

**INITIATIVE, ADAPTATION, AND GROWTH: THE ROLE OF
LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE CAREERS
OF PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS**

**David E. Myers
Founding Director, Center for Educational Partnerships in Music
Professor and Associate Director, School of Music
Georgia State University
Atlanta GA**

A website I discovered recently implied that choosing a career in music is not a very good idea. The site declares: “Many people leave the profession because they cannot find a job or make a living from music. Most musicians have to endure long periods of unemployment. The job outlook is particularly rough for those on the performance side of the business.” (<http://www.careerprospects.org/default-search.shtml>)

Rather than succumbing to such a dismal view, I suspect that most of us would opt for an alternative perspective. Apparently large numbers of young people are not thwarted from pursuing music careers by the lack of guaranteed jobs after graduation. The number of American high school students who planned to major in the visual and performing arts increased by 44 percent between 1996 and 2005. In the autumn of 2005, over 32,000 students were majoring in music at U.S. colleges and universities (Higher Education Arts Data Services, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Among these, it is impossible to predict how many students will successfully channel their enthusiasm for music into viable careers. Various statistics suggest that roughly half of employed musicians work part-time, and that nearly half are also self-employed.

For some of these students, the answer to career viability will rest with they can fulfill those traditional music occupations that are available in a society that does not place a universally high value on the arts – performing, teaching, or directing church or

community groups. For a growing number, however, career viability will relate to how adept they become at leveraging opportunities to connect their work with a diverse array of musical interests among the general public. And that has significant implications for those of us engaged in both higher education and in professional development programs for musicians.

A recent text entitled *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education* (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006) suggests that institutions of higher learning too often fail to “provide an environment in which students are encouraged to learn about their own purposes and values and to seek solutions to larger human and societal issues.” (p. 243) One of the book’s co-authors, Arthur Chickering, defines authenticity as consistency among what we believe, what we say, and what we do. Authenticity is a lifelong challenge associated with encountering new experiences, new persons, and new information. (p.8) Throughout our lives, advancing levels of cognitive maturity and affective complexity urge us to deconstruct and reconstruct our world views.

The text also differentiates between spirituality and religiosity, citing Teasdale’s (1999) view that spirituality is “a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality.” (p. 17) These two concepts – authenticity and spirituality -- form the basis of the authors’ call for bold initiatives to explicitly link the intellectual resources of higher education with the pressing social, economic, political, and environmental issues of the 21st century.

This perspective on higher education resonates with Stephen Brookfield’s (1986) insightful description of adult learning: “If adults . . . are actively exploring ideas,

beliefs, and practices,” he says, “then we are likely to have a society in which creativity, diversity, and the continuous re-creation of social structures are the accepted norms.” (p. 1) In a similar vein, the Lectorate website invokes Jarvis’s (2002) notion of continuous learning as subjective, reflective, and experimental in relation to societal change. Rather than providing answers for a lifetime, Jarvis believes education should encourage knowledge and skills for learners to find answers for themselves. I would amend this view to include the idea that education across the lifespan must instill the dispositions and wherewithal not only for finding answers, but also for identifying problems and challenges and assuming leadership in addressing them.

Taken together, these views provide context for the question that underlies our current international dialogue about pre-service and career learning needs of musicians. Simply put, that question is: What does it mean to be a professional musician in the 21st century? Struggling with this question in its multiple and complex dimensions inevitably raises issues of authenticity. Through inner growth regarding our purpose and value as musicians, combined with consideration of the ways in which our purpose and value interface with larger societal issues for music and the arts, we can accomplish greater consistency between thought and practice. That consistency challenges us to deconstruct and reconstruct our visions of educational systems and approaches that are too frequently divorced from real-world artistic, social, cultural, and financial realities. And reconstruction of systems provides the impetus for the initiative, adaptation, and growth necessary for musicians to establish their professional value in the society of the 21st century. In addition, such reconstructionist thinking forces us to articulate and model

inherent relationships among the careers of musicians, the work of arts institutions, and public perceptions of artists and the arts as essential elements of the public good.

