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Getting 'Capital' in the music world: musicians' learning experiences and working lives

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This paper discusses an exploration of the working lives of musicians working in a range of musical genres in the North East of England, revealing the factors that contribute to their ability to obtain a musical livelihood. These factors can be understood in terms of various forms of social, cultural and symbolic 'capital' (Bourdieu, 1986), which musicians amass throughout their lives, from early childhood and family influences to starting out in the music world and beyond. The accrual of such 'musical capital' is shown to be associated with the quality of musicians' learning experiences and the findings are offered as having potential relevance to music education policy and practice. It is concluded that a wider range of teaching methods, including the recognition of different types of music and ability, could encourage more young people to remain involved in music learning and give musicians clearer signposts for embarking on a career in music.

Introduction

This paper explores the factors that sustain professional musicians' livelihoods and the connection of these factors to education and learning. What follows arose from research whose primary focus was musicians' working lives and influences on their ability to obtain a livelihood. This ability does, however, seem to be intimately associated with learning experiences and the findings are offered as having potential relevance to music education policy and practice.

Despite considerable contemporary interest in the economic and social roles played by the 'cultural' or 'creative' industries,[1] little attention has been paid to the livelihood experiences of the cultural workforce underpinning these developments. This article draws on research carried out in the wake of several culture-driven regeneration projects in the formerly heavily industrialised North East of England. The research explored the working lives of all genres of musician in the region, offering insights into the way musicians reconcile the pursuit of an aesthetic calling with the need to provide for daily existence.

Lack of employment is inherent in the music world, the majority of musicians relying on self-employment for a large proportion, if not all, of their income (Ehrlich, 1985; DCMS, 2001). Indeed, a survey of cultural occupations found the highest rates of self-employment among musicians, at 76.9% (Davies & Lindley, 2003). This compared with 11.5% for those in non-cultural occupations. Musicians' working lives are characterised by an assembly of different jobs – for example, teaching, performing, managing, composing – that are part-time and/or temporary and frequently overlapping (Rogers, 2002). This form of 'portfolio'

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working has advantages, for example the freedom to choose one's own work and hours, and a non-routine working life. Independence and autonomy can, however, be overshadowed by insecurity and a fluctuating income (Menger, 1999; Gill & Pratt, 2008).

Young musicians entering the highly competitive cultural labour market must learn to adjust to these uncertain aspects of a musician's working life at the same time as developing their talents and skills. The music sector and the genres within it have conventions, divisions of labour, constraints and possibilities; and aspiring musicians need to understand the practices and rules of the particular music world they want to inhabit (Becker, 1982; Cottrell, 2004). Their ability to do so is affected by a complex web of factors including family and social environment (Hallam, 2002; Haddon, 2006); parental support and encouragement (Green, 2001; Burland & Davidson, 2002; Macmillan, 2004); the attribution of talent (Kingsbury, 1988; Davies, 2004); gender (Green, 1997; Hallam *et al.*, 2008) and musical experiences (Cottrell, 2004).

Music education, of course, plays a crucial role in many musicians' development, particularly in western cultures. Recent studies have looked at higher education's function in preparing musicians for professional life, highlighting various factors found to be central to navigating the music market. These include motivation, music as a determinant of self-concept, versatility, adaptability and an open approach to continuing learning (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Mills, 2004, 2006, 2007; Creech *et al.*, 2008; Bennett, 2009; Smilde, 2009). Such findings resonate with the experiences of the participants in my research, as I shall discuss below. These studies have, however, an almost exclusive focus on tertiary level music education in the western classical tradition. Only a minority of the participants either experienced higher level music education before embarking on their working lives or concentrated their work in the classical sector. A number were self-taught or learnt through various other informal practices.

