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## **Music in the Community: developing professional skills for students in Higher Education**

Music in the community, the phenomenon whereby music practitioners share their skills and knowledge with groups of people, is a great British invention and whether undertaken by individuals, authorities or professional music organisations or promoters is one of the success stories of British music in the last 30 years. Growing from the progressive music education ideas of the 1960s, nurtured by the community arts movement of the 1970s, it acquired institutional respectability in the 1980s and is now a touchstone of musical funding. Orchestras now expect their musicians to function as composers, teachers and/or facilitators in a range of settings beyond the concert hall, rehearsal room and recording studio; composers are asked to be amateurs and/or enablers; administrators have to be able to devise projects which extend their organisations' work into the community. Today amateurs work on housing estates, in hospices, prisons and schools to enable people to explore their expressivity. Composers and performers are expected not only to turn their own ideas and insights into music, but also to help other people turn their inspirations into music.

Many students already recognise the potential value of work the community as part of their careers. Students, however, need to gain historical and contextual understanding, gain some practical skills and observe and evaluate existing or developing projects. As students find their own projects links established in small projects can develop into longer term commitments. Modules that provide this kind of experience should be set up in all courses with imaginative ways of assessing both practical and written and spoken work.

But how do we know that this is the kind of education that is needed? Although it is difficult to track the employment of music graduates questionnaires sent out by Conservatoires in the UK have found that answers indicate a widespread of activity including salaried and freelance musical performance, composition, postgraduate education and research, class and instrumental / vocal teaching, arts administration, sound engineering, broadcasting and many branches of commerce and industry. Upon conducting further research the ability to be self-reliant became the most obvious result of the research; the future, being only partly predictable, is likely to produce unexpected challenges of employment in the paths of graduates, so high level skills of self-reliance are likely to be extremely useful. Vital transferable skills of self reliance are present in the personal attributes of self-awareness, the ability to plan, having vision and the ability to empathise.

Course designers should be aware of and identify those personal attributes and transferable skills; they should understand the implications for assessment and

adopt a teaching and learning strategy which includes an overt recognition of transferable skills. Managers of institutions should ensure by the distribution of funds that successful and valuable innovation is supported and promulgated.

Technology has made music more accessible. The capital cost of establishing recording facilities is getting cheaper all the time; the club music scene has grown independently of the major recording companies in the hands of small groups of young people with desktop recording facilities and a determination to remain in control of their own talent. Music, the experience of which was once confined largely to the concert hall or classroom, is now a participatory activity in youth clubs, hospitals, day centres and prisons, and there is evidence that specialisms in these varieties of music-making are beginning to emerge, for example in youth music, orchestral education, disability and health. Performers and composers are increasingly having to question not only their role as musicians but also their relationship with their audiences, and they are increasingly expecting these issues to be raised as part of a musician's training.

Higher education has been the principal deliverer of training in the arts. A glance through the course descriptions of the various electives and courses in community music strongly suggests that the institutions concerned were responding, in the first place, to changes in the musical job market. The typical community musician might be an orchestral player who realises that a stable salaried job can no longer be guaranteed or a composer who realises that he/she cannot be supported by commissions alone; community musicians may have an interest in music education but may not wish to train as a teacher, or they may have an interest in special education or health but not wish to train as a music therapist; or may be attracted to the growth in job opportunities in arts management, administration and consultancy; they may wish to explore an interest in popular or world music.

Devising a course that will address these skills is problematic because most arts training tends to be highly specialised whereas community music is very much the opposite. It has been suggested that the community musician is analogous to a Swiss Army Knife; uniquely specialised precisely because it can do most things. This might include teaching or leading a workshop, fundraising, composing and improvising in a variety of musical styles and in most settings from a pre-school playgroup to a high-security prison. Working practices and demands like these call for a redefinition of the term 'musician', yet traditional arts training has rarely, if ever, addressed the way in which types of audiences – the very young, teenagers, the old, the disabled – may differ, especially when it is hoped to engage them as participants in the artistic process. Furthermore, the training of most musicians has equipped them either to perform (in a concert or studio) or to teach (within a school context), but not to relate music to other types of venue or to other disciplines, for example, recreation and health. Consideration of these issues will have a bearing on almost every stage of

course design, from entry requirements to course content, delivery and assessment.

Assessment and evaluation can also be a problem. The interaction between professional and amateur musicians invites a reappraisal by everyone involved, not only of the concept of artistic standards, but also of their ownership. In this kind of activity there are different types of excellence, each appropriate in their own way.

Music in the community is now a very significant career option with a clearly identified training need, so what might we regard as pointers to the future?

I offer these three words to you: **access, participation and partnership.**

The creation of new partnerships offers a reorientation of training needs. For example, it is usually assumed that the main beneficiaries of community music training are going to be music students or professional musicians, but this does not have to be the case. There are powerful arguments for creating access to training for those already in the community, whether amateur enthusiasts or professionals in other fields, so as to foster wider networks of skill and interest.

For some, there will always be misgivings. A common concern about the catholicity of community music is that it might flood the music world with mediocre Jacks of all trades and cultural do-gooders. This is a legitimate concern, but it has not been the experience of other professions (like teaching and healthcare) where there is space for the general practitioner as well as the specialist.

The mere description of community arts as a profession could well be seen as a threat by those who see something insidious in the growth of accredited training courses, but they cannot deny what is happening: the establishment of a premier league of qualified practitioners who attract all the available funding and credibility.