I am not acquainted with the statistics in Europe, but in the United States, attendance at classical music, opera, and jazz events has remained essentially static since 1982, when surveys were first taken. About ten to twelve percent of American adults attend at least one classical or jazz event in any 12-month period, and about three percent attend an opera (NEA, 2002). In 1994, the Knight Foundation funded a ten-year, 13-million dollar program called *The Magic of Music* to assist American orchestras in solving some of their problems. One of the findings of this program was that the public does not dislike classical music; rather it dislikes the concert-going experience. In addition, it became evident that orchestras that are not relevant to their communities are increasingly endangered – outstanding playing, renowned conductors and soloists, and world-class architecture mean little if orchestras' programs do not reverberate throughout their communities. The foundation also learned that transforming orchestras must involve every facet of the orchestra family, including the musicians. And finally, they discovered that participatory music experiences among the public correlate positively with attendance and later ticket purchases for concerts. (Wolf, 2006, pp. 49-50)

Though such societal issues are necessarily interwoven with career development, for the most part they have not been fully integrated into music school curriculums. Nor are they as substantively pursued in independent professional development programs as they might be. Nevertheless, many creative program models, including some that are referenced on the Lectorate website, are striving to raise the consciousness and skills of musicians relative to their roles and potential value in the larger community. I will not

reiterate these here, except to note briefly the recent Juilliard-Carnegie Academy, a partnership between two world-class institutions. According to *The Juilliard Journal Online* (Marchioni, 2006), the Academy has a threefold mission: “to nurture young performers in fulfilling their own talents, to help develop the evolving role of the musician in society, and to provide public-school children with access to a high level of music education and performance.” Though I have some personal reservations about the way the public school piece of this work is being approached, the Academy reinforces the fact that integrating artistic development with social consciousness through collaborations between higher education and real-world arts organizations is a growing phenomenon. An ongoing concern from a lifelong learning perspective, however, is that such programs still remain more peripheral and elective than central to music school curricula.

Music initiatives of this sort also align with more broad-based conceptions of higher education’s role in community engagement and public service. The University of Michigan, for example, houses the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good. The Forum oversees a national movement that is using partnerships, internships, model programs, seminars, and research and scholarship to reintegrate American universities with societal concerns. Graham Spanier, president of The Pennsylvania State University, has been a leading force in engagement for higher education. He stresses that “true engagement must . . . emphasize the integration of teaching, research, and service – being responsive to the needs of today’s students and tomorrow’s - not yesterday’s; it will enrich learning by bringing research and engagement into the curriculum and provide practical opportunities for students to prepare for the world they will enter.” (2002) As a

final example, Arizona State University is seeking to model a system of increased access without sacrificing quality, and that integrates into its mission high levels of teaching and scholarship, global perspectives, and accountability for the economic, social, and cultural vitality of its local region.

Attempts to articulate the contributions of the arts to the public good generally tend toward talking about the psyche, the expressive, aesthetic, non-linguistic nature of our beings, and the ways in which emotional intelligence and aesthetic knowing complement rational and linguistic knowledge. Over the past several decades, we have extended those views to explain the process-based values of the arts, particularly in children's learning – the role of risk-taking, of contemplating multiple solutions to problems, of creating something unique, of reflecting and critiquing and practicing for achievement, of experiencing the intrinsic spiritual connections that occur in the presence of rich artistic expression. And of course there have been efforts to advocate for the arts by extolling their instrumental values, such as improved academic performance, economic revitalization, and physical, emotional, and social well-being.

My intention is not to lapse into the controversy regarding intrinsic versus extra-arts outcomes. Rather, I want to suggest that, in music, the full spectrum of benefits must originate with the fundamental human impulse to create and respond to music. In 1949, Roger Sessions (1965) delivered a series of lectures at Juilliard in which he queried, “How shall we explain the power that men and women of all times have recognized in music . . . If we are to get at the sources of the musical impulse, we must start with the impulse to make music – it is not a question of why music appeals to us, but why men and women in every generation have been impelled to create music.” (p. 3) Sessions's

thoughts were echoed in the later writings of John Blacking, whose studies of the Venda led him to believe that inherent musical ability is a defining characteristic of being human.

In my experience, those who elect music as a career generally are impelled, at least early on, by inspiration and a particular affinity for making and understanding music. We musicians are fond of saying that we did not choose music, music chose us. Many students with whom I have worked have sacrificed the promise of high salaries and material wealth in other fields for the calling of music. When I meet with the parents of prospective students, they sometimes acknowledge being baffled by their children's choice to pursue music studies, yet they also testify to the lived experience of sons and daughters who are inspired by the prospect of devoting their lives to the art.