Informal learning – self-teaching, picking up skills and knowledge from elders and peers, watching, listening and imitating (Green, 2001) – is still largely the norm for those not destined for the classical sector. Increasingly, research has begun to take an interest in the more diverse and informal learning practices widespread among young people outside the school environment, in an attempt to understand young people's lack of engagement with formal music education at school (Sloboda, 2001; Green, 2001; Jaffers, 2004; Wright, 2008). It is suggested that the introduction of informal practices to school music teaching could have a positive effect on young people's musical experiences (Green, 2006), enabling them to critically reflect on what it means to be musical or to be a musician (Jaffers, 2004; Ivaldi & O'Neill, 2009). If music is to be taught in schools it should involve everyone, not just those identified as talented by received standards (Paynter, 2002).

Bourdieu (1973, 1984) formulated the concept of habitus to give an account of the strategies employed by social actors. It describes the set of lasting dispositions or schemes of perception, acquired through social experience largely in early life, which informs subjectivity and, thus, our thoughts and actions. Bourdieu would have explained young people's lack of engagement in music education in terms of habitus, the formation of which he saw as rooted in class position. Thus, those from more privileged backgrounds and engaging with 'high' culture would be more likely to be imbued with knowledge of western classical music from an early age. Music education would be more accessible to them than to those from a working class background who experienced only popular

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culture; and they would be able to achieve higher standing in the music field. This idea works less well in contemporary Britain, where positions in the music field are not so clearly staked out with reference to the western classical tradition. Cultural preferences are diverse and distinction is more likely to be gained from the ability to be wide-ranging in interest (Wright, 2008; Bennett, 2009). If elements such as youth culture are taken into account, the formation of habitus appears more complex.

Early socialisation is considered to be central to the developing habitus, and the musical component of this process, early music socialisation, can play a primary role in the development of actors' musical habitus (Rimmer, 2006). Wright (2008) shows that Bourdieu may have given undue weight to early experience and that musical habitus can be open to later influence not associated with social origins, for example young people's allegiance to certain forms of music – hip-hop, jazz, R&B, 80s rock/pop and so on – from which they gain their musical identities (MacDonald *et al.*, 2002). Since the language of the school music curriculum is far removed from the vocabulary of young people enculturated 'within a predominantly vernacular musical code' (Wright, 2008, p. 398), young people may be alienated from school music, finding the curriculum inaccessible. The experience of music-*making* from an early age, however, also makes a contribution to musical habitus (Green, 2001; Haddon, 2006), whatever the genre or background, and this may enhance a young person's openness to music education. I shall show that the research musicians' stories lend considerable support to these ideas.

Bourdieu conceptualised the advantage gained from possessing certain kinds of cultural knowledge as cultural capital. He used cultural capital in conjunction with the concept of habitus formed through social position to denote the benefit accruing to middle class individuals through engagement with 'legitimate' culture. As I shall show, the participants' narratives do not entirely bear this out, the connection between class and certain forms of culture appearing to be less direct. More recently, Bourdieu introduced new meanings in an attempt to widen the concept of cultural capital and make it more usable (Bennett, 2009); in his recent study of the housing market, for example, using the term 'technical capital' to describe the acquisition of marketable skills (Bourdieu, 2005). In this vein, I propose the term 'musical capital' as a useful shorthand for the interconnected cultural, social and symbolic assets that musicians acquire and turn to economic advantage in the music field. These include resources such as musical training and skills, network building and reputation gained through participation in particular musical events.

Having explored how various forms of music learning and experience may influence musicians' ability to sustain a musical livelihood, I now turn to a brief description of the research on which this paper is based. I shall then discuss the findings relating to the participants' early experiences, education and attempts to gain a foothold in the music world. In conclusion, some implications for music learning will be discussed.

The research

This paper draws on 17 in-depth interviews undertaken as part of a wider ESRC-funded CASE[2] research project in conjunction with The Sage Gateshead music centre.[3] The aims of the research were to provide a picture of the livelihood circumstances of musicians practising in the North East of England; look for the opportunities and constraints affecting

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musicians' livelihoods; investigate the complementarities and contradictions between making a living and being a musician; provide policy-relevant insights into training, business and other forms of support for musicians; and provide a theoretical framework within which to understand musicians' constructions of gaining a living from work of high intrinsic value.

