

Case study: The Days of the Profession

The Days of the Profession Les Journées de la Profession Conservatoire de Paris – 21 –22 September 2006

Executive Summary

The principal objectives of these two days dedicated to the profession were:

- to situate the music profession in a broader cultural, economic and societal context,
- to provide students with a prospective overview of the profession and the ways in which it is evolving in innovative ways,
- to encourage them to imagine and invent their own musical pathways, and
- to provide them with some practical tools to better ensure their entry into professional life.

Obligatory for all music and sound engineering students in their final year of study, these encounters took the form of conferences, panel discussions and workshops with leading professionals and artists in a warm and convivial atmosphere. Breakfast was provided each morning and short musical performances involving students from all relevant departments (early music, jazz, vocal, and classical/contemporary instruments) provided transitions from one conference to another.

How we went about it

A working group including teachers, administrators, and students met twice in the spring to brainstorm and to determine overall objectives and the ways in which these could be translated into action. The first meeting provided three key objectives:

- To provide students with an analysis of the profession, its major evolutions and tendencies through a broad social, cultural and economic overview ;
- To stimulate students' imagination by confronting them with professionals who are changing the profession in concrete and innovative ways;
- To incite students to be pro-active in building their careers, by helping them to identify different pathways and lifestyles that go with these choices, and to help them recognize the pedagogical dimension present in virtually all aspects of the profession.

Practical workshops were seen as essential, the idea of musical interludes was also taken on as a way of sharing students' savoir-faire with professionals while creating a stimulating and warm atmosphere conducive to exchange.

The second meeting was dedicated to suggesting names of appropriate professionals and to detailing the choice of workshops. The organization of each day went from the general to the more specific, involving a conference, a panel discussion and, in the afternoon, practical workshops. It was decided to include three 90-minute workshops (all 3 obligatory): one on the economic and legal status of the musician, including a description of the "intermittence" unemployment insurance scheme for artists; one on the development of an artistic project; and a third on the musician's relationship to his body. Given the number of students involved,

8 workshops were organized on each theme, and the last theme gave an opportunity to explore 4 different approaches: kinesiology and the musician, managing stress, Alexander Technique, and Pilates. While initially we wanted to incorporate a visit to the Cité de la Musique's Médiathèque as an essential resource center, this did not prove feasible given the number of students involved and the scheduling of at-large conferences and round table discussions in the mornings. In collaboration with the Conservatoire library, a bibliography of relevant materials was drawn up; students received individual dossiers with their schedule, the "profession" bibliography, information about writing a C.V. and biography, and an evaluation to complete at the end of the 2nd day.

The first morning took as its overall theme evolutions in the profession, and the second the sharing of multiple pathways of individual artists.

21 September

Introductory Conference (60') *Trends in the Music Profession* by Laurent Bayle, Director General of the Cité de la Musique and of the Salle Pleyel

Panel discussion (105') *What evolutions for the profession?* Themes addressed included the employment market for musicians in France and abroad, the development of new "professions," the relationship to and development of new audiences, and finally new forms of distribution and transmission of music, including use of new technologies.

Six professionals invited included Nicolas Snowman, Director of the Opéra du Rhin, Thierry Beauvert, Director of France Musique (French national radio), Jean-Paul Combet, President of the label Alpha, Valérie Laffont, artistic agent, Benoît Baumgartner, Director of the Rennes Regional Conservatoire, and Jacques Pornon, Director of the national theatre at St Quentin en Yvelines.

Simultaneous afternoon workshops: Developing an artistic project; the legal and economic status of the musician; and the relationship to the body (managing stress, Alexander Technique, Pilates, and kinesiology for musicians)

22 September

Conference (60') *The Economy of Music: towards new models?* by Françoise Benhamou, professor of economics and author of numerous publications in the field of the economy of culture.

Panel Discussion (105') *Inventing one's professional pathway* Six artists were invited to share experiences which influenced or helped them build, invent or imagine their (multiple) paths, to describe how they conceive of the profession, and how this vision had evolved over time, to share the skills and competencies upon which they had drawn, above and beyond artistic ones, to describe how they have continued to learn since leaving the Conservatoire, and finally to share useful advice to musicians graduating from the Conservatoire today.

Panelists included Emmanuelle Haïm, conductor and founder of Le Concert d'Astrée, Claude Delangle, saxophonist and professor at the Paris Conservatoire, Jean-Marc Foltz clarinetist (jazz and contemporary music), professor at the Strasbourg Conservatoire, Alexandros Markeas, composer and pianist, professor of improvisation at the Paris Conservatoire, Jérôme Pernoo, cellist, professor at Royal College of Music (London) and founder and director of the festival "Les Vacances de M. Haydn" and Paul-Alexandre Dubois, baritone,

member of the Accentus Ensemble and artistic director of Axe 21. With the exception of M. Foltz, all were Paris Conservatoire graduates.

Simultaneous afternoon workshops (see above)

Student Evaluations:

Some 135 students participated in these two days: in their own words, they came away with

- a greater sense of assurance and self-confidence,
- a great deal of practical information
- an encouragement to question their own motivations for becoming a musician and reinvent the profession in a way that resonates with who they are
- the necessity to be personally, socially and culturally engaged and open to other art forms, new audiences, and different forms of delivering music
- a response to their “existential” questions and a catalyst for the future,
- the feeling of being part of a larger professional network,
- the conclusion that it was their responsibility to build, invent and create their profession while being sensitive to the society at large
- the certainty that they can’t adopt a “wait and see attitude, but that it is up to them to build their own pathway through their own personal development
- a sense of direction and orientation; confirming the fact that they will always live with “permanent uncertainty”
- a forum in which to build one’s professional network as well as a sense of momentum and vigor;
- a feeling of serenity, with the knowledge that they would succeed in doing something,
- a stimulation to reflect on what they really want to do with their life
- last but not least, a personal benefit which is optimistic – one has to believe in what one does completely and give oneself totally to one’s goal.

Conclusions

The working group, including student participants representative of different departments, came together afterwards to discuss the student evaluations and to draw conclusions from this initial experience.

Overall, these days were seen as successful: students realized there was no single professional path, they met leading professionals as well as students from other disciplines. Points to be improved include a need for discipline-specific encounters, and certain of these themes need to be dealt with in an ongoing way throughout the curriculum (i.e. the relationship to the body). These encounters could be organized earlier in the curriculum both so students can better have more time to develop their own project; this would also enable them to better know in-house resources.

Finally, the remarks made by a number of professionals indicating how valuable these encounters were for their own professional lives suggest yet another area for future development: the fostering of ongoing dialogue with the profession, thus placing the Conservatoire in a position where it is seen first and foremost as a centre where such a reflection with professionals can and should take place, and where indeed the Conservatoire has a leading role to play.

Text by Gretchen Amussen