I have seen this same kind of inspiration in career musicians. Admittedly, it may be less evident in the context of major institutions, where adversarial cultures and a sense of entitlement may blunt artistic inspiration and commitment to the public good. Nevertheless, many musicians find professional rewards in contexts where they can be creative, interact in relaxed and immediate ways with their students and audiences, and feel in control of their own musicianship and time. By way of example, a few months ago a professional musician working in our Atlanta schools partnership program spontaneously declared: "*Working with kids in Sound Learning has brought me back to my love of music and why I became a musician in the first place.*" A high percentage of such musicians have embraced what we now call portfolio careers – self-managed, flexible combinations of activities such as performing, teaching, conducting, composing,

arranging, administering, public engagement activities, and other pursuits that keep them personally and professionally rooted in music.

The role of portfolio careers in sustaining the professional lives and energies of musicians carries important implications for lifelong musician education and learning. Moreover, the fact that at least a portion of these successful musicians has grown to see themselves as adding value to the larger society, rather than expecting society to sustain their isolated and detached musical prowess, indicates the need for early grappling with the question of what it means to be a musician in contemporary society. Structured opportunities for students to think analytically about this question is a positive way to consider that careers will likely involve a complex of intentional and complementary initiatives supported by lifelong learning for a cross-section of knowledge and skills. That's a very different message from the frequently unspoken subtext that if one expects to survive as a musician, he or she will necessarily piece together a potentially random group of jobs that have the cumulative effects of compromising lofty ambitions and perpetuating the view that one is undervalued. It is also different from starting with the question of mechanics – those tools and strategies that will guarantee one's livelihood as a professional musician. Emphasizing technique over values places the *what* before the *why*. It runs the risk of focusing on ways to manipulate an unsuspecting public into supporting what *is*, rather than compelling musicians to consider the fundamental human impulse for music and how they might nurture public demand by asking *what could and what should be*.

The alternative I am proposing, and which I believe is consistent with the themes of the Lectorate, derives from a vocational perspective – being called to the service of

music. Parker Palmer (2000) notes that vocation arises from listening rather than willfulness and that meaning arises from the ability to separate what one's life is truly about from what one wishes it might be about. The RAND Corporation (2001; 2004) has noted that while arts organizations began endorsing community relevance as a legitimate function some time ago, the emphasis was on advocating for the arts by willfully increasing the supply of available events rather than appealing to the public's interest through direct, intrinsically valuable, involvement. By contrast, RAND urges high quality, sustained engagement between artists and the public as the key to transforming people from casual to frequent arts participants. Intrinsic benefits motivate continuing interest and participation, as well as a desire for competence. In turn, those benefits translate into broader and deeper involvement; and the desire for continuing involvement offers a basis for economic stability for arts organizations and artists in the 21st century. This approach represents consistency among our beliefs about the arts, our stated values regarding the arts, and the practices we implement to prepare artists as contributors to the public good. It is what Chickering calls authenticity, and it reflects the creativity and re-creation of social structures that Brookfield sees emanating from lifelong learning.

Turning to the issue of practical implications, Chickering (2006) notes that authenticity can be threatened by indoctrination: “. . . we must become aware,” he says, “of the subtle, and not so subtle, kinds of indoctrination expressed through our daily practices . . .” (p. 10). Everyone here could point readily to examples of the indoctrination that often typifies musician education, and the ways in which such indoctrination is perpetuated throughout the profession: teaching as a fallback survival strategy requiring no discrete body of knowledge; allegiance to the master teacher as a

requisite for survival or career advancement; academic study perceived as a compromise of artistic development; self-centeredness and competitiveness rather than collaboration and empowerment; adversarial attitudes between musicians and management, or between faculty and administrators.

As we propose new and liberating models for musician education, it is essential that we do not impose alternative forms of indoctrination. An extreme example is a book I found recently entitled *How to Make Money Performing in Schools*. Opportunists are attracted to the rise of entrepreneurship programs in higher education, and the back cover of this book declares that “schools spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every year presenting performing arts assemblies – you have all the ingredients you need to get your share of this money.” Such attitudes of entitlement, masquerading as entrepreneurship, obviously do not exemplify the kind of commitment to societal value that I am advocating.

What, then, are some of the practical implications and manifestations of the ideas I’ve raised? First is the adoption and advocacy of a lifespan perspective, one in which career development is viewed as an unfolding process from entry into higher education through post-graduate work and continuing throughout the lifetime of one’s career.

