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Working in music: the conservatoire professor

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This article describes an innovative approach to analysing, describing and evaluating the careers of musicians, and applies it in the case of 37 'professors', that is, instrumental[1] teachers, working at a conservatoire in the UK. The professors emerge as flexible and committed musicians who enjoy teaching conservatoire students, and who nearly all feel that they benefit musically and personally from this work.

Introduction

Careers in performance

Surveys of the 'destinations' of graduates of UK institutions (e.g. HEFCE, 2001) frequently overlook the achievement of the music graduates who have arguably been most successful – because they are earning their livings by practising their subject as a musical performer. Such surveys typically assume that a salaried post with a single employer is the hallmark of success. Few such posts are available in music, and many successful musicians – including famously successful performers like Menuhin and du Pré – never had one and never, so far as is known, aspired to have one (du Pré & du Pré, 1997; Menuhin, 1976).

Some successful performers in the UK do have salaried posts, for example with orchestras or opera companies, but this is not usual (Mills & Smith, 2002). Many performers derive their income through a portfolio of fee-paid work with a wide range of contractors, including some that are based overseas, and through initiating and organising events themselves. While performers may build up regular work with some contractors, for example by participating in the same music festival for several years, there are prestigious performance opportunities that arise at most once in a career. Evaluating musicians' careers using the benchmark of the full-time salaried post almost always leads to the careers being found wanting, and to reports that are uninformative. The wrong tool is being used.

The lack of a tool suitable for evaluating and describing careers in music limits our ability to distinguish between different sorts of careers in music, to offer careers advice to those considering a higher education or career in music, or to guide those – including conservatoire students – who have already committed themselves to music, and want to know how to optimise their prospects. It also reduces the power of musicians to change their employment conditions for the better, should this be appropriate, because there is very little information on which they can draw when making their case.

Devising a tool for researching careers in music

The *Working in Music*[2] research project was set up in 2001 to investigate the careers of alumni of the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London. So that we could do this effectively,

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we first needed to develop a tool for describing and evaluating musicians' careers that would:

- be sensitive to their nature (sensitivity)
- be felt by musicians to give them a full opportunity to talk about their career (authenticity)
- produce accounts of careers that musicians would recognise as their own (recognisability)
- allow comparison between groups of musicians (differentiation)
- be able to be used also for other occupational groups (extensibility).

We began by considering Carey Bennet's notion of 'subjective career' (Bennet, 1987), which we developed and distorted. If you want to ask someone about their subjective career, you ask them, not one of their employers. The notion of subjective career allows one to describe oneself as a composer, for example, even if one's income comes mainly from work in a supermarket, or as an instrumental teacher, as one waits for the next commission to come in, or for a completed work to win a competition. Subjective career is determined not by how one earns the means to pay the rent, or even how one spends one's working time: it is what one feels one is.

Initially, we tried using just two dimensions to model career:

1. the proportion of working time spent on different activities (objective)
2. professional identity (subjective).

Our first interviewees were 34 alumni of 1995. These interviews took place in Autumn 2001. We used a semi-structured interview schedule based around these two dimensions as a framework for encouraging interviewees to tell the history of their careers to date. All these interviews were telephone interviews.[3]

Some 1995 alumni had a relatively simple story to tell. One alumnus has always thought of himself as a classical performer (professional identity) and has always worked as one: initially freelance, and more recently as a salaried member of an established ensemble. We described him as an 'immediate performer'.

A second alumnus has also thought of himself as a classical performer, but his passage has been more troubled. On finishing his course at the conservatoire, he did many auditions, but it was some time before these started to lead to freelance work. Meanwhile, he picked up casual work as a concert usher. Recently, his professional identity has changed in emphasis: he has started to think of himself less as a soloist, and more as a member of a chamber orchestra – which is much of the work that he is picking up, and what he intends to focus on in future. We called him a 'performer'.

However, the stories told by some alumni were markedly more complex. Consider, if you will, the career of an alumna, a 'performer who teaches'. Initially, she took on some instrumental teaching in schools, in addition to work as a freelance performer, in order to make ends meet. Less than a year later, she had gradually replaced the general woodwind teaching that she found less satisfactory with the specialist teaching that she prefers, and she felt reasonably content with her profile of work. However, two years into her career a full-time contract to work in an overseas orchestra became available, and so she gave up

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her teaching and went abroad. A year later the orchestra closed, and she returned to the UK and again took on general woodwind teaching alongside her freelance performance through financial necessity. A few months before we interviewed her, she accepted a full-time instrumental teaching post in an independent school, hoping to continue her freelance performance alongside this. But when interviewed she explained that school had become too time-consuming, and she was reconsidering her future. We intend to interview her again, at a later stage of *Working in Music*, to learn how her career has progressed.

These three alumni each had a professional identity – that of classical performer – that held constant throughout the first six years of their careers. The professional identities of some of their peers changed, as they became influenced by the work that they took on. Some alumni who, like the alumna above, initially took on instrumental teaching simply because they needed the money, had found by 2001 that it was an integral part of their portfolio that they would not wish to be without personally or musically. In terms of professional identity, they had become what we called 'performer-teachers'. There were other alumni who, instead of (or as well as) teaching, had taken on performance work that extended beyond classical music, for example shows or jazz, and whose professional identities had shifted to reflect this. We called them 'performers who have broadened their range'.