Musicians willing to take part in the interviews were identified through an earlier questionnaire survey, at the end of which participants were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. The eight female and nine male interviewees were ultimately selected on the basis of trying to find a wide range of characteristics such as years of experience, household composition, sex, age, genres played in and instruments played. Differences and similarities could thus be explored. Since the focus was on not only the nature of musicians' working lives but also how they develop over time, participants were chosen who had been full-time working musicians – that is, not deriving an income from sources outside music – for at least 5 years.

A biographic/narrative approach was chosen for its ability to range over the course of a life (Chamberlayne *et al.*, 2000; Bertaux, 2003). Biographic/narrative interviews can involve a whole life or a particular aspect of the life experience, such as an individual's work or career. The method involves a face-to-face interview, starting with the interviewer giving an explanation of the topic of research and then inviting the interviewee to give an uninterrupted account of their own experience of the topic during their life. It is useful for revealing the participant's point of view (Smith, 1998; Becker, 2002) and is particularly effective for exploring the trajectories and turning points of working lives (Roberts, 2002). At the start of each interview, I explained that I would like the participant to tell the story of their life as a musician, including all the experiences they thought were important, from childhood to the present. Prompted if necessary by a 'narrative-generating' question such as 'Did you come from a musical family?', each respondent told their uninterrupted story, relating in their own terms what was important to them about the way their musical life had developed. Participants might subsequently be asked to elaborate on various points that had arisen during the narrative and some pre-determined topics were also introduced, covering areas of interest arising from a questionnaire survey which had been carried out earlier. These concerned the nature and experience of the kind of improvised working life described below. The average time for an interview – narrative plus questions – was about two hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and names and other identifying information changed to ensure anonymity.

Analysis

Analysis of the interview transcripts followed a bottom-up or data-driven approach, synthesised from a variety of sources on the analysis of qualitative material (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards & Richards, 1995; Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004). The transcript texts were coded, first tentatively and eventually in a more focused manner, using constant comparison of data and codes to identify themes and build up a hierarchy of concepts and then categories that seemed central to an understanding of musicians' working lives. The aim of this approach is to construct out of the narratives what the participants see as their social reality and how their experiences contribute to it. It has to be accepted, though, that it is the researcher who has control of the data, who divides

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individuals' life stories into fragments that exemplify certain concepts, who ultimately develops the categories and theories that she believes provide the best explanation of the interviewees' experiences. It can only be hoped that any research participants reading the results would feel that their life experiences had been illuminated rather than diminished by this process.

The musicians

Nearly all the interview participants had been professional musicians since their late teens or early to mid twenties. One exception had begun singing in radio advertising as a child, continuing to get a small income from performing throughout his teens. Seven had grown up in the North East, although two of these had lived elsewhere, including abroad, for years at a time and others had travelled away regularly. Four were originally from other countries. All but two received their secondary education in the public sector. Five had undergraduate degrees in subjects other than music. At the time of the interviews, four of the participants lived alone, the rest had spouses/partners and two had children at home. Six lived in two-musician households and in two instances both partners took part in the research. None of the participants could be described as well off by the standards of those in other professions with similar skills and qualifications. Most had experienced financial hardship, although several now described themselves as 'safe enough'. All said that money was not the main driving force in their working lives.

Some basic characteristics of the 17 musicians can be found in Table 1. What cannot be captured in a table is the complexity, discontinuity and changing nature of the musicians' working lives over time: their incomes came from an 'improvised' assortment of jobs that varied over lifetimes as well as between individuals. Activities included performing solo and/or with large and small bands, orchestras or ensembles of many kinds, composing, recording, accompanying, conducting, arranging, teaching, working as session musicians, managing, publishing, organising events and running workshops. Self-employment was a major factor, nine of the musicians being entirely self-employed throughout their working lives. The rest had had spells of part-time or full-time employment in teaching, community music, performing, choral conducting and administration. Once they had established themselves as professional musicians, only two of the participants had worked in a field other than music.

Results and discussion

The musicians' paths to a professional music life were as varied as their subsequent working lives, indicating that there is no clear route to becoming a musician. Their narratives, however, revealed certain sets of factors that can contribute to a person's stock of musical capital, enabling them to make the choice to become a musician and sustain a musical livelihood. These can be grouped under the broad headings of family and childhood influences; education and training; and starting out in the music world.

