrate the proportion of time that musicians may expect to allocate to each career strand, it highlights that musicians are combining performance roles with non-performance roles such as teaching, composing and writing. This is not altogether surprising: it is now well-documented that musicians' careers are generally expansive. However, more strikingly, the data show a real disparity between musicians' money-earning activities and the way they identify themselves. As asserted by Mills (2004), an individual's objective career may not necessarily match their subjective career, and it appears that musicians in the Musicians Union survey exemplify this. After highlighting all of the activities from which they earn money, participants then selected one role with which they most identified. For example, although 43% of survey respondents report earning money as a composer or writer, only 7% identify with that job title. The majority of respondents identified most with the

‘performing artist’ role, regardless of the roles in which they were engaged. Although it is unclear whether certain combinations of job roles would lead an individual to identify with one particular title more than another, these survey results highlight that when a musician identifies as a performing artist (or possibly simply as a musician), it cannot be assumed that they are solely involved in performance work – giving further call for a more nuanced picture of musicians’ lives.

Musicians undertaking portfolio careers must tread a fine balance between fulfilment and (self)-exploitation, flexibility and insecurity. Since much musical work is gained not by traditional application forms and CV scrutiny, but instead through personal contacts and previous good work (Bennett 2008), many freelance musicians work long hours and punishing schedules in order to earn money and secure future employment for themselves (Teague & Smith, 2015; Armstrong, 2013). The notion that the freedom to pick and choose one’s work is artistically fulfilling and therefore pleasurable is at direct odds with recent statistics that suggest that musicians’ work-life balance is so poor that many workers are in danger of serious mental health problems (Gross & Musgrave, 2017). On the other hand, Ascenso et al. (2017) argue that ‘a stereotype regarding the music profession as a source of stress and strain seems to prevail and to be deep enough to permeate musicians’ identity constructions’ (p.77), since musicians in their study had high overall levels of wellbeing (as per the PERMA model), believing themselves to be well and therefore atypical musicians. However, it is possible that Ascenso et al.’s sample of musicians felt socially supported to an extent that maintained their mental health: musicians in this study found a great deal of meaning in their interactions with others, including colleagues. Often freelance musicians experience intense periods of isolation (Armstrong, 2013) which may contribute to poor mental health. Whether or not the stereotype detailed by Ascenso et al. exists – there is little doubt that the ‘struggling musician’ trope exists in popular discourse – these findings may suggest that musicians’ mental health challenges depend on work situation. Ascenso et al., do, however, make reference to struggles of the music profession, highlighting that one of the most challenging times for

professional musicians is the transitional period of establishing oneself in the profession after graduation. It seems pertinent that although their study did not set out to investigate career transition, it found that established professionals have lasting memories of the challenges they faced as graduates. This may indicate that research with musicians who are currently experiencing transition may build a richer picture of the true nature of these challenges.

The above discussions of conservatoire education and musicians' lives highlight discrepancies between current knowledge of higher education-career transitions and the situation of concern in this thesis. Many of the theories of transition discussed in the above literature review concerned students moving from a traditional university degree into structured employment, often within an established company, whereas careers in music are frequently more boundaryless. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that student musicians are developing a professional identity whilst in education, perhaps more strongly than students in degrees of other subjects. This means that current discourse may fall short of illustrating the true nature of the transition from conservatoire to the music profession. Therefore a key objective of the empirical study is to investigate how UK conservatoire graduates manage their transition into the music profession, both in the absence of a clear-cut workplace and in the presence of a performance-based music education. There is a considerable body of research concerning Australian music graduates, and although these studies continue to suggest that conservatoire graduates are unprepared for their transitions and consequently their professional realities, the data from these studies are primarily quantitative. What qualitative data do exist from these are generally short-form accounts rather than in-depth interview studies. For this reason, both studies took a qualitative approach in order to truly interrogate career-young musicians' individual experiences of transition. Qualitative inquiry enabled the undertaking of a deeper investigation into individuals' lived experiences of transition, through the collection of interview data and written accounts (Smith & Osborn, 2015a). Furthermore, qualitative methodologies enabled me to account for the part I play in interpreting the data, which is important given my own experiences as a musician. The following chapter



will detail the methodological approach taken for the first part of the empirical study, *Letters to my Younger Self*.

### 3. Methods: Letters to my younger self:

The *Letters to my Younger Self* project aimed to answer the following question:

- What characterises music college graduates' transitions into the music profession?

The first part of the empirical study used participants' written accounts in order to answer this question. In the following chapter I will outline the ways in which I collected and analysed the data required to answer the above questions.

#### 3.1 Qualitative research:

One of the main motivations for undertaking this project was a need for a nuanced picture of young musicians' experiences of graduation from music college, since, as discussed in the literature review, music graduates are generally unprepared for a career in music. Despite efforts to develop students' performance skills, many graduates are unaware of what a musician's life is like in reality. Furthermore, as outlined in 2.3.1, most institutions' current data focus on employment statistics, collected through the DLHE Survey. Many studies of graduate transitions and musicians' lives have been more grounded in quantitative method (Bennett, 2007; Gembris, 2006), meaning that much of the key theory around transitions for music graduates is lacking in insight from individual experience. In order to capture more experiential data the project adopted a qualitative approach, thus providing the opportunity to collect rich and compelling data whilst also obtaining a variety of individuals' perspectives and accounting for multiple points of view.

#### 3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a method commonly used in the health sciences in order to investigate how people make sense of their world. Smith and Osborn (2015b) conceptualise IPA in three theoretical parts:

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach, initially articulated by Husserl, which aims to produce an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing

theoretical preconceptions. IPA recognises that this is an interpretative endeavour because humans are sense-making organisms. In IPA, therefore, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them. Finally, IPA is idiographic in its commitment to examining the detailed experience of each case in turn, prior to the move to more general claims. (p.41)

IPA has been used in numerous other studies of musicians' lives (Dobson, 2010, Teague & Smith, 2015) and musicians' lives in transition (Burland, 2005; Oakland, MacDonald and Flowers, 2014), in addition to studies more generally concerned with transition and identity formation outside of the musical context (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Rodriguez & Smith, 2014; Smith, 1999). This is understandable, since, as outlined by Smith and Osborn (2015b) above, in the absence of clear preconceived theory, IPA is a very suitable methodology with which to explore individuals' experiences.

Another key element of IPA is the role of the researcher and the value of their perspective in the analytical process. To truly analyse (and not just describe), it is up to the researcher to use the participant's account to construct their own interpretation of the participant's perspective. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the nature of influence that the researcher has on the outcome of the analysis, owing to the reflexive nature of the research process. The importance that IPA places on reflexivity was a key reason for choosing IPA as a methodology for the study. Having been through similar experiences to my participants, using IPA helped to keep my experiences at the forefront of the interpretative process.

### 3.3 'Letters to my Younger Self':

The first phase of the research was primarily exploratory, and sought to answer the first research question through two sub questions:

- What characterises the transition from music college into the music profession?
  - What are music college graduates' lasting memories of graduation?
  - What advice would music college graduates like to have received at the point of graduation?

### 3.3.1 Social Media Methodology

Research using social media is not currently widespread, however it is being increasingly used in both qualitative and quantitative studies as a means of data collection (Lafferty & Manca, 2015; Hipp et al., 2017). Although this form of research is frequently covert, for example in the case of Twitter studies which map public reactions to current affairs (D'heer & Verdegem, 2014), this research was not; at every stage, contributors to the website were aware that they were participating in a research project.

The decision to devise a data collection method, in which the contributions of participants would be publicly available from the beginning, was borne out of a desire to open discourse about musicians' careers and career transitions. Since leaving a degree is a time of uncertainty for many graduates, and in the arts especially (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014), it became apparent that it was possible to conduct a research project on one hand and create a publicly available resource on the other. As discussed above, there is still a great deal more to be done in order to understand the transition experience for music graduates, not least because many students still at music college do not appear to fully comprehend what 'real life' as a musician entails. Therefore, the ambition was to create an online space where participants' stories could be collected, but that other interested parties could visit. It was also thought that the opportunity for respondents to read others' contributions would act as a form of snowball sampling, in that that reading others' experiences may motivate further contribution.

The first idea was one of 'tweets to a younger self,' however it was decided that Twitter, although a previously successful source of research data, would not afford participants enough anonymity, which may have ultimately dissuaded participation. Additionally, it was thought that although 140 characters would make for a manageable data set, it may ultimately hinder the collection of the detail required. Instead, the decision was made to use Tumblr, a blogging site. The flexibility of Tumblr's interface meant that, unlike Facebook or Twitter, it was possible to create a webpage that would still be fully functional for unregistered users. Additionally, the opportunity to remain anonymous (save for the submission

of an email address) throughout the process was key, due to the need to uphold ethical standards. In accordance with British Psychological Association (BPA) guidelines, it was ensured that the use of Tumblr to collect research data was not in breach of any terms of service, and participants' data would not be used for advertising.

### 3.3.2 Recruitment and Participants:

21 music college graduates (11 F, 2 M, 8 unknown) volunteered to participate in the study, by submitting a letter to their younger self on the specifically assigned website. The study was advertised online on Facebook and Twitter, both via dedicated pages and my own personal accounts. Participant information sheets were supplied to all contributors, and their writing for the website was deemed as having given informed consent. Examples of participant information sheets are in Appendix A. All participants were invited to complete a short demographic questionnaire, of which 13 were received. From those who returned the questionnaire, the average age of participants was 34.88 years ( $SD=10.82$ ), however participants' ages overall ranged from under 24 to over 55. Table 1 shows the spread of participants' ages in the *Letters* study. Respondents graduated from five different UK conservatoires, and two international institutions.

*Table 1: Table to show ages of participants in Letters study*

<b>Age bracket (years)</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
15-24	1
25-34	8
35-44	1
45-54	2
55-64	1

### 3.3.3 Materials

Letters were collected through a microblogging site, Tumblr, to which participants submitted their letter to a younger self. Respondents were invited to share the advice they would have given their younger self when they first left music college. All submissions were pre-moderated by the researcher in order to redact any

potentially sensitive information. For further details of the moderation procedure, please see Appendix B. Supplied email addresses were used in order to send a message to thank participants for their contributions, as well as inviting them to complete a short demographic questionnaire, which is included in Appendix C. After moderation, participants' accounts were published anonymously on the website for others to read and motivate further participation. Direct quotes were used in order to further advertise the project on Twitter and Facebook.

#### 3.3.4 Analysis:

Analysis of written accounts was undertaken using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is one of the most commonly-used methodologies in psychology and is concerned with investigating the way in which individuals make sense of their lived experiences. The researcher's interpretation of these experiences is key in this sense-making, which leads Smith (2011) to describe IPA as a *double hermeneutic*:

For the empirical psychologist, an additional complication is that the analysis is of someone else's experience rather than one's own. And experience cannot be plucked straightforwardly from the heads of participants, it requires a process of engagement and interpretation on the part of the researcher and this ties IPA to a hermeneutic perspective. Part of the complication derives from the fact that access to that experience comes from a participant who is him/herself also engaged in making sense of what is happening to them. For this reason, I have described the process of IPA as engaging in a double hermeneutic, whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them. (p.10)

For this reason, the invitation to write a letter was intended as a prompt for reflection, rather than a fact-finding mission: the purpose of this study was to dig deep into participants' experiences of transition. Some participants told colourful stories in great detail: my job as a researcher was not to evaluate whether or not these experiences were true, rather it was to interpret what the participant wanted the reader to think about them and their experiences. As summarised by Smith and Osborn:

The aim of IPA is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings that particular experiences, events, and states hold for participants. (2015a, p.25)

The first stage of analysis began with the reading and re-reading of accounts in order to become fully familiar with the data. Notes were made in the left-hand margin, as a more general interpretative and reflective commentary of participants' words. Initial reflections took an inductive approach in order to minimise researcher bias. Upon subsequent readings, notes were taken in the right-hand margin to demarcate recurring themes, or themes which appeared most central to the participant. In order to maintain a focus on each individual's experience, accounts were coded independently of each other, however in cases where themes recurred, existing theme names were used.

The second stage of analysis consisted of finding commonalities across themes and then combining themes which were similar to each other. It became apparent that participants' writing fulfilled three main functions: motivation and reassurance, practical advice and reflection, so, at first the data was arranged around these functions. However, since the project was seeking to uncover participants' experiences of transition, the data was interrogated through the lens of transition. In other words, I was going beyond 'what are participants telling their younger self?' and asking, 'what does this mean about participants' transitions?' For example, participants seeking to reassure themselves of a positive future may have been suggesting that transition is a time of uncertainty. Direct quotes are used throughout the findings section to illustrate the analysis. They are labelled in the following format: (account number/line number).

### 3.3.5 Reflexivity/Validity

Since IPA is interpretative: that is to say, it is up to the researcher to make sense of the data according to their own viewpoint, the researcher 'plays an inescapably significant part in the process,' (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p.220). This is of particular importance in this study, since I myself was a conservatoire graduate who

felt very uncertain of their future after completing their degree. To an extent, completing this research also represented an opportunity to make sense of my own experiences during this time. For this reason, I attempted to maximise the validity of the research by approaching the analysis with an open mind and without preconception. On occasion, participants' accounts resonated very strongly with my own experiences, and I noted where my interpretation may have been biased by this. I revisited and reviewed these accounts many times to attempt to interpret them less impulsively. Furthermore, participant accounts remain fully accessible online, meaning that others are free to make their own analysis of the data<sup>1</sup>.

The following chapter will discuss the findings from the *Letters* study.

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<sup>1</sup> Submissions available at <https://letterstomyoungmusicianself.tumblr.com>



## 4. Findings: Letters to my younger self

After analysis of the 21 letters submitted to the website, it became apparent that participants' writing fulfilled three main functions: motivation and reassurance, practical advice and reflection. There were several themes which cut across these main functions to illustrate the transition experience for music college graduates.

The key themes in the data were those of (1) trust (2) 'letting go' (3) seeking support and (4) open-mindedness. Quotations are labelled in brackets at the end in the form (participant number/line number(s)).

### 4.1 Trust

Responses were, in the main, extremely positive, and almost every participant includes a statement to their younger self that is intended to motivate or reassure, encouraging their younger self to trust in themselves, the future, or their own abilities.

Keep going, you are awesome! (5/28)

Firstly, and most importantly: you can do it!!!! (17/3)

Everything is going to be all right. (16/3)

The large proportion of statements such as these continue to support previous assertions that graduation from a music degree is a time of uncertainty (Bennet & Bridgstock, 2014; Burland, 2005), and that self-doubt (and its successful management) forms a large part of the transition experience for early career musicians (Creech et al., 2008; Dobson, 2010). Given that participants tended to either begin or end their letter with short motivational statements such as these suggests that this may have been the message of greatest importance to the individual, with further advice given to put the main message into context.

Many respondents spend time reminding their younger self of their strengths, both within and outside of performance:

You don't realise your own strengths as a musician. (5/2-3)

Let the amazing performers be great at what they do, you have your strengths. (15/5-7)

...you will get there, using all your 'other neglected skills like creativity, communication, writing, teaching, leading and facilitating. (17/21-24)

Annoyingly, you don't know this yet, but you're shit hot at project management; marketing, strategy, dissemination and being a totally crafty. Fucking. bastard. (3/36-39)

This paints a picture of the music college graduate unaware of their strengths, or skills outside of music performance. This is unsurprising, given that conservatoire courses prioritise the development of performance skills above all else, reflected in students' perceptions of their music college education (Perkins, 2013). The same study did also uncover tensions between performance and 'the other stuff,' (p. 204) with many participants reporting that they were at college to play, regarding the supporting classes as less important. This finding is not unique, with similar conclusions being drawn by Miller & Baker (2005) when investigating students' perceptions of a pedagogy course. It is difficult, however, to make too many assumptions about the current study's participants and their attitudes to professional studies classes whilst studying, since it was not possible to probe for more information. Nevertheless, it does raise questions about graduates' perceptions of their own skills, and whether engagement with professional studies classes (or lack of), helps graduates feel more prepared for the working world.

A smaller number of respondents share 'spoilers' with their younger self, telling them about future events. These also appear to serve as reassurance, especially as they are often accompanied with some form of self-congratulation, reminding the younger self that they 'did the right thing' or that they are taking the right path for their goals.

You'll spend the first week of what would have been your second postgrad year with a professional orchestra so good choice on that one. You left at the right time. (20/4-8)

You will not mourn the loss of your playing career, nor should you: teaching music suits you. (12/34-35)

Life as a freelance musician is characterised by a large amount of decision-making: in the absence of a fixed employer dictating work patterns it is up to the individual to build a 'portfolio' of work for themselves (Armstrong, 2013; Dobson, 2010; Juuti & Littleton, 2012). When considering the rather more structured environment of the conservatoire, it is easy to comprehend why, in the absence of this, many graduates might feel 'lost for a while,' (15/8) especially coupled with the exacting and inflexible demands of some instrumental tutors (Carey et al., 2013). Later on, many graduates speak of experiencing freedom having left this college environment (Juuti & Littleton, 2012), but the large amount of participants in the current study who assure themselves of having made the right decisions may be alluding to a time when making decisions was a source of anxiety.

#### 4.2 'Letting go'

A large number of respondents urge their younger self to distance themselves from others' opinions, or anxiety about others' opinions.

Stop being afraid of what other people are going to think of what you sound like or what you look like. (6/4-6)

In particular, participants specified a need to take others' opinions of their career 'with a pinch of salt,' and instead use their own judgement when making career decisions. The experience of graduation from a music degree as a time of responsibility for one's own judgements is a conclusion drawn from previous literature (Juuti, 2012), where participants reported a feeling of 'freedom' upon graduation. Respondents in Juuti's study linked this with their experiences at music college, with one pianist describing her time at the Academy as 'being in a straitjacket,' on account of her spending the majority of her time doing solo practice. This is similar to participants' accounts in the current study, in which a large amount of graduates write about prioritising their own wishes above others, with some specifically alluding to a time at music college where this was not possible:

Firstly, understand that at Music college you will be pulled from corner to corner by various departments, tutors and friends. Everyone has strong opinions about what you should be doing, but guess what? They are not really sure either. They cannot know what is best for you, only the

stereotypes of what one should do to be a succes(s)ful musician. So, listen to everyone's OPINION but trust your own judgment on what you want to do. (19/7-16)

This participant's mention of a successful musician 'stereotype' suggests that the advice she was receiving at music college was at odds with what she felt was 'best for her.' In other words, perhaps the image of a musician portrayed to her whilst in music college was something that she did not see herself as reflecting, and upon leaving music college she felt it necessary to let this go. This was not unique to just one participant, and many of the letters received made reference to a music college image of success that needed to be 'let go:'

...you don't have to be an orchestral musician or international soloist to be a success. Music college prescribed such an artificial and elusive idea of success. (17/12-15)

...remember where your strengths lie, they are **not** in the things college think they should be...**this** is what will get you work. (13/86-89) (emphasis author's own)

Previous research has criticised specialist higher education for failing to adequately prepare its students for the realities of the music profession (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014; Bennett, 2007, 2009), and the above quotes do appear to support this, painting a picture of a college vision of success that sits in direct contrast to the participant's reality. Investigations into students whilst still in education have also identified tensions between students' perceptions of the performance strand versus supporting studies (Perkins, 2013). Miller and Baker (2005) suggest that the term SPS (Supporting Professional Studies<sup>2</sup>, used by the RNCM) automatically implies that the course strand is of lesser importance, due to the use of the word 'supporting.' Attempts are being made to restructure courses to remedy the apparent gap between expectation and reality for music graduates, however, such as the Queensland Conservatorium's (Australia) *My Life as a Musician* module, suggesting that music colleges are beginning to evaluate the expectations they create for their students and how they may affect their future employability (Carey & Lebler, 2012).

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the RNCM did re-brand the SPS module whilst I was there, in 2009, renaming it ProfS, presumably to remove the idea that these 'other skills' were less important.

Participants' accounts contained references to 'letting go' of certain social habits, whether these were linked to everyday life or the music college environment. Many of these references paid specific attention to behaviours or social norms in college that the participant no longer had use for after graduating, including 'bitchiness,' practice-talk and fixation on exam marks and feedback.

Stop talking about how much you practiced that day and how you went about getting rooms – it's boring for you and others to listen to! (14/2-4)

Yes it is possible to get 87 for an audition one day and 43 for a technical the next, but it doesn't make a tiny bit of difference to your life from now on. Stop being so bitter. (20/15-18)

Forget about all those bitchy sessions of crowding around the bit of paper... ignore the haters!! (5/3-7)

Although the data can make no case for the *effect* that these thought patterns ultimately had on the participant, the fact that letting go of these was given as advice suggest that they were something of a burden to the participant as a career-young professional. This echoes previous research by Dobson (2010), who, in an interview study of young professional musicians, found that sustained peer comparison, and an atmosphere of 'bitchiness' had a detrimental effect on participants' self-belief and management of self-doubt. The author does however acknowledge that continued 'bitchiness' and back-stabbing may be commonplace in the music profession as a sort of 'unifier,' meaning that professionals may engage in these practices in order to feel included. This suggests that the atmosphere of the conservatoire and life beyond it is far more complex than just one of simple competition, encompassing a need to be the best, but also be included.

#### 4.3 Social connections and support

Many participants encouraged their younger selves to value others' support, whether those others were family, friends or colleagues. Many references to colleagues mention the need to, as above, 'let go' of those who were negative ('Ignore the haters!!') and instead focus on more positive influences, with one participant reporting: 'supportive, empathetic colleagues are like gold.' This links strongly with the above theme of 'letting go,' especially considering that, for some, a negative social atmosphere also provided inclusion (Dobson, 2010). That being

said, no participant advised their younger self to participate in gossip or backstabbing in order to be accepted, so, although this no doubt forms part of musicians' lifestyles, it cannot be inferred that this is a particularly desirable outcome for any of the graduates investigated. One respondent builds upon the idea of valuing other colleagues, reporting that 'working life after college depends a lot on them' (13/98). The importance of building contacts in college is a conclusion drawn from many studies investigating life in a conservatoire (Kingsbury, 1985; Perkins, 2013) as well as those focused on post-college transitions (Dobson, 2010; Juuti & Littleton, 2012), and the prevalence of this theme across accounts in the current study offers further support for the idea that although performance is at the heart of the conservatoire degree, a certain level of 'networking' is required whilst still in education in order to succeed in the following years. The same participant speaks of not seeing 'dearest friends and colleagues for months at a time' (13/38-39) after graduation, suggesting that the exit from music college is more than just leaving an institution behind: it represents a departure from familiar social networks, which may also contribute to the feelings of uncertainty that many previous studies have uncovered (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2013; Nyström, 2008). Departure from these social networks is not always viewed negatively, however, with one participant reflecting upon peers who mocked and disbelieved her tendonitis diagnosis (12/37).

#### 4.4 Open-mindedness

Participants specify an importance to remain open-minded, not just regarding their musical life, but also in cultivating interests outside music. For many participants, the broadening of interests outside of music represented a way in which to become a better musician:

You wish college had trained you to embrace all challenges away from the stage; mindful practice, yoga, keeping fit, seeing the big picture. (11/30-34)

...don't neglect the other areas of life as you get busy with musical projects. Your success depends a lot on your physical, mental and spiritual health. (1/31-34)

These accounts bear resemblance to those of musicians interviewed by Teague and Smith in 2015, who also asserted the importance of self-care – in particular keeping fit – in order to facilitate physical, psychological and social wellbeing. Participants' stories in the current study as well as elsewhere in the literature point to the idea of the musician as a busy, focused individual, 'taking on more work than they can do' (Cottrell, 2004 in Teague & Smith, 2015).

Stop saying 'yes' to every performance opportunity. By second year you will have had a performance or rehearsal every day of the Summer term, 7 days a week from April till August and you will be completely burnt out. (9/7-12)

Reflections on the beginnings of musicians' careers, as investigated here, suggest that this is an idea that begins whilst still studying, which needs to be renegotiated after graduation in order to achieve a healthy and balanced working life, supporting previous longitudinal study of musicians' transitions into the profession (Burland, 2005).

A need to remain musically open-minded was important for some participants, who urged their younger self to explore different musical pursuits outside their main specialism:

Work at improvisation. That is good fun. Improvising with others and playing around on your own.  
Recording music is fun. (8/16-18)

This respondent's emphasis on fun as a motivating factor (and the overriding sense of positivity from her entire account) could allude to a time when music was a more 'serious' pursuit, and a need to leave this behind. Fun and enjoyment are seen as intrinsic motivations; that is to say, motivations that come from the joy of doing the activity itself, rather than any external reward that it may bring. It is interesting to compare these directly with extrinsic motivations, which generally encompass rewards such as grades, and prizes, or fear of punishments and criticisms. By encouraging her younger self to pursue musical avenues that bring fun and enjoyment may suggest that, at the time of graduation, music was not fun, or indeed in danger of becoming unenjoyable. Although this cannot be confirmed

without further probing, which was not possible with this data collection method, it is possible to make tentative suggestions at this stage. When comparing this account with previous research into conservatoires and their culture it is easy to see how a student may become motivated by more extrinsic than intrinsic factors, especially considering the 'musical hierarchies' that exist, based upon marks and reputation (Davies, 2004; Perkins, 2013). Going into employment, extrinsic motivations may take the form of money, which is supported by one participant (13) who speaks of 'the constant threat of unemployment' creating 'a very unhealthy pattern of thinking.' A focus on broadening musical horizons in the pursuit of fun may serve as a form of 'escapism' for some early professionals (Burland, 2005).

For some, the expansion of musical possibilities represented a way to maximise employability, with many participants specifically mentioning a need to remain open-minded as regards teaching work. For one respondent, teaching work unexpectedly fulfilled social functions in addition to becoming a job:

Teaching of course will be another great source of income, but which you were totally not prepared for, and thought you would not enjoy or that it would not suit you. Well you were wrong. Education has now become your passion, and it has also made you a better player/musician. It has taken you out of that little bubble of loneliness and fear and jealousy that being a solo pianist put you in, because you're actually for the first time really able to share you(r) love for music with others, share your knowledge, learn with and from others as much as you're teaching others.  
(7/22-32)

These words create a powerful image: firstly, one of a solo pianist isolated by fear, loneliness and jealousy, and secondly, one of teaching as a liberating force to help connect with others. This links directly to the social support theme above, where accounts suggested that leaving music college represented a breakdown in established social networks, which may lead to feelings of isolation and uncertainty. It is also important to consider the context of this participant's negative feelings. As a pianist, she is likely to have spent a considerable amount of time alone in a practice room, especially if her ultimate aim was to become a soloist. Specific



studies concerning piano graduates' experiences of leaving college do not mention loneliness as a feature of this transition, however further research comparing the experiences of different instrumentalists would help to find out if situations are context-specific. Research into personality types of different instrumentalists has shown that personality factors of musician differ by instrumental specialism (Kemp, 1996), so this could provide another variable with which to compare the transition experience for music college graduates.

Teaching as an unexpected form of income is a recurrent theme not only here, but across the body of literature that examines transitions of music graduates, and attitudes to teaching, specifically. Participants mention a need to remain open-minded to the possibility of teaching, but more than one account mentions others' closed-mindedness to teaching as a career or at least a career option.

You might feel the need to play down your teaching to other musicians, please don't. Their negative attitude and closed mindedness isn't your problem. (20/40-43)

I gravitated to teaching...only to see the hardened pro players' eyes glaze over. (18/18-20)

Given that a 2007 survey of musicians found that 77% of musicians earn over half their income from teaching (Metier, 2001, in Bennett, 2007) participants are wise to advise their younger self to learn to teach, or accept teaching as a career.

However, there seems to be a direct tension between musicians' perceptions of teaching's 'prestige' as a career (or lack of it), and the apparent necessity of taking on teaching work in order to make a living:

You're good at teaching. As soon as you stop seeing this as a cop-out job you will realise that you can be successful and happy as a teacher. (15/10-13)

This is corroborated in numerous other studies, all of which assert that students are out of touch with the realities of a freelance music career, in which teaching will form a lucrative part of the portfolio (Miller & Baker, 2007; Bennett, 2007, Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014; Perkins, 2013; Mills, 2004). For participants in a diary study of freelance musicians (Armstrong, 2013), an open-mindedness to teaching as a

financial mainstay afforded musicians the freedom to have a varied musical life, free to pursue other musical interests such as song-writing and arranging.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Participants used their letters to their younger self to reassure and motivate, which builds upon previous research suggesting that graduation is a time of anxiety for many. Practical advice that musicians gave centred around 'letting go' of self-doubt, others' criticisms, and pre-conceived ideas of success (including those formed during their conservatoire degree). Instead, participants urged their younger selves to value social connections and support, and remain open-minded and determined in order to find a fulfilling career as a musician.

The aims of this part of the research project were to find out what advice music college graduates would have liked to receive at the point of graduation, and to explore what this tells us about the transition into professional life. Many of the accounts reflect upon experiences at music college in order to contextualize the advice that they give their younger self, which can go some way to suggest how the conservatoire experience links to transition. However, it is important to stress that, on account of no interviews having taken place, these links – unless explicitly stated in the participant's account – are only tentative. Given that participants' accounts were standalone stories, no argument can be made for direct causation. Having said that, the themes uncovered in participants' accounts at this stage do appear to link to previous interview studies with recent graduates. The following interview study gives the opportunity to explore potential links more comprehensively.

## 5. Methods: Interview Study

The interview study aimed to more thoroughly investigate the links between musicians' experiences of transition and their conservatoire education. The research questions were as follows:

- What characterises music college graduates' transitions into the music profession?
  - How do they manage this transition?
  - How do they overcome the difficulties that they face?
- What role does conservatoire education play in this transition?
  - How do conservatoire graduates link their education to their career transitions?
- What are conservatoire graduates' aspirations?
  - How do these aspirations form?
  - How do they develop?
- Could conservatoires be better preparing their graduates for their future careers, and how?

### 5.1 Semi-structured interviews

For the second part of the project, two different cohorts of conservatoire graduates were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews. The methods of recruitment and data collection were the same across both cohorts, however the inclusion criteria for each were different. Table 2 illustrates the differences between these two cohorts.

Table 2: Table to show Inclusion Criteria for two Participant Cohorts

	Establishing Musicians	Graduate Musicians
Inclusion Criteria	<p>Must have completed an undergraduate or postgraduate degree at a UK conservatoire*</p> <p>Must have graduated between 1 and 10 years prior to interview</p>	<p>Must be in the process of completing an undergraduate or postgraduate degree at a UK conservatoire (May, June and July interviews) <i>OR</i></p> <p>Must have completed an undergraduate or Master's degree at a UK conservatoire within the last two months (Augusts and September interviews)</p> <p>Must have no plans for immediate further conservatoire study.</p>
Number of Participants	10 (7 F, 3 M)	9 (3 F, 6 M)

The rationale for interviewing two different cohorts was to investigate the 'gap' in knowledge between the point of leaving college and becoming more established within the music profession, especially since research continues to suggest that career-young musicians' expectations rarely match up to reality (Bennett, 2007). The opportunity to capture young musicians' aspirations before they experience life outside of their educational institution was intended to provide another layer of understanding of the transition experience for students, especially if it could offer insight into their aspirations before they are 'tarnished' by the 'potentially exploitative' (Armstrong, 2013, pp.300) reality of the music profession.

## 5.2 Recruitment

The institutions were selected by virtue of being UK conservatoires, and therefore offering a performance-based music education. The specified timeframes ensured

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\*UK conservatoires in the study were: Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music, Trinity Laban, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Royal Northern College of Music, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Leeds College of Music.

that the establishing musicians had experience of at least a year of being out of education before being interviewed, whilst having graduated recently enough to remember key moments without undue effort. Graduating musicians were intended to have had zero to little experience of working as a musician outside of education before being interviewed. As discussed in 2.2.5, key research regarding musicians' career transitions has invited established musicians to recall their career-building processes and experiences from, in some cases, decades previously (MacNamara et al., 2006), which may mean that whilst more 'key events' were recalled, 'daily routines and typical experiences [were] likely to be underrepresented,' (Thomsen & Brinkmann, 2009, p.302). It was anticipated that asking participants to reflect upon more recent events might provide a richer and more detailed picture of career-young musicians' lives. Furthermore, given constant changes in employment patterns for those in the creative industries, an up-to-date view of music graduates' transitions is much-needed.

Recruitment was mainly web-based, consisting of Calls for Participants on Facebook and Twitter. The call for participants was shared as a square picture on both sites, sized so that potential participants could read the majority of the text on mobile and desktop devices before having to engage with it by clicking. Wording was minimal, outlining only the aims of the research, assurances of anonymity and my own contact details, inviting interested parties to get in touch for further information. For examples of recruitment materials used in the interview study, please see Appendix D. Whilst putting the responsibility on the potential participant to make contact may have negatively impacted initial interest in the research study, this did not detract from eventual participant numbers, since of those who made contact, the majority did ultimately participate. Although the Letters to my Younger Self Twitter and Facebook pages were used to recruit participants, no participant took part in both phases of the study. Additionally, I contacted the conservatoires themselves to request that they circulate a call for participants through their alumni and student networks, however this was rather less successful in the first instance: only one office responded offering to help, and no establishing musician participants came via this route. However, this method of recruitment was rather

more successful amongst graduating participants, perhaps due to the fact that the call for participants will have arrived through student email addresses.

### 5.3 The Participants

For a chart showing the spread of degrees completed and instruments studied across both cohorts, please see Table 3. As can be seen from the table, the spread of instrumentalists was not particularly even: the establishing musician group contained three singers and three trombonists amongst a more modest representation of each other instrumental group. The graduating musicians contained more string and woodwind players, however there were three viola graduates. Due to the nature of the study, which required respondents to give up a certain amount of their time at a time convenient to both them and the researcher, it was very difficult to avoid this, since turning away participants without the guarantee of securing any more would have affected the sample size and been detrimental to the research quality. Although this concentration of certain instrumentalists could have skewed the results, upon interviewing the musicians it became apparent that each had had very different musical experiences, and that all had a variety of different career types and goals. Participant biographies are provided in Appendix J, available as a pull-out supplement, to provide context for the forthcoming analysis. The analysis is based upon the experiences of 19 participants.

Table 3: Table to show Summary of Participants' Education

	Pseudonym	Instrument	Status	Degree	Graduation Year	Years between graduation and interview
Establishing Musicians	Martha	Trombone	UK	BMus	2014	2.5
	Oliver	Tenor	UK	BMus	2013	3.5
	Natalie	Soprano	UK	PGDip	2010	6.5
	Phoebe	Guitar	UK	BMus		
	Chris	Trombone	International	MMus	2015	1.5
	Alice	Soprano	International	MMus + PGDip	2013	3.5
	Leanne	Trombone	UK	BMus	2010	6.75
	Beka	Clarinet	UK	BMus	2010	6.5
	Josh	Bassoon	UK	BMus	2011	5.75
	Zoe	Trumpet	UK	BMus	2015	2
Graduating Musicians	Edward	Tenor	UK	BMus	2017	
	Freddy	Violin	UK	BMus	2017	
	Hilda	Viola	International	MMus	2017	
	Sophie	Oboe	UK	MMus	2017	
	Theo	Clarinet	UK	MMus	2017	
	Yasmin	Bassoon	UK	MPerf	2017	
	Richard	Viola	UK	MMus + PGDip	2017	
	Ian	Viola	UK	MMus	2017	
	Gary	Flute	UK	MMus	2017	

In accordance with University and BPS ethical guidance, participants were assured of their anonymity and made aware that any quotations in the thesis would be removed of any identifiable data. Therefore, all participant names are pseudonyms, and, in subsequent chapters, educational institutions have been redacted. This is of special importance within the field of classical music, which is small and close-knit, where success is dependent upon the maintenance of a good reputation (Carpos, 2017). For this reason, any particular accounts that may render a participant identifiable have been redacted from the thesis. Questions were chosen so as not

to cause participants any undue levels of stress or upset, however since anxiety and depression amongst musicians has been found to be common (Gross & Musgrave, 2017), I was ready to steer questioning elsewhere if participants' reactions suggested discomfort. Participants had the option to skip any question that they did not wish to answer, and questions remained sufficiently unobtrusive in order that the participant only shared information with which they were comfortable. Ultimately, there were no instances of participants declining to answer questions or ending the interview early. Since graduation is a time of anxiety for many young people, after interviewing graduating musicians I provided an information sheet containing careers resources and mental health helplines (shown in Appendix E).

#### 5.4 Materials

The primary aim of this phase of data collection was to explore young musicians' experiences of the transitional period between music college and their chosen profession (usually the music profession, but some participants worked within music in an administrative capacity). Specifically, I was concerned with if, and how, participants linked their experiences of conservatoire education with their current practice, whatever their employment. Collecting a large amount of rich qualitative data through undertaking semi-structured interviews meant that I could look at each interview as its own data set, treating each participant individually, but ultimately comparing across cases to investigate for commonalities.

The interview schedule for both cohorts consisted of four main sections, the first of which contained questions concerned with participants' musical lives in the past and present, and explored the following issues:

- Participants' routes into music, including first experiences, school experiences and family influences
- Participants' current engagement with music – either professionally or in practice
- Participants' current employment, musical performance or otherwise.



- Participant's engagement with music during their degree, including typical schedule. (Graduating Musicians)
- Key, crystallising moments, both positive and negative, that participants may recall

The second section was intended to investigate participants' aspirations:

- As they currently stood, and
- How these may have changed over time and why.

The third section focussed on participants' experiences of their education, namely:

- The nature of career preparation the participant believed to have received whilst in education, through formal classes or otherwise.
- Advice the participant received from others (tutors, administrators, peers) and the extent to which they acted upon it
- The careers advice that they would have preferred to have received, in an ideal world.

The fourth and final section was intended mainly as a space for more broad reflection, where the participants answered questions about:

- More general goals in life
- The role of music in their life overall
- The role of non-musical hobbies, in addition to their musical participation.

Graduating musicians were also invited to reflect upon a letter submission from the first phase of the study, as a closing activity. However, due to researcher inconsistency, data from this activity was not analysed.

To view the interview schedules in full, see Appendices F and G.

### 5.5 Analysis:

Analysis of interview data was undertaken using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The analysis process was broadly similar to that of the Letters study. The first stage of analysis began with the reading and re-reading of interview

transcripts in order to become fully familiar with the data. Notes were made in the left-hand margin, as a more general interpretative commentary of participants' words. Upon subsequent readings, notes were taken in the right-hand margin to demarcate recurring themes, or themes which appeared most central to the participant. In order to maintain a focus on each individual's experience, interviews were coded independently of each other, however in cases where themes recurred, existing theme names were used.

The second stage of analysis consisted of finding commonalities across themes and combining themes which were similar to each other.

In order to investigate the similarities and differences between the establishing musicians and graduating musicians, themes from each cohort were compared. There were many similarities between both cohorts' experiences, especially as regards education, however the main differences were between establishing musicians' and graduating musicians' *attitudes* towards these experiences. For this reason, the findings from both interview cohorts will be presented together: three separate findings chapters will each consider different key issues in participants' transitions, whilst simultaneously evaluating the contrasts between the attitudes prevalent in each cohort. Verbatim quotes will be used to illustrate the themes discussed. Quotes will be labelled with the participant's pseudonym, principal study and cohort in the following format: (Name, principal study, cohort). EM is used to denote establishing musicians, and GM to label graduating musicians.

## 5.6 Reflexivity and Validity

As detailed above, it is not possible to produce a fully objective account of the findings contained within this study, but neither is that the aim of an interpretative analysis. Despite this, during the interview study I aimed to minimise bias at the data collection stage by remaining as neutral as possible whilst conducting interviews. I took care to ask questions without leading and listened to respondents' answers without encouraging or discouraging particular trains of

thought. This was not always easy, since my insider status meant that participants frequently turned questions round on me. Participants did not know me personally but a certain proportion had been introduced to me by mutual friends, meaning that they may have known more about my research interests and career path than I had necessarily told them. Despite the previously mentioned pitfalls of being an insider in the field, my musician status meant that it was easy to establish rapport with participants, which may have enabled them to feel understood. This is supported by previous researchers who have suggested that 'personal experience or insider knowledge of the topic of investigation [is] a key conduit to entering those worlds as a researcher,' (Micecz, 2012, in Ramirez, 2014, p.84).

## Conclusion

The following three chapters will discuss the findings from the interview study. Data were found to represent three main themes: Building a career, Conservatoire Education, and Aspirations: thus, the following three chapters will discuss these themes in turn. For a summary of the themes and sub-themes that will be discussed in these chapters, please see Table 4. A more comprehensive Table of Themes can be viewed in Appendix H.

Table 4: Summary table of themes

Ch.	Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme
6. Building a Career	Freelance working	Choosing to be a freelancer Combining work strands
	Difficult decisions	Picking and choosing gigs Financial control Coping with uncertainty
	Role of others	Others hold the power Cultivating a good reputation Perceived value of work strands Necessity of supportive colleagues
	Attitudes towards teaching	Teaching as complementary strand 'Bowling out' / 'just' a teacher Teaching for financial gain
	Identity threat	Feeling different Compromising aspects of personality 'Successful musician' attributes
7. Conservatoire Education	Principal study tutors	Tutors' attributes Expectations of tutors Tutors' careers advice
	Professional studies classes	CV classes Teaching skills classes Work placements Freelance modules Tax and accountancy Careers events One-to-one advice Degree as career preparation
	Avoidance of career preparation	Mistrust Relevance/Irrelevance Quality of sessions/provision Barriers to individuality Unintentional absence Institutional culture
	Ideal careers education	Variety Honesty Timing Opposing views
8. Aspirations	Changing aspirations	Point of change Types of change Abandoning musical aspirations
	Motivating factors for aspirational change	Musical factors Lifestyle factors Shared (musical and lifestyle) factors

## 6. Findings: Building a career

The following chapter explores the way in which participants talked about building their careers. Establishing musicians gave accounts of their career building process, and its associated challenges. Graduating musicians explained their career plans and envisaged challenges, and these accounts were compared in order to investigate the ways in which graduates may be (un)prepared for their future careers.

### 6.1 Establishing musicians' careers

Establishing musicians reflected upon their careers, and the actions and events that had taken them to the point of interview. For a summary of participants' career pursuits up to and including the time of interview, please see Table 5.

Table 5: Table to show the Career Pursuits of each Establishing Musician.