In addition, there were alumni whose careers could not be represented – in a way that would lead them to recognise themselves – using only the two dimensions of time and identity. They comprised:

- alumni for whom there was significant disjunction between how they apportioned their working time and where their income came from. They included composers whose composition, at this early stage of their career, was taking up much time but yielding a relatively low income
- alumni for whom there was significant disjunction between how they spend their working time and what they felt they are, or seriously intend to be. They include an alumnus who took on work in computers (IT) alongside his freelance performing, and who became so concerned by the financial uncertainties of his freelance work that he accepted a full-time IT job. However, he maintains his standard and contacts as a performer by continuing with some freelance playing, and seriously intends to return to playing full-time once his IT job has provided him with financial security.

Accordingly, we experimented with increasing the number of dimensions used to model careers to four:

1. the proportion of working time spent on different activities
2. the proportion of income derived from these different activities
3. the professional identity of the musician
4. the vision, or aspiration, of the musician.

We tested this model over the next year as we interviewed a further 100 alumni who completed their studies between 1957 and 2000, and we found that it met our five aims:

1. We did not feel that we needed to distort careers in order for the model to fit (sensitivity)
2. Alumni felt that application of the model gave them a full opportunity to talk about their career (authenticity)

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3. When we questioned them, alumni recognised our accounts of their careers as their own (recognisability)
4. We had used the model to map the careers of alumni who had followed different paths in music (differentiation)
5. We had used it to map the career of alumni who had moved out of music (extensibility).

The introduction into the research of alumni who had completed their studies prior to 1996 meant that we needed to consider how to research periods of time markedly longer than six years. We opted to ask alumni initially to talk about the five years that have just elapsed, and then about the first five years after they completed their studies at the conservatoire. We then gave them the opportunity to 'infill' by talking about developments in their careers during the years between these two periods. Figure 1 shows how this methodology allows study of musicians' careers:

- quasi-longitudinally (horizontally in Figure 1), through considering individual musicians' careers from the end of their study (the left-hand end of their arrow) until the present day. It is quasi-longitudinal rather than longitudinal because one is working backwards in time, through musicians' reflections, rather than following them forward in time, through direct observation at different points of their development
- cross-sectionally (vertically in Figure 1), for example through comparison of how groups of musicians who graduated in different years, or who specialise in different instruments, have fared over the last five years
- historically (diagonally ↗ in Figure 1), for example through comparison of the 'first five years' of groups of musicians who graduated in different years.

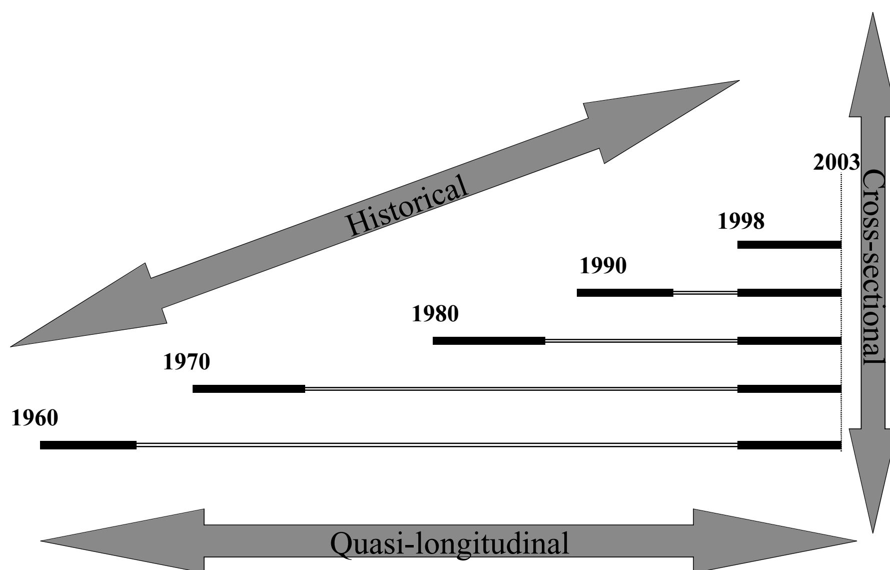

Fig. 1 Researching careers with a length of more than five years

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Supplementary 'units' that may be added to the basic interview or questionnaire schedule:

- probe the teaching career of musicians whose work includes, or once included, teaching (Unit 1)
- ask musicians to describe (and if appropriate describe how they have overcome) barriers in the progress of their career (Unit 2)
- ask musicians who studied at a conservatoire to reflect on how well their course prepared them for their career and, if appropriate, how it could have been improved (Unit 3).

There is scope for further units to be added, in due course, should the need arise.

Below, we apply the methodology developed for *Working in Music* to a sample of instrumental teachers working in conservatoires, i.e. conservatoire professors. At 37, the sample of conservatoire professors was insufficiently large to allow their subdivision into more than two historical groups. However, much of the scope of the *Working in Music* methodology may be illustrated by study of this group.