Family and childhood influences

Some of the participants described the impetus to become a musician as beginning with an awareness of active music-making going on around them. Although I did not ask specific

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Table 1 *Some characteristics of the research interview participants*

Pseudonym and male/female	Class: working/ middle	Age	Instrument family	Genre(s) worked in	Music education
Fiona (F)	M	50s	Brass, voice, keyboard	All	U/G degree
Michael (M)	M	50s	Traditional	Folk	Informal
Rosie (F)	M	30s	String	All	*U/G and P/G degrees
Pat (M)	M	50s	Wind	Jazz	School grade exams & informal
Rosa (F)	M	50s	Keyboard, voice	All	Private lessons, *P/G degrees
James (M)	M	70s	Keyboard, voice	Classical, popular	School grade exams
Avril (F)	W	50s	String	Classical	U/G degree
Colin (M)	W	50s	Percussion	Popular, classical	Informal, private lessons
Tom (M)	W	30s	Percussion	All	Informal, *private lessons
Pierre-André (M)	W	60s	Wind	Classical, jazz, popular	School grade exams, *private lessons
Pudding (M)	W	70s	Wind	Jazz, classical	Informal, private lessons, U/G degree
Clarice (F)	M	60s	Keyboard, voice	Classical	Private lessons, *U/G & P/G degrees
Douglas (M)	W	60s	Brass	Popular, classical	Informal, U/G degree
Lynsey (F)	M	20s	Percussion, wind	Folk, popular	School grade exams
Julie (F)	M	40s	Keyboard, string, voice, wind	Jazz, popular	School grade exams, *U/G degree
Erin (F)	W	40s	Voice, string	Folk, jazz, popular	School grade exams
Dan (M)	W	30s	Voice, keyboard	Popular	Informal, *private lessons

Notes: * = undertaken subsequent to the start of the musician's professional life. 'Private lessons' includes a wide range of tuition in specific music skills in a particular instrument or a particular genre. Many of the musicians had also undertaken further training in the form of master classes, workshops and courses in such aspects as recording technology, choral leading, IT skills, conducting and teaching.

The North East music world is small and instruments are confined to 'families' to avoid identification.

questions about class, and I have based my classification largely on what participants said about their parents' occupations, the narratives generally revealed that these experiences could happen in any genre and background. No participant had professional musicians as parents, but 13 of the 17 mentioned some early experience of music. For eight of them this was a strong home influence in the form of general family music-making or a more focused parental input:

> *Pierre-André*: My father was a fiddler and played the piano and accordion for gatherings and things like that, so I sat on the stairs when I was a child and heard a lot of music in that way.

> *Clarice*: Well, the influences would be a very strong parental encouragement to have music as part of my life from a very, very young age, and together with that went a very strong sense of the discipline that it needed.

For the five who experienced a smaller amount of home music-making, the main influence came from nearby – from a relative, a neighbour or a friend:

> *Erin*: There was this older woman who lived down the street . . . she'd play me something and I could play it back to her, and it was amazing to discover a talent.

Of the remaining four musicians, two had their interest awakened by being offered instrumental lessons at school and the remaining two both began in their teens, one acquiring a drum kit and beginning to teach himself, the other urged by a friend to join a brass band.

What can be learnt from such mixed experiences? It seems that there is no 'best' way to get started in music, but being surrounded by music and, more especially, *making* music of some description from an early age provides a substantial contribution to musical capital. More research is needed, but it is likely that such a start plays a key role in the formation of musical habitus and may help to account for a young person's continuing musical activities when contemporaries drop out (Sloboda, 2001).