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Current Employment</b>	<b>Previous employment</b>
<i>Alice, Soprano</i>	Freelance singer, piano and voice tutor	Nanny, waitress
<i>Beka, Clarinet</i>	Classroom music teacher	Freelance clarinet and saxophone player, musical director (theatre), instrumental tutor, workshop leader
<i>Chris, Trombone</i>	Contracted orchestral trombonist, university trombone tutor, freelance arranger	Trombonist on cruise ships
<i>Josh, Bassoon</i>	Freelance bassoonist (specialising in early music). Events manager and barman for an events venue	
<i>Leanne, Trombone</i>	Artist agent at a young artists' charity	Artist manager for a major agency
<i>Martha, Trombone</i>	Freelance trombonist: orchestral and theatre playing, writing, and brass tutoring	
<i>Natalie, Soprano</i>	Contracted member of an opera chorus	Freelance soprano: opera and oratorio singer; administration work
<i>Oliver, Tenor</i>	Administration for a theatre; small profit-share opera contracts	
<i>Phoebe, Guitar</i>	Administrator at a conservatoire	Guitar tutor
<i>Zoe, Trumpet</i>	Freelance trumpeter: solo, orchestral and theatre playing, brass tutor	

Of the above participants, five had settled into well-defined job roles, in either contracted performance-based jobs or other music-related roles. Of the remaining five, four were undertaking freelance work, and one, Oliver, was working full-time

in a theatre and singing in small opera productions. Although Oliver could be seen to be freelancing, his interpretation of his situation is different:

I: And they ask you what your job is, what do you say you do?

O: Yeah... erm.... I say I work in arts administration

I: OK

O: And I'm working towards a career as an opera singer.

I: Ahh, OK!

O: Yeah [laughs] [...] That's changed recently. If you'd have asked me that maybe six months ago I'd have probably been, like, straight away I was, I'd say I'm an opera singer. But that has changed [laughs].

I: Why?

O: Erm, well I- because I just think for me personally it's gonna take a little bit longer to get to where I wanna get to-

I: Mmm

O: And... currently, predominantly my work is in arts administration, I do more work in that than I do as a singer - at the moment. (Oliver, tenor)

Oliver's identity as an opera singer appears to be conditional upon him doing a certain amount, or a certain type of singing work. This suggests that his visions of what an opera singer is, or does, are not currently compatible with the life he is leading, meaning he does not feel himself worthy of the title 'opera singer,' and only identifies as 'working towards' it. It is possible to compare Oliver's attitude to his identity as a singer with findings from Oakland, et al.'s (2013) investigation into the identity formation of singers experiencing redundancy from an opera chorus. In that study, participants still thought of themselves as opera singers after redundancy, irrespective of paid work: being an opera singer was an irrefutable part of who they were. However the realisation that he needed to do more work on his voice resulted in Oliver provisionally shedding this opera singer identity, at least when describing himself to others. It is also possible that he did not feel qualified to call himself an opera singer, because he had not yet experienced professional opera work, suggesting that professional experiences post-graduation are key to the formation and maintenance of certain facets of a musical identity. Oliver's perspectives have some parallels with Zoe's: she chooses to cease referring to

herself as a soloist, despite taking paid solo work as a trumpeter. Zoe's visions of what a trumpet soloist is are not compatible with the life that she is leading, and therefore, instead of changing her perspectives of music careers, she redefines herself.

At the beginning of the interview, all participants were asked: 'if you are introducing yourself to a new, neutral person, what do you say that you do?' In most cases, those who had fixed non-performance jobs answered the question with their job title, and those with either contracted performance work or more fluid freelance roles described themselves as musicians.

I: If you've got a new, neutral person you're introducing yourself to, erm, if they ask you what you do for a living what do you say?

M: I say that I'm a musician-

I: OK

M: Because- that is at the base of everything I do.

The fact that Martha's teaching, performance and writing work revolved around the trombone justified her musician identity.

### 6.1.1 Choosing a freelance career

It is unclear whether any of the participants interviewed specifically set out to become a freelance musician. It is fair to assume that those who held or aspired to salaried job roles will have had a proactive hand in pursuing these sorts of careers, and many of these participants told a clear and cogent story of the steps they took up to the time of interview. However, with the exception of Zoe, who took part in a 10-month orchestral graduate programme after graduation, the freelance musicians described their careers in a more 'in-the-moment' way, suggesting that a freelance music career is more a state of being rather than a timeline of existence. This makes sense, since traditional career models encourage job satisfaction through progressions such as salary increases and promotions, whereas individuals tend to evaluate portfolio and protean careers in accordance with other values



such as enjoyment and artistic expression. However, no participant described a time when they actively decided to become a freelancer. This indicates that a freelance career could be something of an obvious career choice or considered a 'norm' within the music industry, echoing previous research by Armstrong (2013). Alternatively, participants may have taken jobs as they appeared, becoming a freelance musician almost 'by accident.'

On the contrary, participants who were in salaried job roles at the time of interview reported being freelancers previously, and could outline their journey *out of* freelancing. For Natalie, freelancing served as a door-opener to what was now her full-time role as an opera chorister:

N: So I've been freelancing for about four, four and a half years before I went full- time.

I: OK, got it. So what kind of stuff were you doing then? Was it very very different?

N: A whole range, so, I did a lot of covering, so a lot of understudying, which I really enjoy. Er, for a number of reasons. Erm, so my first job with them was understudying on an education project.

Erm, very much kind of through the back door kind of thing. That makes me sound more shady than it was, but- ... (Natalie, soprano)

When she compares her life as a contracted opera singer to her life as a freelance singer, it is clear that she sees her current situation as an improvement on her previous one:

So the favourite part of the job now is the ability to do something I love, but in a really supportive environment with colleagues. I love my colleagues, they're just - we all, we're all singers, we're all emotionally fragile, we're all you know, so we all have good days and bad days. And when we have bad days, you know, you've got your dressing rooms with friends. Which are- a separate group of friends that you can't, erm, duplicate in the real world or the normal world, cause there's just something that, er, kind of kind of bond that you have with the people you share a dressing room with, erm, and they're just there. They're just there all the time, and that's, for me, a huge change from when I was freelancing. So that's one of my favourite bits of the job is just having these amazing colleagues to make music with. (Natalie, soprano)

Yes, it's more lonely as a freelancer for sure, so- with the freelance hat on that was definitely- and the lack of really feeling like you belong anywhere. That's a huge... thing as a freelancer that's a huge thing. S'kind of like constantly flitting around, and there's no financial security, there's no financial security, erm..... it's a really kind of like, fun, hedonistic lifestyle, if you kind of engage

with it. But it's very lonely, and very- and it can be when you've not got the work coming in, it can be incredibly depressing, cause you're like 'I've got this thing, and I know I can sing, I know that I've got this ability, to do my job, but I'm reliant on other people, erm, saying whether I get to eat this week or not. (Natalie, soprano)

Although Natalie does not report explicitly disliking freelance life, the lack of financial security and social connection meant that she welcomed the chance to join the opera chorus full-time. It is possible that whilst freelancing, Natalie did not see this job as second-best to her opera chorus role, however since then she has looked back and realised that she prefers her present situation. Given that undertaking freelance contracts with the same opera company led to her being considered for the job, it is possible to see how many musicians might see a freelance career as a 'necessary evil,' even if just at the beginning of a more stable music career later on.

#### 6.1.2 Characterising freelance careers

Participants undertaking freelance careers reported combining a variety of work roles, both musical and non-musical, detailed in Table 6. Musical job roles could also be split into a further three categories:

1. *Performance* roles were roles in which the individual was paid to play an instrument or sing.
2. *Performance-adjacent* roles were roles that require competence in instrumental or vocal performance and depth of musical knowledge
3. *Administrative and support* roles, although in musical settings, represented jobs where instrumental or vocal competence was non-essential.

Table 6: Table to show Spread of Freelance Musicians' Career Activities

		<b>Musical</b>			
		<i>Performance</i>	<i>Performance-adjacent</i>	<i>Administrative/ support</i>	<b>Non-musical</b>
<b>Professional</b>	Opera roles		Teaching	Fixer	Events staff
	Opera chorus		Writing for a specialist magazine	Instrument repair technician	Bar work
	Solo playing		Instrumental teaching		Nannying
	Orchestral playing		Workshop leading		
	Theatre pit work (West End)		Arranging		
	Musical direction		Lyric diction coaching		
	Conducting				
	Piano accompaniment				
	Function band playing				
	<b>Non-professional</b>	Choral society playing			
	Voluntary playing (e.g. student orchestras)				

The assortment of ways in which these participants earn money is consonant with previous research which suggests that music careers are varied and complex (Armstrong, 2013; Bennett, 2007, 2009; Bennet & Bridgstock, 2014; Gembris, 2006) Participant accounts suggest that musicians combine these roles for a variety of reasons:

I: So what would you say you- you like the most about- about the work that you do?

M: As in, generally the work I do?

I: Yeah

M: Erm, the fact that I don't get bored, cause I think if I try- like, I love teaching, but if I taught every day and did nothing else I wouldn't love it [laughs]

I: Sure.

M: And I love playing, but actually if I have to rely on that to- for my income I don't think I'd love it at all. It's the fact that it's, like, they all feed off each other, and kind of give each other balance it's really nice. (Martha, trombone)

It [writing for a trombone magazine] actually directly feeds back [laughs] as funny as that is. It feeds back into my playing and has introduced me to great people.

Martha's description of her varied pursuits 'feeding off each other' suggests that rather than seeing her career as discrete activities, she views these activities as facets of her music career more generally, as each is related. She focuses on the benefits of her non-performance activities, which suggests that although freelance musicians have been shown to find meaning in performances (Ascenso, et al., 2017) they may also seek meaning in non-performance pursuits, especially if those pursuits might improve opportunities for performance later down the line.

Alice describes her varied working life with less positivity than Martha:

I: Erm so when- so you said that you mainly do- mainly mainly teaching, is that right?

A: Er yeah, yeah. [sighs] I didn't want it to end up like this [...] Erm, [pause] it changes every day doesn't it? I like the actual... action of teaching.... when I'm in a school. I like being one-on-one with the kids, cause I think they're interesting. Erm, but I kind of hate myself for it cause it's a private school and I - ugh, anyway. But I- I taught as well in [a city], in [a suburb]. At a state school. And the differences are vast. In so many ways [laughs] Erm, but it was- I basically get to do whatever I want, within, within a certain bubble and that autonomy I massively enjoy. Erm, and I enjoy interacting with the children, erm, and I enjoy when the parents keep their noses out. You, know, to your reasonable amount. [...] Erm, yeah so then the private, the private stuff is good, I just don't like the travelling. Really gets me down, from one house to the next. Erm, but on the whole, everyone is very successful [...] On the whole it's- it's, er, it's a good money-earner and the parents are really flexible, so if I need to move things around or if I need to take a week off and, like, leave, or not be there, or if I need to come in on their holidays and they're not like, you know- they make room for me and they're always really understanding. Erm, so that's - so I get to do what I want. So that's good, but I mean they're all piano students. Erm, so it just gets a bit, just gets a bit boring. (Alice, Soprano, EM)

At the time of the interview, the majority of Alice's working time was spent teaching piano and singing privately and in a school. Performance opportunities, in general, came in the summer and consisted of young artist opera schemes. Alice sees the benefits of teaching as more general than musical: whereas Martha focuses on the musical advantages of having a varied career, Alice teaches for its flexibility and financial reward. Unlike Martha, she views her teaching work

separately from her singing work and, although she does not explicitly dislike teaching, she envisages a future where she may no longer teach. This suggests that Alice sees a varied career as a necessity rather than something she wishes to sustain into the long term, and for this reason teaching work does not contribute to her singing work in the way that Martha's does. Both Martha and Alice's experiences can be directly compared to previous research, which suggests that teaching work can be viewed as both *realistic* (necessary for financial and stability reasons) and *holistic* (embedded as part of a wider musical life context) (Juuti & Littleton, 2012). It appears here that Alice's approach to teaching is more *realistic*, whereas Martha's engagement is both *realistic* and *holistic*.

At the time of the interview, Josh was combining early music gigs on the bassoon, with a more regular events management job.

J: Erm, I'm a musician. But I also work in events.

I: OK

J: I think I'd have to say... cause I have- I'm quite happy with a part-time job. erm, sort of waitering, sort of managing. Somewhere in between.

Erm, a typical working week, in, say Easter time? Would be... get on a train, go to a gig, probably stay overnight, cause they're very rarely in Lond-, so go to Norwich or something like that, stay overnight, come back, have a day off cause you're knackered. Maybe do a bit of practice if it's a piece you don't know? But mostly it's warm-ups so if something really hard comes up, work on that. The odd shift [in events], maybe. Whereas, [pause] now [at time of interview]? It could be pretty much nothing cause it's summer and nothing's happening. So, for instance next week, I am entirely free apart from one gig. So I'll practice a bit for the gig cause it's chamber music, but then all- I'll do my own projects so I'll start working on folk stuff or I've got- something I've gotta write to tie in with podcasts. Like I've got little projects I'll have which- I mean, working on the, on the and I'll apologise for the bad language but if I throw enough shit at a wall something'll stick

I: [laughs]

J: Kind of idea! That I'm - I'm trying, yeah-

I: I call it the splatter gun approach! [laughs] Just everything!

J: Erm, and then if there's nothing much going on then evenings, I might go to a folk session, or there's quite a few improv comedy jams going on, so I'll turn up to them, and just have a bit of fun. And if it's, say middle of the term kind of week then it's probably more, erm, do two or three shifts [in events], work, and practice around that, sort of stuff. Go to something interesting if I've got the time and the inclination, yeah.

I: So basically all manner of things!

J: Mm. I mean it does tend to group into entirely empty times and manically busy times. (Josh, bassoon)

He is very accepting of the fact that work could come in fits and starts, mirroring the 'binge-purge' work pattern described in Armstrong's (2013) study. Much of Josh's musical engagement is centred around fun, which is apparent throughout his interview. This could go some way to explaining why he seems relatively content with one performance a month on the bassoon, since he is very clear about prioritising the playing work he enjoys – Early Music – over and above choral society gigs that he finds less rewarding. Doing shift work for the events company is, on one hand, practical: he is paid above London Living Wage and his work pattern is relatively flexible. For this reason, he can afford to do his own projects, which include podcasting, folk music and improvised musical comedy, and although his statement of 'if I throw enough shit at a wall something'll stick,' could suggest that this approach is out of necessity, the energy with which he talks about these pursuits suggests that he is just open-minded and curious. Although his perspective of the events job could be seen as relatively pragmatic, Josh is keen to outline its benefits:

Erm, but it's nice to sort of, say if I do four days there, it's, in a row, it's relatively rare but it's good cause you can - feels like you've actually got a routine, got a workplace, you've got colleagues and that kind of stuff. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

Josh talks about colleagues and routine like Natalie, and although she discusses it in the context of a musical job (the opera chorus) her concerns are similar, suggesting that a lack of these can be considered a real perceived disadvantage of a freelance career. Additionally, Leanne cites a lack of routine as a reason for not ultimately considering a freelance career, and as a result she opted to go into arts administration. A lack of stability was a concern of participants in previous studies (Juuti & Littleton, 2012), and they too found it in other, non-playing jobs, including teaching. This suggests that, for musicians, stable elements of a varied career can be beneficial to emotional wellbeing, especially those who are naturally 'worriers:' although Josh sees his events job as financially necessary, it also fulfils this need.

Furthermore, Josh sees his events job as having challenges that could directly relate to musical problems he may face:

J: And the experience you've got, I mean, it's one of those- I think people overlook a lot, that there's a lot of logistical skill that comes into events. Like, seeing some of the management- I mean maybe this is a bit of a tangent, it relates to conductors... you know conductors, when they just don't have a clue?

I: Yeah

J: It's that kind of thing, where you're sitting there and going 'Right, well, I'm gonna have to completely ignore you to get the job done.' (Josh, bassoon, EM)

Both Martha and Josh are aware of the transferrable skills from their music degree. Whereas Martha reflected on the musical benefits of teaching and writing, Josh can also link a non-musical job to his musical development, indicating that to an extent he has embedded this into his musical practice. Josh and Martha's perspectives could begin to indicate that a key part of musical transition is the embedding of 'non-performance' job roles into musical involvement. Recognising the positive elements of pursuits outside of the 'dream' playing career could also be coping strategies that these participants were employing in the face of delayed success. This has been previously demonstrated by Burland (2005) and resonates with Schossberg's theory (1981; 2012) that adaption to transition hinges upon successful use of a range of coping strategies.

Although Oliver did not necessarily view himself as a freelance musician (as discussed above), at the time of the interview he was combining freelance professional and amateur singing engagements with an arts administration job in a theatre. However, he was preparing to leave this particular job, since it was merely a financial necessity and was preventing him from otherwise furthering himself as a singer.

O: [...] like I said, I handed my notice in for my other job, in February, but the whole point of doing that is that I'm starting my German language course in March-

I: Ah right!

O: And, and again, that's all part of what I view as being ... furthering my training as a singer. (Oliver, tenor, EM)

In contrast to the other participants, Oliver's theatre job was at odds with his desire to become a singer, as it was preventing his future attendance at a German language course, which he envisaged to be a key part of his future development. For this reason, he was planning to give it up. Alice, above, was similar, and although she did not explicitly mention planning to leave her teaching jobs, when she spoke of her future aspirations, teaching did not feature in her plans. On the other hand, both Martha and Josh remained open-minded when talking about their future careers, with Martha naming her main aspiration as just to 'do more of the same,' and Josh seeming relatively focused on exploration, fun and enjoyment as his main motivators. However, the key difference between these two pairs of participants is their perspectives on their non-performance jobs: rather than seeing them as either second-best, or even directly opposed to their roles as performers, they had assimilated them into their identity as musicians, seeing them as smaller, essential parts of a wider musical life.

### 6.1.3 Challenges of a freelance career

When asked about the challenges of a musician's career, all participants, whether working as freelance musicians or in contracted roles, mentioned the challenge of finding financial stability. This is unsurprising, since it is well documented that musicians are not well-paid, in both academic and popular discourse (Brodsky, 2006; Umney & Kretsos, 2015). It is important to note that the graduating participants also made reference to financial challenges, indicating that although students often report inadequate career preview, they are at least mentally prepared for financial challenges. In other words, students are aware that their future may include financial struggle, but they are rather less aware of the emotional load of this struggle.

However, in reality, the musicians' financial concerns did not necessarily stem from a feeling of being underpaid, but rather a lack of control and certainty when it came to securing work in the first place:



I: What would you say are the main challenges in general, of a career in music?

Z: I think... erm, the uncertainty of just not- not really knowing what's coming next. I mean looking ahead in my diary I think I have one thing in August [three months' time], erm, which is actually even a - only really expenses paid concert, so- and obviously no school teaching, so August is looking pretty- pretty bare for me (Zoe, trumpet, EM)

M: When you're in music college you have every day to like work really hard and do the sort of stuff that you should keep up when you leave but then when you leave you're like 'OK, I have to actually balance making enough money to be able to afford food, and actually like seriously being in... danger of not being able to afford it'

I: Yeah

M: As well as, like, constantly having to kind of try and find work, constantly being like on your toes and ready for if someone does call you.

I: Yeah

M: This is the thing and like, I -I struggled for ages with like, trying to keep myself flexible. Cause on one hand you don't wanna be sitting doing nothing, but then you don't wanna tie yourself up so much that if someone does go 'can you get here tonight' you can- you're not like 'no I can't.'

(Martha, trombone, EM)

The experiences presented above suggest that a certain level of resilience is required in order to maintain a freelance music career. Previous research has indicated that freelance musicians are in a state of constant decision-making (Armstrong, 2013; Dobson, 2010; Juuti & Littleton, 2012) which exemplifies Martha's report of having to decide between working for guaranteed money or keeping herself free for potential playing work. Therefore the role of chance and luck should not be underestimated in the lives of career-young musicians. On the other hand, one could argue that musicians are, to an extent, responsible for making jobs for themselves, rather than waiting for others to offer them work. Martha seemed comfortable with the idea of going out and seeking her own work, namely meeting people within musical theatre in order to find jobs on the West End, which could be why she talks about this worry as having been in the past tense. It is possible that taking control of her work future helped to alleviate some of her concerns about finding work. Referring back to participants' reports of their career preparation, many spoke of feeling ill-equipped for the realities of *finding*

work and perhaps in Zoe and Natalie's accounts it is possible to see the results of that: a feeling of powerlessness in securing future work.

However, Josh, who does appear to be proactively running his own projects and searching for work, also speaks of a lack of financial control:

I think the last thing I've got booked in is- I've got a gig sometime in August, and after that it's completely blank. I mean, stuff'll come in. I mean by the time it gets to Easter, so like people are trying to like triple-book me for the same day. Erm, but that's like one day. Erm, yeah it's quite nerve-wracking going like 'I dunno where the money's coming in for the next month or so.' I mean I've got buffers and stuff for that. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

This indicates that financial uncertainty is a concern even to those who are used to being self-sufficient as regards work. For this reason, care must be taken when evaluating the impact of proactive work searching, especially when promoting it at conservatoire level. Although there is evidence here to suggest that proactivity can help musicians to feel more in control of their financial situations, it could be possible to overstate this: it is not feasible to have one individual solution to career precarity. In chapter 7, musicians reflected on self-promotion skills lectures, noting an emphasis on web-based promotion, however research amongst independent musicians has indicated that the benefits of this could have been exaggerated (Haynes & Marshall, 2018). This could be the same in classical music, and therefore creating a culture of empowerment amongst music students and graduates alongside resilience training may better prepare graduates for their transitions into the working world, a notion echoed by Bleasdale and Humphreys (2018) in their study of university undergraduates and staff.

#### 6.1.4 Overqualification and the 'hierarchy of jobs'

Some participants' perspectives on types of jobs and their artistic value proved revealing. For example, Josh wondered if his degree from a well-established London Conservatoire had rendered him over-qualified for certain work:

I have a sneaking suspicion that some of the less prestigious conservatoires, so not so much [college a] [college b] [college c] [college d], that kind of stuff. I reckon, I d- I reckon they maybe get better shots at things? Because I think- I mean I have no evidence to back this up but I think they

probably are more thinking about how to shoot for the lower levels which is where all the work is. Like doing shows, no-one talked about that at college. I mean, I could have quite easily, with a little bit of help, I suspect, got my clarinet playing up a level and then, when someone said, 'Oh do you have a bari and bass clarinet, cause there's this bassoon, bari bass clarinet thing I need a player for, then-' I had no chance at doing that. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

I was taught all the sort of high level orchestral technique for modern orchestra, say Mahler, and all the- stuff where you have a first player and a second player sits, like, behind and then the contra player is like near and you'll have this whole chain of command going through, and it doesn't work in the real world. Cause, you've got a conductor, who you're probably not gonna follow.

I: Yeah

J: In most amateur choral stuff. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

Josh implies that it might be easier to find work by being taught to aim lower, suggesting that he feels as though his education specialised him too much for the music industry. However Josh's description of show work, where he describes it as 'lower-level,' is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, although show work would have been supposedly 'aiming lower,' he admits that it would have required him to improve his technique on a number of different instruments. Secondly, on a professional level, show work can be lucrative as well as having 'the security for musicians that other musical jobs don't [,] with sick pay, and holiday pay,' ("Insiders Anonymous: West End Musician," 2015) although this is not currently robustly supported by statistical investigation. Josh's attitude towards this line of work could be representative of a perceived hierarchy within classical music, where some jobs are considered to have more validity or artistic merit than others, regardless of required skill or earning potential. However, Martha's attitude towards show work does not mirror Josh's:

M: Erm I'd love to do, like West End. Depping.

I: Mhm

M: Be cool. But everyone wants to do it, so....[nervous laugh]

This discrepancy could be for a number of different reasons. Of course, it may be a simple case of individual differences: Martha's personality, or pragmatism, means

that she is more drawn to show work than Josh is, however Martha says that *everyone* wants to do it. This could be because Martha feels the competition between herself and other players vying for the same work as her quite keenly – or perhaps within her social circle there is something of an echo-chamber when it comes to job aspirations. As a trombonist, show work would be a job that is extremely centred around Martha's area of specialism, the trombone, which is why she may see it as 'worthy.' Josh, on the other hand, would have to develop skills outside of the bassoon in order to find similar work, and this 'diluting' of his specialism may be another reason why, to his mind, it constitutes 'lower-level work.' Finally, Josh may label show work as 'lower-level' purely to make himself feel better that it was a missed opportunity for him and devaluing it is something of a defence mechanism.

Phoebe's experiences as an External Engagements coordinator at a UK conservatoire certainly support the idea of a hierarchy in music jobs:

[W]ell, we want groups that just play background music, but for example, the chamber music staff will never listen to any of that stuff, so they won't approve them. So often they won't come to us. So we have to find them. We have to find groups on the internet or on Twitter or whatever and say, 'Oh look there's a current student's got a quartet doing background music- great let's approach them and see if they wanna join.' Erm, join- be on our books. Because it's that snobbiness, er, in a way, yeah so sometimes people do come to us in lieu of their tutors because there is that element of 'You're here to st- you here to play classical music. Play classical music or get- you know, get out,' kind of thing. (Phoebe, guitar, EM)

Both Josh and Phoebe's perspectives indicate that this perceived hierarchy within the classical music industry is, possibly inadvertently, perpetuated by conservatoire education. Although Josh may never have been explicitly told that show work was 'lower level,' perhaps, on account of him having been admitted to one of the most prestigious colleges in the UK, he assumed that anything he was not learning was automatically less worthy as a career. Phoebe holds the conservatoire education system more accountable, suggesting that staff unwillingness to 'sign off' on background music ensembles is limiting to students, who are then unaware of the earning potential of these 'less prestigious' performances. She is keen to outline the benefits of taking background gigs:

You'll make money. And that will help you do whatever it is you wanna do in the future. (Phoebe, guitar), EM

To Phoebe, whether or not these performances have less prestige, it is important to view them in terms of their financial pay-off, especially when that money might be re-invested into more 'desirable' artistic pursuits afterwards. Both hers and Josh's accounts point to a culture in which financial gain is secondary to artistic merit, even when this financial gain may be of artistic benefit further down the line. This lack of joined-up thinking presents additional challenges to musicians building their careers: even if a 'less worthy job' is temporary, the resultant shame associated with taking this job may ultimately prevent musicians from undertaking this work in the first place. Furthermore, data explored in Chapter 7 suggests that new professional experiences were key to students and young professionals in visualising their professional futures: if establishing musicians reject job opportunities as a result of this hierarchy, they could be missing out on key formative experiences.

#### 6.1.5 The role of others in building a career

Natalie described her life as a freelancer as being 'reliant on other people saying whether I get to eat this week or not.' Although she was specifically referring to relying on other people booking her for concerts, participants in this study made reference to a number of processes that may preclude even having the chance to be booked as a player or a singer. Some of these were more formal processes, such as job applications and auditions, whereas others were less clear, consisting of meeting, knowing or simply socialising with the 'right people.' Above all, this indicates that although musicians do need to be proactive in order to build and sustain a career, they do need to be proactive in the 'right ways,' and to an extent be comfortable relinquishing some control to others.

Alice talks about the need to mix with the right people in order to get work, something she feels that she has not done:

So, ah, it's about knowing whose ass to kiss, and er I have absolutely definitely not kissed the right asses. [laughs] Because I'm the type of person who is, like, at [summer opera] everyone was, er, like this summer was hanging out and partying with the Artistic Director, and I was the type of person to, like, hang out with the guy who was like Operations Management for the whole park. And I was just like - 'hey guys, you're fun, you're cool what's up?' And everyone else was like, 'Ah ha ha! Oh my gosh! Look at my high heels and my low-cut dress' [laughs] And I was the kind of person like, you know, like off in the corner with- with the techies, like scratching my balls. Erm, you know I'm the kind of person who makes friends with the costume managers and the hair and makeup girls, er, as opposed to anyone who has any kind of influence. And, er, but the evidence is there because the people who- I mean I got asked back which was great but, the people who got all the small roles and the small step-out roles and the covers - are all people who kissed the artistic director- are all people who were exactly directly in that entourage last year. And I wasn't- and I'm like 'Ah damnit Alice, you really gotta suck it up!' Er, it's er, it's knowing when to ask people for favours and- and when to [pause] it's really hard, you have to be on your A game the whole fucking time. Because everyone's watching you and then as soon as one person says - your kind of lucky opportunity comes up and some- some person says 'I need someone for this' you want to be the person who's the first on everyone's mind, who says 'call this person cause she'd be great at that.' So you can never- just never have an off day. You have to be completely, superhuman.

The above account is illustrative of a real tension between self-reliance, identity and the influence of others in the formation of a music career. Here, Alice perceives that her situation is of her own making: she chose to avoid socialising with people of influence, and as a result, although she was invited back to the summer opera scheme, she was not offered a more important role. In a sense, *she* is responsible for promoting herself to the right people, yet ultimately the casting decisions are still in the hands of the directors, meaning that her autonomy only goes so far. Participants in a study of London orchestras (Carpos, 2017) corroborated Alice's perspective: there, musicians sought to attain more prestige (and therefore make themselves more desirable for future work) by socialising with the 'right,' most influential people. Alice's perspectives are also consonant with Carpos's finding that blatant networkers are not necessarily well-liked: Alice's description of the women in her company 'kissing the artistic director' pulls no punches. Furthermore, for many musicians there is a difficulty that ensues when colleagues are also competition, something that may cause Alice to feel different or isolated if she is not willing to 'suck it up' and network in the same way as them. Alice's perception of the requirement to 'never have an off day' echoes the findings of previous research (Dobson, 2010) that suggests that the need to develop a good reputation

through sociability is paramount to musical success, especially for musicians just starting out in their careers. Furthermore, participants in Dobson's study told stories similar to Alice's, intimating that musicians who did not adequately socialise after orchestral gigs were less likely to be hired as permanent players for that reason. Although that particular study was undertaken with jazz musicians and string players, Alice's perspectives could indicate that singers have a similar experience in the music industry.

Throughout the interview with Alice, she makes reference to being different and feeling different, and her account of making friends with the 'wrong' people serves to perpetuate her narrative of individuality. Whether or not Alice's account was perceived the same by others at the time is not important, since this story is part of her sense-making process. Alice's experiences could indicate that music careers are especially difficult for those who feel they do not fit the mould, whatever that mould should be.

Martha speaks similarly about the importance of socialising with others, when invited to play trombone in freelance orchestras:

M: And it really scares me I hate talking to people. If I could, I would totally just, like, sit on my own. I'm just that kind of person. Particularly when, erm- so like I did, like my first ever orchestral one, out of London, I'd travelled a lot, I was so like 'Uuhh.' Didn't wanna fuck it up, and then, like, it er- just sort of find everyone orientates around pubs? I'm like, oh, I really don't wanna drink [laughs], I like need to make sure I don't mess this up, and I just find stuff like that a bit challenging. Like because you don't- obviously don't wanna be antisocial either, you've gotta be really, like-

I: Oh you mean going to the pub before the performance?

M: Mmm

I: OK

M: Mmm. And it's not necessarily to drink, but like that's just not the atmosphere that I'd choose, if I'm about to do something I don't wanna mess up.

I: Yeah

M: That's all. S'funny I haven't qui- haven't quite got my head round it.

I: Were those- were those players a lot different to you? Were they older than you?

M: Erm, no it was about mixed actually. S'quite lucky. Lots-lots were my age, which is nice, but then, pff, yeah I think I'd been ill, as well. Vaguely remember just feeling shit [laughs]

I: [laughs]

M: But you don't wanna be that person, you don't wanna, like, be, like exclude yourself it's really, very important to get to know everyone.

Martha's account illustrates a conflict between her desire to be alone and focusing herself before a concert, and the social expectation that she will go to the pub and drink with the band. She seems to view this 'professional sociability' as something very important – which supports previous research that indicates that socialising is key to future employment (Carpos, 2017; Dobson, 2010), which Martha is likely mindful of. Similar to Alice's report, Martha hints at feeling as though she does not entirely fit into the world she is beginning to infiltrate, stating that she is 'just that kind of person' who would prefer to sit alone. She is also concerned about the pub atmosphere's incompatibility with her aim to play a gig she doesn't want to 'mess up' but ultimately goes anyway, possibly for the sake of professional contacts. Martha's perspective could indicate that establishing musicians have to compromise some of their own beliefs and values in order to break into the music industry. Furthermore, it suggests that career-young musicians require more than just good technique in order to build a career: they need to possess some level of social awareness.

#### 6.1.6 Mysterious gatekeepers

There were some cases in which participants were mindful of others' influence in their future career, however they were unsure of exactly how. Similar to a lack of financial control, these musicians felt like their future was out of control, either from a lack of feedback or as a result of less clear-cut recruitment processes.

After graduation, Oliver was finding it very difficult getting feedback after his auditions:

O: Erm, you then turn up, do the whole sort of 'cattle call' thing where you're all in line waiting to go into the room, er, you walk in, if you're lucky you'll get to sing through one whole piece. Erm, you'll then get a 'thank you very much, for coming in' erm, and that's it! If you're really lucky, you might have someone on the panel who, perhaps, realises that they should give you a little bit more than that, and they might give you a little bit of, you know, constructive criticism as you're leaving, which is fantastic, cause at least it's something. And then, more often than not, nnnnn, you don't



hear anything for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks...erm, and then if you're lucky you'll get a yes or a no.

I: ha

O: But there's been lots of occasions where you just have- I just haven't – and it's not just me, my friends as well, you're just not contacted. Oh and the best part is is you almost always, erm, have a note somewhere in the application saying, 'Due to the extreme numbers of people applying, we are unable to give you any feedback on your audition.'

I: Yeah I was just gonna ask that question!

O: Which is a complete- so unbelievably useless and in many cases, bullshit, to be completely honest.

I: [laughs] That was gonna be my next question was 'how many opportunities do you get, now, for feedback?'

O: None whatsoever. Unless you know the company, so have a perso- like a sort of back door where you're finding out feedback. Or, [inaudible], like for example I auditioned recently for [Summer Opera x], no it's [Summer Opera y], and the ...gentleman on the panel, I don't know whether he did it with everybody, but he actually gave me feedback on the way out.

I: Nice

O: And it meant a huge amount.

I: That's – [Summer Opera y] is like, it's quite a young- it's quite a young thing, isn't it?

O: Yes, yeah, erm that so I really appreciated that. But that's, you know that's like a rarity. You just, you get nothing.

I: Yeah.

O: Erm, yeah, which is frustrating.

Oliver's concerns about feedback are nothing new: graduates from all disciplines experience a certain level of frustration and anxiety when entering the workplace, as a result of receiving less frequent feedback. Upon socialisation into the workplace, new employees become accustomed to this lack of feedback, usually as a result of decreased autonomy (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008), whereby their focus shifts from personal development (as a student) to advancement of the company (for an employee). However, although Oliver could be seen to be working as a freelance musician, he is certainly not an employee of a company, meaning that organisational theory falls short of explaining the frustration that Oliver so clearly feels. On the contrary, freelance musicians could be seen as both dedicated to

their own personal development and advancement of a company: that company being themselves. Because in this case self and occupation are so intrinsically linked, it makes sense that a desire for, or reliance on, feedback might persist for a lot longer – or indeed forever – for music graduates as they advance into the profession.

Oliver speaks of needing ‘a back door’ to find out detailed feedback after auditions, which again suggests a need for musicians to move in the right circles in order to advance their career more effectively. Later in the interview, he adds that ‘auditions are auditions,’ suggesting that he feels a sort of acceptance or inevitability about his situation, despite having described it in relatively negative terms. It appears that despite all this, he possesses a certain level of resilience towards the process of becoming a musician, which could also show that this level of struggle could be seen as a norm within classical music – perpetuating the ‘struggling artist’ narrative.

When talking about his ambitions to sing in Germany, Oliver makes reference to a set of rules for which he was not prepared:

Erm, opera work that's appropriate for your voice type. Erm, the vocal the Fach system, which doesn't really exist in this country, but everywhere else in Europe, they stick rigidly to it. Which wasn't even really discussed with us, erm, which just makes it really difficult because there's a very small pool in this country, for singing. There's a huge scope in Europe. And a lot of people have had, through, through just wanting to work have had to look now towards working in Europe and all of a sudden they've been, you know they're turning up with the arias that they've been singing for the past three years in this country no problem, and they're turning up in Germany singing them and sort of been told, 'what on earth are you doing singing this, this is completely inappropriate for you.' Erm, yeah, you know, 'Go away and learn what you should be learning.' (Oliver, tenor, EM)

On the one hand, participants reported needing to find their own sense of individuality in order to build a career, however on the other, Oliver's report above suggests that this individuality may only go so far. He uses this account primarily to illustrate how underprepared he felt for the music profession, believing that

greater knowledge of his own voice type with respect to the Fach<sup>3</sup> system would have enabled him to find work in Europe more easily. However, in general, this points to the existence of a 'higher power' or a culture within the music industry that indicates that there are rules to be followed in performance. It is possible that because Oliver views himself in this liminal state – as a graduate but certainly not yet an opera singer – he is looking for an organisation or a system to help him make more sense of his situation. For many graduates, moving from one structured institution into the world of work is challenging enough, but in the face of a less organised industry such as the music profession, this could present additional challenges. Perhaps, for some musicians, a gravitation to something more structured is a way of coping.

The German Fach system provided Oliver with guidelines and therefore helped him to focus his aims as an aspiring opera singer. Martha described an opposite situation when talking about her aspirations to play trombone for Musical Theatre.

I: So how do you kind of get that-that sort of work [musical theatre playing]? Do you have to know people- is it more about knowing people?

M: Mm, I think so, it does seem to be quite a small, network. Like I went to meet this MD, erm, last week and she knew everyone that I know on shows and I was like 'Wow.' Er, very- very tight... tight little circle but then it's good cause like I got recommended by someone, who she's worked with for years so and like-like- I didn't ask for it at all, but I was like that's how it works. Must just be, they kind of get a sense that you'd suit it, but- I dunno, it's a bit confusing, really - I'm

I: Yeah

M: I don't think anyone really knows how it happens! [laughs]

I: Yeah are there, auditions? [laughs]

M: Yeah cause that's the thing its ne- never auditioned! Er, so it's not like if you were on like in the cast, where they definitely would audition you!

I: Yeah!

M: But musicians are like 'mehh' [non-committal sound] '[inaudible]' It's- it's a funny one.

I: Just got their [inaudible] sorted this out.

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<sup>3</sup> The Fach System is a way of classifying voices, primarily used in German opera houses to help select singers for opera roles. It goes beyond simple voice type, evaluating timbre and voice weight in addition to range order to categorise voices.

M: Yeah, and like you talk, asking around about who's depped on, which shows it's all the same people. Interesting.

Martha's experiences continue to support the idea that musicians rely on who they know in addition to what they know: in this case Martha reported meeting up with a Theatre Musical Director in order to further her chances of building up this sort of playing work. However, she is unsure of the process of obtaining this work, and there is a real lack of empirical research into this area of musicians' careers, indicating that the path into Musical Theatre work for musicians is a mysterious route, perhaps governed by its key players rather than any sort of system.

#### 6.1.7 Seeking a sense of ownership

Although participants generally spoke positively about the spread of activities they combined as part of their careers, this was not without its drawbacks. Some respondents made reference to a desire for something to 'put their name to.' Zoe, who, at the time of interview, was undertaking many different types of playing work as a freelancer, spoke of a wish to have a seat in an orchestra:

I mean the [freelance] life's slightly, yeah, the life's like, it's a bit scary but yeah, actually, it's so great in so many ways so. I think I would love to have, er, something regular, so like if I could be in an orchestra, where you're part of this team and it's something you put your name to and it's yours, but also have the time to pursue other things, that would be the dream. (Zoe, trumpet)

Whilst some participants, such as Natalie and Josh, spoke of need for regular work as a financial mainstay or a sense of normality, Zoe saw a regular orchestral position as an opportunity to make a regular contribution to a team and take ownership of part of her career:

I really enjoy getting the chance to perform something again and again and try and do it better every night and get to know something really well, that's also a really good feeling. But yeah, playing in something like operas where you get to know these pieces really well and then you would change every week, or change every month or something. I would love that. Erm, so I think I kind of want to be doing way more of what I'm doing now, basically, and if I could have a permanent position somewhere for a bit of time, that would be really exciting. (Zoe, trumpet, EM)

It is possible that although Zoe likes freelancing, and is arguably making a successful living from it, she does not feel entirely fulfilled by the one-off nature of each of the gigs she does. Natalie spoke of the lack of social connection as a freelance chorister:

S'just you. You make friends, obviously, in a very intense slightly superficial way. Every now and again somebody will stick, and you'll make a really really good friend, that'll stick with you, that you'll keep in touch with. But a lot of the time as a freelancer you just make these incredibly intense relationships because you have to to make the show work... (Natalie, soprano, EM)

Yes, it's more lonely as a freelancer for sure, so- with the freelance hat on that was definitely- and the lack of really feeling like you belong anywhere. That's a huge... thing as a freelancer that's a huge thing. (Natalie, soprano, EM)

Both Natalie and Zoe's perspectives indicate that freelance life presents challenges beyond the more immediately obvious: although financial instability and work-life balance are of great concern to many, feelings of musical or social impermanence also feature. Zoe is clearly concerned about doing a good job of the work that she does (leading her to become overly self-critical at times) and for this reason she craves an opportunity to join an opera or ballet orchestra and improve her performances night on night. This could indicate that some freelance musicians view their work as something shallow, and the chance to commit to a show, company or ensemble would offer deeper meaning to their musical endeavours. It appears that both participants are searching for some sort of connection: for Zoe it is primarily musical, seeking to have a part time seat in an orchestra in order to communicate the music better, and in accordance with her own musical voice ('something you can put your name to and it's yours'). For Natalie, the connection she was searching for was social, and becoming a contracted opera chorister enabled her to go from 'not belonging anywhere' to being part of a team. This echoes previous research which suggests that musicians find meaning through group identity (Ascenso et al., 2017). For Natalie, gaining a group identity through joining the opera chorus enabled her to find greater meaning in what she did as a musician. It is also possible that, after a structured conservatoire environment, Zoe would like the satisfaction of a 'job well done' and be able to feel as though she is improving. As detailed above, transitions into the workplace are challenging, in

part, as a result of a decrease in feedback, because individuals find it difficult to know if they are doing the right thing, or improving (Wendlant & Rochlen, 2008). It is possible that playing different music every night has resulted in Zoe to feel unsure of her own improvement, and the opportunity to commit to something more repetitive would allow her to track her progress. This suggests that transitions into freelance life, as opposed to into more fixed job roles, may become more difficult due to a reduction – or complete lack – of feedback, with little chance for resolution.