But first, some background information about conservatoire professors is needed.

Conservatoire professors

The roughly 1,100 instrumentalists who provide individual instrumental tuition for the nine UK conservatoires are typically musicians with a distinguished career in performance who teach for a minority of their working time and who are usually paid for teaching by the hour (FBC, 2003). This arrangement contrasts with the practice in some other countries, where conservatoire teachers typically have salaried posts, are more likely to teach full-time, and may be civil servants.

As professional performers for whom teaching is an integral part of their professional persona, conservatoire teachers are among the 'performer-teachers' who have influenced, and who continue to influence, the culture of Western classical music.

The position of instrumental teacher in a conservatoire has substantial status among classical performing musicians in the UK, and also in other countries (Nerland & Hanken, 2002). In a tradition that dates back to the 19th century, the teachers in several of the UK conservatoires are still known informally (and in some institutions formally) as 'professors'. Students travel to a particular conservatoire from around the world because they want to study with a specific professor. Professors frequently name the conservatoire(s) where they teach among the achievements listed in the programmes for their concerts. The managers of top orchestras indicate which of their musicians have conservatoire appointments in publicity materials. Professors interviewed for an earlier study (FBC, 2003) spoke frequently of their appointment to a conservatoire as a defining point of their career: a supreme achievement. In particular, many professors who teach at one of the conservatoires where they formerly studied speak of the day when they first crossed its threshold as professor, rather than student, as one that they believe they will always remember.

Performer-teachers fulfil a role within the culture of Western classical music that is crucial to the making of the performers of the future, but which has not been widely researched. Persson's (1996) investigation of tensions between the roles of performer and

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instrumental teacher is based on the study of just one novice teacher working in a UK university. Other studies of this tension (e.g. Bouij, 1998; Mark, 1998) have focused on teaching in schools, which research of school instrumental teachers (Mills & Smith, 2003) suggests is perceived quite differently, in terms of teachers' professional identity and notions of good practice, from teaching in higher education. The influence on conservatoire professors of the educational institutions that engage them is also under-researched (Jørgensen, 2000).

Given the general paucity of research into the careers of conservatoire professors, coupled with the tendency for musicians to focus on their teachers' foibles when writing anecdotally (du Pré & du Pré, 1997; Menuhin, 1976), assumptions that conservatoire teachers give low priority to their teaching, and have underdeveloped teaching skills, are perhaps not surprising (Mills, 2002).

Investigating the careers of conservatoire professors

Method

Thirty-seven instrumental professors were interviewed between January 2003 and May 2003 using the methodology developed for *Working in Music*. Thirty-six of the professors were an incidental sample drawn from the roughly 90 instrumental professors at the RCM who also studied there. The final RCM professor studied at another conservatoire in London. Thirty-five professors were interviewed face-to-face, and the other two by telephone. Thirty-six of the interviews were carried out by the author, the other by another member of the RCM's staff. The semi-structured schedules used included all three supplementary units listed above, but the findings from Unit 3 are not reported in this article. Thus the prompts were as shown in Figure 2.

The most recent five years Please describe your work over this period. What percentage of your working time was taken up with each of the activities (e.g. playing, teaching) you have listed? And what percentage of your income? How would you describe your professional identity? -- i.e. if someone neutral asked you 'What do you do?', what would you say? What are your plans, hopes for the future?

The first five years (prompts as above)

The period in between What were the important developments in your career during this period?

Unit 1: teaching How, when, why did you get into teaching? Does teaching have an impact on your performance, and if so, how? When did you begin to feel this? How did you learn how to teach?

Unit 2: barriers Did you encounter any barriers in the progression of your career?

Unit 3: your time at the conservatoire Could the conservatoire have prepared you better for your career, or helped you to overcome barriers?

Fig. 2 Interview prompts

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In *Working in Music*, researchers make notes during interviews and write them up on a standard form shortly after an interview is complete. Interviews are not recorded. The reasons for this include:

- concern that the use of recording equipment might constrain the frankness of discussion
- concern that the need to secure advance agreement to recording might discourage participation in the research, particularly among those who are to be interviewed on the telephone
- practical difficulties associated with the large number of venues being used for interviews
- a wish to use the funding available for *Working in Music* to interview a relatively large sample of people, rather than for transcribing recordings.

Quantitative data arising from interviews are entered onto an SPSS database. Analysis draws on both quantitative and qualitative data.

The dataset relating to 37 conservatoire professors forms a subset of *Working in Music* data that had been collected, at the time of analysis, in respect of 366 alumni of the conservatoire. In the results section that follows, some comparisons are made with this reference group of 366 alumni.

Results

This section works through the interview prompts listed in Figure 2, and takes the first five prompts listed there as the subsection headings here.

The 37 professors were made up of 25 (68%) males and 12 (32%) females. Thus they are broadly representative of the gender balance of the conservatoire's whole professorial body, where 137 (72%) of 191 professors are male, and 54 (28%) are female (FBC, 2003). The median leaving years of the males and females were 1973 and 1972 respectively: a line drawn between 1973 and 1974 separates both the males and the females into two groups of 19 and 18 professors respectively.