Such early experience does not necessarily affect what sort of musician one becomes, although four of the five participants who had spent the largest part of their working lives in the classical sector came from strong musical home backgrounds where their own music-making was encouraged. In two of these cases the first music they encountered was non-classical and three could be described as working class. Early musical influences are equally likely to play an important part in the creation of popular, folk and jazz musicians through musical enculturation, that is 'the acquisition of musical skills and knowledge by immersion in the everyday music and musical practices of one's social context' (Green, 2001, p. 22). One of the participants, for example, grew up in an extended family of amateur and professional popular musicians and from a young age was drawn to a working life in music. He and several others spoke about the self-confidence they gained from being surrounded by music in childhood. Fiona, for example:

> . . . from a young age being brought up by parents who sang – not in any professional capacity but who loved singing – and it never occurring to me that I couldn't sing.

Green (2006) demonstrates how informal music learning practices, such as listening and copying and exploring music-making for themselves in a supportive atmosphere, can build

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confidence and encourage children to 'open their ears' to many sorts of music and musical experience. It appears that early music-making experiences, largely of an informal nature, contributed to the participants' music capital, for example by the acquisition of music skills, enabling them to develop confidence in playing, to consider themselves as 'musical' and to have the motivation to learn music; but the connections between class background, early music experience and formal music education are more tenuous and complex than in Bourdieu's analysis.

Education and training

As can be seen in Table 1, the research participants had widely varied music education. Some had their entire musical training at school, some had private lessons. Others had a mixture of private lessons and informal learning through association with other musicians. Three were taught by family members for some years before going on to formal or informal learning, while another three had no formal training, learning through a mixture of playing with peers, attending community workshops and teaching themselves. The classical musicians tended to have had an earlier start – one couldn't remember learning to read music – although several didn't begin their formal education, and one had no training at all, until well into their teens.

The quality of the participants' music education experiences was influential and extremely mixed. Avril had an unhappy relationship with an instrumental music teacher, nearly giving up at the age of 14 before finding someone new:

> *Avril*: . . . and that was the biggest force in my life, that determined that I would be a musician. He was just the right teacher for me, we just clicked.

Rosa too had a teacher who gave her confidence. Others were put off by unsympathetic teaching, one giving up for nearly ten years. Some struggled to get help with the sort of music they wanted to play, feeling that the education system placed too much emphasis on classical music. Popular musicians mentioned the importance of skills such as knowledge of notation for many roles within popular music, for example teaching or working as a session musician. Most of them had acquired such skills piecemeal and by their own efforts once they had embarked on a musical career, having missed out on, or felt alienated from, music lessons at school. They were able and motivated musicians who had been unable to find the encouragement they sought within the formal system.

There is another element of musical capital that is usually acquired quite early in life and that can give an individual the confidence to consider a career in music: the attribution of talent (Kingsbury, 1988; Cottrell, 2004). Six of the participants spoke directly about having their talent recognised and nurtured, and it is interesting to note that five of these spent a large part of their working lives in the classical sector. This may be a consequence of the majority of music teachers having been educated in the western classical tradition and tending to attribute talent to those pupils most able to perform in this field (Sloboda, 2001). That young people interested in other kinds of music do not have their ability encouraged may be considered a clash of musical habitus (Wright, 2008). As Kingsbury (1988) argues, the level of talent an individual is perceived to have is associated with the authority of the person who attributes it.

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A certain amount of encouragement and reputation-building does happen in other fields: Colin, for example, felt the benefit of growing up in a (popular) musical family and 'knowing everybody'. These associations, however, are on a more informal basis, without the institution and conventions behind them that exist in the classical world. This is a situation that may change with the current growth in higher education courses in folk, jazz and popular music (Sharman, 2008). Indeed, one of the research participants had been involved in the country's first folk degree, taught at The Sage Gateshead, where students associate with professional performers, are given frequent performance opportunities and encouraged in their careers. The participants, however, appeared to find school level music more confining and this can also be so in higher education: one participant who had played for nine years in a rock band found little recognition for this experience when she embarked on a university music degree.

The instrument a young person begins with can make a difference to early musical experiences (Green, 2001), although it does not seem to be vital to a musician's ultimate working life. Nine of the 17 participants eventually turned to different instruments, sometimes in the course of their career. Nine of them also had their first lessons on the piano, although the majority did not continue with it. The piano makes an acceptable sound right away, is useful for composing and accompanying and three of the participants had taught themselves to play it as a useful extra skill. A piano or electronic keyboard is frequently the only instrument in a household, they are also available at school and tuition is easily obtained. The number of participants who turned to other instruments, however, suggests the value of exposing young children to as wide a range of instruments and choice of music-making opportunities as possible.