However, Zoe's desire for musical ownership goes further than this:

Z: I think, erm that would just, it would just be nice for the music that I do to not always be relying on, to not always be [pause] like, what I'm being paid for. I dunno, I'd like to have things outside of that, what I'm being paid for, like, just something that I do because I love it, in- in music, you know.

I: Yeah

Z: Yeah at the moment it feels a bit like it's either, you know, I'm either practising for a recital that I'm being paid for or an orchestra thing that- it's just all brilliant, that's how I live, that's perfect, but I don't really have anything that I play for just because I love it. Which is kinda sad.

It is possible that Zoe feels less of a love for some of the playing that she does because she knows that she needs to be doing it in order to earn money. This suggests that musicians could feel a disconnect between loving playing music and needing to do it to earn a living. Perhaps there is also a guilt factor at play here, and a narrative that 'money ruins art' is somehow tainting the experience for Zoe. In the quotation (further) above, Zoe describes 'having time to pursue other things,' and perhaps these other things are just that: musical projects that she can pursue for love or interest rather than than financial necessity. Furthermore, Zoe may be thinking beyond the musical benefits of a more repetitive schedule. Instead, the decreased mental load of playing a run of familiar gigs might enable her to pursue other musical endeavours through having more 'headspace.' Ascenso et al. (2017) found that although contracted orchestral musicians reported a number of challenges in their jobs, the social nature of belonging to an organisation and the shared musical identity within their ensembles had a balancing positive effect on their wellbeing. The freelance participants in this study build upon Acenso et al.'s

findings by suggesting that musicians without group identity may struggle to find the same sort of meaning in their musical endeavours. Although many report enjoying the self-reliance and self-direction of their careers, Zoe being no exception, there seems to be a certain level of fatigue associated with prolonged unfamiliar work settings, and the need to 'wear different hats' all of the time. Natalie certainly corroborates this, believing it easier to do music 'for fun' now that she has a contracted position with the opera:

We had a little bit of a get-together, our first kind of get-together as a y-choir, in loose format, erm. A couple of weeks ago we sang some carols, some Christmas music. Everyone had an absolute ball. And I was like 'There are people here who get paid to sing, who want to meet and do it socially.' There are plenty of people for whom that isn't the case, and that's great. But actually what was lovely was one of those, a friend of mine in the chorus, when someone posted something on Facebook about the-the choir get-together, and I was like "and thanks to [pianist] for, er, playing piano bla bla bla' and people saying thank you to me for organising. And then my friend [redacted] posted and went 'I literally can't imagine anything worse than singing for pleasure but fair do's to you for getting it off the ground.'

I: That's so funny!

N: Yeah. Cause people can see that it's wanted, even if they don't want to do it. So I don't know whether that'll continue or not, but for me that's been. It's only- the answer to the question is that it's only very recently happened and I think it's the security of a full-time job that's enabled that. Because I don't think when you're a freelancer you don't want to [pause] you don't wanna spend your time doing that because any time you spent not trying to further your career or get work, is wasted time, in some way. Yes, so I do think that the full-time job has given me the freedom to do that, yeah.

Natalie's perspective could shed more light on why Zoe feels unable to have musical pursuits 'for her:': the nature of a freelance career could be so all-encompassing that it feels as though she is wasting time if she is working on musical projects that are neither lucrative nor beneficial to her career.

This could in turn point to a trend amongst musicians, or the musically-trained, in general. For example, Phoebe, despite being in a full-time arts admin job and not playing the guitar for a living, describes feeling unable to switch off from work:

And it is that feeling of guilt if you're not doing anything, which stems from playing guitar all the time. (Phoebe, guitar, EM)

I think about this a lot, because I find it very difficult to not make my career my main goal? And I wonder whether that's because I've grown up as a musician, with this kind of inherent need to practise all the time and this guilt if you're not practising, and you know I've been so used to having something of being such a main focus and being so focused on [it] all the time, that I think when I stopped playing guitar, I just made my job that.'(Phoebe, Guitar, EM)

It appears that Phoebe became so used to being dedicated to the guitar, that even though it was no longer key to her career or identity, she still felt guilty if she was not doing *something* all of the time. This supports previous research that being a musician is more than just an individual's career identity: due to its all-encompassing nature it becomes more of a way of life (Teague & Smith, 2015; Menger, 1999) For this reason, many musicians push themselves through gruelling work schedules, something that is normalised within the industry (Armstrong, 2013). Before going to music college, Phoebe used to work six-day weeks in order to earn the money to realise her dream of going to music college. Although to an extent she left this life behind after leaving music college, the mentality remains. On one hand, it would be very simple to suggest that music college training in some way contributes to this, but it is important to remember that music college students tend to have been highly motivated individuals since childhood. Furthermore, Phoebe's dedication to her career may be a manifestation of the 'lifelong learning' that music graduates commit to after graduation (Juuti & Littleton, 2012).

#### 6.1.8 'Hybrid' careers: the case of Chris

At the time of the interview, Chris was back in his home country of the US, undertaking contracted work with a State Symphony Orchestra and freelancing as an arranger, university trombone tutor and soloist. Unlike the other purely freelance participants in this study, half of his income (the orchestra work) was salaried. Although Chris considered himself a musician, when introducing himself to others he would pick his words more carefully:



I usually just tell 'em straight up, I - I usually tell 'em, er, I'm a musician, like right now it's it's I've found that people- it's easier to tell people, like if you have some sort of, like title. I- I even know with my, with my own family, like my parents have always been supportive of me doing music, but a lot of people it's like- you tell them that you do music they kind of think you're more of a professional hobbyist as opposed to- professional. And so, I usually just introduce myself as a college professor and, er, that usually gets people like 'Oh but you must be really good.' But literally only difference between me, like, six months ago, and me now is that I have a title at a university. And if, it's awesome, I love it, but it's nothing that special. It's not like I'm teaching at, like, Harvard or something. I just have a couple of students at a small university programme. But nobody else has to know that [laughs].

I: [laughs]

P: Erm, but yeah, you know like so I do that I say I play with the symphony, or something... (Chris, trombone, EM)

The way that Chris talks about what he does indicates a disjunct between the importance that others place upon his job and the importance that he himself places on his job: he believes that non-musicians consider him to be more professional if he introduces himself as a college professor over and above playing with the symphony. Although there is a feeling amongst some musicians that teaching constitutes 'second-rate' work on account of it being non-performing, it is particularly revealing that, despite this, Chris feels the need to play this up in order to feel taken seriously by the layperson. Zoe admits to feeling disheartened when people believe that being a musician is somehow 'not a real job,' which could indicate a more general challenge for musicians going into the industry: although musicians themselves feel their job to be valid, a lack of recognition could become demotivating over time.

In many ways, Chris's career trajectory does not differ from that of the other freelance musicians in this study: he is combining a variety of work strands according to his interests and found these opportunities by networking and building upon existing contacts. However, as a US citizen, a great deal of his career decisions were made with his student loans in mind, and he therefore talks about finding more work with a greater sense of urgency than other participants:

C: So, but like the teaching jobs out where I live pay really well because nobody wants to live there, so I'm conveniently living there, and if I can get a job, like one of the assistant band directing jobs out there it's like sixty thousand a year starting salary, like-

I: Yeah

C: Erm, plus full- full benefits it's like you know, health, dental, vision, and all that kind of stuff. Erm. And I figured between that and playing with the orchestra I'd be running myself crazy for the next couple of years, but I could pay off everything in about three years. Erm, so but then it kind of makes you wonder, it's like - why am I getting a job to just literally piss away sixty thousand dollars?

Chris's account suggests the main reason why he would consider a band director's job would be in order to pay off his student loans and get health insurance, rather than searching for any sort of musical fulfilment. This suggests that when faced with external pressures, such as student loans, musicians building their careers may have to make compromises when choosing their career paths. Although Chris is not the only North American participant in this study, he is the only participant attempting to make a living in America, and as such his experiences cannot be generalised. In the chapter about aspirations, it was suggested that some participants shifted their aspirations to align with their values, and for some participants these values did include a prioritisation of financial stability. However, the notion of financial stability is different when student loans are like those in the US: Chris reports having 'maybe about a hundred and thirty' thousand dollars of student debt (c. £99000). It is possible that whether or not Chris is motivated by the accumulation of wealth – he appears happy to just 'make a living' – he has very little choice given the payment terms on his student loan.

Chris's perspective towards his orchestral job is somewhat lukewarm:

So, like I- I'd looked at doing a DMA, like Doctor of Musical Arts, erm, and I got offered a scholarship to do that, like a full ride to do that at university of Texas, and I thought about taking it, then this job came up and I was like 'no, I'd like to work for a couple of years. And then maybe do it.' Of course, I say that and in a couple of years, I might not want to go do that Doctorate, but, erm I thought it was more important, at least for me at the time, to try to do something. And specially since- then, mind you this is before this opportunity presented itself- once it presented itself I was like 'OK cool, well I'm gonna just do this now.' And so, I got there and was like 'OK I really like what I'm doing. I like all of these different things. I'm gonna just concentrate on this and make it work' And so, erm, I do still look at like, musical chairs and some of those things but like I'm not with the intent of necessarily rushing off to do another job audition or something. To be honest with you, I hate auditions, I hate excerpts - and I'm not, I don't even get nervous with auditions, I just think the whole process is a massive sham, but- erm, so like I, you know like with this job I didn't actually outright win, I was the runner up for it. And, er, the other guy dropped out, and I was like 'OK cool,

I'll take it.' Erm, so I got really lucky, I didn't really consider myself an orchestral trombone player, as such, erm, but I I mean I can play all the rep I can play the excerpts but I just don't - it's just not what I think is fun, um-

I: Yeah yeah

P: You know, and again it's great, but as a trombonist especially, more often than not you're sitting in the back of the orchestra, like, counting rests. And not actually playing.

I: [laughs] yeah.

P: Yeah, reading a book, or something, yeah. Erm, it would be more fun in some ways to be like a clarinettist or bassoonist or something. Cause at least you're playing all the time. Erm, I think a lot of that rep even, like we played Scheherazade back in November, and I love that piece, but it would be vastly more interesting if I was like, the clarinettist, or the principal bassoonist-

I: Yeah

P: Or a flautist or something or the concertmaster, so you know we get some nice fluffy chord in the back and it's nice but, it's not what I trained for, necessarily.

Although Chris admits that being an orchestral player was not necessarily his dream job, he accepted it by turning down the opportunity to study for a DMA with a scholarship, describing it as his chance to 'do something.' Whereas a scholarship to university may have been an opportunity for Chris to continue living a student's life, with fewer financial responsibilities, it is possible that taking the orchestral job was a sensible, adult option. Earlier in Chris's account he seems anxious to describe his career in order that non-musicians might consider him to be a serious professional, as opposed to a 'hobbyist,' which suggests that he is concerned about what others think of him. Therefore, although Chris's orchestral job is clearly not musically satisfying for him, it fulfils his need to appear successful to others whilst he continues his freelance engagements of solo playing and arranging. Although it is generally well-accepted that many musicians seek work according to their own personal beliefs, Chris's experiences provide an alternative narrative, since he seems equally, if not more, concerned with the way in which the work he does reflects on him from the perspectives of others. This concern possibly stems from his discomfort with being in debt: knowing that he has a contracted job may mitigate some of the stress he feels about this and appearing as though he is working to pay these off will make him appear responsible. It is also possible that Chris's orchestral job represented a chance for him to 'settle' for a while: his report

of 'I'm just gonna do this for a while,' is in direct contrast to Josh's report of 'throwing enough shit at a wall till something sticks,' or Alice's experience of having to be 'on her A game,' all the time. Again, this shows that although musicians often do have strong and specific aspirations, these can be compromised for a variety of different reasons.

## 6.2 Comparing musicians' experiences with the graduates' plans: evidence of an 'expectation gap?'

The graduating musicians detailed their post-college plans, and these accounts provide their perspectives on their levels of career preparation. Studies continue to show that transition from music college to the music industry is a challenging time, namely as a result of a lack of career preview. Graduates' plans were compared with the musicians' accounts, in order to investigate this phenomenon further.

All phase 3 participants were interviewed from six weeks before, to a maximum of three months after graduation. Despite this spread in timescale, all were at relatively similar points in finding work, however some had already been working as musicians during their degree. For a summary of participants' plans and previous experience, please see Table 7.

Table 7: Table to show each Graduating Musician's Career Plans and Previous Experiences

Participant name	Plans	Previous experiences
Edward <i>Tenor</i>	Take on teaching work, get singing work. 'Grafting'	Singing in operas (conservatoire and external), teaching, bar work
Freddy <i>Violin</i>	Find out what he likes doing, producing, teaching	Orchestral playing, teaching, theatre playing (keys), playing in bands (guitar)
Hilda <i>Viola</i>	Move to London, take more lessons, apply for jobs. Study Music Psychology	Orchestral playing, teaching (shadowing), airline cabin crew
Sophie <i>Oboe</i>	Teaching, chamber music, apply for orchestral jobs, play baroque oboe	Teaching (voluntary and paid), Orchestral Playing, Chamber Music, Stewarding
Theo <i>Clarinet</i>	Play chamber music, do outreach work. Occasional orchestral work	Teaching (piano and clarinet), Orchestral Playing, Chamber Music
Yasmin <i>Bassoon</i>	Play in an orchestra, take on some teaching (reluctantly)	Orchestral playing
Richard <i>Viola</i>	Freelance orchestral player, play at weddings and functions, set up a function band	Orchestral playing, strings teaching, chamber music, playing at weddings
Ian <i>Viola</i>	Conducting, playing orchestrally, playing and directing musical theatre	Conducting, orchestral playing, playing and directing musical theatre (strings and keys)
Gary <i>Flute</i>	Orchestral playing, woodwind repair, opera singing, chamber music, working events	Orchestral playing, woodwind repair, chamber music, working events

The above table strongly suggests that graduating musicians' plans very much depended on the experiences they had had. Richard, Ian and Gary had an especially wide range of career aspirations: Richard and Ian both took gap years and worked as musicians during this time, before returning to do postgraduate degrees. Gary qualified as a woodwind repair technician during a year abroad from his university degree and was beginning to build a professional identity based around that. This means that their experiences were approaching those of the establishing musicians, since their professional experiences may have already begun to broaden their career perspectives.

In general, the musical lives that the musicians described – the 'inevitability' of freelancing, varied career strands, the importance of networking, and a lack of financial control – bore many resemblances to graduates' plans. This indicates that, on the surface at least, graduates are aware of the 'theory' behind building a career. It appears, instead, that the challenges that come when graduating from music college are more internal: i.e. the unexpected challenges upon graduation were their own changes in attitudes. Notably, the student musicians talked at length about external performance experiences they had had during their degrees – paid and unpaid – which suggests that these experiences, whilst perhaps not fully professional, are key to their identities as musicians. The establishing musicians did not mention such opportunities at all, which may suggest that these reference points are only temporary, until more 'legitimate' professional experiences prevail.

#### 6.2.1 Attitudes towards teaching

Many of the graduating musicians aimed to take on some sort of teaching work after graduating. Whereas many of the established musicians referred to their teaching practice as something embedded within their lives as musicians, some of the younger participants tended to view it as something more separate.

Well I've just found myself a flat, in [a city] yeah. Getting myself a car. So I really, for the next five years, it's going to be a balance of personal, getting myself a foundation, because I do believe you can't do anything without having a basic foundation of self-reliance so, I've got the usual get myself

a job. Now musically: this production company I'm working with is giving me quite a lot of work and what I'd be doing with myself, I'd be putting myself in, erm, some agencies. Get myself there, putting myself out there as a music tutor, cause in my flat, my flat in Salford will be bigger cause I'm not living with students, you know, student accommodation. It's not - so having myself, have people, teaching. Basi- that's bread-and-butter, you know what I mean? Erm, also be going to schools, like I've been doing now, going teaching there So, and also, come from a family of music teachers. It's in, it's already in there so, it's a basic thing to go to. (Edward, tenor, GM)

Edward has very clear musical plans, one of which is to provide himself with an income by teaching, which he describes as 'bread-and-butter.' Although he enjoys teaching, he sees it as an opportunity to create a financial foundation, rather than for any of the musical or personal reasons than the more established musicians did. This could indicate that as a musician's career progresses, their multiple career strands become more enmeshed with each other: as Edward is just on the cusp of leaving his degree it has not yet happened for him.

Other graduating participants did have views on teaching that aligned with those of the establishing musicians, however:

The thing I've really loved about teaching is how much it's improved me as a player. (Ian, viola, GM)

In his gap year, Ian took on a very busy teaching portfolio whilst auditioning for music colleges as a postgraduate. It is possible that as a result of this, he, like the more established participants, can see the value of teaching beyond its monetary gains. This could indicate that, ultimately, the benefits of teaching need to be 'seen to be believed' for many musicians. Edward's perspective may just be symptomatic of a student who has had inadequate career preview before graduation. It is then possible that, two years on, he now views his teaching practice in the same way that the more established musicians do.

Negative attitudes towards teaching were most prevalent amongst the graduate participants. In general, the establishing musicians who did not teach were either looking for teaching work (as was the case with Josh) or avoided it only because

they did not like it or did not think themselves good at it. Conversely, some of the graduating musicians were disparaging about the idea of teaching as a career:

I mean, anyone can go and become a teacher and *just* do that, like in terms of like bowing out if you want to- I dunno that sounds like I'm sort of [laughs] being, erm, what's it called er, hypo-hypocritical of myself but- I find like a lot of my friends have kind of said like they want to do, they wanted to become an orchestral musician and they've got teaching work and they've sort of just been like you know what this is just easier? Because it's structure and it's - you know when your money's coming in, yeah it's it's it's hard work being a teacher, it really really is, but it's- they've kind of realised that it's not worth the stress - so if they've got like, and it's hard work to get teaching work in the first place, but it's easier, it's easier on your mind I think, in the long run.

(Gary, flute GM, emphasis added by researcher)

The reasons that Gary names for teaching – structure and financial certainty, for example – were also detailed by the establishing musicians above. Zoe describes the advantage of time not spent in a ‘stressful performing situation,’ Alice and Martha enjoy the financial stability their teaching work brings, and Josh appreciates the structure of his events management job. All of these musicians combine performance with non-performance roles, and although all state that they would not like their career to be ‘only’ those things, becoming a teacher has not been ‘bowing out’ for any of them. Although there do exist teachers for whom professional playing was once a dream – Beka in this study, for example – Gary’s description of this career path is ‘bowing out’ has negative connotation attached. It suggests that the role of a teacher is second-rate to playing in some way, echoing Miller and Baker’s findings (2007). Furthermore, the idea that ‘anyone can become a teacher’ implies that Gary sees the job as easier than orchestral playing, and somehow less worth doing. As with Edward, above, Gary sees the advantages of teaching as mainly practical rather than musical, implying that teaching is almost viewed as a non-musical pursuit. There are two way of interpreting the word ‘just’ that Gary uses (emphasised in the first sentence). Firstly, he could be using ‘just’ to mean ‘only,’ as in, he is talking about how anyone can leave college, teaching and do nothing else with their careers. None of the participants in this study ultimately did this: Beka is perhaps the closest, yet she sees her job as a teacher as something that is good ‘for now’ rather than having been a choice that she made *instead* of



playing. What this interpretation could indicate is that Gary sees the role of teaching and performing at odds with each other, suggesting that some younger, less experienced musicians view their future careers as a 'performer-teacher binary.' Secondly, the word 'just' could be being used in a diminutive sense, similar to how Richard talks about 'just' an orchestra in the North of England rather than in London. Again, this contributes to the findings in the study which suggest that there are some jobs which are more 'worthy' than others.

Hilda does not dispute that teaching is difficult, when she reports on the teaching module that she did during her Masters at a conservatoire:

I: Do you enjoy teaching work?

H: Mmm... ish. I mean, I did yesterday, I did this [El Sistema scheme] day and ah, I was just like... so we left Birmingham at half 7, we arrived at 9, we left there at quarter to 6, I was here at 7, I was just like, 'Oh my God this is life!' Like, is this- is this what I could do with a masters of music now? No way.

I: Did you get the chance to teach a whole class?

H: No I was like assisting, but, I was like Oh my god. [laughs] Like, what? Why have I spent so many years practising for this? (Hilda, viola, GM, talking about shadowing for a music service)

However, despite this, Hilda's perspective indicates that she feels that teaching is a waste of her skills in some way. Her account of the long hours involved on an El Sistema day, and her dissatisfaction that a Masters in Music doesn't spare her from that is ironic: it is well-documented that orchestral musicians often work long and antisocial hours, with early starts and late finishes if a concert is out of town (Brodsky, 2006). Perhaps, then, for Hilda, the long hours in an orchestral job would be worth the pay-off of playing music.

Yasmin, again, is keen to rule out teaching as a career:

I think I'm going to see how this year goes, and then I think- I think I'm literally going to evaluate at the end of every year because I don't just want a- like, I really really want to be like, in an orchestra or freelancing well, and I don't just want to be, like, a peri- I don't, I know peripatetic- some people absolutely love teaching, but I don't just want to become like, a peripatetic teacher. I, erm, and I know some people are great with that but I'm not a very good teacher, and I don't really enjoy it cause I don't have much patience. (Yasmin, bassoon, GM)

Yasmin also makes reference to teaching as an either/or scenario, rather than viewing it as a small part of her wider future career. She talks about being in an orchestra or 'freelancing well,' as if that and being a peripatetic teacher are mutually exclusive activities. Although elsewhere in the interview Yasmin reports never having taught before, she reasons that she is 'not a very good teacher,' almost using it as a quick, ready-made reason to dismiss it as a job. This is also an example of a scenario where a graduate has no experience of doing a certain job, yet already has a fixed idea of their (in)aptitude for it. This, alongside some of the more established musicians' perspectives above, could suggest that many music graduates and musicians have fixed ideas of who, or how, they need to be to 'succeed,' and believe that they do not fit the mould as they should. 'Just' a peripatetic teacher is a feared self for Yasmin: but given that music graduates often see teaching as a 'fall-back role' and then reassess their aspirations when they experience reality (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014) it is conceivable that Yasmin may have changed her mind as she began her music career.

#### 6.2.2 Graduating musicians' perceived challenges of a career in music

In general, graduating participants and established musicians named very similar challenges in answer to this question, including financial pressures and having to be prepared for work at all times. However, when the establishing musicians talked about financial pressures, more specifically they were referring to a lack of control rather than a lack of money, which was seemingly taken as more of a given.

Amongst the graduates there appeared to be a lack of awareness of just how out of control they might be.

I: What do you think or envisage that the main challenges of a music career are?

E: Main challenges? Well I think we should all, I think for me, it's always, erm, you go to music college.... and quite traditionally, you go to music college and then you find work. And then you work up from there. Cause I've come to the conclusion now really at the moment there's nothing more, education could teach me. There's nothing, I can only build that up myself. By- especially when there's academia and all- I don't need that. What I need to do is go and find. I got myself a basic, erm, you know, a vocal training, which to be honest with you, compared with some people out there, it's, er, [Music college] is a good name to have on your CV. That holds you in some prestigious - not prestigious, it puts you in good state, people know right, you've had a good vocal

training. Some will take you on. Some companies- doesn't, it won't be the popular, it won't be the big ones, it won't be any big company, but it'll be starters like, for example there's a company I'm working with now. They've got. I've got the name, I'm working, I'm actually getting paid, something like that, I'll work on something else. I'll work on something else, it's grafting. You've gotta learn to graft and I'm grafting right now. So basically, I'm making the idea of postgrad, I just don't wanna put more money in the system. What- what am I gonna learn from it? There's nothing I'm gonna learn from it. At the moment. so I just wanna graft. Just work. That's what I'm gonna do. (Edward, Tenor, GM)

Edward is optimistic about finding work: he skirts the question about possible difficulties in his future career and sees it as nothing more than having to 'graft.' He speaks elsewhere in the interview about a 'basic foundation of self-reliance' and seems very sure that he is responsible for his own successes and failures. Edward believes that he now has the requisite skills to succeed as an opera singer and plans to 'work his way up.' On one hand, his plans are admirable: he is keen to work hard towards his career and has put clear plans in place to earn money teaching and register with some agencies. Studies continue to show that the skills required to successfully build a musical career go beyond simple musical technique (Bennett, 2007; 2009; Creech et al., 2008) and the establishing musicians in this study corroborate this. Edward's account suggests that he believes his musical skills and the completion of his degree is enough, and furthermore, his views about his skills appear somewhat fixed. This indicates that Edward may not react well to setbacks whilst building his career. Earlier in the interview, he talked about being marked down for some of his academic work, but refusing to admit he was wrong:

I was looking back on my, cause I did Cambridge pre-U, and I was thinking, I know I only had to write - when I was at school I had to write, you know, chorales, every si- like sudoku, you know what I mean, like every single morning I was like doing it. And then I was having a look, you know, and I was like, 'Right, easy na na na. [mimes writing]' 2:2. What? I and - 'you're doing it wrong.' 'I'm not, erm, no sorry I'm not, sorry.' I had to like, erm, and that was frustrating, so it's like, you know, academia just didn't make sense.

Paradoxically, although Edward places a great deal of responsibility on himself as regards his future career, when his academic skills are challenged, he deflects responsibility from himself onto the college marking system. It is impossible to

know how he may react to musical criticism, especially since he appears so confident in his singing ability. Following the interview, Edward's transition into the music profession could have been a challenging time for him, not least because he appeared unaware – or in denial – of the significant mental difficulties it may present. Previous research has indicated that music graduates who possess fixed beliefs about their abilities find this transitional period to be more fraught with uncertainty than those who believe that they can continue to learn (Burland, 2005; Juuti & Littleton, 2012).

Richard and Ian, who both took gap years between undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, seem to have a great deal more understanding of the myriad extra-musical influences on their potential career success: for example, personal connections, judicious decision-making and diversifying.

[S]o I think it's the way you have to really forge your own career path now and especially with it being a portfolio career you can't just forge it in one direction, sort of having to forge different directions and keep these plates spinning. And if- make judgement calls on do I take this work it's low pay but it's good connections or... I've got two gigs clashing at the same time, which one do I say yes to and it's all those judgement calls you have to make which isn't as easy as the 'turn up, audition and get in' thing that it's made out. (Ian, viola)

Being good enough. Or just, I don't think that's even it I think it's - cause I used to think it was being good enough, and it's not, it's people thinking you're good enough. Erm, which is not the same thing cause you've just gotta have a good relationship with someone and then like play a few of the right notes and make excuses for the ones you don't! (Richard, viola)

This might indicate that even a short amount of professional experience might broaden students' perspectives. Neither Ian nor Richard reported taking any specific careers guidance whilst studying and were quite critical of the career preparation they received as part of their degrees. Despite this, they seem a lot more prepared than Edward, for example, as they describe challenges of a music career in a similar way to the establishing musicians.

### 6.2.3 Being 'good enough'

Yasmin expressed concern about not being a good enough player to achieve her goals:

I'm actually more scared about not being good enough? To be in an orchestra. Like that's my worry at the moment because I- I kind of think like if money doesn't work out, I'll quit and do something else and hopefully I can go, so almost the thing I enjoy least is like, the fear of not being good enough, like, playing really badly in a concert and like being judged by good musicians. Like, you know that's actually my- what I enjoy, I don't like, like I want to be good enough and I don't want to be looked down on as one of those failed musicians. Or like 'she's a nice girl but pity she can't play properly' like that sort of thing. (Yasmin, bassoon, GM)

Establishing musicians reported worrying about the standard of their playing, and what other people thought of it at the beginning of their careers, but this worrying eventually abated.

I don't know whether this would be possible to have done back then but just the- mental health skills, so [pause] being able to go 'that's good enough' cause I really, was a really hard skill to learn that I think I've got to grips with now, like, I think since- my girlfriend doesn't perform she's not a musician. Erm, I'm trying to, saying stuff like [pause]- she doesn't entirely always understand quite what's gone through to get to a point [to not] care what people think [?]. (Josh, Bassoon, EM)

Many of the establishing musicians reported that their college degree gave them the requisite skills on their instrument in order to be a professional performer. This might indicate that although not all graduates necessarily feel 'good enough' to start with, the action of building their careers, making opportunities and doing performances helps them to realise that they are skilled. However, something else that seems key here is the way in which Yasmin talks about being a 'one of those failed musicians' if she does not get an orchestral job. One of the most universal elements of aspirational development and career building amongst the establishing musicians was the realisation that their skills were far more than just what they could do with their instrument. Additionally, it is likely that as musicians' aspirations broaden – often from wanting to do an orchestral job to aspiring to a mixture of work strands – the idea of a 'successful musician' as predominantly a performer is challenged. For this reason, as musicians enter the profession they re-evaluate their skills with respect to the musical work that they are doing. It is also

important to note that Yasmin had only graduated two months prior to her interview, and it was likely that she was still very much in a student's mindset. Many participants in the Letters phase of this study urged their younger self to forget about what other people thought of them, their singing or their playing, which indicates that this is a common concern amongst graduating students, and that establishing musicians need to combat these feelings of self-doubt in order to help with their transition into the profession.

### 6.3 Characterising the transition: what can participants' accounts of building their careers tell us about the transitions of music college graduates?

From the establishing musicians' accounts, it is clear that freelance music careers are complex, often consisting of a variety of different job roles and both long- and short-term engagements. Curiously, these musicians did not describe taking on work in a linear fashion, and rather than offering a timeline of work engagements (as in the case of salaried employees) they described their freelance work as more of a 'state of being.' This means that 'becoming a musician' resists definition in some senses: there seemed to be no clear pathway that the participants followed. Instead, it appeared that these musicians surrounded themselves with work engagements that matched their aspirations and reinforced their identities as musicians by complementing each other. This was especially apparent when comparing both Martha and Oliver's experiences, for example. Martha described her work as 'all relating to music in some way,' viewing her teaching work as an opportunity to improve her playing and her writing work as a chance to meet new and interesting people. Oliver was working in theatre administration but had handed in his notice in order to have more time to take auditions and study German to prepare for his upcoming move to Germany for work. Although Oliver and Martha's perspectives on their work differed, each were making smaller decisions in accordance with the person they would like to become: Martha viewing her freelance engagements as broadly musical reinforced her identity as a freelance musician, and Oliver handing in his notice enabled him to shed a work role he felt was at odds with his identity as a singer.

### 6.3.1 A control paradox

From the above, it could be assumed that musicians are entirely responsible for making their own career decisions, however participants' accounts indicated a tension between a need for self-direction, and a certain need for reliance on others. Although establishing musicians and graduates talked about a need to make their own work, either through networking and knowing the right people, finding a niche or just preparing diligently enough to pass an audition, they were also aware that a certain amount of power remained out of their hands. An increasing amount of course time at conservatoires is given over to self-promotion skills lectures, and for this reason, graduate participants were aware of their own role in finding future work. However, establishing musicians' perspectives indicate that even with these skills, musicians starting their career may feel out of control of their future. Additionally, perhaps music college courses could help students to develop resilience and effective coping strategies in order to prepare them for the uncertainty of the music profession. For some participants, a need for money and employment meant compromising control of the sort of music they played. This is not unusual across the music profession, for example some well-established orchestral musicians feel very little control of the music that they play (Brodsky, 2006), and jazz musicians experience tensions between the desire to create new music (typically poorly remunerated) and a need to make ends meet (Umney & Kretsos, 2015). This was the case for the relatively new freelance participants in this study: Zoe felt like she was always preparing for the next performance, rather than taking time over something that she would have chosen to do or play 'for herself.'

### 6.3.2 Finding meaning in freelance roles:

Ascenso et al. (2017) assert that musicians find meaning in both musical experiences and the social connections that musical employment provides. Many participants in this study concur, reporting that they enjoyed being part of an orchestral or chamber music 'team.' However, the musicians in the 2017 study were limited to those employed by orchestras on a salaried basis, meaning that they could count on this team interaction on a day-to-day basis, whilst building

relationships over time. Participants in this study spoke of enjoying social interaction, and expressed feelings of regret that, in freelance engagements, these social connections were often short-lived (recall Natalie talking about her move from 'extra' work into being part of the opera chorus proper). This search for more of a group identity led to Natalie prioritising work with the opera chorus over becoming a soloist, and meant that Zoe was looking to a future that might contain more opportunities for group music-making. This suggests that a freelance career might be characterised by a certain sense of loneliness, perhaps as a consequence of the intense self-direction required in order to sustain a career. Schlossberg (2011) posits that having a support network can be the ways in which individuals cope with transition, and it could therefore be theorised that music graduates' transitions are made more stressful by the lack of support network that a company might offer – especially for those who move straight into freelance careers.

### 6.3.3. Comparing cohorts: in what way *are* music graduates unprepared?

Although previous research has shown that there is a significant gap between expectation and reality for music graduates (Bennett, 2007, 2009; Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014; Juuti & Littleton, 2012) the data in this study paint a more nuanced picture. Strikingly, when the graduates described their plans to build their careers, they envisaged doing everything that the established musicians reported having to do, which indicates that graduates are, in theory at least, prepared for the process of building a career. The real difference between cohorts was the contrast between their attitudes towards non-performance work. For example, most students made reference to taking on teaching work when they finished their degrees, and for many, this represented an opportunity to financially support themselves whilst trying to find performance work. Although some participants did mention musical benefits of teaching, this was limited to those who had had previous teaching experience. In contrast, many of the establishing musicians saw their teaching work as an opportunity to improve their own playing, meet new people and take a break from stressful performance situations, in addition to earning a stable income. Although the establishing musicians were taking paid



performance work, instead of seeing teaching as auxiliary, it had been accepted into their work portfolio and become an embedded part of their practice. This may indicate that as music graduates make the transition into the profession, they begin to view their career as broadly musical, rather than seeing it as a performance and non-performance binary. Both Gary and Yasmin display this attitude, describing teaching as ‘bowing out’ or becoming ‘one of those failed musicians’ respectively. Perhaps, at first, the establishing musicians felt this way about their teaching practice, which would further support the finding from this study that asserts that professional experiences might enable students to envisage their own professional futures earlier.

#### 6.3.4 “I’m just not that sort of person:” anxiety and identity threat

A number of participants made reference to qualities they felt they needed, or things they thought they needed to do in order to be a successful musician, but then mentioned that they did not feel like they were ‘that sort of person.’ Alice mentions that she isn’t the ‘type’ of person who networks enough to get ahead as an opera singer. Martha isn’t the ‘sort of person’ who socialises before a gig – but she does it anyway because of the expectation that she will socialise, and the associated benefits it may bring her (in line with Dobson, 2010). This presents another paradox: participants in both cohorts were keen to emphasise a need to be an individual or find a niche in order to have success in the music industry, yet both Alice and Martha’s experiences suggest that individuality as a musician only goes so far. It is likely that the perpetuation of this ‘mixed message’ of individuality on the one hand and conformity on the other could be a great source of anxiety during this transitional period. On the other hand, it is possible to interpret Alice and Martha’s accounts as evidence of an identity still very much in transition. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2015) argue that identity threat arises as a result of incongruence between ‘being’ and ‘becoming:’ individuals compare their current self to the self they believe that they need to become in order to be successful. Both Alice and Martha believe that they need to be different to succeed: Martha more forward, Alice more willing to ‘suck it up’ and ‘kiss the right asses.’ However, as was the case in Ibarra and Petriglieri’s research, it could be argued that, to an extent, musicians’

ideas of success are still relatively fixed, as a result of a relatively narrow-minded culture both at college and within classical music. Recalling Josh's reports of 'lower-level' work in musical theatre and Phoebe's reports of trying to book students for background gigs, it is clear that there is still a certain hierarchy around jobs, which might cause musicians at all levels to hold onto a narrow view of what musical success is. This certainly chimes with the 2016 Help Musicians UK report, which found that this narrow view of success is ultimately detrimental to musicians' mental health.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out to investigate the ways in which career-young musicians build their careers, and how they approached the associated challenges. Although many of the establishing musicians had settled into a relatively stable work pattern – either on a contract or as a freelancer – they still experienced identity tensions, believing themselves to be different to the 'sort of person' who succeeds. This could suggest that these musicians are still in transition, or – as suggested by Petriglieri et al. (2019) – the end of transition for these individuals is not marked by the resolution of identity discrepancies. Furthermore, this could be as a result of holding an unrealistic and fixed view about what a musician is or does: a view which may be linked to education. The following chapter will concern musicians' experiences at conservatoire, in order to illustrate the ways in which education may affect their experiences of transition.

## 7. Findings: Conservatoire Education

Establishing and graduating musicians reflected upon their studies at conservatoire in great detail, linking their experiences with their present and future careers. Overall, the most crucial part of participants' conservatoire experience was the one-to-one instrumental lesson, and the corresponding relationship with the principal study tutor, which supports previous research which indicates that this is the central part of the conservatoire degree (Carey & Grant, 2015; Duffy, 2013; Gaunt, 2008, 2010; Perkins, 2013). Outside of this, participants evaluated the careers advice that was on offer to them and detailed its impact on their future careers. There were no significant differences in what the different cohorts talked about: both establishing and graduate musicians made reference to broadly the same degree aspects, which suggest that conservatoire courses have not changed drastically in this time. However, the most marked differences were between the attitudes that these cohorts held, especially towards career preparation classes. The following chapter will outline participants' perspectives of their conservatoire courses, compare attitudes of the two groups of musicians, and suggest the impact of conservatoire education upon graduates' transitions.

### 7.1 Role of the principal study teacher.

For both establishing and graduating musicians, going to music college represented an opportunity to study with a specific teacher. Yasmin's wish to study with a certain tutor meant that she turned down a scholarship at another college, suggesting that for some students the choice of tutor may be one of the most important factors when settling upon a college:

'Yeah so I got in everywhere, I actually got a scholarship to [conservatoire x] and I didn't get one at [conservatoire y] but I turned [conservatoire x] down cause I really liked the teachers at [conservatoire y] and I'd been on a music course, erm, called like [redacted] and and [redacted] was on the music course- this is when I was 17 or something, and [teacher] was just so lovely and they were all so welcoming and I was like 'well, I'd love to study somewhere where there's people like that' I know who have my back, sort of thing so that's' partly why I went to [conservatoire y]'  
[Yasmin, bassoon, GM]

## 7.1.1 Tutors' attributes

Much like Kingsbury's 1989 observations, many of the musicians had headed for a teacher with a certain amount of prestige attached, however they also emphasised the need for a teacher who would be a supportive and comforting individual, as illustrated by Yasmin above. Although previous findings suggest that older students seek playing skill above warmth of character (Davidson, Sloboda & Howe, 1995/1996), the current data do illustrate that personal connection is still important. Despite this, many participants did talk about their tutors' skill as players. One respondent, Richard, talks about both of these attributes as he compares teachers he had during his undergraduate and masters degrees:

The first lesson- the first year in uni I did not like my teacher, I don't think he liked me much either. I tried but he just told me flat out I was probably, you know, not gonna be great, essentially, was not very supportive, and at that point I was just like 'What's the point?' Erm, stuck with me a while, to be honest. (Richard)

Sometimes it's finding the right teacher, I think when I had my first lesson with [redacted] [...] I just had a first lesson with him and he was like right yeah you're doing this this this right, we're moving this. I think I just needed- it's just finding the right teacher, or the right person would kinda know what I wanted to do and knew how I could get there and told me how to do it which is all I've been after all along, people just don't wanna give it to you- don't wanna give you simplicity they wanna scare you cause they think that's what works, erm, yeah just meeting the right person to help me do something, that was probably, that was probably one of the most pivotal moments in my viola career anyway, and that was- I've only had about, I've had [pause] 12 lessons with him? And those are still the best. (Richard, answering the question, *'Can you tell me about a particularly positive musical moment that sticks in your mind?'*)

[T]hinking about some of the teachers I've had, some of them have been truly awful, not just as teachers - actual violinists, erm, just like, I mean, just like a few of his sub teachers that I had at- and she was- this one woman she goes, 'Ah yeah I play with the LSO regularly and all these London orchestras,' and I was like, 'That's amazing. I'm like having trouble with this piece,' 'ah yeah I know that,' played and it sounded aw- truly, just a few things she did play to me and like generally musicianship like, the impressions I got from her were not good, and like that's just one example where I've seen like it doesn't really matter. Like one you get to a certain level, I don't know it feel- at least for the big orchestral stuff it doesn't matter, as long as you know the right people, know the right pieces for the audition and the audition goes well, once you're in- you're in it seems silly.' (Richard)

The first and third of Richard's quotations demonstrate the ways in which teachers' attitudes can be demotivating to their students. He felt as though his first teacher did not believe he was capable of improvement, which caused Richard to question the point of continuing. According to Deci & Ryan's Self Determination Theory, (2000), humans have a basic psychological need to feel competent in order to feel motivated. The attitude of Richard's first teacher was a threat to his competency beliefs, which caused him to feel demotivated. On the other hand, in the second quotation Richard describes his first lesson with his current tutor as a 'pivotal moment.' The new teacher's honesty and encouragement represented a 'simplicity' that Richard had not experienced with other teachers, indicating that encouragement, over and above 'scare tactics,' are still necessary in the preparation of musicians for the profession.

Richard's third quotation is an example of how negative perceptions of a teacher's playing and musicianship skills may affect a student's levels of motivation, which is not particularly well-documented in previous research. The idea that his teacher was playing with a major London orchestra despite her musicianship being generally 'not good' challenged Richard's previous beliefs that becoming a better player would help him to get the orchestral work he desired. A lack of respect for a teacher's playing ability could therefore be detrimental to an aspiring musician's future career transition. Whereas previously Richard had believed that becoming a more proficient player would mean that he could achieve high level work, he might now feel less in control of his future as a result of this revelation.