The evolution of career options for musicians throughout the twenty-first century is currently unknown, and the ways in which the fundamental acts of performing music, creating music, and teaching music may manifest themselves in changing musical cultures will offer untold opportunities and challenges. The vagaries of fiscal stability and the range of audience opportunities for music will challenge major orchestras and opera companies to be increasingly creative about community relevance without

sacrificing artistic quality. Ease of access to music of every style and genre will influence both the nature and the mediums for relationships between artists and the public. The desire for music making and the availability of technical support to create and record one's own music will blur the roles of listener, creator, and performer. Public interest in live classical music will manifest itself more vividly in intimate, informal environments where intergenerational audiences and musicians can form a comfortable and interactive community. Collaborations among schools, social agencies, financial institutions, corporations, arts organizations, and higher education will engender sustainable cultures for music participation and learning. Multiple entry points afforded by third space environments and universal design will invite people to pursue musical participation and growth regardless of prior knowledge, skills, and experience. Distinctions among popular, ethnic, and classical music will break down in the face of new musical expressions. Music management, technology, production, publishing, and recording will become more integrally tied with the historic career options of performance, composition, and teaching.

The point of a lifespan perspective is about developing realistic views regarding the complementary relationships between foundational studies in higher education and dispositions toward learning and growth as lifelong endeavor. Musicians who are equipped to balance the fundamentals of artistic value with adaptation to a changing world are the most likely to have fulfilling and successful careers. Most importantly, both pre-professional and professional musicians must be empowered for self-directed learning and encouraged to pursue formal, informal, and non-formal opportunities for continuing growth and development.

A second implication is the need to foster attitudes that public engagement and service are essential components of musicians' work, and then to provide opportunities to practice supervised engagement in model community programs. As higher education institutions and arts organizations assume increasing orientations toward public service, both students and professionals will be obliged to demonstrate their ability to implement participatory music experiences. Supporting young music graduates as they move into the professional world should be a collaborative expectation of higher education and arts organizations.

Third, the leadership and faculty of higher education institutions must take seriously the need for musicians to develop portfolio careers. This will not be achieved by the addition of endless discrete courses, but by a combination of dedicated course work, supervised internships, and infusion of skills and concepts into existing curricula. Pilot programs should be developed and researched to demonstrate the impact on alumni, and musicians who have effectively built portfolio careers should be studied as models and invited to host seminars and serve as mentors for aspiring students. As a prelude to portfolio careers, student musicians should build cumulative portfolios that document their musical progress, their related education and experience, and their self-analyses of realistic career goals and directions.

Fourth, lifelong learning must be viewed not merely as a process of knowledge acquisition but also as a process of knowledge generation. Through real-time and virtual communities of practice and learning, students and professionals may collaboratively address problems and pose solutions. By assuming leadership in identifying and addressing challenges and opportunities, they will become change agents in the world of

music and in the larger society. As areas such as management, grant-writing, and entrepreneurship are integrated into the curriculums of higher education and professional development programs, action research should be undertaken to assess the impact of student-initiated projects.

Fifth, there must be individuals willing to undertake and lead the time-consuming, political, and delicate process of institutional and curricular change in higher education. Too many professors enter conservatory and university teaching strictly as a function of their achievement as practitioners, without any consideration of their abilities to honor the developmental learning needs of students, changing career perspectives, and supportive learning environments. In many cases, they are inclined merely to replicate the training they remember or to teach on the basis of intuition. These are not necessarily bad things, but they must be informed by a larger context that ensures more relevant career preparation for the musicians of the 21st century. Guided opportunities for student reflection, dialogue, and inquiry are essential to the process of learning how to learn. Professional development for faculty, mentoring programs for entering faculty, and the development of institutional collaborations for cross-disciplinary opportunities are all part of this process.

These ideas are not new to most of you in this audience, and it is clear that generative work in these regards is well underway in Europe. One example is obviously the work of the Lectorate, under which this seminar is sponsored. We know what must be done, and it is essential that we continue to operationalize our ideas in practice and to disseminate both the nature of our work and its impact. Sometimes the multiple facets and dimensions can seem overwhelming, yet perseverance will yield progress. Let us

take heart from Margaret Wheatley's choice of a musical metaphor to explain change in the second edition (1999) of her groundbreaking 1992 book, *Leadership and the New Science*:

This [quantum] world demands that we be present together, and be willing to improvise. We agree on the melody, tempo, and key, and then we play. We listen carefully, we communicate constantly, and suddenly, there is music, possibilities beyond anything we imagined. The music comes from somewhere else, from a unified whole we have accessed among ourselves, a relationship that transcends our false sense of separateness. When the music appears, we can't help but be amazed and grateful. (p. 45)

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