The skills and theory gained by some of the participants from their early music lessons are likely to have given them the confidence to continue on as musicians, but others also spoke positively of early informal learning experiences in rock, folk and jazz during their teens:

> *Pat*: I consider myself very privileged to have worked as a very young player with lots of musicians who were much older than me, [. . .], who would regard it as normal to have a one hour band call for a three hour show, six nights a week with a different show every night. In that sort of pressured environment, you'd learn more in a week than you'd learn in a year in a more structured educational environment.

Until recently, this was the only way to learn in these genres; but several musicians commented that such opportunities to learn 'on the job' are not so readily available today, when a wider variety of tuition exists but there are fewer live performance occasions where young players can play with and learn from more practiced musicians (see also Cottrell, 2004; Mills, 2006).

Returning to formal learning, nine of the musicians underwent some higher education or training in music, including advanced courses, diplomas, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in music and a PhD. Some spoke of the opportunities to get started on a music career that arose through these programmes. Others returned to higher level music education after having worked as professional musicians for some years, finding new opportunities to develop skills, make contacts, increase their confidence and enhance their careers.

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We have reached the point in the musicians' lives where they have accrued some level of musical capital – some more than others – through early enculturation experiences and music education and training, either through formal tuition or informally by listening, copying and interacting with others. Next we shall consider how they further developed their commitment to music and converted it into a working life.

Starting out in the music world

There are no clear entry routes or next steps to a career in music, but the participants can be divided into three general groups. The first comprises the four participants who followed the most traditional path from early inspiration and formal lessons to a music degree at a conservatoire, university or college. While they were still studying, all of these participants began to get work – teaching, playing in ensembles or solo engagements – with the help of their teachers. Higher education programmes provide a structure within which students can begin developing a reputation. These musicians thus began building up a collection of skills, performance experiences and contacts – forms of musical capital that enhanced their ability to become professional musicians. Each spent a number of years entering competitions and engaging in an assortment of performance and teaching jobs before eventually finding settled orchestral positions. The fourth member of this group gave up a place to study opera, feeling that it would cause her family financial hardship. She chose instead a course that included a teaching qualification 'to fall back on'. Her experience supports criticisms of higher level music education's tendency to discourage those who can't afford it or whose family or academic background leads them to believe that it isn't for them (Green, 2001; Davies, 2004; Ivaldi & O'Neill, 2009). It is difficult to generalise, however, since two other members of this group came from families who were considerably less well off.

For the seven musicians in the next group, the end of secondary schooling marked a disruption of their music activities. They read other subjects at university or undertook other jobs or training. Without the first group's backing and support gained through higher music training, this group's start in the music world was more haphazard. Most kept their music going to some extent, learning and performing in an ad hoc way. Some worked in an assortment of 'day jobs' for up to ten years while playing at night and weekends, acquiring skills and gradually building up sufficient confidence and experience to consider a full-time musical career. It appears that these respondents lacked the guidance and encouragement available to the first group at the crucial point of making career decisions, some being pressed by parents and/or teachers to choose work with, as they saw it, greater academic status or livelihood potential (Martin, 1995; Green, 2001; Cottrell, 2004):

> *Pat:* I was discouraged from pursuing music formally at university or conservatoire because there weren't the courses. There were one or two courses in things like writing and arranging for commercial purposes, but they had low academic status.

This raises questions about how music teaching is regarded in schools. Is it considered to be a 'legitimate' subject, to be pursued at a higher level like any other? If it is, is this option open to all, or is it generally confined to those who display talent in western classical music? The experience of this group of musicians suggests that there need to be ways of

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recognising a wider variety of musical abilities, as well as fostering motivation and what might be called the sense of vocation that kept these participants ultimately committed to music despite disruptions.

