

Educating Orchestral Musicians

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This article examines research on the specific training of musicians before they begin work as players in professional orchestras. Most of the research is in the area of education. The present article suggests that little research exists that is specific to the development of a traditional orchestra musician from an early age through the music education system, although considerable research exists on the development and broadening of the actual role of the professional musician in a changing world (portfolio careers).

Introduction

Because orchestras are complex organisations that depend on highly skilled individuals, researchers with a background in a multitude of academic fields (Lehman, 1995) found the organisation, the people involved (musicians, conductors, administrators and board members, and the political milieu in which they operate) and how they interact with and within the orchestra to be a rich source of research material. Similarly, certain studies focused on the occurrence of muscle and hearing loss in musicians (Steinmetz, Scheffer, Esmer, Delank & Peroz, 2015; Clifton, Driscoll & Ackermann, 2013). Although a large number of educational institutions are engaged in higher music education, research on the training of orchestral musicians and adaptation to the profession is perceived as minimal. This view is expressed by the symphony orchestras themselves (Walsh & Levy, 1993; Köping, 2007).

Through this article, we seek to present an overview of the research undertaken during the past quarter of a century on music education specifically for orchestral musicians.

Sources

In our research, we used the EBSCO, Google Scholar, magazines connected to the ERIC database, and CEPROM – a database run by the International Society of Music Education (ISME). We also referenced scholarly journals, anthologies and handbooks.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this article is to shed light on the research conducted on the specific training of musicians before starting work as orchestral players in professional orchestras.

This article considers the following research question:

What specific research was conducted on the education of professional orchestra musicians?

Definitions

The term 'orchestra' refers to a traditional Western-style symphony orchestra, chamber orchestra or opera orchestra. The concept of training a professional orchestra musician is limited to the instrumental and other musical training that a musician – who successfully entered the musical profession as an orchestra musician – received in his or her lifetime, regardless of whether specifically defined as 'professional training' (Allmendinger, Hackman & Lehman, 1996; Lehman, 1995).

Findings

Although the findings are poor, several emerging themes in the research are detected. The main theme is in the field of education, that is, researchers primarily focus on the education process leading up to the professional debut as an orchestra musician. Scholars in the field of education frequently carry out this research.

A second theme is research done by or with the co-operation of the orchestral profession itself. This research can include initiatives by orchestras or orchestral associations and individual orchestral musicians.

A third theme is historical research into the life and workings of an orchestra and the orchestra's musicians that frequently comment on the education process and the transition from student to musician. This research is in the form of anthologies, biographies or handbooks.

Research carried out by scholars in the field of education

Only a handful of articles are found that specifically address the relationship between higher music education and employment in an orchestra.

In Australia, a change in the internal organisational culture is gradually being introduced in Australian orchestras (Watson & Forrest, 2014). Watson and Forrest investigated two programmes covering the introduction of leadership training for sectional principals in Australian orchestras and the qualitative evaluation of musicians' skills. They noted that the musicians are not adequately prepared to play in a professional orchestra. They also insisted that orchestras tend to have annual auditions, and broader leadership of section principals requires aspiring orchestral musicians to be prepared for these factors in their education.

In Corkhill (2005), ten professional orchestral musicians teaching at conservatoires described the difficulties in having time for all moments that seem to be important during an instrumental lesson time. This finding is in line with the results from the survey by Mills and Smith (2003) of 34 music teachers and their thoughts on the moments that are most important in an instrumental lesson. Corkhill also interviewed 10 conservatoire

students and found that, although the students were determined to stick to their dream of becoming orchestral musicians, they obviously had little understanding or knowledge of the profession. In his conversations with leading conservatoire students, Corkhill found that students lacked awareness of the challenges and difficulties involved in being an orchestral musician.

All of the professional orchestral musicians who also taught advanced instrumental students were committed to their careers in the orchestra. They felt that their students would be better prepared for this career than they themselves had been, largely because of the information and experiences passed on to the students from the professional orchestral players. However, at the same time, the musicians were insecure in their roles as a teacher and in passing on relevant information to their students. A certain pessimism was detected among the musicians regarding the students' attitudes and stylistic awareness, whereas the students themselves believed that they possessed these skills.

Having arrived directly from music college, the professional musicians in question did not feel that they had been adequately prepared by the college for the reality that they faced when starting work in the orchestra. How to fit into an artistic collective of this nature was not a part of the college curriculum and made the initial period of playing professionally confusing. The musicians believed that little advanced preparation occurred for the reality of the work, and only hands-on experience in the orchestra taught them the necessary skills to survive in the profession.

Manturzevska (1990) researched the lifespan development of professional musicians. The research is focused on socio-economic background, and environmental and biographical factors, and reveals nothing about the education of orchestral musicians.

Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson (2002) are the editors for *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning* and Colwell (2006) is the editor of *MENC Handbook of Musical Cognition and Development*. None of the articles focused exclusively on orchestra musicians or the training of orchestra musicians, although parts of the publications touched on areas that are important to musical development, such as motivation, developed ear, neuroscience and others.

Considerable research was done from 1996 to 2014 on the changing role of the professional musician. This change is particularly clear when articles listed in CEPROM from the past 20 years are surveyed. The subject of the articles covers expansion of the role of the professional musician (Singer, 1996), career planning (Miller & Baker, 2007), expectations by music college students (Bennett, 2007), the transition from student to professional (Creech et al., 2008) and relevance and reform in the education of the professional musician (Carruthers, 2014). Common to these articles is the endeavour to analyse the necessity to expand the role of professional musicians, which appears to be the only ones listed in CEPROM that focused on the professional musician. None of the articles focused on the relationship between the training that a musician gets and how this training is applied in the traditional career of an orchestral musician. The theme in this research seems to be how the role of the professional musician is changing and expanding, which introduces concepts such as 'a portfolio career'.