It is well documented that students often feel 'in awe' of their teachers at conservatoire, especially at the beginning of a course (Gaunt, 2008). As Phoebe progressed through her degree, this awe became a barrier to her as she began to think about her future career:

Erm, I don't think I ever asked him for careers advice because he's such a, you know, he's so high up. He's so famous, he's so established, that I just didn't think that it was gonna be me. So in a way I kind of felt a bit in awe of h- I'm I'm always hugely in awe of him, so I didn't feel he was gonna be able to help me. (Phoebe, guitar, EM)

Because she could not visualise herself in a career like her teacher's she avoided asking him for advice entirely, suggesting that the principal study tutor as a standard to look up and aspire to is something of a double-edged sword for some students.

Those who spoke positively of their principal study teachers generally referred to their interest in them as individuals:

At college yeah, no my violin teacher's been really excellent actually... she's been really really good at just being someone to kind of listen and offer, sort of advice and stuff. Erm, and I am very lucky because, um, she's not the kind of teacher who would have kind of tried to force me into a particular kind of box, of which, I understand there are some kind of teachers, and for that I'm super grateful, erm...she was kind of open-minded enough to like to empathise and, kind of be really understanding about the sort of things I was talking about, rather than being like, 'Oh that's a shame, now how are your scales?' You know. (Freddy, 560)

Erm, and he [principal study tutor] was just really supportive, like even after college you'd go in and have lessons for free and you can guarantee that if I went up to him and said, 'Hi [tutor] I wanna do folk, or I wanna do jazz,' he'd be like, 'That's great.' (Josh, bassoon, EM)

Conversely, those who had more negative feelings towards their principal study teachers did not necessarily describe them as unsupportive, rather they found them disinterested, disengaged or narrow-minded.

I got the impression it wasn't her, not that, obviously the clarinet was her love, but I got the impression that this [teaching] wasn't her love. (Beka, clarinet, EM)

I mean, on the flipside of this I had a teacher, I was thinking about how- stupid this was the other day how I came to college with all these ideals, and that, but I wanted to learn Berio Sequenza. So it's what, sixteen minutes long and the first breath comes after the eighth minute or something? It's solid and I thought, 'yeah I'd love to do that. And then, so I was practising circular breathing, I was practising improvisation, just cause it was fun and- I had a teacher say, 'Why are you doing that? You could be learning your scales.' (Josh, bassoon, EM)

Josh's negative feelings towards a specific teacher came from feeling as though the teacher was quashing his individual interests, whereas his first quotation above

speaks of a tutor who was more open-minded. Since graduating from college Josh reported playing his bassoon in a variety of settings, including period orchestras, jazz ensembles, on folk courses and even at musical improvised comedy jams. Clearly, his diverse interests are of great importance to him, and it was key to Josh's development that he had a variety of teachers with differing viewpoints, some of whom he described as 'phenomenal,' 'strict,' a 'scary player, and 'absolutely crazy.' The words that Josh uses to describe these teachers also imply a sense of awe, but unlike Phoebe above, for Josh found it energising to be around those sorts of performers. Gaunt (2008) found that that having multiple concurrent principal study tutors was beneficial to music students' autonomy, another of Deci & Ryan's (2000) Basic Psychological needs, because it made students aware of different musical approaches and therefore encouraged them to take their own path as learners. The development of an autonomous learning style is crucial in the development of a positive student identity (Briggs et al., 2012) which could indicate that student engagement with multiple principal study tutors is a key part of the development of a conservatoire student identity. This autonomy could also be key in the formation of a commitment to lifelong learning, which Juuti and Littleton (2010) suggest is a key part of conservatoire graduate transitions. Josh's experiences certainly appear to support this, since despite being disillusioned with the classical music industry as a whole he continues to find fulfilment in his current musical exploits.

#### 7.1.2 Expectations of Tutors

Many participants had very clear expectations of their tutors, however these expectations were met with varying degrees of success. Although the majority of participants did report asking their principal study tutors for career guidance at one point or another (to be discussed later), they tended to see the principal study tutor as somebody who would help their playing or singing become better in the first instance. Those who spoke in most detail about expectations of their tutors were those who felt that their teaching had fallen short of the standard required to help

them into the profession. Here Alice spoke of being told that ‘people didn’t like the sound of her voice,’ rather than being taught how to fix it:

A: Yeah. Cause everyone was like 'you're controlling the sound too much, you're controlling the sound too much I'm like 'yeah but when I don't control the sound it sounds terrible, so, either it sounds medium or it sounds terrible so what do you do?

I: [laughs]

A: Er, but they couldn't tell me how not to do it they just told me what I was doing wrong, but they couldn't actually help me... not to, and that was [Head of vocal studies]'s entire basis of how she liked to run her vocal department. So. (Alice, soprano, EM)

Although Alice seemed dissatisfied with the teaching she received at music college, she made no mention of trying to change teacher. This is surprising given that the time of the interview Alice appeared critical of all of the teaching at this particular institution, which she viewed as deficient in comparison to the teaching she received in her home country of Canada.

Oliver, also a singer, struggled technically throughout his college degree, despite expressing concerns that he needed a new teacher:

O: I went to college as a baritone, which is quite common with the voice type I now, kind of, now have... I was being trained as a baritone, there were technical issues occurring, and unfortunately the teachers didn't know- I mean to be honest they didn't know what to do with me. Erm,

I: Erm OK

O: So I kind of ended up just stumbling through four years, with quite a lot of technical [issues] never being addressed. And, sort of, loopholes and ways around things? To get me through exams - and to get me through all the recitals and stuff but I ended up finishing with .... serious technical issues. Erm, that just hadn't been addressed in the slightest. And then I came to London and every one of the teachers that I went to have consultation lessons with, on that list, all sort of turned round and said, 'I don't know what they've been doing with you for four years.' (Oliver, tenor, EM)

Over the course of his degree, Oliver attempted many times to change teacher without success, resulting in him feeling unsupported and disappointed by his college.

Erm, the only thing I would say the only negative thing was...er, was the whole technical issues and co- at my college and the fact that, erm, I was made to feel like I was.... [pause] when I brought it up with, you know, the head of department I was I was made



to feel like I was somehow in the wrong for even suggesting, that it was somehow my fault. That I- I just wasn't listening properly, I just wasn't doing what I was being told properly. Erm, which is very difficult when you're when you are in essence paying a substantial amount of money, erm, to- to leave with particular things. And in my mind what I wanted to leave with, was... you know I wanted to leave better than when I went in- [Oliver, tenor, EM]

The above quotation illustrates just how much importance is placed on the principal study tutor's input. Unlike Josh, above, who spoke of studying with a variety of tutors whilst at the conservatoire, Oliver only had one singing tutor at any one time. It is possible that having just one tutor's input made him feel reliant on this one tutor's advice, and as a consequence this may have impacted his autonomy, leaving him feeling helpless.

Interestingly, in his account, Oliver also refers to a past teacher from his schooldays, describing her effect on his learning:

Erm, I was really lucky, because the woman that I started studying with, ran, at the time, a very successful South-based company called south Coast Opera [...] And, if there was any sort of treble roles, she would use her younger students. Erm, so that was my sort of my way in, initially. [...] So as I got a bit older my voice changed, I did chorus for them for five years running. Erm, before I went to music college, so I was really lucky but If I hadn't have had that particular teacher? I can't - I don't know what sort of opportunities would have been there otherwise. [Oliver, tenor, EM]

It is clear that this early teacher was a key figure for Oliver, especially because it was through her that he had some of his most pivotal musical moments. It is therefore possible that Oliver had hoped for a similar relationship with his teacher at the conservatoire, and the lack of this left him feeling disappointed.

Since graduating, both Alice and Oliver have undertaken further lessons in London to address technical deficiencies that, to them, have hindered their advancement into the profession. Both expressed disappointment that their principal study tutor's teaching had not enabled them to seek work, suggesting that, in the

simplest sense, principal study tutor relationships do have an effect on career transition.

Other ways in which tutors were found to directly affect students' career transitions were through the opportunities for networking and professional experience they may be able to offer their students. For example, Zoe talks of performance opportunities gained through her trumpet teacher:

Erm, I think you know there's a lot of performance opportunities and erm, erm, particularly with my teacher, I found he was really brilliant at erm, yeah offering opportunities out and, and, yeah it was definitely a kind of respect thing, if you worked hard *for him* he would reward you with- with good things and I found that that really paid off [laughs]. (Zoe, trumpet, EM, emphasis added by researcher)

However, it is possible that this sort of relationship could have its downsides. It is unclear to what extent Zoe felt as though she was working for her tutor rather than herself, but later in the interview she appears disappointed that she does not do more music 'for herself.' Perhaps, during her degree, she became used to focusing her motivations more extrinsically – for example working hard for a tutor to be rewarded with opportunities – and upon going into the profession, her relationship with music has remained transactional. Although Zoe did not seem dissatisfied with her work as a freelance trumpet player, levels of job dissatisfaction are high amongst musicians, certainly amongst orchestral musicians (Allmendinger, Hackman and Lehman, 1995; Kenny, Driscoll & Ackermann, 2016). It is possible that the formation of a sustained transactional relationship with music might contribute to this, however it would require further research.

Not all principal study tutors directly aided their students in finding performance work, with some actively discouraging students to take certain types of work. In her job as external engagement officer at a UK conservatoire, guitar graduate Phoebe talks about some of the students she works with being afraid of asking their teachers for advice about certain performances because they 'don't approve' of them singing more popular styles of music. This suggests that principal study tutors'

opinions of what their students' careers can, and should, look like could negatively impact students' perceptions of what their future careers could look like.

### 7.1.3 Principal study tutor as careers advisor

The majority of participants in both phases reported asking their principal study tutor for careers advice at one time or another. There was a wide variety of reasons given for and against asking the tutor for advice, but many respondents ultimately felt they had nowhere else to turn due to a lack of career guidance from the college itself.

For many participants, the principal study tutor was their closest link to the outside profession, as well as being someone who had experienced a career most like the one they were aiming for.

Yeah, so I think my main teacher [redacted], definitely, so I asked him, a couple of lessons ago, just was like 'how do you go about getting extra work?' Just cause like- I felt like it's his thing. (Sophie, oboe, GM)

This is especially true for Gary, who considers himself to have a wide variety of musical interests. He sought advice from two different principal tutors according to their areas of expertise:

[Y]eah there were two [teachers] definitely. One from an academic perspective cause he's a professor at a university in Sweden and the other one from a playing perspective- I mean they're both professional musicians, one was [inaudible] chamber orchestra and erm and the [European] opera and you know, he went to Paris conservatoire he's amazing. They're both amazing flute players but they've both taken different sides one's the [major orchestra] principal' not taking sort of erm, entrepreneur side to his career [...] and erm, so yeah them both- they both sort of informed me in different ways, like one's helped me with my writing and he wants to promote a lot of my writing so that's nice and the other one wants to help me with my entrepreneur side of my job.

However, for some participants, the tutor's area of expertise was one of the main reasons why they *did not* ask for their advice or consider it to be particularly relevant. Hilda found that her tutor's experience as a teacher wasn't relevant to her interest in becoming a performer:

Interviewer: So did you go to your principal study tutor for careers advice? Would you have asked-

Hilda: Erm, well I dunno- she's been- I mean mainly obviously it's about the instrument playing, you go into a lesson and that's why you're there really, and they obviously they, I mean my teacher wasn't an actual performer so then the whole advice on careers is limited because I mean if they've never really been in a performing career, how are they going to give someone who wants to be a performer advice? They're just like 'Oh you have to play this, you have to play that' I mean, it's a bit- yeah. (Hilda, viola, GM)

Participants' perceptions of the way in which their tutors' experiences may help them indicate that performance expertise is important to them. The above two quotes do, however, point to a larger attitude amongst students that tutors are only capable of advising what they know, which may, as in the case of Hilda, lead students to discount their tutor's advice entirely.

On the other hand, even for participants who felt that their aspirations were better matched to their tutors' expertise, there were a significant amount of respondents who reported feeling unable to relate to their tutors' career paths.

You have people right at the top telling you 'OK, lets' do this' but then you think, like, [my bassoon teacher] for one, walked out of college straight into a job with like the [major orchestra], at the age of 22 or something like that. And has stayed in all- I think he got [major orchestra x] at 21 and [major orchestra y] at 22 and stayed there ever since. Until like he retired. So, it's not necessarily the most useful. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

[S]o he's [oboe tutor] been in [major orchestra] for like decades and is just starting to retire now, is kind of going down to half time, so I w- I would go to him for stuff, but I'd always be slightly wary that when he was getting- when he was at my stage, things were just very different, and he's had a stable, full time job for all this time, so he's slightly out of that world. (Sophie, 382)

Both Sophie and Josh's concerns are very similar to those expressed by Leanne and Beka, both of whom considered their tutor's advice limited to the only career that they know about – their own:

Yeah but that was only about applying for kind of jobs, like, like orchestral jobs [...] But I just think that yeah, he wasn't very, he [trombone tutor] wasn't very forthcoming with other jobs. I'm not sure that he completely knew. (Leanne, trombone, EM)

[M]aybe that's the case so when you, when you have, er, a professional clarinettist from an orchestra that's what they're gonna know or when you, and that's the thing is we've all got the same thing- a violin teacher from an orchestra, so-and-so from an orchestra. And so they all guide you that way. (Beka, clarinet, EM)

Erm, you're supposed to get that advice from your teachers but one of the biggest problems is that your teachers don't really know their arse from their elbow on that because most of them play in orchestras, and that's all they've ever known. (Gary, Flute, GM)

The variety of attitudes exhibited by the above participants suggest that the principal study tutor plays a complex role in the career preparation of their students. On one hand, a certain amount of importance is attached to the tutor's expertise, especially performance expertise, since all interviewees as students envisaged doing performance work as some or all of their future career. As a consequence of this, many students felt unable to relate to their tutors' experiences. On the other hand, the 'wrong' sort or amount of expertise was demotivating. Phoebe's teacher's performance expertise was, to her, beyond what she was capable of ever achieving herself and therefore she felt unable to ask for help. Many participants, for example Josh and Sophie, felt energised and inspired by their teachers' levels of expertise but ultimately unable to take useful advice from them, since they built their careers in a different era. Hilda was prevented from taking advice from her principal study tutor because her principal activity was teaching, something that Hilda did not aspire to do in the future. The above scenarios suggest above all, that whilst at college, students are primarily looking for somebody to relate to when seeking careers advice. Gary's experiences might approach a more ideal scenario, where he has a variety of principal study tutors with different specialisms. Since it is relatively commonplace for older conservatoire students to have several concurrent principal study tutors, students could use this to their advantage by selecting teachers with a variety of experiences.

With this in mind, it is therefore important to consider the impact of a student *not* being able to select their tutor(s). In Oliver's case above, his inability to change teacher impacted his learning and consequently his perception of his own

career-readiness, but interviewees suggest that teacher-student pairings go beyond this, with students requiring a relatable character with whom they can achieve their goals. It is possible that the lack of this relatable character could have a similarly negative effect on musicians' career readiness.

It would be interesting to find out if conservatoire course directors are aware of the level of influence principal study tutors have on their students' career transitions, especially as previous research suggests that some principal study teachers do not think that careers advice falls under their remit (Corkhill, 2005). Providing these relatable characters in the form of mentors could take the onus off the principal study tutor to provide careers advice and/or act as a role model, especially as many participants are aware that their tutors' routes into work are as relevant to their potential work pathways. Further research into principal study tutors' perceptions of their students' future careers may tell us if principal study tutors are aware of the extent to which their own careers and career biases might affect their students career transitions.

There was a certain suspicion from some participants that principal study tutors were not entirely forthcoming with the truth.

I mean I think it's a fine line for them because obviously they need to keep giving hope to their pupils, they need to be like 'come on, go for it, you need to do this and this,' so they were good. Erm, but I'm always worried that they were just being nice to me and actually should have said 'no, give up,' you know. That was always my fear that they were just being nice to me, rather than being honest. Cause we're paying like nine grand a year, they can't be like, 'you're not gonna make it.' (Yasmin, bassoon, GM)

I've always believed this- the people- the teachers, they're probably talking about the orchestra, but don't tell me there's not- don't say, why would they wanna say that to people constant- like, there's not enough jobs going. Why, you're depressing them in the first place, erm, but I just don't believe that. I got- I just think they're just trying to give the money to themselves. (Edward, tenor, GM)

Although, in this study, there is no way to ascertain tutors' motives for giving career advice, the above quotations highlight the differences between students' attitudes during their degrees and afterwards. Yasmin was generally negative about her

potential as a bassoon player, despite having spent six years at music college. This could suggest that her conservatoire education did not empower her to feel career-ready, which is likely a result of the degree as a whole rather than her principal study tutors' input. Yasmin did not engage with many opportunities outside of orchestral playing. It is possible that as a result of pinning all of her hopes on one thing – playing the bassoon in the orchestra – any negative experience caused her to feel helpless, contributing to her cynical viewpoint above. On the other hand, Edward exemplifies Dobrow and Tosti Kharas's (2012) findings, which indicate that individuals who feel a high level of calling to a risky career are likely to ignore career advice, even from trusted tutors. Both of these contrasting perspectives suggest that principal study tutors, and conservatoire educators more generally, should remain mindful of the spread of attitudes that exist within student cohorts. It is possible that a lack of awareness of these types of student viewpoints might become a barrier to students' career readiness, if not addressed.

## 7.2 Professional Studies Classes

The vast majority of undergraduate participants mentioned that their degree had some form of professional studies integrated into it, whereas those who were undertaking or had undertaken postgraduate degrees were rather more unsure.

At undergraduate level, these professional studies classes appeared to be broadly similar across all colleges, consisting of CV clinics, advice on building a web presence, and in some cases, classes about building a teaching studio. Perceptions of these classes were mixed, for reasons explored below, although participants' criticisms seemed to differ depending on principal study specialism and length of time since leaving. When reflecting upon their professional studies classes, establishing musicians were generally more critical than graduating musicians, which is to be expected since establishing musicians had presumably spent time in the music profession and were answering the questions with hindsight.

Theo (clarinet, GM): Are you asking me about what I don't know that I don't know?

Nevertheless, the perceptions of the graduating musicians provide a compelling insight into the mindset of a young musician about to enter the music profession, and the immediate effectiveness of the classes given whilst in education.

### 7.2.1 CV Classes

Whilst participants appreciated the necessity of CV classes, they also questioned the efficacy of a session aimed at all students in general, rather than specific instrumental and vocal groups.

Uh! we d- we did [have CV classes]. Erm, we did but again it very generic because we weren't we were in the same lecture as the violinists, the composers. so it was an incredibly generic 'This is a music CV' And it's like well, unfortunately that's completely different, you know the CV you'd have as a violinist is completely different to what you'd be asked for as a singer. Erm and you know chatting about website designs. Well great but that is just not- it's just not specific to exac- to what we would be looking at doing. Erm, it was sort of very generic, blankety, and then obviously like a CV for teaching. (Oliver, tenor, EM)

You get some- we got a lecture on CVs? Which I think just pissed us off because it showed a string player, who was- and it said like 'Oh yeah, put all the people you worked with' so it's got like- whereas we've all got, I dunno like, Hackney Choral Society or something, which might be a very esteemed organisation, but they have like LPO extra work LSO extra work, all that kind of stuff and you think 'Why are you sharing this, this is not going to help because' especially wind players. Like, I did an ENO sit in and that was great, but I didn't do a concert with them. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

It is clear from both of the above quotations that Oliver and Josh did not see generic CV classes as particularly useful. Oliver's viewpoint stemmed from his belief that the requirements for a singing CV are significantly different to those of instrumentalists, and therefore he would have preferred a more individualised set of classes. The perceived differences between string players' and wind players' experiences as students meant that Josh found the idea of a generic CV session delivered by a violinist wholly irrelevant, since he could not relate to their experiences.



However, not all participants' reports of CV classes were negative. Edward's description of 'shaking it in' (his CV) for a checking session implies that he did not think that the class was worthwhile until he saw the benefits of it later on – in his case finding work as a result. This scenario is not unique to this participant or situation and will be further explored elsewhere in the thesis.

We actually had, no we actually had two weeks of intense CV checking and they made- and they [inaudible] yeah we had a woman come in, we brought in our CVs and we just presented the night before, made them the night before, shaking it in like that, and you know, she said right, this is good, that's good, no that's rubbish that was rubbish that was rubbish, and she analysed it, she went through one by one. And that was really good. Erm, and that got me a few jobs actually, so that was good. (Edward, tenor, GM)

Still, it is possible that Edward's more glowing review of the CV classes he received was due to his relative naivety as regards the music profession, since more established musicians tended to be more critical of this sort of class.

### 7.2.2 Teaching skills classes

Participant attitudes towards teaching, or the prospect of teaching, as part of their career portfolio were mixed. Most, but not all participants mentioned having attended teaching skills classes as part of their professional development. Some reported whole modules dedicated to teaching skills, incorporating shadowing work and marked observations, whereas others spoke of more one-off classes within a larger professional skills module.

Did you do, like, teaching skills then, was that throughout your time at college, was that every single year?

M: Nooo, it's a sort of module towards the- er towards the later bit of our degree? Erm, where actually they do it by instrument family so we had a lot of brass coaching so we had people come in from each instrument which was really helpful cause I don't know - I still don't understand French Horn... that well...[...]. Which is- so they set us up really really well for it and actually talked [taught?]- so we have like professional studies sort of thing, so they talk us through how to actually find students. And what to charge, all that sort of stuff. (Martha)

But as I say, I- y'know, didn't really do much of it [teaching] when I was at uni so erm, that's something again that I'm gonna look to. In September, probably.

I: Yeah. And did you get any kind of lessons for that at college or anything like that?

F: How to teach?

I: Yeah

F: No [laughs] no I didn't. (Freddy, violin, GM)

Erm, yeah I dunno, like teaching-wise I didn't really find it that helpful. The lectures, obviously they're only a tiny amount of what you would need to know if you wanted to work as a Suzuki teacher or as whatever, so they give you a lecture on, half an hour on this method and then fifteen-minute discussion and then the session is over, and then you never hear about it again. (Hilda, viola, GM)

The above three quotations illustrate three very different experiences, which suggest that students' education regarding music teaching greatly differs between institutions. Despite this, the vast majority of participants reported making, or envisaging making, a significant amount of their income from instrumental teaching. Since studies indicate that musicians make a considerable percentage of their income working within education (Bennett, 2007; 2008), this suggests that music students and graduates are reasonably well-informed about this aspect of their future. Paradoxically, educational training for musicians is not consistent, and unlike other facets of professional development education, where students appear to have to experience it to appreciate its importance (discussed in 6.2.3), respondents reported teaching as a possible part of their future career regardless of engagement with professional development classes. This suggests that teaching work is seen as a 'given' by most music graduates. For this reason, some participants, like Hilda above, and Freddy below were dissatisfied with the level of preparation for teaching they received.

Yasmin's criticism of her teaching training was that she felt equipped to do teaching, but unequipped to get teaching work, especially when faced with competition from orchestral principals in London.

Erm, so yes, so at college we had like Art of Teaching training which was really good. Erm, and they had at college they had like a teaching service, but I was really busy at college like, I just wanted to enjoy my time there, so I didn't sign up to that. But I did do the Art of Teaching training and that was really good, and we had- we got to go to like [inaudible] at [a school]. But then it's

really good but then it doesn't say how you get your teaching you know? So although they teach you on the art of teaching not, I don't know. I think it's very competitive at the moment trying to get teaching work cause it's so well paid if you get like a private school it can be 40, 45 pounds an hour so it's like actual orchestral professionals are going for it as well.

Yasmin felt unaware of how to get teaching work, however, in the sentence before, reports turning down an opportunity to get teaching work. Similar to the participants below, whose experiences in work placements shaped their future career paths, it is possible that signing up with the college's teaching service might have provided Yasmin with students, as well as contacts in order to find future work. Students and professionals in the study, Yasmin included, were all well aware of the necessity for musicians to make contacts and take on smaller jobs in order to find future work (see 6.1.3) yet when presented with this opportunity, Yasmin did not take it. Her justification for not signing up to the teaching service was being too busy and wanting to enjoy her time at college. Conversely, elsewhere in the interview, Yasmin admits to sometimes not being busy enough in college, which made her quite unhappy in her first year:

Erm, I did actually really struggle with my first year at college. It was a really big struggle. I think, erm, I- actually I really struggled socially, so it was kind of a hard time for me. Erm, and I felt quite, I felt quite lonely. Like I actually, I don't- maybe there weren't enough contact hours? Erm cause I often didn't know what I was doing with my days.

I think of my second year at college, I think I didn't have enough, contact- and my first year actually, after the first term, like, the modules and keyboard skills and choir would be ticked off and you'd done that module[ ...] sometimes I'd had weeks where there really wasn't much on to do...

Erm, but then, say in third year, fourth year if you weren't in orchestra, you might only have two contact hours a week. So, you had to be really on it to make sure you kept doing things with your day.

Although a considerable amount of the music college degree does consist of private study taking place outside of contact hours, it is clear from the above that, to Yasmin, the cost of taking on teaching work whilst studying outweighed the

perceived benefit. There are a variety of other reasons why she may have avoided signing up to the teaching service (for an exploration of reasons why students avoid engaging with career preparation, please see 6.3) but it would be interesting to know the way in which these opportunities are publicised and marketed, since Yasmin's perspective reinforces the notion that students in education are unaware of why opportunities are presented to them, and the benefits that they may have. An improvement in 'marketing strategy' for these opportunities may bring about a change in students' attitudes.

### 7.2.3 Placements within professional studies

The music education module given as part of Beka's degree was key to her future as a community musician and music teacher. One of the important features of this module was the inclusion of a work placement in addition to lectures and classroom-based learning.

B: I think it was in the second year we did a community music course, erm, yes so second year focus on community music, and that helped me realise that I enjoyed teaching groups more than individuals, so whilst I like teaching my instrument, I, I much prefer it with the whole group. Erm, and so I started doing community music, did one placement at [a theatre], er, with the- it's called [name], it's the, erm, for retired people. Daytime courses, or classes or groups or whatever. So I did my community placement there ... I really enjoyed it, and erm so I knew that I wanted to teach in groups, and this is right in the middle of the financial crisis. So I figured that rather than throw myself out in some really unstable point where I knew that I would have to fight for every single penny, erm, and not being able to charge as much because I didn't have a teaching qualification, I figured that I'd go and do my PGCE, get my teaching qualification, and then I could decide what I wanted to do?

Beka's involvement in a community music module made her realise that she enjoyed teaching groups more than individuals, opening her eyes to a future work focus. Although she did not necessarily see classroom music teaching as her ultimate career goal, and in fact had a relatively fluid and open-minded outlook on where her work might take her next, the decision to do a PGCE followed on from her discovery of interests from a professional development class and its associated placement. It is possible that the interactive nature of undertaking a placement in

additional to more lecture-based activities, enabled Beka to explore a future side of herself and her career in a more active way.

Martha also reflected upon her placement opportunities whilst at college, which she found to be broad and useful, especially concerning education and outreach opportunities.

M: Er, loads and loads of things with kids you can, you can do as much of that as you like, really. So loads of the schools round here, kind of, welcome anyone from [college] to come in and you do that as part of the course and learn the leadership stuff, basically [...] I think generally if the School [of wind and brass] know that you are interested, they'll do what they can to get you involved. Even if it's just observing projects. Still really useful [...] The workshop skills I was terrified. TERRIFIED. I'm fine with kids but in front of other adults I'm like 'Ooh, s'horrible'

I: [laughs]

M: [laughs] But got to, er, love that.

It is very likely that Martha's involvement in non-compulsory placement and shadowing projects was key to her development as a musician, since, at the time of interview, she was successfully making a living out of several work strands including teaching and outreach work. From the above quotation it is clear that she proactively engaged with the opportunities available to her whilst at her college, including those outside of her comfort zone, such as workshop leading, which 'terrified' her at first. Both Beka and Martha's placement experiences and their link to their current jobs indicates that first-hand experience could be a key predictor or at least a key influencer of future work avenues. It is also important to consider that those choosing to actively engage with placements may have been proactive and open-minded in the process, and this in turn could have influenced their career outlook and outcomes.

#### 7.2.4 General 'freelance' modules

Some participants reported the option of a more generalist 'freelance musician' module, which seemed to be a non-compulsory degree component offered to postgraduate students. In general, feedback about this module was negative, with one participant, Sophie, saying that she avoided it because 'people who had taken

it before said it 'wasn't very good.' Gary, a student at the same college, did take the class and was could see both pros and cons.

[I learnt] how to use iMovie, basically. But I mean, like it was a good module, in the sense of it teaches you to think about how you're gonna build your career but they don't help you in any way to give you avenues of doing that. Like, erm, the module sessions all we did was improvise. Which yes is a useful skill but don't call it a freelance musician class, call it an improvisation class, which is what it was. (Gary)

The above quotation illustrates that Gary was looking to acquire practical skills in career development and management, on top of or in lieu of learning to improvise and use iMovie. Furthermore, Gary's expectation of being 'given avenues' is an interesting concept, and merits further analysis. Alice, a singer, expressed disappointment that her tutors did not provide her with contacts or introduce her to people who might have furthered her career, which could be construed as a similar sort of complaint. These expectations could come from the idea that a principal study tutor or department head may sometimes pass opportunities on to their students – mentioned by Zoe, Edward and Gary himself earlier – : as a result some students may believe that this practice radiates out into professional studies classes too. Another striking thing here is that students have acknowledged that professional development classes *do* provide these avenues, albeit in the form of work placements. It is therefore possible that music college students are not making the link between professional studies placements and their potential as future career building opportunities. As discussed in 2.2.5, conservatoires do tend to market their degrees based on vocational outcomes, which could be a reason why students have certain expectations regarding the manner in which their degree might prepare them for their career.

#### 7.2.5 Tax and accountancy classes

Participants frequently mentioned tax and accountancy classes, or the absence of tax and accountancy classes as part of the degree. This echoes findings from Burland's study (2005) where conservatoire students expressed disappointment that they did not learn a wide range of supporting skills in addition to musical skills.

However, there was inconsistency between institutions: some offered a financial education as standard, others as an option and some not at all. Yasmin reported missing such an optional class because of 'hopeless diary management,' but perhaps it was missed by virtue of being optional: it is possible that students interpret a non-compulsory class as somehow less important than its compulsory counterparts. Although Hilda saw a tax lecture as a good thing, she questioned its timing:

[W]e had a module called professional development where they talk about tax OK that's good because you know, usually no-one knows what to do with their tax or- but that was also the- in a way that was too early to actually be relevant. Because you you know BMus you don't I mean you don't really earn enough to pay tax anyway, ever. you have a student loan or you get the odd gig or whatever and do your \$7 hour paid job, and you know – [Hilda, viola, GM]

Because Hilda could not see a tax lecture being of any immediate use to her she dismissed it as irrelevant. Gaunt (2008) posits that principal study teaching in the conservatoire prioritises the development of the immediate self, and it is possible that this attitude radiates into professional studies. This suggests that whilst well-timed career preparation is important, sustained career activities which encourage students to think about and enact their professional futures from the outset may be even more crucial.

#### 7.2.6 One-off careers events

The one-off events that participants reported mainly consisted of external speakers visiting the college to talk about their careers. Other events included whole days set aside where students could pick and choose the classes or talks they wanted to attend. A number of respondents did not attend these talks or events at all, for a variety of different reasons (explored in 6.3). Participants who did engage with these one-off sessions had mixed perspectives on their efficacy, which will be explored below.

The wide range of visiting talks on offer was refreshing for Freddy, especially since he had expected a lot of 'crusty old violinists.'

Erm, and they got – [...]the kind of people you'd expect, the people who played in orchestras, for many years and the people who'd had fantastic chamber careers [...] but they also got some people who had- who'd had you know, orchestral career and then massive change of direction, er, one of whom, erm, was, er, a violinist in a quartet and then had a car accident and went to work in the Ministry of Defence. Which was - which was like, er, really refreshing actually, cause I thought they were just gonna bring loads of crusty old violinists in or something.

Freddy's expectation of 'crusty violinists' could be directly linked to his other experiences in his college degree, where he talks of narrow-mindedness amongst his peers and staff. He regrets that these talks were only available to him in his fourth year and not before, after having found this atmosphere in his first few years stifling and counterproductive. These talks served as a reassurance that *not* becoming an orchestral violinist (which was Freddy's plan for after graduation) was a valid aim. This theme of timing links back to Hilda's above assertion that her tax lecture was too early in her degree, suggesting that correct timing is important to students when designing careers events. Freddy compares his perspective to that of his colleagues, who were less than impressed by the variety of talks on offer:

I suppose one of the things some of my colleagues were saying about these careers, er, things was that they were a bit sceptical and like, 'Oh you've gotta just spend four years practising the violin aiming to be an orchestral violinist and now they're telling me I don't have to do that? That's ridiculous!'

The way that Freddy talks about his colleagues reinforces his belief that parts of the degree caused a very one-track form of thinking for many students, something that he admits struggling with whilst studying.

I feel like some of the things I'm kinda trying to work out in my head now, might have been al-ugh, alleviated slightly if that sort of advice had been offered just earlier, you know?

The above suggests that one-off talks from visitors can be effective, but perhaps only if sustained throughout the degree. Oliver's concerns resonated closely with Freddy's. In Oliver's opinion, alumni talks were a missed opportunity for the college to broaden students' mind and perspectives.



It would have been fantastic if we had people come in, erm [laughs] who had reached different stages, so yeah, fantastic, get somebody who's who, you know, to come in who went straight from graduating into the ENO Operaworks programme, and went straight from that into National Opera studio and went straight from that into a small role at ENO and then went straight from that into a role at... Paris Opera [...]But then get, you know, the girl who actually after graduating postgrad decided to go into psychology, get her to come in as well and chat about, you know, her reasons for it, erm, get the people like... like me to come in and talk about, actually, you know, it's been a real struggle and it still is. Erm, this is a mix, it's a mix of things that happen, erm, and I think you need to see all the different strokes of it.

There is evidence that courses are broadening to include more varied examples of musical employment. In addition to Freddy's experiences above, Edward mentions a talk by an alumna who had set up her own business since graduating, however he is not particularly complimentary.

E: They also brought in, there was one, so there was one girl, she'd set up a party themed singing like carousel of opera, where you spin a wheel and then you choose a song, something like that. It was a it was a it was, er like a party idea.

I: Cool

E: That, er that was- I mean it was like bread-and-butter money I can understand that, but erm, I don't think they brought in anyone who was big in the game, if you get me?

I: Do you think that would have been useful?

E: That would have been useful. I mean you've got people from Masterclasses, after they give you professional ideas, but, er, no-one who can actually go, right 'this is how-this is how I made-' you know, not talking people like, erm, Susan Boyle of course, someone like, someone big like that...

Interestingly, for Edward it would have been more relevant to have received a talk from a star 'big player' – the sort of talk that Oliver did not necessarily find particularly useful or empowering. Natalie, another establishing musician, was also less enthused about a 'big player' talk she received at college. It is very possible that this is an opinion influenced by hindsight: both Oliver and Natalie can see that in the long-term this talk was not useful, given that their own career paths had changed over time, and that these paths are individual in nature. However to Edward it could have been a key to success, an opinion that went unchallenged because he had not had the chance to attend one of these talks and see for himself.

Edward's insistence that knowing about a 'big player's' career path in detail would have been beneficial to him may indicate that he is unaware of the fact that professional musicians' career paths vary greatly, and that modelling one's career path on another's can hinder success (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014). Perhaps, in Edward's eyes, the idea of setting up a business is obvious, whereas 'making it big' is more of a mystery, hence why he believed a talk from someone in this position would be useful. However his dismissal of this party idea as 'bread-and-butter money' may also mean that Edward is relatively unaware of the creative and financial potential of an original business idea. Edward's need for clear instructions on how to build a career – ahead of just the provision of 'professional ideas' – is very similar to the attitude exhibited by Gary above, who reported being taught to 'think about how to build a career' without being given 'avenues.' Both of these participants' attitudes suggest that the career preparation given by these courses fall short of students' expectations.

#### 7.2.7 Careers service/one-to-one career preparation

When interviewed about the presence of a 'careers service' at their conservatoire, participants' reports were mixed. There was little agreement amongst respondents as to whether, and to what degree, a 'careers service' existed.

An investigation of music college prospectuses and websites reveals that college careers services do seem to vary, with some offering standalone 'centres' for professional development (E.g. *Centre for Creative Careers* – formerly *The Woodhouse Centre* – at the Royal College of Music), comprising jobs bulletins and mock interviews, for example. Other colleges' provisions are present but rather less involved. At some institutions, it is the careers centre that delivers curriculum professional development lectures, one-off events, professional engagements and more individualised one-to-one career support. It is therefore unsurprising that across all participant reports, there is a certain level of confusion around what constitutes a 'Careers Service,' as opposed to the Professional Development Department or the External Engagements Office. Despite these differences across

institutions, participant accounts suggest that regardless of how career development was delivered, there was some level of difficulty in knowing where to turn for one-to-one advice.

For instance, both Hilda and Leanne attended the same conservatoire:

[B]ut it was so ugly, kind of like even - you could just tell that they didn't prioritise it because it was, like, tucked away in a mezzanine, in like a little crappy box room. It just, it kinda gave the impression that no-one gave a damn. (Leanne, trombone, EM)

I:[D]id you have a specific careers service?

H: I don't think so, I mean maybe there is one, but I've never had contact with them so-

I: So as far as you're concerned, no

H: [laughs] Yeah, as far as I know, no [...] Yeah, so if they are [there] then they need to come out and don't hide. (Hilda, viola, GM)

It is possible that the lack of attention that careers services attract mean that students do not see these services as particularly exciting or important.

Given that college departments are structured so differently, it therefore makes sense instead to refer to a 'careers service' as one-to-one career advice for the remainder of this section.

Very few participants mentioned having attended one-to-one careers sessions at their college, and those who did were not generally positive.

So there was a careers advisor in college, but... it was shit. I'll be honest, I- I didn't see any, like it just appears to be more about how to get onto a PGCE course, how to go to more education. It wasn't like they were sending out gigs every week saying to people 'apply apply apply,' you know what I mean it wasn't- erm, it wasn't contacts, it wasn't, erm, broad [...]. There was never a thing of, 'get yourself to London you've got skills' or, 'get yourself to Manchester,' or it was all just what, anything with a, with a leaflet or anything with a prospectus. That was the only kind of stuff they had. (Beka, Clarinet, EM)

Beka found the one-to-one advice she received passive, and therefore uninspiring. Furthermore, her complaints also point to a lack of encouragement from her

college to use her skills outside of the locality in which she was studying. This is particularly interesting because it provides an alternative to the widely accepted narrative that the pressure of a conservatoire education prevents students from succeeding. Although many previous studies, and data in this particular study, do also support this more established narrative, Beka's perspective is important because it sheds some light on how a lack of encouragement into performance careers can be demotivating. Later on in the interview, Beka talks of how, whilst studying, she felt like there was no career between performer and teacher for her, which which was likely caused, in part, by her feeling like her college had no other ambitions for her.

Ian's perspective is similar:

But it's not very helpful to be honest, [...] it gives er, sort of job opportunities that are coming up and it- it sort of says 'oh come here and discuss,' but it's like the careers advice at a school to be honest, it's just someone sitting there who doesn't seem to be able to do much more than give you leaflets. Erm, yeah it wasn't the most helpful thing. (Ian, viola, GM)

Both Ian and Beka's viewpoints indicate that students and graduates would prefer more dynamic and personalised one-on-one careers support, since a more passive, leaflet-based approach was not useful to either of them. This is supported in section 6.4, which is a more in-depth discussion of participants' ideal career advice and support.

#### 7.2.8 Degree as career preparation

Outside of professional development classes or career sessions, many participants believed that just doing the degree was, in itself, career preparation.

The strict atmosphere at Zoe's college encouraged her to think like a professional musician early on, to cultivate habits to make her more employable. It is well known that punctuality and preparation are prized in the orchestral world, especially for those who are freelance players (Carpos, 2017), and this rigid rule system played an important part in Zoe's musical development.

Erm, I think firstly somewhere like [music college], it's- it did feel quite like school sometimes, quite strict and there were things like black mark systems and things where, er, if you're late to rehearsals or if you're you know if you don't hand things in on time, you know then you get marks deducted from things, from end-of-years, you get punished and I think, erm, that sometimes felt a bit like, childish or felt like being back at school. But actually, you realise, they're literally just preparing you for the- for the professional world, and trying to make you as professional as you can be, and that means, you know, never being late, and you know always being ready for anything that might come up, as ready as you can be. Erm, so I think they do a really good job with that even though at the time it can be a bit of a faff or a bit scary or whatever. I think it means that when you actually leave there you start to realise how professional they make you there, you start becoming that then.

Zoe's description of her college 'making her a professional' is particularly interesting. The findings above and in the rest of the study suggest that many participants in this study did not feel prepared to be a professional in a broader sense, however Zoe's experience of the orchestral part of the degree was very 'professionalised.' Given that Zoe's experience of orchestral playing at her college was not unique in its professional outlook, this suggests that although colleges are helping to develop their students' professional *orchestral* identity through an immersive professional experience, it is likely that students' perceptions of their broader musical identity are weaker as a result of a neglect of other 'professional' experiences. This could also go towards clarifying why many participants in this study left college as aspiring orchestral musicians over and above other career strands (which were later discovered and developed). For an in-depth exploration of the development of participants' aspirations, see Chapter 8.

The opportunity to put operas together was a significant part of Edward's career preparation:

Technical. Oh vocal training. Erm, introduction to languages, er so your your basics, your Italian and your German and your French. Erm, I'm not very good at French but there we are. [...] Erm, how you handle your money, that's good. Erm, contacts, so how to handle your money- we had a few lectures about tax- tax, you know tax returns and everything like that so erm, some people didn't turn up which is interesting erm, how they're gonna do their tax returns but, anyway. Yeah it's interesting like that but erm, things- you know basic things that you- how is performing, erm, sitz, sitzprobes you know, kind of the idea of you know what you do during, an opera kind of basically. So your like- it's a bit, I mean to be honest with you it's a basic, it's a basic kind of foundation really. But something you can definitely work on. [Edward, tenor, GM]

It is understandable that participants' see this 'basic foundation' as career preparation, and there is no doubt that it is, since students choose a music college degree in order to improve their playing or singing (Perkins, 2013) rather than to undertake academic classes. It cannot be disputed that the first way to make oneself employable as a performing musician is to be an excellent player or singer, however a number of participants in the study make reference to a need for additional skills in addition to help them find fulfilling and sustainable work. Despite this, the small number of respondents who consider the degree itself as career preparation does suggest that there may be many students in colleges who believe this and think that other classes are unnecessary, or non-existent.

