

Classical Instrumental Musicians:
Educating for Sustainable Professional Practice

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ABSTRACT

This study extends understanding of the careers of classical instrumental musicians within the cultural industries, and ascertains the extent to which professional practice is reflected within current classical performance-based music education and training.

Little is known about the careers of classically trained instrumental musicians in terms of the activities in which they engage and the skills and attributes used to sustain their professional practice, and there is also widespread lack of understanding about the music industry and the wider cultural industries. The extent to which education and training reflects the careers of music performance graduates has gained heightened exposure at the same time as higher education institutions have become increasingly accountable for the employability of graduates, and yet much of the available literature has only tangential relevance and there remains a shortage of literature relating to the complex area of creative practice.

The research approach for the study bridges both the interpretive and normative paradigms. Using survey and interview methods, the study employs three distinct but interrelated data collections to investigate sustainable professional practice through analysis of musicians' careers, performance-based education and training, and the cultural industries.

The study identifies the longitudinal characteristics of musicians' professional practice and presents in a conditional matrix the intrinsic and extrinsic influences that impact upon it. The study proposes a practitioner-focussed Arts Cultural Practice (ACP) framework that consists of four practitioner-focussed, non-hierarchical groups which were determined through analysis of the major foci characterising roles within the cultural industries. As such, the ACP framework represents a new paradigm of sustainable practice that circumvents existing barriers; submitting a non-hierarchical view of cultural practice that clearly indicates the potential for an exciting diversity of holistic practice often not considered by practitioners.

The ACP curricular model posits the collaborative delivery of generic skills across artforms. This study substantiates the generic skills used by artists throughout the cultural industries, and confirms the rationale for education and training which considers the sustainability of music graduates' careers as arts cultural practitioners. Thus, individual strengths and talents should be developed according to the intrinsic and extrinsic influences which drive the passion for arts practice.

Curricula should undergo continual renewal based on consultation with industry and educators, and should be delivered collaboratively by people who maintain professional contact with the field and possess up-to-date knowledge of the cultural industries. Thus, the ACP curricular model encapsulates a collaborative approach to maintaining curricular currency. When applied to tertiary curricula, students and practitioners will be provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve sustainable careers.

A significant finding of the study is that Australia lacks effective cultural intelligence to inform efficient policy. Instead, Australia is reliant upon economic studies, and lacks effective data collection processes and a comprehensive understanding of the way in which artists live and work. The study found that Australia has much work to do to achieve a collective cultural industries voice and proclaim effective advocacy, as well as to ensure that data collection is sufficiently informed and accurate to create effective, intelligent change to cultural policy. Significantly, if the fluid working lives of artists is a sign of things to come in the general workforce, the inclusion of data on multiple job-holding is essential to Australian statistical collections. Likewise, it is imperative for graduate destination data to recognise the composite careers in which most musicians engage.

The study concludes that musicians in the 21st century require a broad and evolving base of skills and knowledge to sustain their careers as cultural arts practitioners. When implemented, the impact of these findings will be to create a more intelligent and informed cultural environment in which practitioners can maximise their creative energies for national benefit.

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