Most of the remaining six participants began working in music straight from school, two giving up university places at the last minute and two dropping out of university courses. Three were able to make some sort of living from their performance work; others survived on benefits and/or with parental support for several years – in one case, eight or nine – while trying to get established. For this group, younger than the previous two groups and in some cases not yet possessing their level of musical capital, entry to the music world depended largely on a blend of chance, desire and innocence:

> *Dan*: It was all through the fact that I was just so ignorant of my lack of aptitude and ability that I just felt a complete conviction that I was really good at it. And having done a couple of gigs, it just made me want to do it all the time.

It is difficult to explain the different paths these three groups took: each contained musicians from an even mix of backgrounds, a wide variety of music learning experiences, similar numbers of male and female musicians and, in the second and third groups, performers across all genres. That the first group consisted of classical musicians, however, emphasises the benefits accruing to those who follow a more established route to becoming professional musicians. As many studies have shown (e.g. Burland & Davidson, 2002), this in itself is no guarantee of success, but perhaps it highlights the even greater difficulties facing those lacking this level of support and guidance. All the participants described in some form their sense of vocation, of being 'driven to pursue a performing career by powerful intrinsic motivation' (Burland & Davidson, 2002, p. 129). It is perhaps this element that enabled the second and third groups to find a way to their working lives in music despite the interruptions and challenges.

Having made the first moves towards becoming professional musicians, the participants continued to become further established in the music world, accumulating musical capital by developing their own skills, adapting to the norms and conventions of the music world, learning the value of collaboration and building networks.

Smilde (2009) discusses the value to musicians of becoming 'lifelong learners' and this is a feature that figured strongly in the musicians' narratives, with an evident sense of growth and progression throughout their careers. The musicians' ongoing learning happened informally through self-teaching or playing with peers; or through privately arranged sessions, workshops or new experiences such as conducting or composing for the first time. Several had taken up new instruments or styles, some of them travelling abroad for tuition. One, for example, had developed a project with an orchestra in China, learning about and composing for traditional Chinese instruments. Most had experienced changed directions in the courses of their working lives as a result of developing a new skill or area of expertise, such as training in community music. As shown in Table 1, four of the participants had turned to formal education after they had been working in music for some time, some for many years. The chief benefits of this were developing technique and confidence and getting performance opportunities through extending networks.

Some of the musicians were clear about the benefits of getting as much and as varied work as possible in their early days, in order to gain experience, hone skills and become

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known to others. Some emphasised the importance of being open-minded about the nature of the work undertaken. Colin, for example, began his career by playing with various bands on a freelance basis, travelling abroad, working to establish himself as a session musician, writing songs and taking on anything that was offered. Having grown up in a family of popular musicians, he perhaps learnt there – consciously or unconsciously – that flexibility and adaptability were needed when setting out to be a professional musician.

Being flexible was not always an easy lesson to learn. Even those who experienced the guidance available in higher education received ambivalent messages, occasionally being advised to be adaptable but generally encouraged to have a narrow focus on solo performance skills within a particular genre:

> *Rosie*: I'd say that that's within the system, just the way degrees are structured, that you work further and further towards a specialism.

The participants who were initially focused on the single thing they wanted to do found this could cause difficulties. This applied in any genre: all the classical musicians had had to adjust their dreams of solo careers; but lack of flexibility was a particular problem among the popular musicians who tried to make a living exclusively as members of original bands. If that is the only paid music work a musician does, it can be difficult to get established, since their entire musical existence – writing, travelling, gigging and recording – is bound up in a single enterprise. This can be creative and exciting but ultimately a hindrance if the band doesn't thrive, since they have no other store of musical capital to fall back on. They may have failed to build up networks of other musicians with whom to collaborate and lack the skills to know how to do this. Such professional networks are an essential form of musical capital, enhancing the chances of work offers (Granovetter, 1995; Lin, 1999). For some it had been a hard lesson to learn, but all the musicians expressed their awareness of the importance of maintaining networks:

> *Pat:* The more collaborators you've got, the more opportunities there are to work . . . And what happens is that part of your reputation as a player becomes bound up with your reputation just as a human being.