### 7.3 Avoidance of career preparation

Many participants across both cohorts of the interview study report missing the above career preparation sessions, whether deliberately or accidentally, citing numerous different reasons for doing so.

#### 7.3.1 Quality of sessions

As discussed above, optional professional development modules were often avoided by students because it was 'legend' that they weren't particularly good (Sophie).

Leanne points out the cyclical relationship between students' attendance and the quality of the sessions on offer.

I wouldn't say it was really professional development support anyway. And it was kind of [...] - you could just tell that they didn't prioritise it because it was, like, tucked away in a mezzanine, in like a little crappy box room. It just, it kinda gave the impression that no-one gave a damn. And it was then also probably cause the students really didn't give a damn, that they didn't put any, anything into it.

I: It's like a spiral, almost.

L: Yeah, it's just like chicken and egg. You kind of go, 'they don't care so we're not gonna care,' so they care even less. So we care even less, like- whereas if someone just put their neck out and said, right, actually these are compulsory[.] (Leanne, trombone, EM)

The idea that it is necessary to make sessions compulsory in order to improve attendance, and therefore quality of sessions, is a view shared by many participants at both stages. Edward notes that students only tend to do things when they have to:

It's when- it's when students are made to do something, it becomes good. It's like then you give them free rein, it's not gonna... (Edward, tenor, GM)

### 7.3.2 Delivery of sessions

For some students, the perceived quality of the sessions was dependent on the member of staff or visitor who was delivering it. In particular, respondents' opinions of their tutors were shaped by their credentials and experience, and respondents were less inclined to engage with sessions led by somebody who was not perceived as an 'expert in their field.' In the same way that Hilda reported not asking her principal study tutor for careers advice because she was not a professional performer, both Chris and Leanne found careers talks irrelevant to them because they were not delivered by those doing that job at the present moment.

So, then it made me kind of question, like, why are people, like why are people who have only ever been in academia, never had jobs as performers advising people on how to have performing careers? Erm, but - that's kinda one of the thing that I... did question there, with like, er my friends taking classes like that, well it's like - 'can you really advise somebody on how to be a soloist, cause you're not international, like concert, whatever instrument...' you know, erm, can you really advise somebody on how to win a job, cause you never won a job, so.... (Chris, trombone, EM)

Like I'm sick of people talking about jobs when actually you should really get someone in who does the job to talk about it (Leanne, trombone, EM)

These concerns, along with those above, generally suggest that students and graduates agree that they want to meet and hear from a variety of people in

different job roles. However, it is clear that participants had a more diverse spread of reasons for this. As discussed in 7.2.6, Freddy and Oliver believed that it was important to see a spread of different people at different stages working within and outside of music, in order for them to appreciate the different facets of working after their degree. Martha, who, after graduation, was responsible for making bookings for trombone class at her old college, describes picking a contributor:

M: And then, like, my job now, for the trombones is to bring in guests, to make sure they get a huge variety of actual, what to expect. So I'm getting [...] there's someone called [trombonist], who's a trombone player, and you might know her, she's er- she's sort of based up North. Well she- she's amazing, cause like she's one of the few trombone players who uses social media, as like a [...] plus thing, so I'm like, right we're gonna get her in! (Martha, trombone, EM)

Martha's perspective is similar: she is keen for the students at her college to see examples of different approaches to music careers, in order that they can manage their expectations before leaving their degree.

However, Chris is more concerned that a non-specialist talking about a job may not be able to give accurate advice on what it takes to get that particular job. This could indicate that although students and graduates agree on what they want, they are not in agreement about why they want it. Chris imagined that the role of career preparation classes and events was to tell students exactly what to do in order to obtain specific job roles. For this reason, he saw the most relevant contributors as people who do the jobs that he aspired to. These views echo those of Edward's, who wanted a talk from someone 'big in the game,' to find out how they got to where they were.

These issues also closely resonate with Gary's disappointment that, despite being given ideas of what to do with his career, he was not given more precise instructions on exactly what to do to go and get it (see 7.2.4).



### 7.3.3 Career advice as a threat to individuality

Some participants imagined that attendance at career development sessions might be a negative experience, owing either to the advisor being narrow-minded, or to a fear of being told what to do. Paradoxically, Chris, who above expressed dissatisfaction that a non-specialist careers advisor would not be able to tell him what steps to take in order to do a certain job, described another reason why he avoided career development sessions:

I: Did you have any specific classes to do with, like, careers? Like future career development? Or anything like that.

C: Erm, not really no. Erm, part of it was perhaps- I think they were [inaudible]. Er, I think they were available to us, I assume they were I can't really remember. But, erm, some of it was kind of out of arrogance, I think. On my part because I'd already gone through three or four years of being told what I had to do with my future. And I didn't want anybody else to do that, I wanna craft my own future. (Chris, trombone, EM)

Chris's fear of a careers advisor telling him what to do is in direct contrast to the perspectives of many other participants, who would have liked to have been told what to do more. It is expected that participants might have different personality traits that would affect whether or not they would have appreciated being told what to do. However, this split in opinion regarding career guidance could also point to a spread in students' expectations of their degree, and therefore it would be interesting to know what sort of career guidance students expected when beginning their degree, alongside their motivations for taking on a degree of this nature in the first place.

### 7.3.4 Unintentional missing of sessions

In addition to participants who purposely avoided career development sessions, there were many who reported having missed them unintentionally.

Yeah, I don't feel there was very much in terms of careers advice. Maybe I just was too focused on what I was doing to recognise it. I mean, that is a distinct possibility. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

I: And did they give you much practical knowledge, like, did they teach you to do your taxes?

Zoe: Oh! No not really, I don't think so. I mean, again I think that was on one of the optional days, and apparently because it- somehow it passed me by but I would have really been on top of that.

(Zoe, trumpet, EM)

I: I mean you said that you didn't really go to the talks anyway-

Yasmin: Oh, that was me being really bad.

I: Was it because, was it because you thought they might be boring, were they uninspiring or was it just-

Y: No I was just hopeless with my diary and I didn't actually put- they had a really, both [College X] and [College Y] got really great [inaudible] like tax lectures, and I was like I missed it at [College X] and I was like I know they get them at [College Y] I'm going to go when they're at [College Y], totally read the email, totally didn't put it in my diary I missed it [laughs]

I: OK

L: So but yeah, they would have been really good, apparently, they were. (Yasmin, bassoon, GM)

The above quotations suggest that whether or not participants were aware of careers classes and events available to them, these events took lower priority in comparison to playing engagements and more pressing deadlines. Previous research indicates that students go to music college to improve their playing and just get by on 'the other stuff' (Perkins, 2013) and this outlook is certainly mirrored in the above participants. However this attitude could prove ultimately detrimental to students' development since they are missing out on education that they themselves admit is key, such as accounting knowledge. Zoe's account above is particularly interesting: unlike Yasmin who continually refers to her lack of diary management skills, Zoe prides herself on being in very good control of her diary, describing herself as 'obsessed with organisation.' She expresses surprise that she wasn't 'really on top of' her attendance at a tax lecture, instead missing it. This could indicate that although some students are not always organising themselves effectively, these optional career events and days may not be publicised frequently or forcefully enough to the students.

[T]hey've done these careers talks - isolated sessions not part of the curriculum so they're not mandatory, erm, and they were advertised sort of a week before and stuff on a mass email, so it's

not the most, it's not like they're really driving students to come to these, erm, but they- they were quite good. (Freddy, violin, GM)

Freddy believes that his college isn't 'driving' students to attend careers sessions, and this could be a contributing factor to students' ambivalent attitude towards these sessions generally.

### 7.3.5 Institutional culture

Given that music college students are, generally, focussed and motivated individuals with respect to their playing, students tend to display a striking level of apathy regarding the supporting skills they need to become a successful musician. Richard goes so far as to suggest that attendance at a careers session, perhaps with an advisor, would be a cause for ridicule amongst his peers.

I: What do you think would prevent students from looking [for careers advice]?

R: It's a scary thing to look into and it's not- if you say, I'm not being funny, if you're talking with your mates in your flat and you're saying, 'Oh I'm gonna go for this careers advice session with this mentor,' they'd be like 'Oh what you doing that for?' (Richard, viola, EM)

The combination of these two factors – habitual non-attendance by students and peer pressure to avoid sessions – could point to a wider cultural problem within institutions.

### 7.4 How do participants envisage an ideal career education?

As detailed above, participants had very strong but varied opinions of the careers education they received as part of their degree. Given that many descriptions were quite critical and negative, it is unsurprising that respondents had many ideas of what an ideal education in music careers would consist of. Giving participants the opportunity to reflect upon what their career education *wasn't*, in addition to what it *was*, resulted in further insight into how careers advice links to future careers. For the most part, participants were in agreement that their careers education could

have been expanded or improved, but some graduating musicians disagreed. For an exploration of their perceptions please see 7.4.5.

Although participants' views on this subject were wide-ranging, their perspectives can be arranged into four broad themes: *variety*, *individuality*, *honesty* and *timing*.

#### 7.4.1 Variety

Throughout their interviews, many respondents spoke about the variety of work available to musicians, and their lack of awareness of these types of work whilst in college. Beka believed that being able to have contact with a wide variety of musicians doing different jobs would have broadened her perspective and opened her mind to the career paths available to her:

I think that's why it's important to have a variety of tutors isn't it, so that their experiences can open up more doors. Even if it's just in your mind like oh ok they do that. (Beka, clarinet, EM)

Zoe's wish to engage with people from a wide variety of careers centred around gaining a knowledge of non-performance careers in addition to performance careers.

I know it's difficult to organise, and probably expensive and time consuming, but, erm, just having a chance to talk to people, yeah, who work at radio 3 or- or who work in artist management or who work in, erm, for the ISM. Or you know all those different areas. N- not all necessarily just performers. Erm, I think that would have been really good. (Zoe, trumpet, EM)

The rationale for wanting a broader outlook on musicians' careers differed from participant to participant, however, generally speaking, establishing musicians were interested in a wide variety of jobs because they were doing, or envisaged themselves doing, a mixture of performance and non-performance related work strands in order to make a living. For example, Josh would have appreciated meeting people who had more varied careers in order that he might be able to relate to them as a mentor:

But there was, there weren't many role models of people that were going, or fessing up to 'Oh I left three years ago and now I teach most of the time and I do these gigs and I do that' - you know?  
(Josh, bassoon, EM)

Josh's use of the words 'fessing up' implies that he also felt that there was a certain level of dishonesty around the career advice he was given, discussed in depth below. Freddy shares a similar point of view to Josh but believes himself to be different from his peers, whom he described as more closed-minded to non-playing career strands:

And, erm, ah, I dunno, I- I think perhaps my colleagues were slightly sort of blinkered in their vision a little bit but, erm, [pause I suppose it does seem a bit, erm, hypocritical for you to go to music college, and for them to be exploring 'other' career opportunities. From their point of view.  
(Freddy, violin, GM)

This indicates that for some younger students, non-performance work was an avenue only to be explored as a 'backup' career, rather than as a work strand in a wider portfolio. Whereas establishing musicians were unanimous in their interest in a more varied careers education, there was less agreement amongst the younger graduating musicians. Sophie's ideal careers advice comprised sessions about what happens in the *absence* of a playing job, rather than in *addition* to a playing job, implying that performance and non-performance work strands are mutually exclusive.

[...] you know you do sessions on kind of like, going on from here, so you know, say you haven't just got a position in the LSO, so you know and what- what do I do now? (Sophie, oboe, GM)

Edward, discussed above, dismissed a session delivered by a small business owner as 'bread-and-butter money,' instead wishing that they had met someone 'big in the game.' Ultimately, this lack of agreement between participant groups appears to stem from graduating musicians' lack of awareness of the true nature of a music career. This strongly supports previous research that indicates that students' career expectations are not adequately managed during conservatoire study (Bennett, 2007, 2009; Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014).

### 7.4.2 Honesty

The vast majority of establishing musicians believed that careers education should seek to be truthful about the reality of the music profession. This again highlights the lack of expectation management that took place over the course of the degree, however it is unclear whether or not measures were taken by institutions to remedy this: it is possible that this management *was* there but, as discussed above, students were simply unresponsive to it or unaware of it. It is important to note that not all participants felt deliberately deceived, rather their perceived need for honesty was linked to a feeling that they had not been given the entire truth

Natalie made reference to needing a ‘reality check’ whilst in college.

N: A reality check, that's what was lacking, I think.

I: Yes, and did your, like, singing teachers talk to you about it? Ever? Was it ever spoken about?

N: Not that I remember. Probably in passing, but nothing in a way that stuck at all [...] I can kind of understand I suppose why they don't do it. Because it's petrifying!

I: [laughs]

N: Someone comes into college while you're all kind of like 'I'm amazing! This is great I'm going to take the world by storm and be the best singer/pianist/clarinetist that there's ever been.' If someone comes in and goes 'Yeah by the way it's really crap. And you're gonna be eating beans on toast for three months, and....

I: And wondering which role to do

N: And wondering whether I should sing Celine or Tosca or actually just going to work for Tesco... If someone does that does that put people off? What detrimental effect does that have, the? Does that- does it? There's a balance to strike isn't there. To between giving that reality check and just putting people off. (Natalie, soprano, EM)

However, she also questions the effect of a more honest careers education and wonders whether this would ultimately demotivate students from working towards their goals. However, as illustrated from Edward's report below, negative careers advice does not always have a demotivational effect on music students. He reports being told directly about the difficulties of the job market for musicians and responds rather cynically, believing that tutors were dishonest about career

prospects and unforthcoming with useful advice because they wanted to take work for themselves.

I think at the end of fourth year you become really strained, stressed and strained and you- you're told 'right there are not enough jobs going' but I always questioned because I- so why are people in music college, why are people in music college, if there are not jobs, why are you in it. And people [inaudible] 'but why are you in it then,' you know, exactly, it's so I just don't believe that. Erm, yeah the - there's a few things but yeah. Actually that's a good point, I've always believed this- the people- the teachers, they're probably talking about the orchestra, but don't tell me there's not- don't say, why would they wanna say that to people constant- like, there's not enough jobs going. Why, you're depressing them in the first place, erm, but I just don't believe that. I got- I just think they're just trying to give the money to themselves. (Edward, tenor, GM)

It is, however, possible, that Edward is using this cynical viewpoint to offer some explanation of why he is choosing to ignore what could be construed as some concrete and honest advice from tutors. It is well known that individuals who are focused on and feel a calling toward risk careers are more likely to ignore negative careers advice, even from a trusted tutor (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012), and it is therefore conceivable that Edward is doing just this. Although this is just one example, and care should be taken with generalisation, it could be an indication that a certain amount of frank insight into the difficulties of the music job market may not have the detrimental effect that Natalie envisages. This imbalance between management of expectation and receptivity to careers advice is clearly complex and merits further research.

Chris's description of a more honest career education suggests that some graduates felt misinformed by their institution, albeit unintentionally:

I think I have an interesting perspective [...] I was talking with a friend of mine who's still there as an undergrad, and he was telling me that, like, they have to take some sort of like music careers class or something like that and, erm, I told him with my- bout my experiences working on a cruise ship, because he had looked at doing that [...] And, er, I actually had pretty- again, not great experiences working on that. It was a fun gig, but, er, it's not something that I'd ever look at doing again [...] Erm, you just got drunk every single night, and that sounds fun until you do that, like, every day for like three months and then it's just [a] not ...very good ... like use of your time. So, erm, anyway but you know but they're like 'it's a really good job and it's really stable and like' the way they were talking about it from what he was telling me, they clearly had no understanding whatsoever of what the career was like. So, then it made me kind of question, like,

why are people, like why are people who have only ever been in academia, never had jobs as performers advising people on how to have performing careers? (Chris, trombone, EM)

Chris's experience of a person without direct understanding giving inaccurate information means that he he was ultimately mistrustful of the advice given to him at college. This could go some way towards explaining the phenomenon discussed above, where many students are unwilling to take advice from somebody who has not 'been there.' This suggests that whilst many students were critical about the spread of experience presented by visiting speakers, there is still great value in students' interactions with these visitors, if judiciously picked.

Edward would have also appreciated more concrete guidance about how much money he might expect to earn in the future:

[Y]ou can talk to them one to one but you can't talk to them about money, and that's also part, actually really really important, you should be able [...] Erm, absolutely well they're all, you're friends, you're friends with big players in the game, but I wanna know about how much you're earning, just it's f- it should be an impersonal question, just like, give us an idea, cause I'm gonna potentially be taking over your job in, you know, about ten years. (Edward, tenor, GM)

Although participants made mention of financial concerns and difficulties in their future careers (see 6.1.3), it is interesting that Edward is the only participant who mentions wanting to know his earning potential in precise monetary terms. Others allude to general financial difficulties without mentioning whether or not they, needed to know about it, or would have liked to have learnt about it, suggesting that many graduate musicians take financial uncertainty as a given. This is particularly interesting since it implies that the honesty that graduates are looking for goes beyond the issues of financial difficulties and an insecure job market, and instead concerns difficulties explored elsewhere in the thesis, such as the search for individuality and definitions of success.



### 7.4.3 Individuality

Given that both music careers and participants' experiences are, by their nature, varied and individual, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of participants reported that they would have appreciated more individually tailored career support. When talking about the nature of this proposed career support, it became apparent that whilst all wished to meet with a tutor or mentor once in a while, the priority for these sessions was not just tailored support. For many participants, regular meetings also represented the opportunity to firstly, make a personal connection, and secondly, speak one's mind to an impartial individual.

Many respondents envisaged this support taking place at the institution, in the form of a regular tutor with whom to make contact.

I would have like there to have been somebody who has a music degree, who has experience of doing various things, working in various sectors, to have that person there, to go and talk to. Maybe it's not their full-time job or maybe you could just- they just, you can just email them and they'll give you half an hour. To go and have coffee and just talk honestly and openly about things, because I think people are very afraid to be honest about things when they're in an institution it's hard to say, 'No-one's helping me,' or, 'I've not been given...information about various things.' But to have someone that you know is completely impartial would have been so helpful to me.  
(Phoebe, guitar, EM)

There are a number of noteworthy points from Phoebe's account above: firstly, that her viewpoint mirrors those of her peers when she places an importance on a tutor with first-hand experience of careers. Secondly, she emphasises a need for honesty, as above, but this time on the students' part: she is concerned that students may be afraid to be honest about what they think are a degree programme's shortcomings whilst they are in that institution, and therefore suggests that the tutor should be impartial.

Phoebe's need for impartiality is not unique, and both hers and Edward's need for impartiality stems from a need to feel able to express even negative opinions without fear of consequences:

[I]magine the head of music walks in and the head of your department says, 'is there anything wrong,' and you you're sat like this like, 'there is something wrong but I can't tell you,' because you- you potentially feel you're gonna be persecuted because of it. (Edward, tenor, GM)

The suggestion that students fear consequences of criticising their degree programme likely indicates that there is a certain power structure at play within institutions.

Impartiality is also important to Richard, but for him impartiality means somebody who does not know his playing:

I think if you'd had sessions with a mentor or something like that in college, outside of your instrument- your instrumental tutor who's' gonna have one very focused view of what you should be doing based on your playing style, then, erm, yeah. That's' that's my opinion. (Richard, viola, GM)

This attitude towards his teacher's judgement of him suggests that he felt as though his teacher might limit his outlook or opportunities according to his opinion of his playing. Furthermore, although it is well known that, to an extent, musicians' futures are influenced by others' opinions – and findings in this study do support that notion – it is also apparent that student musicians are still keen to develop their own sense of individuality outside of the parameters that others set for them. It could be that in Richard's mind, the opportunity to engage with an impartial mentor represented the opportunity to find out about all the options available to him, beyond the immediately obvious.

Phoebe speaks of being an impartial contact for students at the institution where she currently works as an administrator:

[F]or example [a] singer, who asked me whether she should change her name: I said to her 'Why don't you take it up with your tutor?' And she said, 'Because she doesn't approve of me doing the pop stuff [...] Oh, she's elitist, she's snobby, she doesn't want me singing that repertoire.' (Phoebe, guitar, EM)

As discussed in 7.1, principal study tutors are an important source of career advice, and their attitudes can have notable effects upon students' aspirations. What is

clear from the above quotations that students are not unaware of their teachers' biases, which is likely to be why they are keen to have an impartial advisor. Furthermore, given that students are anxious about criticising their degree for fear of repercussion, it is possible that the student that Phoebe talks about did not talk to her principal study tutor about the pop singing for fear of upsetting her and jeopardising her degree in some way.

In the quotation above, Phoebe mentions wanting somebody to 'go and talk to,' in an informal setting. Hilda echoes her sentiments when asked about her ideal careers advice:

I: In an ideal world what kind of advice or classes would you have been given? You've already mentioned [...]mentoring or something like that?

H: I think so, I think, yeah. I think it should be offered, like individually. Literally like, even- maybe even every other week or at least once a month or something, yeah you just sign up for something. So even having a chat or a discussion about something, on a regular basis I think can give you ideas, or, yeah. I dunno, yeah [laughs]. (Hilda, viola, GM)

It is important to note here that neither Phoebe or Hilda wish to have a mentor to give them ideas, rather they hope that the opportunity to chat with somebody might help them develop their own ideas. This suggests that a more tailored and personal approach to career development might enable and empower students to take more ownership of their future, in place of being given ideas by others (reported by many participants above).

Josh goes one stage further and suggests that whilst mentors would be useful, they should also be relatable characters in order that they might give more accurate and honest advice:

Whereas, I mean, that was an idea that jumped out in my head a couple of months ago. Wouldn't it be great to have sort of a mentor programme where someone is saying 'This is what it's actually like.' OK, it might work for them- someone might walk out once in a generation and get a job in an orchestra but that's rare, and you're gonna- if you're a clarinet player, yeah you're gonna wanna play sax and flute cause then you can do- take up all the show work. (Josh, Bassoon, EM)

Josh wishes to have a mentor to whom he can relate, in addition to getting advice from his principal study tutor, who, by his own admission, has had a rare career path. This provides further support for the notion that principal study tutors, whilst inspiring, may not be the most useful source of advice since they are difficult to relate to.

#### 7.4.4 Timing

One participant made reference to the issue of timing when reflecting upon exemplary careers education. For Freddy, the introduction of a variety of careers talks in his fourth year (very likely as a result of the curriculum undergoing an overhaul whilst he was in education) was simply too late, for both himself and his peers. This supports Gaunt's (2008) assertion that conservatoire education may be too focused on 'the immediate self.' As discussed above, the late inclusion of non-performance careers was not welcomed by his peers, who found it sudden and therefore felt conflicted after having worked towards what they thought was a purely performance career. However, the inclusion of non-performance work strands was a source of comfort to Freddy:

[T]hat [the careers talks] was, that was great, but my main criticism, was like why weren't we getting that sort of advice from first year, you know? And, er, it's it's just a shame, cause I feel like some of the things I'm kinda trying to work out in my head now, might have been al-ugh, alleviated slightly if that sort of advice had been offered just earlier, you know? (Freddy, violin, GM)

At the time of the interview, Freddy was 'trying to work out' how his skills in violin, guitar, composition, music production and sound engineering might result in a fulfilling and lucrative career. Although his degree was in the violin, Freddy's enjoyment of a wide variety of music meant that he did not always feel particularly connected to the more classical, orchestral component of his degree course, which set him apart from his peers somewhat. His reference to timing, and in particular his wish that this more varied outlook on musicians' careers might have been presented early and consistently throughout his degree, suggests that students might feel more supported into their careers if careers education took place from the outset. Investigations into musicians' careers strongly suggest that it is far from

unusual to mix skills like Freddy's into a varied career of performance and non-performance work, so it is particularly interesting that he felt like this was so difficult to work out whilst he was in college. Freddy's perspective suggests, again, that music students are largely unaware of the realities of the music profession. Furthermore, it is possible that even those with a multitude of different career skills are in danger of being left behind despite this, simply because they feel like they are not represented by the education they are receiving until it is too late.

#### 7.4.5 Opposing views

A small number of participants did not think that their careers education could have been improved upon or added to in any way. Yasmin reflected upon the sessions she had received during her undergrad and postgraduate and concluded that building a music career was 'simple' and to her it was therefore obvious what she would have to do:

I: Erm, so to your knowledge, do you think that there was anything really missing from the careers advice?

Y: Erm, I don't know I think careers advice for musicians is hard. Because there's no other advice apart from that you have to- I'd say you just have to practice, you have to be the top of your game, you have to get your tea rounds in, you have to get rounds in at the pub, like, you know? And then you have to be able to sit in the section and get on with people and you have to just turn up you have to be on time- sorry- and you know and erm, and just play and just play in tune at the right time, so I think I- like it's almost quite simple in a way? I don't know. But it's just getting to that level where your playing is of that standard, that thing and getting noticed, people wanting to play next to you. So I think for- for orchestral advice it's all those, there's not much advice apart from get your practice in. Keep applying for things. (Yasmin, bassoon, GM)

To Yasmin, a music career means exclusively orchestral work, whether freelance or salaried. For this reason she places little importance on aspects of career preparation mentioned by other participants above, such as running a teaching studio, becoming a versatile musician, or simply 'figuring things out.' She is very accepting of the fact that this orchestral work may not come straight away, and describes this 'in between stage' as something that she is unprepared for, but not especially worried about:

We were totally prepared for orchestral life. But what we're not prepared for is, the bit in between, where you're like trying to make it into an orchestra, but I think that's hard for everyone, I think that's where you just have to get a part time job and practise as hard as you can and then just keep doing auditions. (Yasmin, bassoon, GM)

Yasmin's perspective suggests a certain level of naivety about the realities of this transitional period but this is likely to be a result of her having just left education. Although many of the younger participants seemed more aware of the complexity of this time than than Yasmin, it is possible that Yasmin's lack of awareness is a consequence of her career aspiration being totally supported by her education. For example, many of the participants at both stages of the study felt like their interests were unrepresented during their degree, and therefore felt a certain level of uncertainty about the future. Yasmin, on the other hand, had completed an orchestral preparation Masters degree with the ultimate aim of becoming an orchestral bassoonist, and it is therefore likely that this contributed to her rather stoic attitude towards her transition into the music profession. It is impossible to say what future effect that this had on her transition, since follow-up interviews were not conducted, but it would be interesting to know if those students who obtained more vocation-specific masters had a largely different transitional experience than those who did not.

Theo's perspective was similar to Yasmin's, although he completed a more general Masters course in clarinet:

I don't think there's - there's only a certain amount that you can- you can do? To produce a career? Erm, the- and most of it will be down to erm, once you've got the basics of like how to make- how to make bullet points on a CV, most of your career will be down to your, your level of skill and your luck. That's what it looks like to me at this point, but I might find out that there's lots of stuff that I don't know.

Theo's mention of luck is interesting in this context. Although it is widely accepted that luck plays a certain role in the advancement of creative careers (Weller, 2012), some individuals place an emphasis on luck as a defence mechanism (Walderkine, 2003). For example, Theo may believe that luck has an influence on his future

because it offers a convenient explanation of why he may not achieve his career goals later in life.

Overall, both Theo's and Yasmin's perspective continue to support the assertion that there is a clear lack of career preview whilst studying at music college. It would be interesting to know if both of their visions of the future were in any way similar to their reality.

#### 7.5 Summary and Conclusions:

This chapter has explored musicians' attitudes towards their conservatoire education and the ways in which they link it to their current and future practice, in order to consider how this may impact transition. The vast majority of participants placed a great deal of importance on their instrumental or vocal lessons, which was unsurprising since this is generally accepted as the central part of any conservatoire degree. Attitudes toward principal study tutors directly affected participants' perceptions of their own playing and future career-readiness. Some participants reported directly taking career advice from their principal study tutors whereas others felt that their tutors' experiences were sufficiently far-removed from their own that this advice would not be particularly relevant. Despite this, many participants reported a lack of careers advice from other sources, whether this was resulting from weak course design or avoidance. This presents something of a 'Catch-22:' students are aware that careers advice from a principal study tutor may not be useful to them, yet careers advice from other sources is often avoided, meaning that many students are at risk of leaving conservatoire education generally unprepared for their futures.

The main difference between graduate and establishing musicians' accounts was in the attitudes they had towards their professional studies classes. In general, graduating musicians felt that their CV and self-promotion classes had set them up well, however the establishing musicians complained that these classes were in fact too generic to be useful. The more experienced musicians had a wide range of suggestions as to how their classes could have been improved, whereas those with

less experience believed that there was no real way to be prepared for a career in music outside of being technically good enough and getting lucky.

Despite negative reports of professional studies classes, respondents' accounts of their career preparation at conservatoire indicate that there are aspects of the degree which give a certain degree of career preview, namely hands-on immersive experiences which enable students to try out new roles. This is a double-edged sword, however: whereas many establishing and graduating musicians spoke of work placements which were ultimately valuable experiences, many students did not have these opportunities, or avoided these experiences. As a result, the only immersive experiences that some students had were playing in the orchestra, performing in operas and preparing for recitals: i.e. performance-only pursuits. This could potentially have a detrimental effect on graduates' transitions, since students could leave conservatoire education with little awareness of their competencies outside of performance.



## 8. Findings: Aspirations

The two previous chapters have highlighted disparities between graduating musicians' expectations of building a career and establishing musicians' realities. There was concern amongst many establishing musicians that their education did not prepare them for the wide range of careers that were available to them as musicians. As a consequence, many musicians spoke in depth about developing their career aspirations both during and after their degree, reflecting on the origins of their original career aspirations.

In the following chapter there will be an exploration of participants' career aspirations and their perceptions of their development. In the previous chapter it was asserted that immersive, hands-on professional experiences were of great value to students wishing to discover new career competencies. The relationship between these experiences and future aspirations will therefore be further investigated.

### 8.1 Exploring participant's career aspirations

At the time of interview, participants generally aspired to have a career as a freelance musician, incorporating a variety of work strands into their weekly schedules. However, none of these participants reported having started their music college degree with this aspiration, suggesting that it developed during their education. Exceptions to this trend were participants whose aspirations did not change at all, for example Yasmin and Oliver, or participants who abandoned the idea of a playing career altogether in favour of arts administration jobs, like Phoebe and Leanne.

Interestingly, the vast majority of participants from both stages in the research reported beginning their degree with one of two career aspirations, either envisaging themselves as a full-time orchestral musician or a soloist.

I feel like when I first started I was absolutely convinced that I was going to win x number of major competitions, get a recording contract, you know, be this huge household name, do solo recitals, do concertos, do chamber stuff, er, and it was a good few years before I realised that that probably wasn't gonna happen. (Phoebe, guitar, EM)

I think about a year ago, if someone said, you know, 'what would your kind of, dream job be,' I'd say, 'you know playing in a professional orchestra, kind of thing.' (Sophie, oboe, GM)

This narrow range of early career aspirations are likely as a result of youthful naivety: it is possible that participants at the early stages of their music education believed these to be the only career options available to them, or perhaps the only career options that signify having 'made it' as a musician. However, participants' reflections on their aspirations and their development suggest that these changes happen at different times for different people, in a variety of ways, and for numerous reasons. These changes and their possible origins will be explored below.

#### 8.1.1 Points of change

When comparing accounts from the established musicians and new graduates, it was clear that participants' aspirations were in a constant state of flux. Whereas the younger participants spoke of a change in aspiration taking place whilst at college, many of the older more established professionals described altering their aspirations at college and numerous times afterwards. This suggests that first-hand experience of the music professions helps musicians to further hone their aims and aspirations. Participants in the study reflected on the how and why their perspectives had evolved throughout their music careers. Whereas some changes in aspiration stemmed from key, crystallising events and experiences, for others it was a smoother realisation or reorganisation of existing aspirations. This resonates with Burt & Mills's research which intimates that there may be 'key events' which characterise and delineate a transitory period (2006).

### 8.1.2 Nature of change

After analysing participants' perspectives of their aspirations, it was clear that there were a multitude of ways in which these aspirations had changed and developed. Responses were sorted into five themes, which will be explored in detail below. It is important to note that these themes serve as descriptors and are therefore not mutually exclusive: for example, a participant's change in aspirations could be described as both *flipped* and *broadening*.

The four themes, in brief, were:

- *Flipped*: when a participant changed their point of view about something, perhaps abandoning an aspiration altogether in favour of an alternative;
- *Reorganised*: the participant held onto one or a number of aspirations, but changed the priority of these aspirations;
- *Focusing*: The participant's range of aspirations narrowed, ruling out or abandoning certain career strands
- *Broadening*: the participant's range of aspirations broadened to include other career strands
- *Fixed*: the participants' aspirations were unchanged.

#### 8.1.2.1 Flipped aspiration:

Some participants reported changing their mind about a specific career aspiration. The result of this often resulted in the individual abandoning the aspiration altogether, or simply putting it on hold for a while in favour of exploring other avenues. Most commonly, this *flip* was a change in opinion about full-time orchestral playing: many participants at some point aspired to have a salaried orchestral job (as opposed to freelance or 'extra' orchestral work), yet at the time of interview had decided that this job might not suit them as well as they initially thought.

Josh: I wanted to be a principal, in an orchestra, like principal bassoon of the LSO, when I was like, sixteen, seventeen.

I: Yep.

J: And then I even had an agreement with a mate in our first week of first year, we were like 'We'll get jobs before we leave, right?'

I: [laughs]

J: Erm, and my mate actually did! She's just phenomenal. Erm, and I- yeah, I - I don't really want to do that anymore. It just seems really a not great job. [laughs] Erm, -

I: What makes you think that?

J: [pause] Well you'd just be sitting there playing, I suppose. you wouldn't really be- you wouldn't be solving any problems, you wouldn't be doing anything massively creative. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

Josh's phrase 'we'll all get jobs when we leave, right?' is particularly interesting since it is characteristic of participants' tendency to use the word 'job' to mean a salaried orchestral position, rather than any other job role – Yasmin and Zoe also do this. This is indicative of a culture that reflects an established narrative that professional orchestral musician is the only job, or 'real job' available to instrumentalists. It is still common, amongst older musicians, to hear the question 'Do you have a job or are you a freelancer?' which could perpetuate a narrative where being a freelancer somehow does not count as a job. It is therefore possible that those students who begin their degrees aspiring to an orchestral career are, in part, doing so as a result of a culture that implies that the only job is in an orchestra. This could also go some way to explaining why so many participants in this study did begin their degrees aspiring to an orchestral career.

Josh is not the only participant who rejects his original plan of becoming a full-time orchestral musician in favour of more creative pursuits. Sophie and Freddy share a similar point of view:

I think about a year ago, if someone said 'you know what would your kind of, dream job be' I'd say, you know playing in a professional orchestra, kind of thing. And now I'm like- don't really want to do that I think the more I hear about professional orchestras the less I wanna be in one in terms of [pause] I guess the kind of of artistic restrictions in some ways. I'd – it's probably not the same for every orchestral player, but one of the things I love about chamber music is that you're just kind of in charge of the music and you have like, sort of intimate contact with the music and the other musicians, and - whereas in an orchestra, you - you've got a bit of that but ultimately the conductor kind of gets to decide. (Sophie, oboe, GM)

I've sort of realised that, sure, I enjoy playing in orchestras and they're and they're cool and everything but- I'm I'm not the best violinist and I'm not being kind of horrible to myself saying that, but I'm always kind of sat towards the back of the section, I- I very much feel like a cog in a machine, to be honest sometimes [laughs] and, erm, I feel like, of course you know you can kind of put your creativity into, er playing the part that you've got but what's given me so much more satisfaction is, erm, kind of playing my own music, playing music with others in a small group.  
(Freddy, violin, GM)

These above perspectives indicate that aspirations can change as a result of musicians becoming more aware of their own motivators and values (for a more detailed exploration of values please see 8.2.4). For example, Sophie, Freddy and Josh realised that a great deal of musical satisfaction was to be had as a result of creative input, something they found difficult to obtain whilst playing with the orchestra. For this reason, Josh and Freddy flipped their opinions about this career path, preferring to avoid orchestral playing in the future. For Sophie, she placed a lower priority on orchestral playing as a part of her future, however she does still add that she may apply for orchestral jobs, rather than ruling this out completely.

You don't want to kind of shut too many doors, so it's a bit hard to know. (Sophie, oboe, Phase 3)

Her reference to 'shutting doors' suggests that undertaking orchestral work may be more motivated by financial necessity rather than artistic fulfilment, implying that financial stability is likely to be another key motivator of musicians' aspirations.

Two participants in the study began their degrees with the aim of becoming professional musicians, but, at the time of interview, were in arts administration jobs. Unlike Oliver, who was working at a theatre to fund further singing lessons post-graduation, these participants had chosen to pursue arts administration careers instead of becoming professional musicians.

At the time of interview, both Leanne and Phoebe held fixed beliefs about musicians' job prospects:

L: I just wanna say that you come out of it thinking you've failed because you haven't become an orchestral person, that's probably just a brass thing, cause that was our only option for a job.

I: Were you, were you told that- explicitly that that was the only job for you?

L: Pretty much. It was that it was do like orchestral playing or... why don't you go into teaching? You know, and because brass bands don't pay any money so anyone working in brass and they don't like the music anyway. It was kinda like orchestras, opera orchestras, maybe, you know or- or you know all the soloists we got in, all of the guest artists we got in were members of orchestras. We didn't get anybody else in that was kind of, doing anything else but that because if you were seen as kind of doing anything else... but there's nothing else to do! There was no other option.  
(Leanne, trombone, EM)

The main [challenge] for me, with my instrument, I can't strive to be in an orchestra. You know, I can't strive to do all these things that maybe the other people around me could eventually do.  
(Phoebe, guitar, EM)

This is in direct contrast to the vast majority of establishing musicians, all of whom reported finding out that their career options were wider than they had originally thought. It is therefore possible that because Phoebe and Leanne do not have the experience of establishing a music career, their earlier perceptions did not change, which continues to suggest that participants' experiences shape their aspirations. However, even the recent graduates, who have far less experience of building a music career, have more open-minded views about their career options as musicians, which implies that their outlook may have been influenced by another factor. Leanne and Phoebe report being set back by injuries whilst doing their music college degrees:

I ended up having an injury, erm, which kind of set me back a bit in terms of playing. Erm, I had to recover from that but never really took it that seriously, just carried on playing. Got to the end of my fourth year, back in [city], did my recital and kinda thought 'I'm not really sure that playing is something I wanna do.' I couldn't be bothered to do the rehabilitation properly, my grade was fine, but I always knew that I was quite an organised person and kind of being a freelancer didn't necessarily- while it takes being organised I kind of need a bit more structure in my life. (Leanne, trombone, EM)

You know, and I think the crunch point came for me when I went to stay with a professional guitarist. Really respected international guitarist in Barcelona. Teaches all over Europe, concerts, CDs, and she was struggling so hard financially she asked me to go out and buy hand wash and groceries for her. And I thought 'hang on a minute, you're supposed to be... what I. This is supposed to be the- you know, as high as you can go and everything that I'm aiming for, and you can't afford hand wash' -

I: Yeah

P: And it- just, it was in that moment it just suddenly clicked and I thought 'Right you need to look at yourself, Phoebe, and you need to decide what you're gonna do with your life, and really look at different people's career paths.' Because I felt 'If she can't do it I can't do it.'

[...]

I: Was that toward the end of your degree that that happened?

P: It was when I was in third year. So, it was toward the end, but I'd already started thinking about my arm and my limitations as a performer.

Whilst the injuries they incurred weren't necessarily the sole reason why both respondents decided to undertake non-performance careers, these injuries, in combination with other concerns, ultimately helped them to come to this conclusion. Phoebe's experience of watching one of her idols struggle financially, when she was 'already thinking about her limitations as a performer,' resulted in a change of direction. Because her expectations of the music industry were so strongly challenged in her third year of her degree, it is possible that Phoebe closed her mind to alternative music careers having decided on arts administration, which is why she still held these fixed beliefs at the time of the interview. Although Leanne does not describe a 'defining moment' in the same way as Phoebe does, it is possible that her apathy towards recovering from her injury (an embouchure collapse) hinted to Leanne that playing the trombone for a living was not particularly important to her, so she, like Phoebe, closed her mind to many of her career options. However, this closed-mindedness was not necessarily damaging to either of these participants' future careers: in actual fact it resulted in them focusing on their goals and redefining what was important to them. Phoebe decided it was important to have financial security whereas changing her mind about a freelance musical career enabled Phoebe to enjoy a more structured schedule. Above all, Phoebe and Leanne's perspectives indicate the role of

experience in the choices that musicians make – some experiences affirm and reinforce the continued pursuit of particular activities, whilst others prompt musicians to reflect and reassess their values.

#### *8.1.2.2 Reorganised aspirations*

Participants who reorganised their aspirations referred to changing the importance of different career goals, rather than ruling out specific goals altogether. For example, Richard describes changing his aspirations multiple times throughout his degrees and during the two-year period between his undergraduate and masters:

They changed- at one point I thought 'you know what I'm rubbish I'm going to be a really good music teacher' then there were loads- 'naaaah' erm, don't wanna do that. Erm, but most of the time I've just wanted to play. At some point before uni I was like I'm going to play with the LSO. LSO- Ok, be realistic about what you can do here, and how much you have actually got the stamina to practise with. Cause I had to look at myself and think 'how much do I practice, how much am I realistically ever going to practise' I think I've - have a certain mindframe to be able to practise, it's not just filling the time it's knowing how to practise, being able to do it without getting distracted. And I know my limits when it comes to that. I know I'm not gonna be every weekend recording with the LSO or you know the LPO and doing stuff like that and I'm cool with that, If I, if you know, have a [inaudible] I manage to get a few deppy gigs with some good orchestras, like even if it's just Opera North, doing a gig in town, just a few of those, mixed in with wedding and the odd pop thing I'll be happy. I don't have- it's always been, that's' the only way it's changed in that I just wanna do a few more different things and not tie myself down into becoming some crazy practice-obsessed person which is what I thought I wanted to do and then realised there's no fun in that, yeah.