Four of the professors – male leavers of 1963, 1968, 1969 and 1973 – left the conservatoire early because they had secured positions in major orchestras.

The instrumental specialisms of the 37 professors while they were students at the conservatoire were as shown in Table 1. However, six of the professors have changed their specialism since entering the conservatoire:

- A pianist (1966[4]) worked mainly as a recorder player and singer once she left
- A trombonist (1968) was an orchestral trombonist for many years, but now specialises in conducting
- A pianist/oboist (1969) left the course early to take up an orchestral position as a percussionist
- A pianist (1974) has returned to the conservatoire to teach baroque viola
- On completing his course, a trombonist (1974) took up an orchestral position as a percussionist
- A guitarist (1976) changed to lute during the course.

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Table 1 *Instrumental specialisms of professors when studying at conservatoire*

Family	Instrument	No.	Family	Instrument	No.
Keyboard	Piano	7	Woodwind	Flute	1
Strings	Violin	3		Oboe	1
	Viola	2		Clarinet	1
	Cello	1		Bass clarinet	1
	Bass	1		Bassoon	1
	Harp	2		Saxophone	1
	Guitar	1	Brass	Horn	2
	Lute	1		Trombone	3
Voice		6	Percussion		2

How many years elapsed between the time that alumni left the RCM as students and returned as professors? Twelve professors answered this question, from memory, during their interviews. In their cases, the time that had elapsed ranged from 1 year to 25 years, and the average (mean) was 13.7 years.[5]

Some conservatoire professors can give a clear date which separates the time when they were working as a professor from the time when they were not. For example:

- A singer (1961) was invited to take on two or three regular pupils at the conservatoire in 1977, and has carried on working there ever since
- A clarinettist (1991) began teaching at the conservatoire by taking on some regular pupils in 2000.

Many, however, cannot.

It is common for musicians to give some masterclasses or to 'dep' (deputise for a professor who is ill or on tour) prior to being asked to take on some regular pupils – and the new professor will often then take on the pupils they taught while depping. It is not unheard of for musicians to have several periods of masterclasses and depping, sometimes separated by a few years, prior to their being invited to take on regular pupils.

One can say that musicians have typically gained several years of experience as performers before returning to the conservatoire as professors. Instances of them returning within five years are very rare: an interval of over a decade is more usual, and in some cases the interval is longer than 20 years. The sample includes a singer (1963) who returned as a professor within a year, taking on two or three regular pupils alongside an indubitably distinguished performing career. But this appointment was a strategic one, made by an incoming conservatoire head who was deliberately injecting some 'younger blood' into the institution. It was very unusual then, and it is difficult to imagine it being repeated today.

The last five years

Study of the last five years is cross-sectional: it addresses how a cross-section of alumni from different years fared over roughly the same period – 1998–2003 in the case of the

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Table 2 *Time spent, and income gained, from teaching and performing*

		37 professors	366 alumni
Last 5 years	Time performing	59%	46%
	Income performing	60%	45%
	Time teaching	37%	32%
	Income teaching	40%	34%
First 5 years	Time performing	78%	55%
	Income performing	81%	52%
	Time teaching	18%	30%
	Income teaching	19%	32%

professors. As *Working in Music* began in 2001, the period for the reference group of 366 alumni ranged from 1996–2001 to 1998–2003.

Dimensions 1 and 2: time and money (see p. 181) Given the generally close relationship, in this study, between the proportion of working time occupied by an activity and the proportion of income that it generated, Dimensions 1 and 2 are reported under the same heading.

Table 2 shows that, over the last five years, the professors recall spending an average of 59% of their working time performing and 37% of it teaching. Thus, overall, they did more performing, and more teaching, than the reference group. In addition, their performance tended to be more lucrative. However, there is wide variation in the balance that professors set between their performing and their teaching. The proportion of time spent performing ranges from 0% to 95%, while the proportion of time spent teaching ranges from 5% to 95%.[6] This is not a simple matter of professors teaching more and performing less as they get older, or of performing careers on some instruments being of shorter length, as the following two examples illustrate:

1. One singer (1973) performs for 30% of the time, while another singer (1974) performs for 5%
2. One pianist (1968) performs for 70% of the time, while another (1973) performs for 35%.

However, there is a tendency for professors who completed their studies earlier to teach more and perform less. Table 3, which divides the professors into two roughly even historical groups, illustrates this. However, even the seemingly large difference of 16% shown for teaching time is not, quite, statistically significant.[7]

Table 4 shows differences between the time that male and female professors recall spending teaching and performing over the last five years. While the females appear to be teaching more and performing less, this difference is not statistically significant. For a small amount of their working time – an average of 4% – professors neither perform nor teach. Examples include:

- A pianist (1967) who spends roughly a tenth of the time writing for music magazines. Some articles relate to piano music, others to piano technique. He derives negligible

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income from this work, but feels that it helps him to develop his insight as both performer and teacher

- A viola player (1974) who, like some other professors, composes
- A clarinettist (1991) who is chairman of his orchestra.