The ability to adapt to circumstances does seem to be a quality that all the musicians had acquired, and it is interesting to note that almost all of them had experienced a degree of informal learning at some point. It is possible that such learning modes enabled them to have more confidence and less inhibition in engaging with the type of new activities described earlier, or even playing in different genres: a participant who had been a classical musician for most of his working life, for example, turned to playing in jazz ensembles.

We have seen that while it is not possible to predict who will succeed in becoming a professional musician, the participants' narratives revealed some factors worth noting. Early experience of music of any kind as part of one's life, and especially of music-making, could have a positive influence on musical development regardless of genre or family background. When it came to learning music, there was no single best way, although there were advantages to be had in the formal education system for those able or willing to engage with it. What seemed crucial was the quality of the experience for each individual: whether they felt encouraged or recognised as musical could play a central role in their ability to choose to pursue a musical career. While the clearest signposts for entering the

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music world existed for those continuing on to higher level music education, all participants ultimately learnt that adaptability, flexibility and 'lifelong learning' were major contributors to their ability to sustain a working life in music.

Conclusions

Education and learning were not the primary focus of my research and further research is merited, but the findings have relevance for music education and policy. It is likely that gaining access to the music world is even more of a lottery than was shown by the research participants' experiences, since no interviews were carried out with those who had abandoned musical careers. Nevertheless, the research into musicians' stories offers useful insights into the complex connections between music education and learning, the development of a musical habitus and musicians' ability to pursue a professional career. I have used Bourdieu's notion of capital to encapsulate the skills, experiences and opportunities that enable individuals to develop their musical selves and encourage them to progress. Musical capital is gained by experiencing and participating in music at an early age, being inspired by open and inclusive teaching, acquiring and honing musical skills, having the support of music institutions and getting varied performance opportunities, especially with more experienced musicians. Although a small group from which to generalise, the participants' narratives indicate that those with the most opportunities for acquiring musical capital have a better chance of becoming professional musicians.

Supportive, engaging and varied music teaching at all levels makes a clear contribution to musical capital. The research participants' experiences suggest that more could be done to provide a wider range of opportunities, training and teaching methods. The needs of both music teachers and learners could thus be met at every stage and music and musicians enabled to flourish. Teaching in the classical tradition suited some of the participants very well but excluded others. There is growing evidence (Green, 2006; Wright, 2008; Bennett, 2009) that informal modes of music learning have a contribution to make, whatever style of music is being learnt. By opening up music education to a combination of formal and informal methods, as well as recognising and accrediting skills and talents in a variety of genres, more young people might find a way into learning and playing music. The professional practice of popular musicians could be enhanced by the elements of formal training many of them currently lack; while those receiving a classical training might develop a more open attitude towards their music-making and the choices they feel able to make in the course of their working lives.

There is a final important element, touched on earlier, that carried participants through negative experiences and hard times: the vocation to be a musician, along with the persistence and capacity to overcome difficulties that a vocation promotes (Cochran, 1990; Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2006). All the participants described what it meant to be 'called' by music, to feel *compelled* to do it. Having such a calling recognised, legitimised and nurtured appears to be rare outside classical music, judging by the participants' accounts. This could be a matter for both teachers and school career services to consider. If music teaching were able to find ways of reaching a greater variety of music learners, it might be possible for the ability and motivation of young people interested in all kinds of music to be recognised and accredited, avoiding the confusion experienced by so

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many of the research participants when deciding what paths their working lives should take.

Notes

1 The shift in terminology from 'cultural' to 'creative' industries came with the delineation by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport of the 13 'creative industries' (DCMS, 1998). See Garnham (2005) for a useful summary of the debates surrounding the implications of this change.
2 Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering: doctoral research carried out jointly with an academic and a non-academic organisation.
3 The Sage Gateshead opened in 2004, one of the flagship cultural projects (along with the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Middlesbrough Institute for Modern Art and the Millennium Bridge) playing a part in the regeneration of the North East region. It is an innovative centre, encouraging involvement in music through the provision of both education and entertainment.

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