(Richard, viola, GM)

For Richard, his main motivation is to simply play the viola, and apart from the earlier time he describes, where he aspired to teach music – possibly due to a crisis of confidence in his own playing – each of the career goals he describes centres around playing in some way. Whereas he previously pictured himself playing with a top London orchestra, his change of heart suggests that he got to know himself better whilst studying: highlighted by the phrase 'I had to look at myself.' Earlier in the interview Richard speaks of only applying to one college because he was 'afraid of failure' and did not think he would be good enough to get in anywhere else. He makes constant references to knowing he will 'never play with the LSO,' and whereas this might indicate that Richard possesses entity beliefs about his own



potential, the above quotation suggests that there are other forces at play here, too. Richard neglects his aspiration to play with the LSO because he realises that this is not the type of person he would like to be, acknowledging that it would be a feasible dream if he were willing to become 'a crazy, practice-obsessed person.' Instead, he aspires to find fulfilment in a variety of musical pursuits, linked by his playing of the viola. It is also particularly interesting that when Richard describes his orchestral experiences at his institution, he does so without fond memories.

[P]robably about two [orchestral projects] a semester. I did get to- erm yeah this is I did some cool stuff which is- unfortunately the standard at [college] for the project is... well the thing, the people they get to do the projects I mean in terms of outside leaders for the projects and professionals is really good but unfortunately people just don't care, specifically string players don't care

I: Oh the students

R: So it puts a bit of a downer on it. Erm,

I: Do you mean that they don't play well or they don't show up?

R: They- they don't show up, they don't play well and they don't care. They don't practice for it.

They could play well, if they wanted to but they don't, because it's not part of their course [...]

(Richard, viola, GM)

Unlike other participants, who received an orchestral education which largely mirrored the professional world, Richard felt disillusioned with orchestral playing throughout his degree, which could offer another explanation for why he changed his mind about a full-time orchestral career relatively early in his degree in comparison to other respondents. Previous findings from this study indicate that relevant professional experiences can be key to students feeling prepared for particular career pursuits. Richard's experiences add to this by suggesting that these experiences need to be sufficiently positive in order for students to feel prepared. For this reason, perhaps Richard's experiences as a student were so far removed from his visions of the LSO that he simply could not imagine himself ever being there.

The reorganisation of Natalie's aspirations took place after graduation, as a direct result of a solo engagement:

N: Professionally I think the pinnacle was when I did Musetta here, in La Boheme, in 2014.

I: OK

N: That was... a wonderful experience. What made that so lovely for me: they double cast it, erm, and it was all meant to be kind of young opera singers, who were kind of still learning the ropes. As a result we had an interesting mix of characters, as you'd expect. But what was particularly lovely for me was I'd just done my first season as an extra chorister. The season before. So I was just starting to know people who are now my colleagues. And so, I was able to do this amazing solo role as an external contracted soloist, but amongst people that I was starting to call friends.

I: That's nice

N: And that, was pr- yeah that's probably one of the nicest experiences, and professionally the pinnacle.

I: Mhm

N: Because that was for me that was a really flip-point at which I could have really milked that for all it was worth, and gone and sought my fortune. Which obviously you know, we're all very rich, as singers [sarcasm - laughs]. Erm, ah, I could have kind of, really milked that and kind of tried to get the agents on board and tried to... maximise the opportunities out of that.

I: OK

N: Erm, and it- it was not doing that that made me realise that my priorities had changed. Erm, and that actually I'd thoroughly enjoyed doing the season before with the choristers, erm colleagues, and with friends. You know that kind of probably dampened my... blinkered, soloistic desires  
(Natalie, soprano, EM)

Natalie had been working with the same opera company as a freelance 'extra' the previous year, and the experience that she had, being a part of a company, with supportive colleagues, motivated her to put a solo career on hold for the time being, at least. She talks earlier in the interview of the fickle and lonely nature of freelance life, and, as a consequence, the alternative path offered by the role of full-time opera chorister motivated her to apply for this job in place of seeking a career as a soloist. Natalie spent only a year at music college: prior to that she had freelanced as a singer and held temporary office posts after having dropped out of a science degree. When recounting her year at music college she mainly talks about preparing a solo role for the college opera alongside preparing for a final recital.

Like it was- it was a good year, and I learnt some stuff. I did a role, a f- my first Italian role at college, so I was kind of, quite, that was quite handy. Changed my college experience quite a lot. Cause obviously, it improved my stagecraft and my Italian, and my ability to work with colleagues and all of that kind of stuff-

I: Yeah

N: So that's helpful. There were still gaping holes by the time I left.

I: Gaping- just gaping holes in knowledge, or technically?

N: Technically. So my singing teacher at college, is ama- she's [redacted], she's amazing, she's like, well known. She is more of a coach than a teacher, but also because I had the role that was kind of, like, all-consuming. So we didn't have a huge amount of time, even, to work on technical stuff.

(Natalie, Soprano, EM)

Natalie's account resonates with Gaunt's observation (2008) that conservatoire education can encourage a focus on the 'immediate self.' Natalie's time at music college was not particularly varied, and as a result her degree did not reflect a particularly balanced picture of the industry. This is most probably owing to her having spent such a short time there, however it does indicate what can happen as a result of students having only a very narrow set of experiences during their education: Natalie had no idea that she would enjoy working with a chorus until she did it, which is reflective of other participants' experiences throughout this study. Furthermore, Natalie's change in aspiration is not just as a result of a change in musical priorities:

It it probably changed more because I changed and I grew up and I entered my thirties, and your priorities change in your thirties, and, erm, I think that's probably what changed the most [...]

And then also at the same time I was personally changing, my priorities changed. I realised that actually buying a house and having a family at some point might be nice. [...] And, whilst it's possible to do that as a freelancer, it's very difficult. So, yeah in that respect I think my priorities just hugely changed. (Natalie, soprano, EM)

Choosing a career as an opera chorister also represented the opportunity to achieve a contracted salary rather than being self-employed, something that would offer financial security if Natalie wished to be approved for a mortgage and raise a family. This supports previous research that suggests that although musicians are motivated by music itself, in many cases these motivations interact with other,

wider, life goals, and in some cases career goals are compromised in order to pursue other goals such as raising a family (Burland, 2005).

### *8.1.2.3 Broadening aspirations*

Some participants added to their aspirations either during or after the degree, often as a result of finding out they enjoyed a new career strand, following a hands-on experience. The vast majority of participants' aspirations had broadened in some way. This is unsurprising, given that, as students, they were either completely unaware of career options outside those of soloist or orchestral musician, or believed these 'other' options to be somehow less valid.

Chris was the only participant who reported aspiring to a teaching career from the outset of his musical life, however this aspiration did not stand alone for particularly long.

I'd been doing it for a year or two I kinda said, 'OK I really like this I wanna be a teacher,' and then as I started doing more and more I said, 'OK I'd really like to go be a performer.' (Chris, trombone, EM; describing the development of his teenage aspirations)

I made all-State three times, was fist chair all-State Philharmonic orchestra, first All-State Jazz in High School, twice, and I started saying 'Alright so if I'm doing this then maybe I should consider maybe being more of a performer.' And, so I kinda started thinking of that path, but er, I think when you're younger you kind of have like a slightly glamorised idea of, like, what that is. You know it's like 'Oh I'm just gonna play gigs, I'm gonna make a living, it's gonna be great.' And then like as you get older you see like reality kinda sets in like it is possible to be a performer for a living, but it's really freakin' difficult. Erm, more often than not you're gonna have to do a little of everything. You're gonna have to teach, you're gonna have to play- and that's like one of the reasons I started developing this sort of portfolio career, so to speak, where I started just trying to say yes to everything I could. (Chris, trombone, EM)

In his younger years, Chris believed there to be a performer-teacher binary, so as he became a more active performer, his aspirations for the future changed direction, excluding the career path of teacher in favour of a career in performance. However when he reflects on this further he admits that he was slightly misguided as to what a career in music actually entails, implying that there is a necessity to

use a wide range of musical skills in order to make a living. Given his youth at the time, this is unsurprising, and resonates with many other participants' reports of their early misconceptions around the nature of music careers. It is interesting that Chris's initial change of aspirations largely came about as a result of winning competitions and places with national ensembles in his home country of the United States. His use of the word 'should' suggests that his musical success brought with it a sense of responsibility to follow a certain path as a performer. Later, Chris talks about feeling like a 'rockstar' at a solo competition, and it is possible that this moment, and his previously mentioned competition wins, combined to cement his identity as a performer, which has been previously observed in young musicians (Dobrow Riza and Heller, 2014). Many participants suggest that experiences 'feed' aspirations and Chris is no exception, seeking out further performance experiences to follow on from these early ones. As Chris established himself in the music profession, his focus shifted from being a performer to being a portfolio musician, and although he is motivated by his early performance experiences, the 'reality' to which he refers is the student debt he accrued whilst studying in the United States.

I mean to be honest with you, like, what I'm doing with my career is kinda dictated by, like, how I can, er, pay off my loans or get benefits and that kinda stuff. (Chris, trombone, EM)

Although Chris became aware of a wider range of careers whilst at college, and there is no doubt that he does find enjoyment in musical career strands such as composing, teaching and arranging, it is possible that his motivation to broaden his career portfolio is ultimately borne out of a real necessity to pay his bills. It would be interesting to know whether Chris would be as drawn to this career path were he not so anxious about paying off his student loans, but cases like this, and Natalie's above, do indicate that musicians' musical aspirations are connected to wider 'life aspirations.'

Zoe's experiences are very similar to Natalie's, in that she experienced the social connection of making music with others, which resulted in her changing her aspirations. However, whereas Natalie chose to switch her solo aspirations in

favour of a chorus job, Zoe held onto her solo aspirations and added other career strands:

Erm, when I was growing up, I, you know, came across, you know, Alison Balsom and I was just like, 'Oh my goodness that's what I wanna do,' and it was the most beautiful thing I've ever heard. And I- you know I was quite vocal about saying 'I want to be a soloist and that's what I want to do' and then when I was at [college] I was also quite open about that and keen on being a soloist and no-one ever told me that I shouldn't be or I couldn't be, erm and that meant that I got I think quite a lot of opportunities like as a soloist at [college] because perhaps an opportunity would come up and, erm, yeah an opportunity would come up and people would think 'Oh, who'd be interested in that oh, Zoe,' because I spring to mind, cause I was so, you know, interested in that. Erm but funnily enough as time has gone on I- and I think the more orchestral playing I've done the more I think 'Oh I absolutely love this and I wouldn't -I wouldn't want to solely do solo stuff, or' but I also don't think I'd want to only do orchestral so, I mean, yeah I think a varied career is exactly what I want. I mean I think one of my favourite things to do, is to play sort of- as a soloist but sort of in an ensemble. (Zoe, Trumpet, EM)

Zoe speaks of a long-standing aspiration to be a solo trumpet player, like her idol, Alison Balsom. Whilst studying, people around her helped to cement her identity as a soloist by offering her opportunities to play solos, 'acting out' this profession whilst in education. At the time of the interview, Zoe was undertaking solo trumpet engagements amongst other career pursuits, which is undoubtedly rare: very few participants in this study reported doing any solo work at all. It is likely that having had this aspiration, and consequently this side of her identity, so well-supported whilst in college will have contributed in some way to her sustaining this aspiration, enabling her to achieve her goals. It is also interesting that she has held onto her aspiration to be a soloist (unlike many other participants), so it is possible that the key to enduring aspirations is an early adoption of this aspiration as a core part of musical identity. Both Burland (2005) and Davies (2004) make mention of conservatoire students' perceptions of favouritism: participants in Davies's study in particular express dissatisfaction that those who are not offered opportunities at the outset of their degrees become 'labelled' as lesser players and do not get a chance to improve. It is therefore possible, then, that Zoe's repeated engagement with solo opportunities whilst at conservatoire enabled her to hone her craft and gave her an advantage going into the job market as a soloist.

Zoe speaks about adding other career strands to her portfolio of work, finding it difficult to articulate which sort of playing she prefers:

I get a real buzz from playing on the stage or playing in a concert. Erm, and yeah, I think that's definitely my favourite thing- I think I, I love performing, you know, as a soloist, I think I get the biggest adrenalin rush from that, because I find it probably the scariest [laughs]. But also, then I think I probably enjoy more playing in an orchestra because you're part of this team an- and you all work together, erm or in a chamber music, chamber music or something like that. I really love the feeling of all being in it together and sharing that- sharing the nerves, sharing the excitement and sharing it all out. Erm, rather than feeling like all eyes are on you which can feel quite nerve-wracking.

It appears here that Zoe does not dislike being a soloist, but perhaps since graduating she has realised that the pressure of solo work could be too much if it were her only career pursuit. Later in the interview she talks about her struggles with perfectionism, wishing she could be 'kinder to herself,' and it is therefore possible that Zoe's orchestral and West End show work serve as some sort of mitigator for the stress that solo playing brings her. This suggests that mental health could play a certain part in shaping musicians' aspirations for the future. Interestingly, when talking about her decision to broaden her career goals, Zoe implies that she is no longer a soloist:

[P]eople perhaps who knew me, five, seven years ago will say 'oh so are you still going to be a soloist?' and I always go 'I don't know, things have changed a bit' and, erm whether it's that I don't think I could do it, I don't maybe it's that I think I actually couldn't make it, maybe that's why I changed my mind but I think it's, to me, I just think like actually it's because I realised that I love working more with other people, so.

At the time of the interview, Zoe was playing trumpet solos professionally, but reports having changed her mind about being 'a soloist.' It appears that she has 'cast off' her soloist identity after broadening her career outlook, and it is therefore possible that her visions of what a soloist is does not match with her reality. Zoe's earliest aspiration was to have a career like Alison Balsom's, a prominent trumpet soloist, and perhaps it is as a result of this that Zoe does not consider herself to have made it as a soloist: she is not touring internationally and making the bulk of her income playing solo trumpet. As Ibarra and Petriglieri (2015) observed, having a

fixed role model may cause identity tensions if this role model turns out to be an 'impossible self.' This does not seem to have impacted Zoe negatively, but this does suggest that identity and the way in which musicians view themselves is dependent on far more than the activities they choose to do repeatedly. Although Zoe talks and plays like a soloist, to her a soloist is somebody with a career very different from hers, and so she does not see herself in that role. This may suggest that there is something of a 'mythology' around the soloist's role, in comparison to a more 'ordinary' freelance career path.

#### *8.1.2.4 Focusing aspirations*

Some participants' aspirations focused during and after their degrees, but this was not highly prevalent amongst participants' responses. This is unsurprising, since the vast majority of participants began their musical careers with perhaps only one or two job roles in mind, and to narrow one's career aspirations from those would be impossible.

The two participants who focused their career aspirations were those who had broad or vague ambitions in the first place: for example Beka, who reported knowing that she wanted to do music 'somehow,' but with no focus beyond that. For Beka, going to music college represented an opportunity to focus on playing music. Following two professional placements, undertaken in second and third year, she decided to focus on working in music education:

So I did my community placement [at a theatre] and that might have been third year actually.

Anyway, doesn't matter, I really enjoyed it, and erm so I knew that I wanted to teach in groups, and this is right in the middle of the financial crisis. So I figured that rather than throw myself out in some really unstable point where I knew that I would have to fight for every single penny, erm, and not being able to charge as much because I didn't have a teaching qualification, I figured that I'd go and do my PGCE, get my teaching qualification, and then I could decide what I wanted to do?

I: Yeah.

B: Erm, and actually it turns out that I quite like teaching kids, anyway, so that was a bonus!

Wahoo!

I: So kind of worked out quite well.



B: Yeah, so I mean I don't expect that I'll always teach classroom in the same way that I am now, like as such mainstream- albeit here it's private, but, mainstream teaching classroom, I figure I might eventually end up doing more community stuff again, or stuff for older people, or stuff for vulnerable people, or, or whatever. Erm -whatever comes but I do know that having that PGCE means that I've got that, erm, freedom to choose what I want and charge that little bit more because, er, because I have got the qualifications and the experience behind it.

After increased disillusionment with her clarinet lessons ('I never really wanted to be a solo musician'), Beka ruled out playing for a living and turned her focus to music education. She seems to have pragmatic aspirations rather than musical ones – she prioritises becoming a qualified teacher in order that she might be able to achieve financial security for herself and her future. Therefore, Beka's aspirations within education are quite fluid, which suggests that rather than being motivated by a particular job role, she is more concerned with building the life she would like to live. Later in the interview Beka goes on to say how she sees her next career move being dictated by geography more than anything else:

Yeah, I mean the only- more of them, they're geographical. Because obviously being over [here], you're mostly you're thinking where you wanna go next, not what you wanna do next. Erm, so for me at the moment this job finishes July 2018 and you know, I could extend if I wanted erm, but we've made the decision, me and my partner, erm, made a decision that we'll move back, at least to Europe. (Beka, EM, Clarinet, answering the question 'Do you have short- and long-term career goals?')

Although the narrowing of her career aspirations did result in Beka ruling out certain career strands – namely, deciding not to pursue a playing career after going to music college specifically to play music – this narrowing mainly consisted of an increased focus on other areas of her life and career. Focusing her energy on becoming a qualified teacher afforded her the freedom to choose where she works over and above what she does. Despite this narrowing of focus, Beka remained open-minded to opportunities, meaning that she ultimately followed her aspiration to have financial security and a boundaryless lifestyle. Although throughout this study it has been argued that students may benefit from receiving a broader careers education, Beka's perspectives reveal that this should not be at the expense of encouraging focus, since it is likely that Beka's focus on her aims of becoming

financially secure contributed to her having a transition with real sense of direction and fulfilment.

Alice, a soprano, also speaks of focusing her career aims after completing a broader academic university degree in her home country of Canada:

A: Ermmm, er so those are - those are my kind of three aspirations but I thought the closest ones are likely going to be contemporary music, devising, like, new opera that kind of stuff - weird shit.

I: Cool!

A: Just weird shit. And, erm, and some French stuff on the side. And then hopefully, eventually someone will sit there and go 'Oh! you can do - you can do goat trills come and sing Monteverdi.'

And then, then I will be complete. [laughs] (Alice, soprano, EM)

For Alice, finding the right shape for her career was mainly about her finding her own individuality as a singer. At the time of the interview she spoke of wanting to find a 'niche' for herself, one of which – French lyric diction coaching – stemmed directly from her French language education in Canada, where she grew up. Alice undertook some French lyric diction coaching at her college in order to pay her bursary hours, and held onto an aspiration to continue this type of work since, suggesting that work placements help students to imagine themselves in future job roles.

Alice constantly references feeling different to other people, on account of her being from Canada which she believes makes her more forthright and consequently less likeable. She also felt as though her voice was different, unsuited to many bel canto roles. It is likely that Alice's sense of 'otherness' caused her to think about her differences, and her narrowing of focus onto the 'niches' she is seeking out is a way of taking ownership of her individuality.

I think also my undergrad prepared me for more things like, if you wanted to be the 'everything singer.' So there are singers who go through their lives only doing art song recitals and only doing oratorios, but they prepared us for, you know, if you wanted to sing oratorio, if you wanted to sing bla bla bla if you wanted to be an ac- in, er, an academic. If you want to be a teacher, if you want to bla bla blabla bla. Like, they gave you an overview of like, totally everything. Erm, which made you feel like you could do it. But then when I went to the [UK college] and did my postgrad, it was more

like a rude awakening of what the world is actually going to be. [pause] In the sense of, not everyone's going to like you.

Many participants reported that their UK conservatoire degree did not prepare them for all of the realities of becoming a musician, which is in direct contrast to Alice's perspective on her university degree in Canada. At her university, academic study, pedagogy skills and performance were equally marked and weighted, and she implied that after receiving this broad education, she 'felt like she could do it.' It is likely her awareness of these core skills brought the requisite confidence that she needed to go into the music profession. This suggests that a broad education is about more than just showing students what job roles are available to them; it also builds students' confidence in their own employability.

#### *8.1.2.5 Fixed aspirations*

Only two participants reported not changing their aspirations in any way: Yasmin and Oliver.

Oliver links his aspirations to be an opera singer with his early encounter with a prominent soprano:

I: You said that you know, you see yourself doing auditions for bigger roles in future. Has that always been your aspiration? Is that- even before college?

O: Erm, pfff [raspberry], yes

I: Was that always what you had in mind?

O: Yeah, opera's always been - I mean, again I was really lucky that through the teacher I had when I was younger I got to do masterclasses with a renowned British soprano, who's now a mezzo-

I: Aha

O: Erm, and.... she was my first introduction to a professional working opera singer.

I: Yeah

O: And, after I met her, I was like 'that's what I want to do, what she does. That's what I want to do.' And I think in some ways, it's been a positive and a negative, cause her career is sort of, my benchmark. (I: Like a gold standard) But her career is, like, one of those real exceptions. That... very rarely happens. Erm, but having that in my mind has always been what I've wanted to do. That's the standard I wanna be at, erm. (Oliver, tenor, EM)

At the time of the interview Oliver was continuing to take singing lessons to prepare himself for auditions for chorus and solo opera roles, despite having left college two years previously. At that point he had had limited success, but this did not deter him from his path, even though he seemed aware that this narrow career aim may have been limiting him. There is no way of knowing, now, whether Oliver either met his goals or developed them, however this is indicative of the dogged determination that some musicians have after graduation, even in the face of unlikely odds. Oliver makes constant reference to very early musical experiences, singing with his first teacher's opera company both as a boy treble and as a chorus member:

So [I] started studying privately, and it was just by complete fluke that the woman that I started training with was an opera singer so.... started training sort of straight away, erm, on a lot of stuff to do with opera. Erm, then did work as a treble for, er, different companies. Erm, as I was growing up. Then when my voice changed, er continued training, erm, entering local competitions, all the rest of it, then started auditioning for music colleges once I'd finished my A Levels. (Oliver, tenor, EM)

It is possible that, similar to Chris above, Oliver's early opera experiences shaped his musical identity as a singer. However, unlike Chris, Oliver's aspirations did not develop, and it appears that he is 'holding on' tightly to these early experiences and seeking to recreate them in his present. He attributes his lack of success in finding professional vocal work to two factors: firstly, his voice type being incompatible with operas cast in the UK, and secondly a lack of jobs in general, something he believes is not a problem that instrumentalists face.

O: I'm working with people who have only just started their undergrad, have only just maybe graduated from undergrad as instrumentalists, and they're already going into incredibly well-paid instrumental gigs. Erm, you know some of them already have agent representation, there's countless competitions they can enter in... Erm, you know if you come out of undergrad as a relatively decent violinist the chances are you're gonna be able to get paid- even if it's weddings- you can still, you're still going to get good money. And also there's, you'd never in a million years be expected to do anything without a fee.

I: Yeah

O: As an instrumentalist. Regardless of what level you're at, if you're in conservatoire training you will not, you are not going to do a free gig. You will be paid for it. Whereas as a singer, you come

out after doing undergrad, postgrad, Opera School...and you can expect to spend the next three to four years doing profit share if you are lucky.

It is possible that Oliver's strong belief in the difficulty of the job market he is in enables him to maintain focus in the face of adversity. Perhaps it is through this focus that he sustains his narrow and specific aspiration.

Yasmin always aspired to be an orchestral player, possibly due to her strong belief that it is the only career option available to her as a bassoonist:

I: Have you always wanted to be an orchestral player? Has that always kind of been the dream?

Y: I think so, yeah, I mean you don't really get solo bassoon, and I think chamber music, there are personally, I don't think that wind quintets are that great. I mean there's amazing stuff like Strauss serenades and Mendelssohn octet and that's amazing, but you can't just do that, you know I think for bassoon it's either orchestra or that's it really for bassoon. (Yasmin, bassoon, GM)

It is important to note that at the time of the interview, Yasmin had just finished a postgraduate degree in orchestral playing, so it is unsurprising that she had held on to orchestral aspirations for some time: it might be assumed that she embarked upon this specific degree as a result of this aspiration. However, prior to this Masters she had completed an undergraduate degree at another college, and it is possible that her beliefs about her employability had gone unchallenged throughout this degree. Yasmin made constant reference to giving up the bassoon entirely, since she did not want to have a career in music if it did not mean she was playing the bassoon. This means that she had ruled out teaching if it would end up becoming her full-time career:

I: What's the aspiration for the future?

Y: I think I'm going to see how this year goes, and then I think- I think I'm literally going to evaluate at the end of every year because I don't just want a- like, I really really want to be like, in an orchestra or freelancing well, and I don't just want to be, like, a peri- I don't, I know peripatetic- some people absolutely love teaching, but I don't just want to become like, a peripatetic teacher. I, erm, and I know some people are great with that but I'm not a very good teacher, and I don't really enjoy it cause I don't have much patience.

Yasmin's attitude towards her future suggests a certain naivety: she possesses many beliefs that the more established participants report possessing either when

they first left college, or whilst they were a student. For example, Yasmin is very clear that she does not want to be a peripatetic teacher because she is not good at it. Many respondents did not realise that they either enjoyed teaching or were good at it until they tried it – and Yasmin is very open about not doing any teaching whilst she was completing her degree. This suggests that relevant professional experience is key to making students aware of their own abilities: if Yasmin had experienced teaching before deciding that she wasn't a very good teacher, her perspective would seem more founded. Instead, it is possible to interpret Yasmin's dismissiveness of teaching as a belief rooted in the idea that teaching is somehow a less valid career option than playing, which is a well-established narrative within classical music (Bennett, 2007, Miller & Baker, 2007). Additionally, Yasmin's career aspirations are primarily centred around roles that will allow her to play the bassoon. Over time many of the establishing musicians became more open to career strands outside of playing their instrument, shifting their focus from playing their instrument to being involved in music more generally. It is not possible to know what Yasmin is doing for a living now, or even if she is still playing the bassoon, but if her trajectory is similar to that of the more established participants in the study it could be expected that she has broadened her perspectives in the 18 months since the interview.

### 8.1.3 Abandonment of musical aspirations altogether:

A small number of participants talked about circumstances which may cause them to change their aspirations in the future. This indicates that, rather than simply moving from point A to point B, aspirations are constantly evaluated. For both Josh and Zoe, the prospect of having a family was ultimately more important than their careers as musicians, suggesting that although their musical aspirations are strong, they might eventually be overruled:

There's [pause] there's I mean there's the long-term thing of I'd like to be settled down, have a family, that [inaudible]. I don't know how that fits in with my career as it is at the moment. I mean it's not really applicable at the stage I'm at in my life but at some point in the future there's obviously [pause] money becomes way more important. Which, erm, I'd be quite- I'm quite open to the idea of doing an entirely non-musical job. Erm, so probably not doing- going into events full

time but maybe like, podcasts, I was thinking recently about radio production, how to get into that. Erm, I mean these are phases that kind of go away and come back.

I: Sure.

J: But, erm, yeah. I'd be quite happy to do something like that instead of doing a career as a performer, I think.

I: Yeah

J: Erm. wouldn't wanna go and do a PGCE I don't think, not at this stage, but. I've got a mate who does classroom, curriculum music teaching, but as a peri, and he seems to enjoy that. He was the guy I shadowed and I think that would be pretty cool as well. (Josh, bassoon, EM)

I think for me, my whole life has been, erm, I would choose family over career. So, I hope I never actually have to make a choice like that – as dramatic as that but I would love to have kids, I want to have a happy marriage and I, and I would do whatever it takes to- to have that. And, erm, I will never choose being a trumpeter over that and I don't think I'll ever have to make that choice, but erm, I think that's something that I feel is important for me to remember as well, that- life is I think, about so much more than playing the trumpet, even though it's what I love and what I want to do. (Zoe, trumpet, EM)

Although Josh talks of taking an entirely non-musical job in order to support a family, upon closer analysis, it appears that he is in fact saying that he would give up his playing career in order to have a family, rather than giving up music entirely. This is unsurprising, since, in the absence of a salaried playing job in an orchestra or theatre, playing work is generally less predictable and therefore not the most financially stable line of work. Similarly, Zoe talks of life being 'so much more than playing the trumpet,' which may not indicate a willingness to abandon music altogether, rather rearrange her career priorities away from playing for a living. This supports previous research that suggests that although musicians are motivated to achieve their goals, more general 'life goals' can become more important (Burland, 2005).

Edward suggests that his mental health is as important to him as a music career, meaning that he would give up his dreams of being an opera singer in order to stay healthy:

I wouldn't make it all my life [singing] cause there's other things I wanna do, but there's other parts of me that actually I really like and enjoy but that's just one thing I've been trained to do. If- if- if you understand what I mean so it's just like, there's you don't- there's other parts, not being forced

to basically be something from parents- like parental, so, erm, if if I don't get myself a job in music first off, if I don't get myself a job in music at all, it wouldn't mind me at all really. Erm, cause I wanna be- I'd rather have a healthy mind. (Edward, tenor, GM)

Although musicians tend to be highly motivated individuals, Edward's perspective indicates that aspirations do have their limit, and these limits can be personal depending on the participant's circumstances. It is possible that Edward feels comfortable in the knowledge that he could turn away from a music career if he wanted to, because he does not feel pressure from his parents to succeed.

## 8.2 Factors affecting changes in aspirations

From the above, it is clear that the musicians in this study developed their aspirations in variety of different ways, for a plethora of reasons. It is clear that a change in aspirations is complex and individual: for some participants a specific key event motivated them to change their perspective, and for others there was a smoother period of realisation. Both musical and non-musical factors contributed to these aspirations and their change. Some factors were both musical and lifestyle factors, which is unsurprising, since artistic life blurs the boundaries between occupational and private life,' (Menger, 1999, p.554). Table 8 is a summary of these factors.

*Table 8: Summary of Factors Affecting Aspirational Development*

<b>Musical Factors</b>	<b>Lifestyle Factors</b>
Creativity	Financial stability
Stress mitigation	Routine
Broadening, holistic focus on music	Flexibility/freedom
Perception of musical skill	Family
	Faith
<b>Shared factors</b>	
Enjoyment	
Individuality	
Recognition	



## 8.2.1 Musical factors

### *8.2.1.1 Creativity*

In general, the most prominent musical reason for changing aspirations was a search for career strands with an opportunity for creativity. For the most part, this occurred amongst the musicians who had originally aspired to an orchestral position, but had changed their opinions after experiencing it, for example Josh, Sophie, and Freddy. The high percentage of participants who had originally aspired to play in the orchestra but ultimately deprioritised it or turned away from it completely suggests that orchestral playing may be seen as a 'given' career path at the outset of a music degree. Whilst in education, Josh, Sophie and Freddy came to the realisation that orchestral playing might not be a good fit for them personally. This indicates that orchestral experiences whilst in college do serve as a useful litmus test for students when assessing their suitability for future careers. However, it is interesting that participants such as Yasmin did not think that there was anything more creative available to her than the orchestra. It is also possible that she never sought it out, since at the time of interview her ambition to play with the orchestra was quite strong. This indicates that different musicians place different levels of priority on opportunities to be creative when building their future careers.

### *8.2.1.2 Stress mitigation*

Zoe's experiences as a freelance trumpet player – and a self-confessed perfectionist – indicate that some musicians may reassess their career aspirations after discovering its mental demands. Although originally aspiring to be a soloist, her discovery that she could 'share the nerves' with other members of the orchestra meant that she sought out further ensemble opportunities in addition to her solo work. For Zoe, reorganising her priorities as a musician steadied her mentally, suggesting that some musicians do not fully understand the demands of certain aspirations until they undertake them in the profession.

### *8.2.1.3 Broadening, holistic focus on music*

The vast majority of participants who appeared to broaden their aspirations did so by adding more general musical jobs to their portfolio of work, such as teaching, arranging, and composing. It is very possible that this took place as a result of other, non-musical factors, such as a need to become financially stable or a search for freedom, but nevertheless this may indicate that musicians are willing to compromise on specific goals in order to stay within music.

### *8.2.1.4 Perception of musical skill:*

It is possible that some participants shifted their aspirations as a result of evaluating their own musical skill, however this is rather more veiled. Recall Richard, for example, talking about not being good enough to be in the LSO: in actual fact he ascribes this to a wish to avoid becoming 'crazy' and 'practice-obsessed,' implying that he might be good enough if he put in the work. Perhaps abandoning a more high-level aspiration is an opportunity for Richard to protect himself and feel in control of his musical future.

## 8.2.2 Lifestyle Factors

Non-musical factors seemed to centre around the type of lifestyle that participants aspired towards, namely one with stability and freedom at its heart.

### *8.2.2.1 Financial stability*

Many musicians in this study reported changing their aspirations as a result of a search for more financial security. At the time of the interview, Chris's motivation to pay off his United States student loans was so strong that he was even considering taking a full-time band director's job in a high school, in addition to playing with the State Symphony Orchestra. He reveals that he could have gone to 'a good law school' after taking the LSAT (Law School Admission Test) which no doubt would have provided him with more lucrative work than his pursuits as a musician, however he opted to stay within music. Chris's perspective is representative of the sacrifices that many musicians make to pursue their career,

suggesting that financial concerns only influence musicians' aspirations to a point. Similarly, Phoebe and Leanne, who are both determined to be financially stable and therefore take jobs in arts administration, at the time of the interview were still working in music which may indicate that a certain level of musical aspiration still remains even when exiting a 'musician's career.' For some participants, an aspiration for financial security was borne of a desire to have a family in the near or distant future.

#### *8.2.2.2 Routine:*

Leanne's perceived discontinuity of a freelance career prompted her to ultimately pursue a job in arts administration. She decided that her need to organise herself and others would be incompatible with a more ad-hoc musician's lifestyle, suggesting that whilst financial stability in particular is important to some, the notion of stability can filter outwards into more general lifestyle factors, such as a desire for routine and predictability. Additionally, this was a conclusion that Leanne came to later on in her degree, which could infer that it was as a result of her having got to know herself better and therefore realising the importance of routine for her wellbeing.

#### *8.2.2.3 Faith:*

When talking about her aspirations, Sophie mentioned her faith as being more important to her than her aspirations as a musician:

S: I've never really had strong aspirations, as a person. So I've never, you know people say,, 'What are your goals in life' I'm like - 'Don't really know?' Whatever. And I think that- I've struggled with that actually cause the music world is often quite goal- driven, and so people say you know if you're gonna be a musician or likewise an actor or a dancer, people kind of say you should only do it if you really want to do it, cause it's hard. It's a hard world to be in and I'm like- that's that's kind of made me doubt I'm like- 'I don't know if I really want to do it' but then I'm like there's nothing I r- I love it, but I don't feel, like tied to it, like I don't feel like my life will suddenly lose meaning if I wasn't a musician anymore.

I: Yes

S: Erm, and so... yeah from that point of view I don't have any specific goals, er, I think the most- the thing that defines my future the most is the fact that I'm a Christian and therefore my [pause] I guess my big goal is to glorify God in what I do- and I hope that I can do that through music, or I could do that, er, if I become a parent, I hope that I could do that through my family or- you just kind of - so in that sense it's more kind of general stuff that are my goals, rather than specific, 'I wanna play in this orchestra' sort of thing. (Sophie, oboe, GM)

As a result she saw her goals as being more general: rather than aspiring to specific job roles, Sophie's ambitions were guided by a desire to 'glorify God,' possibly, but not exclusively through music. Her lack of strong goals and desires were making her question whether she really wanted to pursue a career in music, not through lack of love or drive, but through a feeling that she was different, or that she somehow deviated from the goal-driven norm. In actual fact, she is not all that different from many of the participants in this study, reporting an aspiration to have a varied and enjoyable career, playing, teaching and workshop-leading. It is interesting, then, that she questioned her dedication to a music career because she felt like she did not want it 'enough.' This suggests that the established narrative of relentless pursuit for success can be demotivating for some, simply because not all musicians fit that narrative. It is also important to note that at the time of the interview, Sophie had just completed her degree and was likely to have come from an establishment where this narrative was well-accepted. Many more experienced participants, after graduating, had mellowed their aspirations to a similar level to Sophie's, aspiring to a varied and enjoyable career rather than a focus on 'top jobs.' It is therefore possible, that as time went on, Sophie felt less different to those around her.

### 8.2.3 Shared factors

#### 8.2.3.4 *Enjoyment*

Amongst the participants in this study, by far the most commonly mentioned aspiration was to enjoy their career.

I think, first of all finding- finding your niche in that, you can find something that really does give you kind of job satisfaction. Erm, and one of the things I've discovered during my time at college is that my level of job satisfaction for playing in orchestras is very low, and that's' why I've kind of put

the- put the lid on that, er, for the time being. Erm, so that's' one challenge, and something which will probably take a few years, to sort of explore, and 'What do I really enjoy?' (Freddy, violin, GM)

I absolutely do stick with what I want, because I find something I enjoy and then go after it.  
(Martha, trombone, EM)

I taught when I lived in London which is before I even went to college. Worked out very early on that it's not something I wanted to do. I'm not very good at it and I don't enjoy it. And I'm gonna leave it to people that tick at least one of those boxes. (Natalie, soprano, EM)

Participants place equal importance on pursuing career strands which do bring enjoyment, as they do eliminating those which do not. It is not surprising that participants place a certain amount of importance on enjoyment, since many reported choosing to do a degree in music because they had enjoyed it so much at school. For Phoebe, memories of enjoying music as a teenager served as motivation to enjoy music again after having experienced difficulties at college:

P: Yeah, I'm doing some today, a friend at work who plays the flute, and I, are doing some duets, later, some Christmas duets.

I: Yeah!

P: Cause I thought, right well I was watching a concert with her the other day and I thought 'We've worked together for three years and we've never played music together.'

I: Yes.

P: 'Let's do it, you know, why not? We've got this talent, we've got time, we've got the venue. Let's play some music together!' So we're gonna do that today, and I think it's doing little things like that, will kind of ease me back into doing it for fun- and for me. (Phoebe, guitar, GM)

This is interesting because, at the time of interview, Phoebe was working as an administrative assistant at a music college, and no longer had aspirations to play the guitar for a living. Despite this, she still aspired to enjoy playing music, suggesting that the drive to play music is not always connected with a drive to have a career playing music. This may suggest that she was moving towards developing an amateur musician identity (Burland, 2005). Despite having a challenging time at college, including a period of time where she was too injured to play, Phoebe's aspiration to enjoy playing the guitar regardless, albeit outside of a music career,

indicates that an enjoyment of music can be enduring and strong even in times of difficulty.

#### *8.2.3.5 Individuality*

Some participants based their aspirations on a desire to be individual: Chris reported wanting to ‘craft his own future,’ and at the time of the interview was combining playing, teaching and arranging work in order to make a living. Chris’s strong sense of individuality meant that he did not seek career advice whilst at college, for fear of being told what to do. For Alice, finding her ‘niches’ was a way to exploit her individuality for musical success, but also a way of taking ownership of her perceived cultural differences that she felt held her back whilst she was in education. Whilst not all participants necessarily considered themselves as individual, a large percentage of them made reference to the individual nature of music careers, and the differences between many musicians’ personal pathways into the profession.

#### *8.2.3.6 Recognition*

At the time of the interview, Edward was working towards a career as an operatic tenor, and whilst he had broadened his aspirations a little during his degree, his core aim to become an opera singer endured. As discussed in 7.2.6, Edward was anxious to know all about how to become ‘big in the game.’ He made references to roles he had played whilst in college, which had been key to the development of his identity as both a singer and a performer:

I will always remember, you always remember the main parts. Yeah you always do. The first main part was funny - I mean I was playing a mute! Erm, it's, you know, it's still a main part because it gave people the opportunity to see that I was a physical performer as well. And that gave me an actually interestingly more, more more work as well, in college. I was playing more mutes! I was still on stage, I was still working it. Then there first, erm, we did, er street scenes, Kurt Weill's street scenes and that was to do with dancing and singing at the same time. That was great and that really showed people cause obviously when I was at the, I was, erm, in school I did dance- I did dance a level I did drama, and I did the three, so then that really, cause I was, and I was a performance scholar. So then-

I: Hence why you looked at musical theatre

A: Hence why I moved to, exactly, yeah. So then people say, and I got people going 'Oh god you're really good at dancing' which I was obviously I was like you know, 'thank you very much' but I was like 'well I have been doing this for you know quite a long time actually, yeah' and singing was only the thing I was good at from those. I was only good at dancing as well. So but then again then, that was a really really good moment, but then, erm, fourth year we did, erm, la Vie Parisienne, I was playing a character called Brasilein. It was quite, you know out there character cause at the moment where you sat- sat on centre stage, music starts it's me, I'm like 'yeah, everyone's looking at me' it's, this is my moment. And there's something, yeah, you know exactly, you always remember those. (Edward, tenor, GM)

Edward makes frequent mention of gaining recognition from others: being seen as a 'physical performer,' 'really good at dancing,' having 'his moment.' It is therefore likely that Edward's aspirations stem from a desire for recognition as a performer. His core aspiration did not change whilst he was at college, which is unsurprising: his aspiration to be an opera singer went relatively unchallenged because his degree provided him with the opportunity to further solidify his identity as an opera singer. Unlike students who changed their minds about other musical pursuits (such as orchestral playing), Edward's experiences lived up to his expectations, and the aspiration endured.

Leanne's desire for recognition manifests itself differently: she did not want recognition for being a principal player:

I would never want to be a soloist but I was really happy to sit in second trombone, because it would like, meant that - again it's probably because - reflects in what I do now. I never wanna be the person at the front, but I wanna be the person that helps the person at the front. (Leanne, trombone, EM)

Although she freely admits that she had 'no idea' her current job existed when she finished her degree, it is likely that Leanne's desire to help others achieve recognition is linked to her enjoyment of the job that she does now. Although it may be an expectation within popular culture that musicians are motivated by recognition, Schwartz found that, whilst musicians and artists do place importance upon the self-enhancement values of Power and Achievement, they are more driven by Self-direction and Benevolence (1992). Sophie makes reference to 'feeling different' at conservatoire on account of not wanting to seem 'ostentatious,'

however it could be that she is more usual as a musician than she thinks. This may suggest that there is an established narrative within conservatoires that alienate some types of musician. This is in some ways unsurprising, considering the high level of competition that exists within these institutions, but these respondents' accounts suggest that a prevailing narrative around a 'hunger' for recognition could impact students negatively, meaning that conservatoires may benefit from supporting students who do not fit this mould.

#### 8.2.4 Schwartz's Theory of Values

Factors that influenced participants' aspiration development can be broadly compared to Schwartz's Values (1992) (Table 9). Schwartz conceptualised these values as guiding principles that individuals use to inform future life choices and directions, including employment, which is 'one main avenue to express values,' (Knafo & Sagiv, 2004, p.256). This more established set of values was theorised to represent the general population, and as such, some of the factors explored above are particular to musicians and cannot be compared. Table 10 is a reproduction of Table 9 with Schwartz's values added, where compatible.