Where professors are doing some work outside music, this is through choice. For example, one (1979) is trustee of a charity.

Table 3 *Time spent performing and teaching by professors who completed their studies before or from 1974*

		Before 1974 (19 professors)	From 1974 (18 professors)
Last 5 years	Time performing	52%	66%
	Time teaching	45%	29%
First 5 years	Time performing	78%	79%
	Time teaching	20%	17%

Table 4 *Time spent performing and teaching by male and female professors*

		25 male professors	12 female professors
Last 5 years	Time performing	61%	54%
	Time teaching	33%	46%
First 5 years	Time performing	79%	77%
	Time teaching	21%	13%

Dimension 3: professional identity (see p. 181) Sixteen professors described their professional identity primarily as 'performer', 15 described it primarily as 'musician', five said that they are primarily a 'teacher', and one is primarily a 'coach'. When asked why they described themselves primarily as a 'musician' rather than as a 'performer', for example, five reported that they want to signal the broad range of their work, and two spoke of the negative, or trivial, image of their instruments (trombone and recorder). Interestingly, four of the five professors who are primarily 'teachers' are singers.

Dimension 4: vision (see p. 181) Some professors are very satisfied with their profile of work now – for example:

> 'I have realised my dreams. I remember standing outside [the RCM] as a teenager and thinking that I wanted to be a principal trombone and teach at the [RCM]. Well, I have done that.' (1981)

Twenty-six of the 37 professors are broadly satisfied with their profile of work now, and hope to continue it – although several said that they were always trying to raise further the

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standards of their work, and two spoke of hoping to cut down the overall amount of work that they are doing. One said:

> 'I would like not to work so hard, but to still maintain my abilities in everything.' (1991)

Another (1972) would like to divide his time into periods of touring/concerts and others when he is working and thinking on his own. If he could group together concerts with similar repertoire, this would be more efficient and more satisfying:

> 'Musicians usually have to build up their career in a haphazard way, accepting everything that comes along. It is easy to carry on like that forever, instead of reappraising.'

Eleven of the professors aspire to alter their balance of work, at least slightly, by increasing their performing (5 professors), composing (3), teaching (1), time for research (1) and conducting (1). Comments include:

> 'I do not want to become one of those old profs about whom everyone says "He was a good player once".' (1983)
> 'I want to carry on using music to express what I want to express. This is more important to me than money. I feel fortunate to be having so many opportunities to do what I really want to do.' (1985)

Experienced professors sometimes speak of their future in terms of passing on their knowledge to younger players – for example:

> 'I want to carry on being a bassoonist, and to pass on some of this to young musicians.' (1965)

The first five years

Dimensions 1 and 2: time and money (see p. 181) Table 2 shows that the professors recall spending 80% of their time performing and 18% teaching.[8] Thus they did more performing, and less teaching, than the reference group of 366 alumni. This ties in with the reputation of conservatoire professors as particularly successful performers. Moreover, the performing work of the musicians who were to become professors was more lucrative than that of the reference group.

Most professors speak of having had a number of 'lucky breaks' during the early stages of their career. Some went straight into orchestras. Another professor, who prefers the variety of working freelance, became principal Wagner tuba in Welsh National Opera's production of *The Ring* as soon as she left (1983), and this provided plenty of work straight away. Several future professors had built a freelance career for themselves before they left the conservatoire. Some were offered surplus playing by the professor who had taught them, and then gradually upgraded their portfolio of work as more high-quality work was offered to them directly. One describes being 'runner-up' for an orchestral post as the best thing that could have happened to her, because it led to a lot of freelance work without tying her to an orchestra (1983).

Some of the future professors took on a broad range of work. One (1968), for example, spent his entire first five years freelancing: he played with all the London orchestras, did a

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year with the London Symphony Orchestra, played in films, was in *Hey Jude*, and played with Deep Purple and David Munro. He had diversified before he left the conservatoire: in addition to playing for the Philharmonia and at Covent Garden, he had been in an on-stage band at the National Theatre. He relished the challenge of playing in costume, and without music or his spectacles.

Table 3 shows that the time that future professors spent performing and teaching differed little whether one completed one's studies before or from 1974. This casts an element of doubt on the oft-made anecdotal assertion (see, e.g., Youth Music, 2002) that the world of music employment has changed substantially over the last 20 years or so.

Table 4 shows that male and female professors spent similar proportions of time performing during the first five years after completing their studies. Female professors spent less of their time teaching – but this result is not statistically significant.

Dimension 3: professional identity (see p. 181) Twenty-two professors described their professional identity primarily as 'performer', and the other 15 described it primarily as 'musician'. Two of the 'musicians' said that they described themselves that way because they wanted to signal the broad range of their work, and two said this was because of the negative or trivial image of their instrument: they comprise a recorder player, and a classical guitarist who had tired of assumptions that any professional guitarist must be a rock star. No-one described themselves as a 'teacher', which is unsurprising given that only two of the professors (both of whom labelled themselves 'musicians') taught for more than half of their time at this stage.