Research carried out or initiated by the orchestra profession

A major orchestra in Australia developed an alternative educational programme (Johnsson & Hager, 2008; Hager & Johnsson, 2009) with the aim of introducing young musicians to the workings of professional orchestral musicians. The researchers identified different types of learning that are important for a successful performance as a professional orchestral musician. However, different learning methods seem only achievable through participation in practical orchestral work. Although researchers do not believe that the teaching that occurs at music schools is irrelevant or of poor quality, they feel that what is learned at music schools is not enough to train professional musicians.

Kartomi (2008) discussed two practical problems facing national youth organisations in Australia devoted to the transmission of European classical music making across generations. The first problem is figuring out how to help individual young musicians pursue their desired careers. The second problem is how – with a focus on social justice – to provide access to music education opportunities for young people in areas with relatively large geographical and cultural isolation. The article analyses the efficiency of the urban-regional interface and educational practice in a partial solution to the two problems: a chamber music development and regional outreach program called the Young Australian Concert Artists (YACA), presented since 1999 by the Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO). The article analyses the programme's philosophical framework, its ethical and educational purposes and its logistics.

Several articles were written in the magazine *STRAD* (1996; 2009; 2011) on the subject of orchestral training. Examples of such training include training opportunities for students offered by the Royal College of Music in London, England. The school's Pathways system enables students to sit in on rehearsals with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Pathways also allows students to receive 20 hours of coaching in the orchestral repertoire by musicians from that orchestra, and to plan a radio broadcast concert (STRAD, 2009). Features include the Incorporated Society of Musicians' (ISM) new information sheet for young professionals planning an orchestral career, entitled 'The First Two Years – Establishing an Orchestral Career' (STRAD, 1996), and an article on China raising the standard of its orchestras. According to the article, higher standards will provide greater opportunities to play at prestigious locations and to tour abroad. The cooperation agreement between the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic – with the intention of helping young musicians achieve a career as an orchestral musician rather than as a soloist – further illustrates this ambition (STRAD, 2011).

The Swedish Orchestra Investigation Report (Orkesterutredningen. SOU 2006:34) addressed the training of orchestral musicians in the context of the sustainability of professional orchestras. The report maintained that the number of music students in Swedish music schools (after-school activity) who play in the schools' symphony orchestras declined by 30 per cent between 1987 and 2006. The report also argues that little natural contact exists between the professional orchestras and the pupils. The report further pointed out that amateur orchestras are an important link between young pupils playing orchestra instruments and the professional world. The report stated that municipality-funded discretionary music schools (after-school activities) in Sweden provide an important basis for the future recruitment of professional orchestra members. The report went on to

provide recommendations and models of good practice for the future training of musicians that lead to the professional level (Orkesterutredningen. SOU 2006:34, p. 94–97).

Davis (2004) analysed professional orchestral players in terms of both the profession itself and the processes leading up to the status of a professional musician. The analysis, which is quite detailed, touched on various 'hands-on' subjects, including how young musicians should select the appropriate education before starting a professional career as an orchestral musician, preparing for the audition procedures that orchestras use to select their players and describing the reality faced by young musicians who start working in a professional orchestra. Davis' book, which is written from within the profession itself by an experienced participant, is a practical guide for the young professional who has already decided to embark on a career as a professional orchestral musician. However, Gaunt (2005) argued that although Davis' book presents interesting viewpoints, it 'has little basis in formal research' (as cited in Miller & Baker, 2007).

Discussion

Is it possible to trace any trends in the academic research related to the training of orchestral musicians and their initial forays into the professional music world? In brief, the answer is that very little research has been done in this area. Some research exists on the educational aspects of teaching an instrument and on career development by young musicians entering their professional life. However, little of this research seems focused specifically on the career and educational path of the successful orchestral musician. Several of these studies are micro-studies based on qualitative research methods.

As might be expected, most research in this field occurred in the area of education. The orchestra industry itself conducted very little research into the particular demands that a professional orchestra makes to secure a well-educated and versatile employee. Given the variety of instrumental and orchestral preparation that a musician undergoes before entering a professional orchestra, whether such research by the industry is possible or indeed desirable is worth determining. We were unable to find any research that specifically addressed this question. Specific research should be undertaken that illuminates both the perceived needs of the industry and the reality of higher professional music education.

Researchers in education do not seem interested in limiting their research to the path of the successful orchestral musician from early instrument (and general musical) education to his or her first steps in the orchestra profession. Some researchers addressed the need for flexibility among up-and-coming musicians when faced with the reality of the music profession when leaving college. Although a few researchers addressed the transition from college to profession (for example, Creech et al., 2008), no in-depth focus was directed towards the young successful orchestral player as the 'end product' of a long educational process. Similarly, when asked whether higher music education is a neglected area of research, Jørgensen (2010) pointed out that research is lacking on the education of orchestral musicians.

Specific research on the young successful professional player in an orchestra does not seem to be a popular research topic. In contrast, the complex world of professional music is for the music college graduate when engaged in career planning, and the necessity for diversity and flexibility is addressed in the literature.

Conclusion

Based on our study of research into training musicians before starting work as professional orchestral players, we conclude that very little was done specifically on this subject.

An emerging theme in this area of research is analysis of the work of a professional orchestra and how this work relates to the reality of education at music colleges, as perceived by students and teachers. Most such research was done by scholars on education. Another theme is research or reports from the orchestra industry itself on the particular initiatives to bridge the gap between the realities of student life and that of the professional orchestra musician.

Further research that focuses on the traditional orchestral musician, the challenges of the orchestra work environment and how the music education system prepares for the realities of professional work in orchestras is necessary to better understand the correlation between education and professional reality.

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