*Table 9: Table to show Schwartz's 10 Values*

<b>Definitions of 10 Values (Schwartz, 1992)</b>	
<i>Hedonism</i>	Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself
<i>Achievement</i>	Personal success through demonstrating one's competence according to social standards
<i>Power</i>	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
<i>Security</i>	Safety, harmony and stability of society, relationships and of self
<i>Conformity</i>	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
<i>Tradition</i>	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide
<i>Benevolence</i>	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
<i>Universalism</i>	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature
<i>Self-direction</i>	Independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring
<i>Stimulation</i>	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life



Table 10: Table to show Intersection between Aspiration Development Factors and Schwartz's Values

<b>Musical Factors</b>	<b>Lifestyle Factors</b>
Creativity / self-direction	Financial stability / Security / Tradition
Stress mitigation / security	Routine / Security
Broadening, holistic focus on music	Freedom / Self-direction
Perception of musical skill	Family / Tradition
Recognition / Achievement / Power	Faith / Tradition
<b>Shared factors</b>	
Enjoyment / Stimulation / Hedonism	
Individuality / Self-direction	

The above suggests that musicians' values can be broadly compared to those of the general population. The way in which participants spoke about creativity and individuality merit further discussion. Firstly, although both of these factors are covered by self-direction in Schwartz's model, amongst musicians there is a distinction between these two values: individuality was more about celebrating individual, personal differences, and creativity was about saying or creating something new. The above values could also go towards explaining the tensions that participants feel between their desire for self-direction and their conservatoire education. Gaunt (2008) reports instrumental tutors' feelings of 'responsibility' to pass tradition down to their students. It is possible, then that there is a mismatch between conservatoire tutors' values and those of their students: whereas tutors value tradition and conformity, students value self-direction. However it is important to consider that many respondents did not report feeling these tensions whilst studying – only Josh felt as though his interests were being quashed – which supports the notion that establishing musicians generally reassessed their values after graduation. Perhaps increased engagement with values would be beneficial during conservatoire education, but on the other hand, it might threaten existing narratives within the conservatoire.

### 8.3 Conclusion:

This chapter has considered the aspirations held by both sets of participants, and the way in which these aspirations developed, both during the course of the music

college degree and after graduation. Participants' experiences suggest that that aspirations change frequently and for a variety of different reasons, and although the vast majority of participants appear to be motivated by music, above all, many have goals which are more guided by lifestyle factors.

Many participants reported having changed their aspirations as a result of having got to know themselves better: for Richard, realising that he would have to become 'practice obsessed' to join the LSO made him revise his aspirations to something more achievable. Leanne linked her salaried arts administration job to a need for routine and organisation. However, it is also possible that many participants made these sorts of realisations in conjunction with assessing their own level of musicianship.

There is also evidence to suggest that the development and endurance of aspirations whilst in college is dependent on the way in which students experience these activities whilst studying. For example, at the outset of their degrees, many participants aspired to be orchestral musicians, but their experiences with the orchestras at their institution caused them to either solidify their aspiration or rethink it. Some respondents formed entirely new aspirations as a result of professional placements undertaken at college, suggesting that opportunities to experience different career strands first-hand can be some of the most powerful ways to develop students' aspirations.

The importance of experience can also be observed amongst the establishing musicians: many report that professional experiences presented further opportunity to develop and focus their aspirations. This suggests that throughout the transition into the music profession, musicians' aspirations are constantly being reviewed and revised.

## 9. Characterising the Transition for Conservatoire Graduates: a Proposed Model

Issues raised in the previous three chapters will now be discussed concurrently in order to build a holistic picture of career transitions for career-young musicians.

### 9.1 Problems of definition: challenges to existing transition narratives

From the findings discussed thus far it is apparent that the career building process for establishing musicians is complex, and therefore difficult to define in a linear fashion. Whereas researchers in non-music disciplines have more successfully theorised stages of development in students' transitions into workplaces or the labour market (Wendlandt & Rochdlen, 2008; Reid & Petocz, 2013) the sheer spread of musicians' career activities alongside their tendencies to combine these activities to form a lucrative and fulfilling career mean that the career-building process is rather more messy. This was communicated through participants' accounts of their own experiences: they often found it difficult to describe in precise terms how their career had developed, instead explaining how their work patterns had ebbed and flowed according to their own availability, interests and opportunities. Furthermore, regardless of graduate or establishing musician status, respondents still spoke in somewhat temporary or liminal terms: freelance musicians tended to be looking towards the next job or project, and even those in more stable jobs – such as Beka who was teaching or Natalie in the opera chorus – readily admitted that their job may not be 'for life.' These perspectives echo findings regarding gig economy workers' identities (Ashford et al., 2018; Petriglieri et al., 2019), which indicate that the process of transition may not end as neatly for those in precarious jobs as it does for those in more traditional work roles. Much previous research has focused on the idea of a 'resolution' of identity crises as an end to transition, whereas participants' reports in this study point to the possibility that transition for establishing musicians is either very protracted or does not resolve itself similarly to those in other domains. In any case, the vast majority of participants appeared to be negotiating discrepancies between the person they

were and the person they wished to become, which hints at a period of identity crisis (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2015). This could suggest that even the more established musicians in this study were still 'in transition.' On the other hand, it is possible that these identity discrepancies are something to be consistently reckoned with, or even a source of motivation, as was the case with Reid et al.'s gig economy workers, meaning that musicians are always 'in transition' in some way.

## 9.2 What *does* characterise transition for conservatoire graduates?

The above study investigated transition by inviting respondents to reflect upon their experiences of *Conservatoire Education*, and, for the establishing musician participants, its perceived impact on the subsequent career-building process. Graduating musicians reflected on their envisaged future career-building in addition to any career-building activities they had already undertaken, whilst studying or since. The reason for encouraging participants to reflect upon their education was two-fold: firstly, it is widely accepted that a conservatoire degree prepares students for careers as performing musicians more overtly than a general music degree (Creech et al., 2008; Gaunt, 2008, 2010; Kingsbury, 1987; Perkins, 2013). Despite this, research continues to suggest that conservatoire graduates are generally unprepared for a career in music, and therefore first-hand accounts from musicians may provide a vital picture of how and why these career-young musicians are (un)prepared. For this reason special attention was paid to participants' accounts of careers education whilst at conservatoire.

Secondly, an individual's experience of transition is dependent on their environment prior to the transition, and it therefore made sense to explore possible links between this experience and the period of transition. Career preparation at conservatoires mainly centred around three aspects of the degree. Firstly, students attended CV and self-promotion classes, which were compulsory for undergraduates but optional at postgraduate level. Other one-off seminars – such as panels with established professionals or skills-based lectures – were arranged throughout the year although attendance at these was not compulsory. Secondly, some participants mentioned work placements and these were formative

experiences, either revealing new career possibilities, highlighting previously unidentified competencies, or enabling them to rule out more unsuitable aspirations. Thirdly, and more tacitly, respondents tended to view the degree itself as career preparation, especially time spent preparing operas or playing with the symphony orchestra, which mirrors Davies's findings from 2004. These could be seen as conservatoire activities which emulate professional performance experiences as closely as possible in an educational setting: the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland has labelled these 'proto-professional activities.' Respondents often spoke critically of their career preparation classes, deeming them too generic to be useful, or not detailed enough: curiously many graduating students were disappointed that these classes were not more instructive. A significant proportion of the respondents suggested that they would have liked more one-to-one careers support, and paradoxically, although all colleges claim to offer this sort of support, only one participant reported arranging this for himself. This hints at a certain level of apathy on the part of student musicians, suggesting that students do not see career preparation activities as relevant or important whilst studying at conservatoire. This may also point to a wider issue concerning students' priorities during their degrees: whilst respondents had a desire to improve their technique and become better musicians, this focus may come at the expense of employability. Rather than engaging with career preparation activities, many participants reported asking principal study tutors for advice. This is unsurprising, since this one-to-one tuition is generally accepted to be the central part of the conservatoire degree (Carey et al., 2013; Gaunt, 2008, 2010; Perkins, 2013). For many students, the principal study tutor will be the member of staff with whom they spend the most time over the course of their degree, so it makes sense that many participants valued a teacher who cared about them and their future in addition to being an excellent, well-connected player or singer. The principal study tutor's expertise was a double-edged sword, however. Although, in many cases, participants did find their teachers' expertise inspiring and motivational, the high status of tutors caused students to find them difficult to relate to or intimidating. Furthermore, in some cases, negative perceptions of teachers' playing skills caused disillusionment. This illustrates that although the principal study tutor is an important figure to many

developing musicians, their level of influence is complex and individualised. This is potentially problematic because it suggests that those students who are not actively engaging with career preparation outside of their principal study tutor's advice may be 'making do' with the advice they are receiving.

Every respondent in the study reported having *aspirations*, and the vast majority had changed these aspirations at least once, if not multiple times. This was especially pertinent because in all accounts it was clear that a change or development of aspiration was a key part of transition. For some musicians, aspirations developed as a result of planned experiences – for example work placements that were liked or disliked – or unplanned experiences like injury or disappointing exam results. It was quite clear that as students and graduates developed their aspirations, they did so as a result of engaging more readily with their own values and priorities in life. Whereas some of these were musical factors such as a need for creativity or recognition, as these individuals got to know themselves better they began to take note of other priorities, such as a wish for stable work hours or a salary that would enable them to raise a family in financial security. It was clear that in both cohorts a greater self-knowledge enabled participants to clarify their aspirations. However, this was not associated with greater feelings of security about the future if the individual came to realise that they were somehow unusual or did not fit the mould. This indicates that although aspirations and their development are a key part of transition, these are only positive experiences when suitably supported.

Exploration of the establishing musicians' experiences of building their careers indicate that there is a general assumption amongst graduates that they will become a freelance musician, at least in the short term. Some establishing musicians and graduates differed in their perspectives on this in that the graduates tended to see freelancing as something to do before getting a more permanent job with an orchestra, whereas many of the establishing musicians had settled into their freelance roles and desired to continue in this way, picking and choosing their preferred work strands. Given that many of these settled freelance musicians had

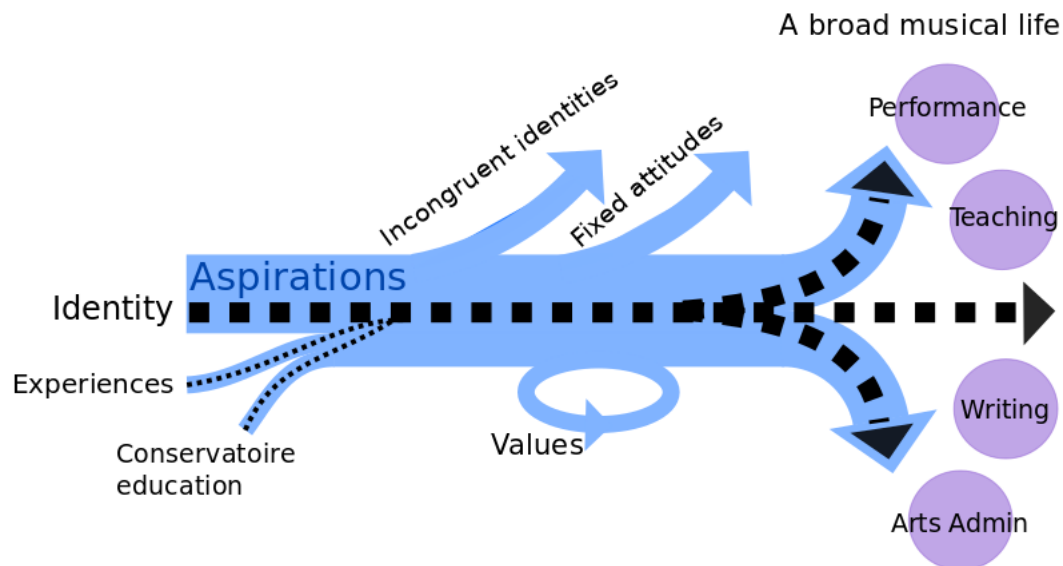
assigned less priority to the securing of a salaried position with an orchestra since graduating, it is very possible that many of these less experienced musicians went on to reassess their priorities and aspirations similarly. Some of the more established freelancers shed their more fixed views on what made a ‘successful’ or ‘acceptable’ musician, and instead sought to cultivate work patterns that supported their identities as musicians in a more holistic sense, using teaching and workshop leading alongside performance engagements to build a portfolio of work that reflected their values. Participant reports suggested that building and maintaining a career in music was difficult but not impossible. Although it is widely expected that a musician’s career involves some degree of financial difficulty (graduating musicians frequently alluded to this) establishing musicians felt that it was the financial uncertainty that was more challenging. In other words, the more established musicians no longer felt like they were struggling financially but they still had worries about the future. This was augmented by musicians feeling wholly responsible for their future success on the one hand – proactively seeking contacts and networking whilst maintaining their technique – and on the other hand feeling ultimately powerless since they were still reliant on someone else to book them as a player. Despite the fact that musicians’ aspirations became more fluid upon graduation, there was evidence that participants in both cohorts held comparatively fixed perspectives on what ‘sort of person’ they needed to be in order to be successful: recall Martha who feels as though she has to go against her true self to be chatty at gigs in order to secure more work, or Alice who fears that she does not ‘kiss the right asses’ to further her singing career. This presents something of a paradox, since participants allude to their individuality, or ‘niches’ as strengths on the one hand, yet these differences also appear to be barriers to them feeling career-ready.

### 9.3 Towards a model:

The following diagram illustrates the way in which the above dimensions interact, in order to suggest a model upon which conservatoire graduates’ transitions might be based. Firstly, as detailed above, it is possible that the end point of this

transition is unknown, and therefore this model could conceivably perpetuate itself throughout a musicians' life, especially those in freelance careers.

Figure 2: Diagram to illustrate Conservatoire Graduates' Transitions



### 9.3.1 Aspirations:

As represented by the blue arrow, the constant development of aspirations was the central part of participants' transitions. Although some participants report making 'snap' changes to aspirations, many graduating and establishing musicians came to 'smoother' realisations that their aspirations had changed, sometimes multiple times over the course of their degree and beyond. As Markus and Nurius (1986) assert, the roles that individuals hold for themselves in the future serve as motivations, becoming 'influential in directing behaviour,' (p.955). Establishing musicians' aspirations moved from a hope to become a professional performer to a hope to become a professional musician in a more holistic sense, combining performance engagements with performance-adjacent work strands. This suggests that as musicians became more established, they become more aware of the reality of the job market, since statistics continue to suggest that musicians do not make their sole income from performing (Bennett, 2008; ven der Maas & Hallam, 2012). Aspirations were influenced by a variety of factors, denoted by the 'tributary'



arrows running in and out of the central line of the diagram. A breakdown of these contributing factors will follow.

### 9.3.2 Experiences

A key driver of aspirational development for all participants was first-hand experience, whether this was through involvement in conservatoire ensembles and productions, undertaking work placements as part of a professional development module, or taking paid engagements outside of the degree entirely. It has been well established in healthcare education that encouraging students to enact their professional futures as soon as possible enables them to develop a strong sense of their own professional identity (Clouder, 2005), ultimately resulting in a smoother transition into the workforce, so this finding is not entirely surprising. However, participants' accounts of their attitudes before and after work placements were striking. Some were apprehensive about certain work scenarios, and until experiencing them had not imagined that they would be good at them. This indicates that students may be unaware of their competencies beyond playing their instruments, which, given that many musicians will not make the majority of income from the playing of their instrument, could hinder graduates' transitions into the workforce. For some musicians, saying yes to work that they had never done before opened up more employment possibilities and ultimately influenced aspirations. This was particularly true for Ian, who described having to be 'dragged' to try out new things. This may suggest that narrow-mindedness could be a barrier to career success. Ian's description of being 'dragged' could also indicate that it requires the input of another person or system to motivate students to think about their future: just as younger instrumental learners, however motivated, sometimes need parental persuasion to practise (Davidson et al., 1995) it is possible that institutions assume too readily that students will engage with activities beyond their private practice in order to influence their future as musicians.

### 9.3.3 'Shedding' of ideas and attitudes

A broader perspective on aspirations was accompanied by a shedding of narrow-minded attitudes and ideas, often pertaining to definitions of success and 'ideal' musicians' careers. Amongst the graduate participants there was evidence of these more fixed attitudes, especially regarding teaching which was seen as a 'second-best' career plan. Crucially these musicians did not yet associate teaching with the possibility of a portfolio career, instead viewing teaching as an activity that is done in place of a performance career. In reality, it is unrealistic to imagine a future career that only consists of performance work, which suggests that it is this sort of fixed attitude that is shed during transition. Letters data suggest that musicians have to 'let go' of a lot of parts of their conservatoire degree, with participants making reference to 'bitchiness,' 'worry' and the fear of others' judgement. This is similar to Juuti and Littleton's (2012) findings that indicate that graduate musicians have to let go of the 'shoulds' of their Academy education in order to strengthen their own artistic voice and convictions through their transition.

### 9.3.4 Shedding of incongruent identities

In general, participants' aspirations were underpinned by identity, represented by the dotted arrow in the centre of the diagram. Therefore, in addition to the shedding of attitudes, some participants let go of ambitions or identities which they found to be incongruent. For some, there were certain aims that were ultimately inconsistent with who they believed themselves to be – for example Leanne who turned to an arts administration career after deciding that the uncertainty of life as a freelance musician was not compatible with her identity as 'an organised person.' Zoe mellowed her attitude towards becoming a soloist after realising that full-time solo playing was incompatible with her perfectionist nature.

There was evidence that some graduate musicians were evaluating their compatibility with their chosen career paths at the point of interview but their strategies for dealing with perceived incompatibilities were different. Yasmin, a bassoon graduate, was concerned that she was 'a stressy person' and wondered how this may impact her future as an orchestral musician. In comparison to Zoe,

who coped with feelings of stress by focusing on different work strands, Yasmin had decided that if she could not find a job in an orchestra she would simply give up playing the bassoon: instead of re-organising her career goals and aspirations, her proposed solution was to abandon the dream altogether. At the point of interview, Yasmin was only just beginning her career, and therefore the contrast between Zoe and Yasmin's experiences could suggest that time and experience is a major contributor to the broadening of aspirations. Although Zoe aspired to a soloist's career she still broadened her outlook by undertaking a wide variety of additional work after graduation.

#### 9.3.5 Conservatoire Education

Participants' experiences of transition were influenced by their conservatoire education. Part of that influence came in the form of work placements and work experiences (arranged through the conservatoire or part of the curriculum) as discussed above. Therefore, the 'conservatoire education' section of the diagram, on the left, refers more generally to other aspects of the conservatoire course and input from tutors. The vast majority of respondents felt well set up to play their instrument at a high level, which is unsurprising since it is widely accepted that the central part of conservatoire education is the development of the principal study, which takes place in one-to-one lessons (Carey & Grant, 2015; Ford, 2010; Perkins, 2013). This indicates that the conservatoire degree's primary aim of providing a rigorous performance-based education is being met for instrumentalists. On the other hand, all three establishing singers in the study did not feel that the level of technical preparation they had received was satisfactory, with two of them still taking vocal lessons at the time of the interview. It is unclear why the singers' experiences differed so markedly from those of the instrumentalists, but further research may shed more light on singers' experiences of transition, especially since these data suggest that singers may present a special case. Despite feeling technically able on their instruments, respondents emphasised that this skill alone would not help them to 'make it' as a musician and some felt as though they had left their conservatoire with the ability to play, but not with the ability to find work

in a broader sense: Josh mentioned wanting to put on concerts but not knowing where to begin in terms of logistics, for example.

The data explored in Chapter 7 reveal that conservatoire modules focusing on career skills (that is to say, not principal study lessons or academic study) were centred around self-promotion, and did not necessarily lead to students exploring the career possibilities available to them. Participants suggested that despite being relatively confident in their self-promotion skills, many musicians find it very difficult to get self-managed projects off the ground, suggesting that a curriculum centred around the development of self-promotion skills, whilst useful, may be painting a false picture for students entering the profession. Whilst there is no doubt that competency in self-promotion may help graduates to feel in control of their futures during a difficult time, it may be possible to overstate the importance of this. This is especially important for newcomers in the creative industries, since a narrow focus on individual agency can cause self-exploitation in the pursuit of work (Teague & Smith, 2016; McRobbie, 2002). Above all, some of the most effective parts of conservatoire education were those that enabled students to see themselves in a variety of different roles, for example in the form of work placements, detailed above in 'experiences.' As discussed above, many participants who described having new experiences found their previous perceptions of the job were challenged, which then contributed to a change in attitude and often a change in aspirations. It is therefore possible that a *lack* of these first-hand experiences could directly (and negatively) impact graduates' transitions. Since many respondents reported that first-hand experiences had enabled them to develop their aspirations, and these developments often came about as a result of a previous attitude being challenged, it is possible that a lack of these experiences could result in students' narrow views of music careers going unchallenged throughout the conservatoire degree. That is not to say, of course, that there are not challenges to narrow-minded discourses in other parts of the degree, but since first-hand experience (within and outside of the conservatoire) appeared to be a cementing factor for so many participants, perhaps including work placements as a compulsory part of the degree would have great effects on future students' transitions.

Students' attitudes to orchestral playing and opera singing provide further support to the notion that first-hand experiences are key to aspirational development. The vast majority of participants reported aspiring, at some point, to a career in the orchestra or on the opera stage. Whilst they may not have aspired to do this job full-time, they did not necessarily have any concurrent ambitions. This aspiration endured for many of those participants. This could be due to the fact that those particular, more 'traditional' aspirations are well-supported during conservatoire education: most students will at some point be in several opera productions or orchestral concerts during their degree. It is possible, then, that in the absence of other more diverse professional experiences, playing in the orchestra or singing in the opera may be the only professional experience with which some conservatoire students engage. As a result, these students may, as graduates, only be able to visualise themselves in that one, narrow, musical role. Above, it was asserted that professional experiences allow students to challenge their previous beliefs. Recall Freddy, who realised during his degree that he had 'a low level of satisfaction from sitting and playing in orchestras.' He spoke of experiencing 'a lot of mental stuff' as a result of this, feeling lost and unsure of his future. It therefore may be likely that the provision of orchestral playing as the only compulsory professional experience for conservatoire students results in some students' narrow career views going unchallenged, alongside other students feeling anxious as a result of not relating to this narrow career aim.

#### 9.3.6 Values

Participant values were also key to aspiration development. In particular these were work values: characteristics that individuals prioritise in their current or future employment which play a critical role in career choice and development (Schwartz, 1992). Participants appeared to engage with their values at multiple times during transition, sometimes almost subconsciously, which may suggest that the process of transition is characterised by a constant reckoning with these values. This is in direct contrast to experiences which were often identifiable and quantifiable events which caused participants to make new decisions about their futures. For this

reason, values are illustrated by a loop towards the right of the diagram. As participants became more in touch with their values, it enabled them to let go of aspirations that felt incongruent with these values, in much the same way as participants shed aspirations that they felt were incongruent with their identities. This might suggest that there is an overlap between an individual's values and their identities, however this is not always the case. For instance, Phoebe realised in the end that material rewards – namely money - were important to her, which meant that she began to look for jobs in arts administration instead of pursuing a career as a classical guitarist. However she was keen to distance herself from the idea that she was 'obsessed with money' which could indicate that although she wished to live a comfortable life, she did not consider it to be a strong part of her identity, necessarily. Some participants emphasised the value of creativity, which is broadly similar to Schwartz's value of self-direction (1992). It was striking that the ways in which participants talked about their values suggested that their realisations emerged as they got to know themselves better, and crucially these often took place after graduation from conservatoire education. Amongst others, Josh spoke of aspiring towards a full-time orchestral job whilst studying, however at the time of the interview says that he now sees it as 'a not very good job' on account of 'not being creative ....or solving any problems.' Creativity, self-expression and individuality played an important part in many established musicians' lives, serving as a motivator for future career choices. However, fewer graduate musicians made reference to these values with respect to their future aspirations. This may indicate that students are unaware of their own need for creativity in their future career, regardless of whether they think it important for future employment. In other words, the establishing musicians believe that *they* need creativity in order to feel fulfilled, whereas graduate musicians were more likely to cite the need for creativity as important in terms of their own employability. This suggests that one of the main ways in which institutions might better prepare their students for transition into the music profession would be the provision of activities that encourage them to get to know themselves better by engaging with their values whilst still studying.

### 9.3.7 An end to transition?

Based on the findings of this study it is difficult to assert whether transition ever truly ends for establishing musicians and recent graduates. It could be that identity discrepancies and uncertainty become embedded in the life of these individuals, somehow serving as a driver for continued success, as in Reid et al.'s 2019 study. However, the suggested scenarios of music work and non-music work illustrate the variety of different situations that participants were in at the time of interview. It is unknown whether they are end points or simply 'stops along the way,' but they do highlight the ways in which establishing musicians manage identity discrepancies in their working lives. The freelance musicians had been in transition for a number of years, and still had plans to stay in a relative state of flux: for example Martha, Josh, and Zoe had relatively open-minded outlooks on their work and simply wished to do 'more of the same.' These are the most likely participants for whom transition may either be protracted or even incessant: the nature of freelance work could mean that they do not 'settle' for some time. They were choosing work engagements based upon how they supported their musical identities and work values at any given moment. Ian and Richard, both graduate musicians, had similar aspirations to the freelance musicians, even soon after graduation. Crucially, the two of them had taken gap years before undertaking postgraduate degrees at conservatoire, and it is therefore possible that their previous experiences of building careers (which mainly involved taking occasional gigs and the cultivation of a teaching portfolio) had already helped them to refine their aspirations. It is not possible, at this stage, to make a strong claim for the validity of this claim, however it seems plausible since many students and graduates in this study found real-world work experiences to be key to developing their aspirations. Further research comparing the experiences of graduates undertaking gap years and those commencing postgraduate study immediately may provide further recommendations to educators and graduates alike. On the other hand, Beka, who had previously been a freelancer and was teaching at the time of the interview, appeared to be settled in her identity as a teacher, asserting that, 'whilst I do count myself as a musician and that's important, I kind of think that when somebody says, 'What do you do?' They're asking you 'Where do you make your money?' This

supports the notion that transition is often accompanied by a renegotiation of identity, and echoes Oakland et al.'s findings that a musician identity is often conditional upon being paid for musical engagements (2013). Beka previously described herself as a musician above all, but her work as a teacher had led her to separate her musical identity from her professional identity, represented in the diagram by the 'splitting' of identity pathways. Some participants had cast off elements of their musical identity: Phoebe and Leanne, who had both gone into arts administration since graduating from music college, had not played their instruments since their degrees and no longer considered themselves musicians.<sup>4</sup> Instead they had made career choices that felt consistent with other aspects of their identity, for example Leanne was working as an artist manager because she felt strongly that she was 'an organiser,' which she saw as incongruent with life as a musician. Interestingly, despite the lack of strong salience of a musician identity, they were still not protected from the feelings of liminality that were endemic amongst those who identified as musicians: both were constantly looking ahead to better themselves, with Phoebe even directly linking her training as a musician to her unwillingness to relax and live in the moment. This may say more about the type of person to study at a conservatoire rather than the nature of conservatoire training, however: it is well-known that in order to gain admission to a music conservatoire one must have been motivated to succeed from an early age (Burland, 2005; Manturzewska, 1990). Rather than insinuating that music education 'causes' a need to achieve and be the best, this instead may raise questions about how highly-motivated individuals find meaning without engaging with the activity that used to bring them so much validation. Juuti & Littleton (2012) assert that a key part of music graduates' transitions is an acceptance of lifelong learning: perhaps a focus on learning can persist outside the musical domain as well as within.

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<sup>4</sup> Phoebe in particular had not considered whether or not she was a musician until I asked her at interview. It was almost as if she had 'blocked' this part of herself out since graduating.



#### 9.4 Limitations and further research

The findings of the above study have resulted in a possible model that may represent conservatoire graduates' transitions. Perhaps the greatest limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size: the main interview data came from the experiences of 19 establishing and graduate musicians, meaning that the model may only represent the transitions of *these* participants. For reasons detailed in Chapter 5, the recruitment criteria were purposefully kept narrow, however within the participant cohorts there were a wide spread of experiences, musically and generally. Furthermore, the interview data were analysed separately to the *Letters to my Younger Self* and to an extent this meant that the earlier data acted as a valuable reference point in validating the model. Many facets of the model were supported or complemented by the letters, which may mean that the model is applicable to more conservatoire graduates than only the nineteen whose experiences form the basis of the proposed model. In any case, the findings from this study contribute to continued discourse around conservatoire graduates' transitions into the workforce, and the qualitative findings build a compelling picture of life as an establishing musician in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Previous qualitative research projects of this type have taken place outside the UK (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2014; Juuti, 2012; Juuti & Littleton, 2012) or have relied upon prominent or well-established musicians' retrospective accounts of their career-building process (Creech et al., 2008; Macnamara et al., 2006). The UK research most comparable to this study took place in 2005 (Burland, 2005), meaning that there is a significant gap in knowledge from then until the present day. The job market for musicians is constantly changing, and even over the course of the four-year period during which this research was conducted, conservatoire curricula have been re-designed. It would be beneficial if research concerning the perspectives and experiences of ordinary career-young musicians were more regularly undertaken in order to evaluate the impact of these curricular changes with respect to the changing face of music employment. Furthermore, although the present study provides a compelling insight into musicians' first steps into the professional world, a more longitudinal study which tracks graduate transitions could elicit more detailed perspectives whilst helping to validate the model presented above. Given

that the findings detailed here have raised some links between musicians' lack of career-readiness and their education, institutions may find that continued engagement with graduates' career trajectories proves valuable in keeping courses relevant.

As detailed above, the present study was limited to conservatoire graduates of classical courses, specifically. Furthermore, these participants trained either as instrumentalists or singers. Further research may shed light on career trajectories of composers or conductors training at these institutions. Furthermore, as conservatoires begin to offer courses in popular music or jazz, a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in the career development and aspirations of students of these genres may enable conservatoires to cater to the career development of a wider range of students.

One of the main arguments for undertaking this research was the lack of consideration of the 'new world of work' amongst previous studies of work and work transitions. Many previous studies in all fields have focused on organisations, and more music-specific enquiry has been limited to graduates entering the teaching profession and going into the orchestra. Recent studies of employment are beginning to take a broader perspective, including those in boundaryless careers or working within the gig economy, and findings from this study provide support for the novel assertion that those in more precarious careers may not experience a resolution to transition in the same way that their more stable, contracted, counterparts might. For this reason, further research may be conducted in order to test whether this model can be applied to graduates transiting into other boundaryless careers. This could include artists and dancers, for whom it is more usual to have a freelance career. It may also be interesting, however, to consider graduates' transitions into freelance careers from degrees where a more 'traditional' career path is expected, especially given that many participants in this study felt as though they had to 'let go' of more traditional ideas of music careers in order to find their own success as musicians.

Singers' experiences differed from instrumentalists' so markedly that further detailed research may be beneficial. In general, there was agreement amongst establishing musicians that they were technically capable on their instruments. Graduate musicians exhibited a small amount of anxiety that they may not play well enough to find success in their desired career path, however, if the more established instrumentalists had previously felt this way, their anxieties seemed to have subsided by the time of the interview. The singers, on the other hand, told a different story, with all three establishing singers reporting leaving their conservatoire degrees with technical deficiencies. Alice and Oliver were still taking lessons at the time of interview, after, by their own admission, failing to meet their potential during their degrees. Natalie, despite having secured a job as a full-time opera chorus member, spoke of a long period of time where she was very unsure of her voice type and its own capabilities, resulting in her being pulled between two very differing operatic roles. This suggests that conservatoire education for singers is falling short, technically, in a way that instrumentalists' education is not. It may also point to a difference in attitude between singers and instrumentalists: perhaps singers expect different input from their tutors than instrumentalists do. It is already accepted that singers' relationships with their musicality and voice is unique in many ways (Oakland et al., 2012, 2013, 2014), which may suggest that transition for singers is different, and therefore that education for singers may benefit from being different to that of instrumentalists. In any case, further, more detailed research into singers' educational experiences and career transitions would be beneficial here, in order to further explore the similarities and differences of their experiences.

Although participants had a wide spread of experiences, no pianists took part in the interview study. Many instrumentalists' aspirations centred, at least at first, around orchestral and ensemble work, and given that these experiences may not be so prevalent amongst pianists, it is possible that keyboard students experience their education and therefore transition differently. Many participant reports in this study, however, did chime with findings from Juuti and Littleton's study of Academy pianists (2012), which may indicate that piano graduates' concerns are broadly the same as those from other schools of study. Nevertheless,

future research into UK pianists' experiences of graduation and transition may offer a more fine-grained perspective.

### 9.5 Recommendations

Further insights into the educational experiences of conservatoire graduates and their resultant career transitions have a wide range of practical implications, especially within the field of performance-based Higher Education. The following table summarises the findings from the study alongside their resultant recommendations.

Table 11: Table to show findings and their corresponding recommendations

Finding	Recommendation
Graduates are unaware of the realities of a music career	Conservatoires must offer a holistic view of what a music career entails
Conservatoires do not adequately challenge students' fixed ideas of an 'ideal' music career	Make a wide variety of (performance and non-performance) placements and experiences a compulsory part of the curriculum
Work placements and experiences are key to developing students' aspirations	
An extensive focus on self-promotion as a solution to career uncertainty can bring about more stress to graduates	Avoid overstating the effectiveness of self-promotion, and offer careers guidance outside of the development of these skills.
Graduates felt more empowered to make career decisions after graduating and becoming more in touch with their values	Incorporate values-based modules into the conservatoire curriculum.
Students are unsure of where to go for impartial careers advice.	Offer a mentorship scheme as part of conservatoires' career development offer.
Conservatoire students are often closed minded to careers advice	Incorporate a career development programme into the curriculum which challenges narrow-minded attitudes from the outset

Above all, the research supports previous findings which continue to suggest that graduation from a music degree is a time fraught with uncertainty, not least because of an absence of clear-cut employment patterns and a lack of general awareness of the realities of a music career. The study aimed to shed more light on the the nature and root of these uncertainties, and findings revealed that many students and new graduates hold fixed, and relatively traditional, ideas of what a musician's career entails, which are not adequately challenged whilst in

conservatoire education. It is likely that prior to entering the conservatoire, these fixed ideas are borne of youthful naivety, however participant reports imply that many students do not alter these fixed ideas until 'reality bites' post-graduation. Conversely, some participants who felt their aspirations deviated from the traditional norms whilst at conservatoire also experienced anxiety as a result of feeling like there were no career options available to them outside of those norms. For this reason, students would benefit from their conservatoires offering a more holistic view of what a career in music might truly entail. However, this assertion may be rather too simplistic. The study sought to investigate the effect that aspirations have on transition, and found that a change in aspirations was central to graduates' experience of transition. In the main, this change was brought about by a lived experience: a work placement, a chance meeting, or saying 'yes' to something they had not previously considered. Many of these experiences took place whilst studying, especially work placements arranged as part of the degree. This means that, to an extent, conservatoire courses are providing students with opportunities to envisage and enact their professional futures, but it may not be entirely effective. So where does the problem lie? Although aspects of conservatoire education do challenge fixed ideas and attitudes, it is possible that the conservatoire course as a whole is not challenging discourses around musicians' careers robustly enough. Since work placements in particular seemed to be such formative experiences for so many establishing musicians, embedding these placements into the curriculum and making them compulsory would be an effective first step. Graduate musicians generally aspired towards careers in the orchestra or on the opera stage, and establishing musicians reported doing so before revising their aspirations later down the line. It is very likely that participating in the conservatoire orchestra or opera provided participants with a 'work experience' that helped them to form these aspirations, providing support for the notion that lived experiences cement aspirations, so it makes sense to broaden these by ensuring students have a wider range of musical experiences.

Another important factor in the development of aspirations was an increased engagement with values, and work values. As establishing and graduate musicians

became more self-aware, they reformed their aspirations in order that they became more congruent with the type of person they believed themselves to be. Again, this was a reformation that generally happened after graduation, meaning that an increased engagement with values whilst studying might enable graduates to focus their aims and find fulfilling work sooner rather than later. There are some relatively new advances in the provision of this type of education for students, which have had some positive results (Freer & Bennett, 2012) so it makes sense that this may have similar success amongst conservatoire students.

A further aim of the empirical study was to explore the career preparation given by conservatoires, and investigate its effect on transition into the music profession. Participants spoke of a wide variety of career preparation activities, however the only constant in these accounts was the inclusion of CV and self-promotion classes in the degree. Although graduate musicians generally regarded these classes and activities as useful, establishing musicians realised that, in reality, they were somewhat deficient. Some participants were disillusioned that despite knowing how to promote themselves, it was still difficult to secure work. For many of the establishing musicians, this was the only compulsory part of the undergraduate degree that pertained to career development. For postgraduate students, this module was an elective. This suggests that although graduate musicians may initially feel empowered to promote themselves as a result of this, the process may become demotivating if it does not pay off. Some participants made reference to a paradox within the music business, that no matter how well-prepared and well-promoted one is, it is ultimately others who make decisions about who gets to work. The overstatement of the importance of self-promotion and the 'hustle' in the creative industries (Haynes & Marshall, 2018) brings with it the possibility that individuals may exploit themselves in the pursuit of success (McRobbie, 2002), and, to that end, an exclusive focus on these types of career skills in conservatoires may be irresponsible. Better equipping students to earn money in a variety of different ways, including the use of entrepreneurship education, would enable conservatoires to avoid sending the message that graduates are wholly responsible for their own success and the resultant stresses that may bring about.

Some participants spoke of being unsure of which way to turn to advice: whilst some felt comfortable asking their instrumental tutor for guidance, others did not wish to 'bother' their tutor, or felt that their tutor had a biased view of their capabilities. Some students could not relate to their tutor as a mentor since they had built their career at a different time to them. This suggests that an impartial mentoring scheme within conservatoires may prove useful in order that students might feel individually supported, and, in fact, some participants mentioned this solution.

It would be remiss to omit the fact that one of the greatest barriers to career awareness for musicians – and therefore to a 'smoother' transition – is the students themselves, and their attitudes to career preparation in general. Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas (2012) found that students who feel a strong calling to a particular subject may ignore career advice, even from a trusted tutor. Assuming that a student may enter conservatoire training on account of feeling a strong calling to a musician's career, the findings of this study certainly lend some support to this. Participants did not necessarily ignore career advice, but neither did they seek it out. Many reported avoiding career development classes because they were 'boring' or 'useless,' and some simply never prioritised the optional activities, forgetting to diarise them. One participant described it as a vicious cycle: since attendance was poor there was no incentive to improve provision. It is difficult to 'assign blame' in this case, and neither should we. Perhaps the first step in enthusing students about developing their future career is challenging their naive attitudes – which for some will have been held since before conservatoire entry – before they become more fixed and narrow-minded attitudes. This could be done by ensuring that, from the outset of their degree, students do not see their orchestral and instrumental lessons as the most important part of their course, but simply as refinement of the tools they will need in order to qualify for a wider range of musical work.



## 9.6 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the career-building process for conservatoire graduates in order to characterise the transition into the professional world. Conservatoire degrees are marketed on vocational outcomes, yet the fact remains that many conservatoire students are unaware of the realities of building a career in music, and therefore the objective of this research was to investigate the ways in which conservatoire graduates manage this challenging transition. Findings suggest that the value of career preparation activities have to be 'seen to be believed:' whereas performance is central to conservatoire students' degrees, they find it more difficult to anticipate the significance of non-performance activities. The central part of graduates' transitions was a development in aspirations, often brought about by hands-on, immersive experiences. This means that work placements at conservatoire level have the potential to be powerful and formative experiences. Furthermore, participants made career decisions based upon a greater self-knowledge and engagement with values, which indicates that an integration of values-based education into the conservatoire curriculum may help students and graduates make smoother transitions into the music profession. Most importantly, conservatoires may benefit from incorporating these more experience- and values-based activities throughout the entire degree. That way, career-young musicians may be able to experience, enact and develop their professional futures alongside honing their instrumental technique.

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## Appendix A: 'Letters to my Younger Self' Information Sheet

### **Participant information sheet.**

Submission to this blog will form part of a wider research project exploring how musical identity develops and how graduates build their career after music college. All contributions are welcome! Whether or not you make a living from music now, and whether your letter is long or short, so long as you went to a music college or conservatoire, you can post here. Your story will help us to get a greater understanding of the lives of professional musicians, and how visions of their career change across the lifespan. Additionally, I hope that the live nature of this blog will make thought-provoking reading for other musicians and non-musicians alike.

The following information is being provided in order that you can make an informed decision as to whether you wish to participate in this project. Please read this carefully, as submission is deemed a you having given consent for your words to be used.

You need to provide your email address in order to post, however this is the only means by which you must identify yourself. Only my supervisors and myself will have access to this information, and nowhere on the blog will your email address be linked to your story. Your email address may be used in order to contact you about subsequent phases of research, all of which will be totally optional.

The anonymity of yourself and others is extremely important, and for that reason all submissions will be pre-moderated before posting. Any information that may reveal others' or your own identity will be redacted, and names may be changed.

A similar anonymisation process will be undertaken in the production of the final report (submitted for award of the degree of PhD at University of Leeds, ethical approval number PVAR 15-050).

If you change your mind about participation, you may delete your post, however please remember that I will already be in possession of a copy and therefore you will need to contact me directly to fully withdraw from the study. In addition, in accordance with Tumblr's own guidelines, it may not be possible to remove all traces of your words from the Internet, as others may have reblogged or simply copied them.

By adding your story to this blog you are assumed to have:

- Read and understood the above information and have had the opportunity to ask questions,
- Given consent for your words to be used in the above mentioned research project, and in the promotion of the research project,
- Have understood that all personal details will be anonymised before publication, either online or in the written report,
- Given consent for your words to be used in future research projects.