Dimension 4: vision (see p. 181) Twenty-six of the 37 professors were very satisfied with their profile of work during the first five years after completing their studies. Their excitement about their careers at that early stage was reflected in comments such as:

> 'I just couldn't believe that I was in the English Chamber Orchestra, playing for Benjamin Britten . . . ' (1968)

Table 5 shows how 11 professors were trying to improve further the balance of their work. The one who wanted to do less teaching at this stage explained his reasons as follows:

> 'This was because I did not have any good [i.e. advanced or motivated] pupils in the [junior conservatoire]. The beginning of one's career is the very last time when one should have problem students.' (1969)

Table 5 *How 11 future professors sought to adjust their work in the first five years*

	No.		No.
More performing	3	More solo work	1
Orchestral position	2	Wider range (including composition and jazz)	1
More chamber music	1	Be a conservatoire professor	1
More accompanying	1	Less teaching	1

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He was still taking lessons regularly at this stage, and his performing career was taking off. It would be wrong to suggest that the future professors were continuously lucky throughout these five years. For example, one (1988) had a year when six principal roles in six different places were cancelled. All the cancellations related to circumstances beyond his control, but this was close to the beginning of his career, and frightening. He kept his nerve.

Between the first five years and the last five years

The length of time that professors were speaking of here ranged from 2 to 29 years. For many professors, this was the period when their international reputation was established, although several report that 'some years were better than others'. Professors sustained the creative momentum of their work during the period. In some cases, this seems to have happened naturally, as new musical opportunities presented themselves. But this was also a period when many professors diversified their work, for example by developing a new specialism such as bass clarinet (1968), or became heavily involved in contemporary music, for example through playing in the Fires of London (1979). Some professors deliberately took time away from 'distractions' such as teaching so that they could focus on – and develop mental clarity about – their playing, sometimes at considerable financial cost to themselves. One (1968) did this for nine years, another (1976) for one year.

The beginning of this period was roughly when several musicians started to think more seriously about what they would be doing when they were 50 rather than 30. This led one future professor (1991) with a very happy and productive freelance existence to obtain a job in an orchestra. Some professors who got orchestral jobs young gradually found it difficult not to feel ground down by the more mundane aspects of their work, and the personal demand of touring. The work that many were undertaking by that time as conservatoire professors helped to sustain their creativity.

Unit 1: teaching (see Figure 2)

Teaching histories Five (14%) of the professors began teaching while they were at school, 14 while they were at college, and 18 not until they had left the conservatoire. In contemporary terms, this makes them late entrants to teaching. Half of the Year 3 BMus students currently enrolled at the RCM began teaching while they were still at school (Mills, in press).

Several of the professors started teaching before they left the RCM because they were part of a teaching family, and it was assumed that they would teach. One has a mother aged 86 who still teaches for 20 hours a week (1969). For another professor (1974), growing up with evangelism had led him to think of teaching and performing as complementary activities.

Others began teaching while they were still students because someone asked them to give lessons. For example, a future professor (1981) thought nothing of it when the parents of one of his peers at school asked him to give their son some lessons: 'I taught him in the front room of my family home.'

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Some professors started teaching simply for the money, while they were still students, but soon felt that they were learning from the experience. One (1983) described teaching at a school where standards were low. He soon realised that his flute lessons were not just about the creation of good flute players. He started planning lessons by thinking 'What can I give this person in this lesson?' and found that this approach also generated better flute players! He found this very satisfying, very fulfilling.

There were other, sometimes surprising, lessons to be learnt from teaching less advanced players – for example:

> 'There was a lad who really wanted to play in the Royal Artillery Band, and he really did not seem to have the ability. He could not play at all. But he was so determined that he made it. This was eye-opening.' (1981)

It was for similar reasons that a future professor (1988), already very well established as a soloist, continued to welcome self-styled 'non-singers' as pupils. One such pupil was a journalist, and it crossed the teacher's mind that the journalist had asked for lessons as a 'sting', as the noise that the journalist made when 'singing' sounded more like retching. The journalist had said that he wanted lessons so that people would no longer laugh at his singing. Initially uncertain about how to approach the problem, the teacher fell back on the routine of taking the pupil through the range. Following the lead given by his teacher from the piano, the journalist retched his way upwards from bass low G. Suddenly, at tenor top C, a voice emerged. The journalist was a natural countertenor, with no lower voice. He had a few lessons, and went away able to sing.

Some professors choose to continue teaching beginners for part of their time. One (1983) speaks of particularly enjoying teaching beginners 'because you do not have to undo their problems'. Another (1969) has deliberately retained a wide mix of private pupils:

> 'My private teaching includes a very gifted 8 year old Taiwanese child, and a woman in her 60s who has been learning with me since 1980 and who will say: "I heard some Martinu at a concert. Is there any that I could play?" She is a very fulfilling student to teach.'

However, some professors began teaching only when they received an invitation to teach at a conservatoire. And some have never taught a beginner.

Teaching and performance All but one of the professors considers that, at least at times, teaching helps them to perform more effectively. The professor (1965) who disagrees feels that she takes the problems of her students with her to performances, and finds it difficult to 'change gear psychologically'. This is a problem particularly when she teaches on the same day as giving a performance.

Around half of professors feel that they have always been aware that their teaching improves their playing. The others feel that they have become aware of this during their teaching career, either as they have matured, or as they have started to work with more advanced pupils.

While one can categorise the ways in which 36 professors consider that teaching improves their playing, and summarise the results as in Table 6, this gives a bland and

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Table 6 *The positive impact of teaching on playing*

	No.		No.
Improves their analysis of playing	22	Helps them maintain their technique	3
Increases their awareness of playing	2	Exposes their playing in front of a potentially critical audience	8
Requires them to address their practice skills	6	Provides a stimulus for self-reflection	5
Introduces them to new repertoire	5	Other	7
Improves their communication skills	4		

oversimplified impression of the complex responses of professors. Examples of individual responses include:

- Explaining things to someone else promotes personal understanding. Hearing someone else's playing makes it easier to diagnose and solve one's own similar problems – and helps in 'the quest to play things in the most simple way possible' (1966)
- It is 'the explaining to someone else that proves whether what you say about how you sing is accurate' (1988)
- Stopping students making mistakes similar to one's own shows up the worst aspects of one's playing. 'You have to teach students how to teach themselves, and this helps with teaching yourself' (1983)
- Teaching is more intellectually demanding than performing, and so teaching helps one to be less frustrated by some performing work. Teaching firms up a teacher's understanding of technique, and raises their expectations of the technical possibilities of the instrument, and its optimal sound. One professor thinks of teaching as a form of continual enquiry: 'students have different problems, and that is part of the fascination of teaching' (1983)
- 'One feels under pressure to play in concerts with the same concentration and rigour as one has made students play with during lessons that are still uppermost in one's mind' (1981)
- 'Teaching is a form of sharing that differs from performance, but that nevertheless helps to develop performance communication. It also requires one to learn new repertoire' (1979)
- 'One learns new repertoire from pupils' (1976)
- 'Teaching clarifies one's understanding about the possibilities of technique. For example, one might advise a pianist that they can only play fast octaves with a loose wrist, and then someone comes in and plays them superbly with a stiff wrist. It can also freshen one's enthusiasm for some repertoire that one has known for a long time.' Teaching leads this professor to explore new repertoire that he would not know about otherwise. For example, a student introduced him to a sonata by Stuart Macrae, and he recently played it at a recital (1973)
- 'The more I teach, the more I pick up. The more I see the problems, the more I learn about my own problems and how to solve them' (1982)

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- Teaching has impacted more on one professor's playing since he became chairman of his orchestra, and has had less time for practice. Using his instrument in lessons helps. He has become more aware of the need to play as well when teaching as he does on stage, and so lessons contribute to his practice, as well as revealing points that he needs to work on during his limited practice time (1991)
- Teaching has helped a professor to get better at turning down performing work that he does not have time to prepare for: there is nearly always a former student in the audience (1983)
- 'When teaching I look at my own playing through that of the student. It is too claustrophobic to look directly at one's own playing' (1969).

Some professors were conscious that teaching does not always improve one's playing. One (1963) commented that this had varied over his career with his level of confidence:

> 'The self-analysis that teaching requires can build playing, but also can destroy it, because you cannot [produce] any notes because you are thinking too much. Teaching is great for performing if you can cope with this. But you also have to be able to play without thinking.'

One professor (1968) agrees that teaching can have a positive impact on performance, but tries to separate teaching from performance in his mind. He feels that teaching and performing require two different sorts of energy, and that teachers must take care not to exploit their students by feeding off the latter's energy in a way that is confusing. He thinks that some teachers use teaching to show off to their students.

Learning to teach Three professors commented that their conservatoire course had included teaching skills, and one professor (1974) had qualified for school teaching by taking a Postgraduate Certificate in Education course. She taught for a Local Education Authority instrumental teaching service as she built up her performing work.

Eight professors felt that learning from other teachers had been important to them. For example:

- One professor reported that her own teachers attended her early masterclasses, and would then spend the evening with her, reflecting on how they had gone (1983)
- When another professor finds it difficult to help a student, he will knock on the door of another flute teacher, and this can lead to two teachers and two students working together to try to solve a problem. In addition, from his golf teacher he has learnt the necessity of embedding technique so that it becomes a natural habit. On one occasion, the professor had spent hours trying to perfect a detail of his golf technique. When he got to his lesson, his teacher said: 'Now forget all that – and just whack it' (1983).

Twenty-four professors felt that they had learnt how to teach primarily by doing it, and then reflecting on their teaching intellectually. One of these professors (1969) observed that some of his students appear to be natural teachers, because 'their egos are not too

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inflated' and 'their playing is not too intuitive' – in which case they would have difficulty communicating what they do to others, or understanding that different pupils require different answers to different questions. Another of these professors (1982) feels that the main ingredient that he has added to the teaching that he received is enthusiasm. 'You can't look at music as a job, it is a vocation really.' And he is certain that this must come through in one's teaching if students are going to understand that.

Unit 2: barriers to progress (see Figure 2)

The professors are a group of very successful musicians, and speak of feeling fortunate that their careers are going so well. Almost half of them (17) feel that the barriers to the progress of their careers in music have been so slight that they hardly like to mention them.