Thanks very much for reading. If you have any questions about the study, please contact principal researcher Kate Blackstone via email: [mcl3kb@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:mcl3kb@leeds.ac.uk)

## Appendix B: 'Letters to my Younger Self' moderation process

1. Participant visits site and reads previous submissions.



2. Clicks "write your own here."



3. Directed to information sheet.

Visitor does not give informed consent, and does not participate



4. Writes own submission (deemed to have given informed consent).



5. Submission arrives in researcher inbox (hosted on Tumblr).



### 6. PRE MODERATION:

- Names and places? REDACT
- Potentially identifiable situation (even post-redaction of places and names)? REDACT
- **Report of illegal activity?**



Use supplied email address to enquire as to whether participant wishes to withdraw entire story, or remove sensitive information.

- **Participant requests non-publication online**



Story retained for research but not posted on blog

### 7. PUBLICATION ON TUMBLR:

Moderated accounts posted online.

Use supplied email address to thank participant for submission, and invite completion of a short demographic questionnaire. Include participant information sheet with particular emphasis on conditions for withdrawal of participation.



## Appendix C: 'Letters to my Younger Self' demographic questionnaire

1. Please enter the email address you used to submit on the Tumblr blog.  
This data will not be stored with your response.
2. What is your age?
  - a. 15-24
  - b. 25-34
  - c. 35-44
  - d. 45-54
  - e. 55-64
  - f. 65+
3. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Other
  - d. Prefer not to say
4. Which conservatoire(s)/music college(s) did you attend? You may choose more than one answer. If your college has changed name since you studied there, please select its current name.
  - a. Royal College of Music (RCM)
  - b. Trinity Laban conservatoire of Music and Dance (TCM)
  - c. Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD)
  - d. Birmingham Conservatoire (BC)
  - e. Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM). Formerly Northern School of Music and Royal Manchester college of Music
  - f. Leeds College of Music (LCoM)
  - g. Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS), formerly Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama
  - h. Other (please specify)
5. In which year did you graduate from your most recent music college degree?

6. Please select the highest level of qualification you obtained from music college/conservatoire
  - a. HND
  - b. Graduate Diploma
  - c. Bachelor's degree
  - d. Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)
  - e. Masters
  - f. PhD/Doctorate
  - g. Other (please specify)
7. In which discipline did you specialise? This may be your instrument, voice type, or composition.
8. Do you still play music now?
  - a. Yes, professionally (full time)
  - b. Yes, professionally (part time)
  - c. Yes, but for leisure only
  - d. Not at all
  - e. Other (please specify)
9. This questionnaire and the Tumblr you submitted to both form part of a wider project exploring how musical identity develops and how music graduates build their career after music college. Further phases of the project will take place later in the year, and may include additional questionnaires or face to face interviews. It is anticipated that this will take place in late 2016. If you are happy to be contacted for participation in further phases of the project (using the email address supplied) please indicate below. Participation is entirely optional, and agreeing here does not represent a binding contract of any kind: you may decline involvement when later contacted.
  - a. Yes, I can be contacted about further research. I understand that I may choose to opt out if contacted.
  - b. No, please do not contact me about any further research.

## Appendix D: Examples of adverts used to recruit interview participants



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

### Call for Participants

- **Did you graduate from a UK Music College or Conservatoire between 2009 and 2015?**
- **Would you like to take part in a research project?**

We are looking for recent UK graduates, from performance-based music courses, to help with a study aimed at investigating the ways in which young musicians build their careers after leaving higher education.

If you graduated from a UK music college between 2009 and 2015 and would be willing to spend between an hour and an hour and a half of your time talking about your education and career, we would love to hear from you! You will participate in a one-to-one face to face interview at your own convenience, and your anonymity will be protected. We can even pay any reasonable travel expenses.

**To find out more (with absolutely no obligation to take part if you change your mind!), please contact Principal Researcher Kate Blackstone on [mc13kb@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:mc13kb@leeds.ac.uk).**

*Project funded by the University of Leeds and approved by the Faculty Ethics board on 31/10/16 (Ref: LTMUSC-060).*



## Call for Participants

- **Are you currently a postgraduate or fourth year at a UK conservatoire?**
- **Would you like to take part in a research project?**

We are looking for students who are about to finish either their undergraduate or postgraduate studies at any UK conservatoire. This is to help with a wider project aimed at investigating the ways in which young musicians build their careers after leaving higher education.

If you are graduating from a UK music college this year **without immediately undertaking further study**, and would be willing to spend around an hour of your time talking about your education and career plans, we would love to hear from you! You will participate in a one-to-one face to face interview at your own convenience, and your anonymity will be protected. We can even pay any reasonable travel expenses, although as far as possible we will travel to you.

**To find out more (with absolutely no obligation to take part if you change your mind!), please contact Principal Researcher Kate Blackstone on [mc13kb@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:mc13kb@leeds.ac.uk).**

*Project funded by the University of Leeds and approved by the Faculty Ethics board on 30/03/17 (Ref: LTMUSC-060).*

## Appendix E: Post-interview information sheet given to graduating musicians

### Where Next....?

First things first, thank you so much for your time! By participating in my research, you have made a valuable contribution to, at the very least, my dataset, and at the most, the future of young musicians who are just like you.

If our interview got you thinking, and you would like to know more, I have collected a variety of different resources I think are useful when thinking about musicians' careers. Some are more practical, whilst others are blogs or opinion pieces I have collected along the way. I'd be interested to hear from you if there are any that you particularly liked or disliked, but hopefully at least one or two will resonate with you.

#### **For more general and practical advice, head to:**

[Musicians' Union](#) (MU) and [Incorporated Society of Musicians](#) (ISM) – Both offer advice about careers, taxes and self-promotion, as well as mental health and wellbeing guidance. Both are very similar, except the Musicians' Union is a trade union and the ISM isn't.

[Help Musicians UK](#) – A charity supporting the UK's professional musicians, Help Musicians UK are currently promoting the results of their large scale survey of mental health in musicians. The website also contains careers advice along with a helpful funding database.

#### **For job listings, check out :**

[Arts Council](#) – Here you can sign up to the daily mailing list, and specify your preferences for jobs. It's good for a holistic view of what's out there in the arts in general.

[Musical Chairs](#) – List of orchestral auditions both in the UK and nationally

[Music Mark](#) – for jobs in Music Education

#### **Blogs worth a browse:**

[Bulletproof Musician](#) – Noa Kageyama is a Julliard graduate who now blogs about performance psychology, effective practice, and strategies to reduce anxiety.

[Wholehearted Musician](#) – Cellist and Psychotherapist Dana Fontenau writes about learning to be your best musical self. Her insightful thoughts on taking non-musical work to support yourself as a musician are [here](#).

David Taylor – After founding the Yorkshire Young Sinfonia and propelling it to success within just two years, David writes about entrepreneurship and innovation

in classical music. Head straight to '[Networking – an introvert's guide,](#)' for tips on making those all-important contacts.

[Notable Values](#) – From careers onstage, offstage and outside of music altogether, Susan de Weger's blog and podcast explore what it means to be a musician in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, through her work as a careers coach and tutor at the University of Melbourne.

[Double Depresso Podcast](#)– Ben Turner, an Australian Conservatoire graduate now based in Berlin, has conversations with performers about mental health in the arts.

**My Work:**

[Letters to my Younger Self](#) – Not really my work, I suppose, but written by the first round of my PhD participants, who answered the question 'What advice would you have given your younger self as you graduated from music college?' All are very different, but make compelling reading.

[Ten Top Tips for a Career in Classical Music](#) – This was written for the classical music website Bachtrack, who were running a feature on competitions. My article is about what to do when you don't win a competition, and it's all based around the letters from above.

**For general mental health advice:**

[Time To Change](#)

[Mind](#)

**If you'd like someone to talk to:**

[Samaritans](#) - or call 116 123 (free to call, 24 hours a day)

If you have any further questions about the research study itself, you can contact me on [mc13kb@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:mc13kb@leeds.ac.uk), where you can also request a copy of your interview transcript.

Thanks again for your participation, and best of luck in all your future endeavours!



## Appendix F: Example interview schedule for establishing musicians

### **Investigating conservatoire graduates' transitions into the music**

#### **profession:**

#### Sample Interview Schedule

#### Main question

- *Additional prompts if required*
1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your musical life?
    - a. *When did you start playing?*
    - b. *Where did you study?*
    - c. *What happened next?*
  2. Thinking about what you do now, how do you describe your job, or what you do, to a new, neutral person?
    - a. *Have you always used this description? If not, can you explain how it has changed?*
  3. Tell me more about your career now.
    - a. *How much time do you spend performing?*
    - b. *Do you do teaching work? What do you think of this?*
    - c. *Do you have 'non-musical' jobs?*
    - d. *(Participant may wish to use diary as a prompt)*
    - e. *Can you describe a 'typical working day/week?'*
    - f. *What aspects of your career do you enjoy?*
    - g. *What aspects do you enjoy less?*
    - h. *What would you say are the main challenges of a music career?*

4. Can you tell me about a particularly positive moment or situation in your music career?
5. Can you tell me about a more negative experience?
6. How does the career you described compare with your aspirations for the future?
  - a. *Is there any work you would like to do more/less of?*
7. Are these aspirations different to the aspirations you held in the past?
  - a. *How have these aspirations changed?*
  - b. *Why do you think they have changed?*
8. Reflecting on your education, can you explain how it prepared you for your career?
  - a. *Who/what were your main influences at that time? Has this changed, having gone into the profession?*
  - b. *What careers advice were you offered, and who gave it to you? How closely did you follow it?*
  - c. *In an ideal world, what advice would you have been given?*
  - d. *How does your current career link to what you were taught at college? Could that link be better?*
9. If you had your time again is there anything you would do differently?
  - a. *Why?*
10. Looking to the future, can you say anything about your aims for a) the next five years b) longer term? What about personal goals as well as musical ones?
11. In general, how important is music to you?
  - a. *Has this changed at all? a) Since university b) Since graduation?*
  - b. *Is music an interest in your spare time? Why/why not?*
  - c. *Do you have non-musical interests?*
12. Is there anything else that you think is relevant, that you might like to share?



Appendix G: Example interview schedule for graduating musicians:

**Investigating conservatoire graduates' transitions into the music profession:**

Sample Interview Schedule – college leavers

Main question

- *Additional prompts if required*

13. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your musical life?

- a. *When did you start playing?*
- b. *Where did you study?*

14. Thinking about what you do now, how do you describe your job, or what you do, to a new, neutral person?

- a. *Have you always used this description? If not, can you explain how it has changed?*

15. Do you take paid musical work now? Can you tell me about it?

- a. *How much time do you spend performing?*
- b. *Do you do teaching work? What do you think of this?*
- c. *Do you have 'non-musical' jobs?*
- d. *(Participant may wish to use diary as a prompt)*
- e. *Can you describe a 'typical working day/week?'*
- f. *What aspects of your career do you enjoy?*
- g. *What aspects do you enjoy less?*
- h. *What would you say are the main challenges of a music career?*

16. Can you tell me about a particularly positive musical moment or situation?

17. Can you tell me about a more negative experience?

18. How does the career (if working) you described compare with your aspirations for the future?
- Is there any work you would like to do more/less of?*
19. Are these aspirations different to the aspirations you held in the past?
- How have these aspirations changed?*
  - Why do you think they have changed?*
20. Reflecting on your education, can you explain how you think it may have prepared you for your career?
- Who/what were your main influences at that time? Has this changed during the course of your degree?*
  - What careers advice were you offered, and who gave it to you? How closely do you envisage following it?*
  - In an ideal world, what advice/classes would you have been given?*
  - How do your current aspirations link to what you were taught at college?*
  - If working, how does this work link to your college education?*
21. If you had your time again is there anything you would do differently?
- Why?*
22. Looking to the future, can you say anything about your aims for a) the next five years b) longer term? What about personal goals as well as musical ones?
23. In general, how important is music to you?
- Has this changed at all?*
  - Is music an interest in your spare time? Why/why not?*
  - Do you have non-musical interests?*
24. SHOW STIMULUS
25. Is there anything else that you think is relevant, that you might like to share?

## Appendix H: Comprehensive table of themes

Ch.	Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme	Codes
6. Building a Career	Freelance working	Choosing to be a freelancer	Work leading to more work
			Title of 'musician' conditional on certain work
			Freelance musician as lifestyle
			Freelance musician as a given
			Freelance work as 'stepping stone' to contracted work
			Freelancing as 'necessary evil'
			'Ending up' a freelancer
	Difficult decisions	Combining work strands	Performance work
			Performance-adjacent work
			Musical administrative roles
			Non musical roles
			Music as the basis of a varied career
	Difficult decisions	Picking and choosing gigs	Non-performance roles supporting performance work
			Deciding between money and artistic fulfilment
			Feelings of impermanence
Financial control		Coping with uncertainty	Being exploited
			Overworking
			Choosing between practising and earning money
			Waiting for work
			Lack of financial stability
		Anxiety of a 'bare' diary	
		Making proactive choices	
		Proactive choices not paying off	
		Having financial buffers	

Ch.	Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme	Codes
6. Building a Career	Role of others	Others hold the power	Waiting for work Mystery around who exactly is in control (e.g. Theatre) Reliance on others for being booked Having to find approval from others (auditions etc.)
		Cultivating a good reputation	'Being on my A game' Going to the pub Have to be social offstage Being the first person who is thought of Being seen working
		Perceived value of work strands	'Lower level' work Snobbery around background gigs Performance outside of main instrument is less valuable 'Just a teacher'
		Role of colleagues	Performing better with people you like Feeling supported by colleagues Colleagues invite you to dep Forming strong alliances offstage
		Teaching as complementary strand	Teaching improves playing Teaching occasionally viewed as 'more valid' than being a musician Contacts made while teaching may bring performance work
	Attitudes towards teaching	'Bowling out' / 'just' a teacher	'Escape' from stress of performance Desire to do more than teach 'Anyone can teach' Second-best to performance work Waste of skills
		Teaching for financial gain	Teaching as 'necessary evil' Teaching as enabler for other work

Ch.	Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme	Codes
6. Building a Career	Identity threat	Feeling different	Not mixing with the right people Lack of confidence networking Being too outspoken Not being social enough
		Compromising aspects of personality	Pretending to like going to the pub 'You've gotta suck it up, Alice' Keeping opinions and problems quiet
		Successful musician' attributes	Having the 'wrong' voice Musicians avoid playing with those who are too nervous
		Tutor's attributes	Supportive tutor Simplicity of approach Truthfulness Support/lack of support of students' individual interests Understanding
7. Conservatoire Education	Principal study tutors	Expectations of tutors	Tutor helps student to become a better performer Tutors hand students opportunities Tutor is a proficient player Tutor can provide contacts
		Tutors' careers advice	Tutor 'too high up' to be bothered with career advice Tutor's advice may be outdated Tutor's opinion of student may skew advice Tutor may be only source of career advice

Ch.	Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme	Codes
7. Conservative Education	Professional studies classes	CV classes	
		Teaching skills classes	
		Work placements	
		Freelance modules	
		Tax and accountancy	
		Careers events	
		One-to-one advice	
		Degree as career preparation	Diary organisation
			Becoming a better player
			Meeting and making contacts
		Learning to be professional	
	Avoidance of career preparation	Mistrust	Tutors do not know what life for graduates is like Tutors 'want to take the work for themselves' Those without first hand experience cannot give reliable advice
		Relevance/Irrelevance	Generalist classes relevant to nobody Difficult to see relevance in development of some skills 'Big name' talks irrelevant Non-'big name' talks irrelevant
		Quality of sessions/provision	Staff member not engaging 'Hidden' careers service Vicious cycle: poor attendance leads to poor provision Wanting to be told what to do
		Barriers to individuality	Wanting to 'craft own future' Not wanting to be told what to do
		Unintentional absence	Forgetting to diarise events Poor publicity of events Careers service does not appear valued
		Institutional culture	
			Peer pressure to avoid sessions

Ch.	Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme	Codes
7. Conservatoire Education	Ideal careers education	Variety	Reflect variety of music jobs
			Inclusion of non-performance strands
			Normalise non-orchestral careers
			Narrow career outlook as source of anxiety
		Honesty	Openness about financial prospects
			Avoid giving false hope
			Need for 'reality check'
		Timing	Inclusion of career preparation throughout degree
			Representation of wider career throughout degree
		Opposing views	Tax and accountancy classes at a relevant point
It is not possible to prepare for a music career beyond practising Career success is down to luck			

Ch.	Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme	Codes
8. Aspirations	Changing aspirations	Point of change	Changing aspirations during degree
			Changing aspirations after degree
			Professional experience as bringer of change
		Types of change	Flipped aspiration
			Reorganised aspirations
			Broadening aspirations
			Focusing aspirations
	Abandoning musical aspirations	Musical factors	Creativity
			Broadening and holistic focus on music
			Stress mitigation
	Lifestyle factors	Shared factors	Perception of skill
			Financial stability
			Routine
			Flexibility/freedom
			Family
			Faith
			Enjoyment
			Individuality



## Appendix J: Participant biographies

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Alice

Alice was a soprano: at the time of interview she had left music college three years previously. All her life she had been committed to music and the performing arts, primarily as a singer but also as a pianist and dancer. Performance had been key to her childhood development, as she believed that it had helped her to overcome her early shyness to become more socially confident. She described music as a 'way of life to her,' and explained that she had 'kind of never really done anything else.'

Alice completed a four-year music degree at university in Canada, where she was born and grew up. After that, she relocated to the UK in order to do a Masters in singing at a conservatoire. She extended her degree to 3 years by undertaking an additional PGDip degree. She enjoyed her university degree immensely, but was encouraged to attend conservatoire in the UK because her head of year believed it would bring her more performance opportunities than those available to her in Canada.

Alice enjoyed her conservatoire degree less. She felt criticised, but unconstructively: she knew that she needed to improve her voice but did not feel technically supported to do so. She also felt as though she was an outsider, firstly, on account of her being more direct than her British peers, and secondly as a result of her unwillingness to ask influential people for favours ('kiss the right asses'). She had hoped that her music college tutors would have helped her to build her career by introducing her to important people, but she did acknowledge having made 'inactive choices' during her degree.

At the time of the interview, Alice was making the majority of her money from teaching singing and piano. This disappointed her; however she appreciated the financial security that teaching brought, and the flexibility of her schedule meant that she could organise performance commitments around her teaching work. In terms of singing, Alice had opera chorus contracts, which were generally young artist schemes taking place over the summer.

Looking towards the future, Alice was hoping to build a career combining what she saw as her three 'niches': French lyric diction coaching, contemporary opera and early music. She planned to do this by meeting people already in these job roles.

Beka

Beka was a clarinettist who undertook a 3-year conservatoire course, graduating six years prior to the time of interview. She began piano lessons at the age of six, after playing around on it at home from an early age. She took clarinet lessons from the age of 7, and by the age of '8 or 9' knew that she wanted to do music 'somehow.'

Although Beka chose to go to music college to focus on playing, she decided in her second or third year that she would prefer to focus on teaching and workshop-leading in her future career. She was concerned about the financial crisis and its impact on her future, and wanted to avoid 'fighting for every penny.' As a result, after graduation she went directly into PGCE study, seeing a teaching qualification as something that would enable her to charge more and apply for a wider range of teaching jobs.

After her PGCE, Beka held a number of teaching positions. She also worked as musical director for a youth theatre production, work that she would like to return to someday. At the time of the interview, Beka had been working as a classroom teacher in an international school in the Far East for two years. She was clearly an engaged and enthusiastic teacher and talked about her enjoyment of helping students to develop independence and creativity. Beka's favourite parts of her degree were the moments that she was allowed to be independent and creative, and it is likely that her job as a teacher allows her to fulfil these values in her career. Outside of school, she still enjoyed playing the clarinet and saxophone in local amateur bands and orchestras.

Beka saw her future as being shaped by geography rather than any specific job role, and at the time of the interview was contemplating moving back to Europe for another teaching job. For Beka, her music education and PGCE served as the key to financial security and freedom of movement.

Chris

Following his postgraduate degree in trombone, Chris moved back to his home state in the USA. Prior to UK study he had completed an undergraduate degree in America. He began playing the trombone whilst at school, and as a teenager had the ambition to be a music teacher. However, winning various solo competitions that made him feel 'like a rock star' helped to cement his identity as a performer, and he therefore went to music college with ambitions to play for a living.

Chris enjoyed his UK conservatoire degree, but although he enjoyed playing a wide variety of music he felt 'pigeon-holed' into becoming 'the jazz poster child.' However, he saw this as a worthy pay-off as he believed it brought him many opportunities to perform. Chris enjoyed the social atmosphere at his college, and found that it was crucial to his musical development as he found a lot of work by networking.

At the time of the interview, Chris was undertaking a variety of musical jobs, including solo work, university teaching and contracted playing with the state symphony orchestra. He was thrilled that the trombone had become his way to make a living, but the orchestral work was the least satisfying of his musical pursuits, and it seemed as though he was motivated to do this to appear responsible to others after graduating. Chris's student debt was large, and he was considering taking a band director's job in addition to his current work portfolio in order to pay off his loans as soon as possible.

Josh

Josh was a bassoonist, who graduated 5 years prior to the time of his interview. After starting on clarinet, he took up the bassoon as a teenager because it was 'about as weird as you could get.' Josh's engagement with music was mainly about exploration: whilst at music college he discovered an enthusiasm for Early Music, and since graduating he was also enjoying playing folk music and participating in musical improvised comedy jams.

Josh began his conservatoire degree as an aspiring orchestral bassoonist, but this aspiration changed when he realised that he would prefer a more creative engagement with music. He enjoyed his degree, but found some of the teachers he had were dismissive of his ideas and diverse enthusiasms, which caused him to feel demotivated at points. He was disappointed with what he felt was a very rigid approach to musical development. He believed his bassoon playing was technically very good by the time he left college, but, by graduation, he was unsure he wanted an orchestral job, and felt ill-equipped to put his musical projects into action.

At the time of the interview, Josh described himself as a 'musician who worked in events,' on account of him working part-time for an events company in order to financially supplement his musical income. His enthusiasm for Early Music, which he found more exciting and creative than more modern classical music, meant that the majority of his gigs were in this relatively small world. As a result, his performing income was sporadic. He was open-minded to teaching work, but preferring to avoid teaching students for exams, which reflected his free-thinking approach to his own music-making. Unlike other participants, he is not resentful of his non-musical work in events, seeing it as an opportunity to find a routine and work with other creative people outside of music.

Josh was open-minded about his future and was unsure whether being a professional bassoon player was crucial for his career satisfaction. Although he clearly loved music, for Josh there was a tension between the musical projects he enjoyed and a need to make money: he was keen to eventually have a family, and acknowledged that this would make money far more important to him.

Leanne

Leanne undertook a four-year degree in trombone, and at the time of the interview was working as an artist manager for a small charitable foundation for young artists. She decided to go to music college in place of undertaking a maths degree at a prestigious university as she had had so much fun as a musician at school.

Throughout her degree, Leanne did not have particularly strong career plans, and assumed she would go into an orchestral job after graduation. However, she suffered from a playing-related injury in her second year and did not recover, but admitted being unmotivated to do so. She talked extensively about her experiences as the only female member of her department, and regretted 'going along with the lads' rather than taking care of herself by going to yoga. She was going to stay at her conservatoire and do a postgraduate degree, but she admitted that this was through lack of something else to do, and was ultimately talked out of this by her parents. During Leanne's conservatoire degree, she took a work placement with a local orchestra. This experience was formative: she enjoyed the responsibility of orchestral management.

After graduating, Leanne took an internship at an artist agency and learned that she could channel her love of organisation into organising others. Since then she has moved into the charity sector. Leanne no longer plays the trombone, but is hoping to increase her engagement with music in the future.

Martha

Martha finished a degree in trombone in 2013, and since then had been working as a freelance musician. She described herself as 'proud to do a mixture of things,' and at the time of the interview was teaching, workshop-leading, playing and writing for a magazine (whilst dog-sitting at the same time!).

Unlike many other participants, Martha reports arriving at conservatoire almost blindly: rather than having a focused engagement with music throughout childhood, she had picked up and put down the trombone multiple times and chose to go to music college because of the fun she had had with National Youth Ensembles. Work placements were key to Martha's development, and she reported going outside of her comfort zone in order to develop her skills. She described her degree as having prepared her well for her career, and she felt able to contact her old tutors for help if she needed to.

Although Martha did not feel especially confident meeting new people, she saw it as a necessary evil for finding and maintaining work. She was aiming for a future playing for musical theatre, and as such had been trying to meet as many people as possible who may help her to achieve this. Despite this aim, she had no particular plans to give up her teaching or writing work, viewing her work as a musician as all of her activities combined. Instead, her main aim for the future was to be able to choose her work as she became more established.

Martha had hobbies outside of music, which she was working hard to keep non-competitive. She could even link these to her career, claiming that being able to talk about non-musical hobbies was key to developing good social connections with fellow musicians.

Natalie

Natalie's path was different in many ways to that of the other participants. Her mother was a singer-songwriter, and as a result she had grown up around music, singing in choirs at school and taking lessons as a teenager. Unlike the rest of the cohort in this study, Natalie did not do an undergraduate degree in any subject and although she had tried to undertake a degree in the sciences she dropped out because she felt it was not what she was 'meant to be doing.' Instead, she continued to sing, taking on small roles with amateur and profit share companies whilst working a variety of different temporary desk jobs. In the end she opted to go to conservatoire, but mainly because other people were telling her to in order to advance her career – she reported feeling confused at the time, saying:

You know when you're kind of starting out, as a musician, and when you're much younger, and someone says to you "you're really good at that, you should have lessons,' and you're like 'well that statement doesn't make sense. Either I'm good at it or I need lessons.' Like if I'm good at it, why would I need lessons? You know like that's the- as a teenager, or whatever, that's your initial, like 'That's slightly insulting, why-'

In the absence of a first degree, Natalie's only option was to do a one-year PGDip degree, which she enjoyed, however she reported that it had left her with 'gaping holes' in her technique. Natalie's experience at music college was based around her having prepared a solo role for an Italian Opera, which gave her an idea of what it would feel like to be a professional singer. Outside of that, she felt largely unprepared for the practicalities of building a career (however had a good working knowledge of business processes from her temporary jobs), and she needed to work more on her voice, meaning that her degree as likely to have mainly provided her with an 'association' over and above an education.

Natalie freelanced for a number of years after graduation, but at the time of the interview she had been a full-time opera chorister for six months. After singing a small solo role at the same company, she auditioned for the opera chorus, craving the continued social connection and security that she had felt as an 'extra.' Although being part of the chorus had changed her outlook on music and her pace of life – she had found more time to sing choral music for fun and was hoping to buy a house – she didn't see this job as 'forever.' She envisaged that her voice would change as she got older (as many voices do) and was looking towards a future singing on the European continent as a soloist.



Oliver

Oliver finished an undergraduate degree in voice in 2013, and at the time of the interview was working primarily in arts administration. Alongside his full-time job at the theatre he was singing in profit-share opera productions, taking further voice lessons and working at a concert hall as a steward and page-turner. Singing in operas was key to Oliver's identity as an opera singer, and his lack of performances meant that he referred to himself as an 'aspiring opera singer' rather than a singer outright.

Oliver began singing lessons at the age of 7, taking part in amateur opera productions as a boy treble from an early age. These early experiences were key, and it was via these performances that Oliver 'got the bug' for opera. However, throughout his conservatoire degree, Oliver was frustrated as he felt somewhat left to his own devices. He had hoped that he would improve his technique whilst studying, however he described teachers who 'didn't know what to do with him' and difficulties in changing teacher when he asked. Instead, his degree felt more like jumping through hoops and passing exams rather than becoming a better singer. Curiously, Oliver talked about his early teacher extensively and with fond memories. It is possible that he remembered the relationship he had with his first teacher and the opportunities that she offered him, and expected that his experience at conservatoire would be similar. He expressed disappointment that his teachers were not equally key to his later educational experiences.

Oliver modelled his future career on a prominent singer he had met when he was a child/teenager, and although he reported knowing that this aspiration could be somewhat unrealistic, he held onto it regardless. Oliver was planning to give up his theatre job, and had just handed in his notice in order that he might have more time to sing in operas. He was looking forward to learning German and hoped to eventually move to Germany as he envisaged that there would be more performance opportunities for him there.

Phoebe

After finishing an undergraduate degree in guitar in 2012, Phoebe was working in an administrative role at a conservatoire. Growing up in Australia, Phoebe's life revolved around music. Her father was a professional guitarist, and music became a form of escapism as Phoebe practised and listened to music for hours to counteract a difficult school life. Phoebe's journey throughout her education was not easy: despite having dual citizenship, she had to work in the UK for two years prior to her degree in order to have Home fee status. Furthermore, she sustained an injury in her second year which caused her to take two years out before completing her degree.

Phoebe's injury became a key turning point for her: after aspiring to be a professional guitarist, she turned her focus to completing her degree and finding a job outside of performance. Back home, she had watched her father struggle with a playing-related injury and had experienced its associated financial difficulties when he could not work. Ultimately Phoebe realised that she did not want to live a life like her parents' and prioritised achieving financial security. She spent the latter part of her degree making connections with arts administrators in the city in which she was studying, and undertaking relevant work placements, which meant that she lined up a job for herself soon after graduation.

Phoebe offered a dual perspective, reflecting upon her own experiences of the conservatoire degree whilst adding observations of her own from her vantage point as a conservatoire administrator. At the time of the interview she described how the classical music world could be quite stifling, with pressures to play the 'right' repertoire and portray a narrow view of success as a musician. She reported needing to become 'obsessed' in order to finish her degree, and had spent time away from guitar playing since graduating. However, once removed from the pressure and obsession, she was busy trying to find ways to enjoy music 'for herself' again, by playing the guitar and going to non-classical live music events.

Zoe

Zoe was a trumpet player who graduated from her degree in 2015. The following year, she participated in a 10-month orchestral graduate scheme, and at the time of the interview she had been freelancing as a trumpeter for around a year. Zoe learnt the trumpet at school from the age of 7 but reported writing to Father Christmas for a trumpet at the age of 5: although her parents were not musicians, Zoe clearly had an early motivation to play music. Zoe described her parents as supportive and encouraging, and although they were concerned about her going to music college, they did not try to dissuade her.

Zoe greatly enjoyed her conservatoire degree, and put a great deal of time and energy into creating a reputation for herself as a soloist, possibly due to an early enthusiasm for Alison Balsom. As a freelancer, she was playing in a variety of settings: as a soloist, orchestral 'extra,' depping on the West End and playing occasional weddings as part of a function band. Although Zoe was playing as a soloist, she had somewhat shed this label from her identity, perhaps due to the fact that it was no longer the sole focus of her career. Outside of playing, Zoe had a busy teaching and coaching schedule, which she credited for its flexibility, financial stability and lack of stress.

Although Zoe clearly loved her job, she described feelings of stress and perfectionism – she even appeared anxious that she had been 'completely useless' at interview. She was hoping that in the future she might find opportunities to play the trumpet for her own enjoyment, and take up non-musical hobbies as a break from work.

Edward

Edward was a tenor, and was interviewed towards the end of his undergraduate degree. He did not have any plans to go onto further study, and although he had places on Musical Theatre postgraduate degrees, he decided against that route because he did not want to 'throw away' his opera training. He had lined up some teaching work for the new school year and was looking forward to 'grafting' his way to a singing career.

Edward was from a family of music teachers and went to public school from the age of 16. He had been singing in operas and musical theatre shows since school, both in school and for national youth companies. His musical motivations stemmed primarily from performance: he described himself as a 'performer who sings' and 'musician comes second.' Edward's principal reason for studying at conservatoire was to improve his vocal technique, and he expressed disappointment that his degree also comprised academic work, which he described as 'pointless.' In some ways, Edward appeared realistic and resilient, he was prepared to do no-musical jobs to support himself, and was prepared that it may take many years for him to find job security as a singer. However, he did not appear to take criticism well, and expressed disbelief that his academic work was marked down.

Edward had high ambitions for himself as a performer, and believed that reports of scarcity of jobs were for the benefit of those already in the profession. However, later in the interview he mentioned that he would ultimately trade a job in music for a 'healthy mind,' if he had to, suggesting that his strong ambitions had their limits.

Freddy

Freddy was a violinist, and had undertaken a four-year conservatoire undergraduate degree concurrently with a three-year university music degree. At the time of the interview, Freddy was in his final weeks of conservatoire study.

Freddy's early musical life was varied and exploratory: his first experiences centred around playing folk music with his dad, learning tunes on the violin by ear. Later he took more formal lessons, playing in the local youth orchestra but also playing the guitar in bands formed with schoolfriends. Choosing to do music at university, in Freddy's words, 'seemed like the obvious choice.' It was not until halfway through his gap year that Freddy made the decision to audition at music college, and was accepted to complete both university and conservatoire degrees simultaneously. His motivation for studying music was a love of music in all its forms, over and above a love of the violin, or even performance.

Although Freddy did not have any particular work lined up for the end of his degree, he was focusing on his strengths as a musician, and planned to find work in teaching, performance (violin, piano and guitar) and composing and producing. He was unafraid of finding work outside of violin in more diverse areas, having taken on small arranging jobs and more pop violin gigs previously. He believed himself to be unusual in this regard, since many of his peers were very focused on orchestral jobs, which Freddy had decided did not appeal to him. This feeling of being different, and having different aspirations, was something of a source of anxiety for him, since he felt generally unsupported into careers outside of orchestral or chamber music.

Freddy planned to experience as many things as possible after leaving college, in order to rule out options, and narrow his focus.

Gary

Gary had just finished a postgraduate degree in flute, and was interviewed a month after his final recital. Before attending conservatoire, he had completed a university music degree, undertaking a year in industry in his third year working for an instrument technician.

Gary's musical journey began relatively late and he began the flute after moving to the UK at the age of 13. He studied with the same teacher throughout his undergraduate degree, choosing his institution for postgraduate study based upon his desire to continue study with his previous teacher. At the time of the interview, he was taking unpaid performance work, but for himself rather than his career: he was motivated by interest rather than 'exposure,' which he found did not pay off. Gary's establishing work portfolio was varied, comprising teaching and playing work alongside non-musical roles in hospitality, as well as a sales job for a flute company. Although playing was important to Gary, it was not central to his work identity, and he derived great enjoyment from his repair work, especially because it enabled him to switch off from work when he returned home. He was realistic about his future as a flautist, and was open to combining a wider variety of jobs to make money.

Gary was arriving at a crossroads after his degree: he had been offered a job training as a flute maker in the US, but he knew that taking this job he would be unable to dedicate his time to practising the flute as he would like. He mentioned having to give up 'the things I would personally want to do to call myself a professional musician,' suggesting he was not yet ready to relinquish his professional musician identity. He had also more recently begun singing opera, and was equally open to waiting for his voice to mature with a view to pursuing a career as an opera singer.

Hilda

Hilda was born and grew up in Germany, but studied in the UK. At the time of her interview she was in her final weeks of a postgraduate degree in viola. She had undertaken her undergraduate degree at the same institution, and although she had gone into her postgraduate degree without a gap year, she had interrupted her undergraduate study previously.

Hilda began playing the violin at the age of 8 because her best friend was taking lessons. She swapped to the viola when she was 13 at her teacher's recommendation, and auditioned at conservatoire at the age of 18, when a family friend suggested it. As such Hilda had not necessarily made any particularly active decisions to study music at any point in her life, however she clearly enjoyed playing the viola and also had a keen interest in music psychology.

Hilda's favourite part of her conservatoire experience was running her own academic research project. She also had fond memories of playing with a string quartet whilst she was a student although they were no longer playing together. It was not particularly obvious from where Hilda's musical motivations stemmed, although she made frequent references to the social benefits of playing music as a group.

When questioned about her plans for the future, Hilda expressed disappointment that her conservatoire Masters degree would not enable her to do a PhD in music psychology. She described her ideal career as being split between research and performance but at the time of the interview she had not put any plans in place to achieve this goal. She was unsure whether teaching was a good use of her qualifications. Her main plan was to live in London and take more lessons on the viola, building her CV in order to 'get a job,' meaning an orchestral position.

Ian

Ian spent three years studying the viola at a conservatoire: two years doing a Postgraduate Diploma and an additional year on an independent study programme, which was non-assessed. He had completed his studies two months prior to his interview. Before conservatoire study, Ian studied music at a university so that he had 'transferable skills, if for whatever reason performance didn't work out.' He commenced postgraduate study after two gap years.

Ian was already working as a musician during his postgraduate studies, mainly as a strings and piano teacher but also taking on piano accompaniment work and later working for amateur musical theatre companies as a musical director/keyboardist. He readily admitted to being relatively closed-minded about his career options in the past but was more recently committing himself to saying yes to more diverse pursuits, which led to him surprising himself on a number of occasions.

Additionally, he was an aspiring conductor, taking lessons and attending conducting courses over the summer to meet other musicians and develop his skills. This led to him conducting an amateur orchestra that he set up himself for an ambitious year-long project.

Ian's aspirations for the future were mainly to continue what he was already doing: combining many different work strands to make enough money to pay the bills and enjoy his job. He clearly loved music and dedicated most of his free time to it, however he was trying to improve his general fitness and was training for some running events in the future.



Richard

Richard was a viola player, who had finished his postgraduate degree a couple of months prior to his interview. He had studied for his undergraduate degree at the same college, and after taking two years out, returned to do a postgraduate to give himself 'a little bit of a boost like more contacts and some things.'

Richard's early musical life consisted of taking lessons on as many instruments as his parents would allow, including the violin, clarinet and piano. During his A Level years he started to listen to a wider variety of music, which brought with it the realisation that music was 'the most fun thing [he did]' – prompting him to apply to conservatoire. He swapped to the viola from the violin on a teacher's recommendation, for more work opportunities but also to solve technical difficulties. After leaving his undergraduate degree, Richard began teaching strings, but realised that he preferred playing, so gave it up to avoid being 'sucked in,' ultimately returning to conservatoire for a postgraduate degree. Richard was clear that teaching did not define him in the same way that the viola did, admitting that if he was teaching it was because he 'had to.'

Richard was already taking future bookings for his string quartet, a venture that he had set up during his gap years and maintained throughout his postgraduate degree. Richards aspirations changed whilst studying: whereas previously he had aspired to audition for the UK's top orchestras, he later decided that he would prefer to have a fun, easy life, rather than becoming 'practice obsessed.' At the time of the interview, he had ambitions to run a busy function band and was hoping to combine a variety of performance pursuits into his future career.

Sophie

After completing a music degree at a top UK university, Sophie did a postgraduate degree in oboe at a conservatoire, which she finished two weeks before being interviewed. Music was a big part of her life growing up: she began piano lessons at the age of six and violin lessons at the age of seven, finally beginning the oboe aged ten. She was originally drawn to study music at university because she was academically able and hoped to have more orchestral performance opportunities than if she were at conservatoire. A tour with a top university ensemble inspired her to aim for a music career and she auditioned to conservatoires hoping that a degree would improve her oboe technique.

Sophie enjoyed the breadth of her college degree, and had chosen to specialise on the baroque oboe, upon which she was beginning to pick up paid performance work. She found the social scene at her conservatoire a lot different to university, and relished the chance to build strong friendships.

Sophie described herself as 'guided by her faith' more than anything, which at times she found difficult to reconcile with a career in music. She found the prevailing discourse around musicians' careers – which was centred around needing to 'really want it' somewhat at odds with her ultimate aim of 'glorifying God.' She was very aware of what she would need to do in order to find work as a musician: networking for example, but worried that she wasn't the right sort of person as she was in no way 'ostentatious.' Although she aspired to combine performance and teaching work as an oboist in her future, she was equally comfortable with leaving the idea of a music career behind if she needed to.

Theo

Theo had completed a postgraduate degree in clarinet two months prior to his interview. He held an undergraduate degree in linguistics from a top UK university, and took a year out before embarking on his Masters degree.

Aside from music, Theo had 'no other strong ideas of what to do with [his] life,' but he first completed a non-music degree in order that he might be more employable in the future. However, throughout his degree he spent a significant amount of time playing music, and it was this 'itch' to be a musician that prompted him to do a postgraduate degree at conservatoire. Music was clearly central to Theo's identity, and he reported feeling most like himself whilst playing music.

The main benefit of Theo's conservatoire degree was the opportunity to build and become part of a network of musicians: he was already relatively dedicated to his clarinet playing whilst at university. Theo took a lot of opportunities for professional development whilst studying, including doing outreach work which continued to provide him with occasional employment. At the time of the interview he appeared rather dissatisfied with what he was doing, although he was early in his career. He was clarinet and piano teaching for one day per week, which he enjoyed, but he felt as though he was 'waiting around' for other work to come to him. He did hold aspirations to play chamber music and was hoping to branch out into other genres, such as klezmer. He hoped to do more interdisciplinary work, for example collaborations with artists and dancers. However, he appeared unsure of how to do this: he believed that there was 'only so much you can do' to build a career aside from having a well-presented CV.

Yasmin

Yasmin was a bassoonist and had finished an orchestrally-focused Masters degree two months prior to her interview. Before her Masters, she had studied a four-year undergraduate degree at another conservatoire. In the intervening summer between graduation and her interview, Yasmin had moved home and considered giving up the bassoon entirely, but she had recently been offered a place on a year-long orchestral experience scheme, which she had decided to take up. She was therefore living in London and trying to find musical and non-musical work.

Yasmin started playing the bassoon after the local music service suggested she switch from clarinet. She was initially motivated by her first teacher, whom she described as 'just the nicest, bubbliest person.' She spent her sixth form years boarding at a specialist music school, but despite this, she was still considering studying science or medicine at university. However, when the time came to make the application, Yasmin applied to music college because it seemed like 'the easier' option. She did not appear to outwardly regret the decision but she did admit to occasionally asking 'what if.'

Yasmin did not find her conservatoire degrees easy: she suffered badly from performance anxiety, and throughout the interview appeared to be quite harsh on herself. She was disappointed that she had not yet had any professional playing work, and therefore worried about becoming 'one of those failed musicians' or 'a struggling musician.' At the time of interview her aspirations were somewhat fixed: she wanted to be an orchestral musician above all and was unenthusiastic about taking on other work strands. Yasmin also possessed some fixed beliefs about herself: she was a 'stressy person,' bad at self-promotion, and 'not a very good teacher,' amongst other things. These fixed beliefs and aspirations combined allowed Yasmin to justify ruling out certain career strands, and led to her exhibiting some very helpless behaviours. However after the interview, she sent an email to say that the interview was very useful and had helped her 'work things out.'