Several professors speak of seeing their careers in music as a series of threads that link past activities to the prospect of future activities. Professors gave countless examples of these threads, including:

- formation of a violin/piano duo with a German pianist leading to concerto work in Germany
- formation of a clarinet/piano duo with a friend at the conservatoire: they are still playing together 20 years later.

Decades after they completed their studies at the conservatoire, many professors can trace back some of their current work to musical partnerships formed when they were students – even if the peers with whom they worked then are no longer part of their circle, or no longer working in music.

Some of the developments in the professors' careers, however, have not been predictable. In particular, some professors who now specialise in period instruments are not entirely sure how this happened. One commented: 'You sow the seeds, and they sometimes come up in extraordinary places' (1967).

One professor (1967) spoke of trying to combine what he loves to do with what he is asked to do, and explained that he had recently turned down three recording contracts because they related to music that he does not find satisfying to play. He has found that when he turns away from one activity, another one is often presented. But it takes a degree of confidence, and a willingness to shoulder substantial financial risk, to do this. The professors generally appear to have found a balance between financial gain and professional fulfilment that emphasises the latter more than is the case in some other occupational groups.

Those professors who acknowledge that they have encountered barriers to their progress speak most frequently of various sorts of prejudice, followed by personal problems (including divorce from a collaborating musician or ill health), financial problems, difficulties establishing an appropriate balance between job satisfaction and income, and uncertainty about how to establish oneself as a musician in one's own right if one comes from a family of successful musicians.

Two professors commented that the image of their instrument had at times been an obstacle – for example:

> 'People are surprised if a harpist asserts themselves musically.' (1985)

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Concern that saying 'no' to an offer of work will lead to a thread being severed (or a seedling withering) has resulted in several professors feeling that they take on more performing than they have time to accommodate:

- One professor (1973) who struggles to say 'no' writes 'I can say no' in the back of his diary. Then when someone calls he says 'I will just look in my diary'
- When another professor (1983) was living at home with his parents, they put a large notice saying 'no' over the phone, to try to help him turn work down.

Conclusions

This article has reported the use of methodology developed for *Working in Music* to describe the careers of conservatoire professors. The professors have emerged as musicians who:

- in general, performed more and taught less than their peers during the early years of their careers, and who still perform more than them today. However, there are wide individual differences
- are committed to their conservatoire teaching, and generally feel that it improves their effectiveness as performers
- are determined in their pursuit of music as a career. This determination is shown, for example, through some professors leaving the conservatoire early, without gaining a qualification, so that they could take up a post in a major orchestra. It is shown also through future professors' resilience when they encountered obstacles to their career
- are flexible as musicians. This flexibility is shown, for example, through some professors changing their specialism from the one with which they entered the conservatoire. It is shown also through the thirst of future professors for new musical experiences, including various forms of teaching, in order to sustain the creative momentum of their careers.

Bransford and Brown (2000) distinguish between two sorts of experts: the 'answer-filled expert', who knows all that there is to be known about the subject of their expertise, and the 'accomplished novice', who is rightly proud of what they have achieved, and constantly strives to learn more, and to push out the boundaries of his or her expertise. Conservatoire professors emerge from this study as examples of this second kind of expert.

What should contemporary conservatoire students do now if, like the future professor (1981) described above, they dream of being a conservatoire professor, and want to maximise their chances of success? What worked for the aspiring professors of the past will not necessarily work for the aspiring professors of today. But one point is clear: conservatoire professors are 'accomplished novices' rather than 'answer-filled experts', and proud of this. Locking oneself in a practice room and emerging four years later with definitive performances of three concertos, or six Beethoven sonatas, and nothing else is not the route to success. Today's professors generally worked hard, and with sharp focus, when they were students, and probably accumulated as many definitive performances as the next person. But they did not – metaphorically speaking – lock themselves in; they networked, and were alive to opportunities to learn through playing new music, playing

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with new ensembles, and in some cases teaching. And they even changed instrument, if this is what they needed to do to move forward.

And if doing all this does not guarantee success in becoming a conservatoire professor – which it almost certainly does not – what is there to lose? I would hazard a guess that the chances of musical success, personal fulfilment and personal happiness – and even financial gain – are all to be found more readily within the collegiality and openness to new experiences of the 'accomplished novice' route.

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Notes

1 In this article, the voice is regarded as an instrument, and so the term 'instrumentalist', for example, includes singers, and the term 'instrumental teacher' includes teachers of singing.
2 *Working in Music* is funded by the Prince Consort Foundation.
3 Telephone interviews proved to be a successful means of collecting data from these alumni. Of the 35 that we located, 34 agreed to be interviewed (response rate: 97%).
4 Dates given in brackets denote the year when a professor completed their studies at the conservatoire.
5 The standard deviation was 6.6 years.
6 The standard deviations are high: 28.7% for performing and 25.2% for teaching.
7 $p = .055$ (t-test). Consequently the difference in the means is not significant at the $p < .05$ level.
8 The standard deviations were not as high as in the most recent five years: 20.5% for performing and 19.2% for teaching.

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