

**Conference report 'The Musician as Creative Entrepreneur', Polifonia 3, The Hague (NL),
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Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Evert Bisschop Boele. I am professor of New Audiences of the research group Lifelong Learning in Music of the Prince Claus Conservatoire, Groningen, the Netherlands. Having worked in conservatoires for a big part of my working life, I do deep inside consider myself first and foremost as that what I was trained in: an ethnomusicologist, a musical anthropologist. As you know, anthropologists are expected to be the observers of human life. So what did I see when I got at this conference?

I enter the hall for the opening session and take a seat. The hall turns dark. Then, some lights are turned on. The emblem of the Royal Conservatoire is lighted, a table with technical gear, and of course the exit signs. We know where we are and what we are going to do: there will be music, we are supposed to sit still and listen; we are in institutional, even Royal surroundings; and we are not supposed to have contact with the outside world, the world where people walk on the streets, drive in trams, sit in houses, drink a beer, have a fight, or exchange a kiss. Only in cases of emergency we may mingle with them. The world has been shut out, and we are shut in. Are your mobile phones off??

Two young guys enter; beards (that token of youthfulness nowadays), long hair, one is barefooted. They take opposite places at a table. One is handling a computer, the other an old-fashioned box with loads of wires. I try to follow the hands' movements and to establish a relationship to the sounds produced. The guys don't seem to notice us, or each other; probably their ears, rather than their eyes, do the communicative work involved in making their music? Towards the end of their piece (but how do I know it's the end?) they finally look at each other; they coordinate with cues like glances to obtain the fade-out of the music. The hall lightens; we clap. And I wonder: for whom was this music made?

Ladies and gentlemen,

I extend my warmest thanks and congratulations to the Polifonia Working Group. Thanks for inviting me in; I had two wonderful days, meeting old friends and future friends, walking around the building I once worked in, remembering the days I was a member of a Polifonia Working Group myself – those were the days, yes, those were the days. And congratulations: I think this final conference has shown that this Working Group 4 of Polifonia 3 has tackled with success a topic that is vital for the future of any conservatoire student: entrepreneurship.

In the first session, yesterday afternoon, we were given a grand overview of the work performed by the working group. And what a work it has been! A questionnaire, answered by 81 different European institutes, was analyzed carefully and led to descriptions of five models of shaping entrepreneurship in five different European regions. They were elucidated by five in-depths interviews. Good practices in

four conservatoires as well as five professional practices have been studied by carrying out extensive site visits, resulting in detailed case studies. Literature has been gathered, dissemination symposia have been organized, and all information has been assembled on a website which has just been presented to us. I had the opportunity to have a look at the website earlier this week, and I cannot but – again – congratulate the working group: it is concise, informative, and will serve as an inspiration for many of us dedicated to shaping entrepreneurship within conservatoires.

Of course, minor questions remain: how representative are the five geographical models really, I wonder? But then again: maybe exact representativeness is less the point than serving an inspirational goal, and that it certainly does. Another question: what were the criteria on which the good practices were chosen – why were they ‘good’? If we are not clear on those criteria and trust our intersubjective implicit artistic judgment so central in our lives, there might be a slight danger to run into circular reasoning too easily.

Indeed, there is the question whether the website is an electronic final report or an electronic living document; and if it is the latter, who will keep it alive? And then, as Marjan Hammersma pointed out so rightfully yesterday, we might do some more work on mapping the students’ point of view. But with caution: intentionality often works backwards in human life, and often we know about our goals and wishes only in retrospect, after having gone through powerful, even transformative learning experiences, as for example the boot camp that was demonstrated this weekend. But those are, as I said, minor questions, and the overall picture is one of a wonderful job done by a wonderful group of colleagues.

Today, we started with a great key note by Michelle Wright, about ‘the ability to make stuff happen’. What struck me there was how she presented the central notion of the portfolio career: not just as a reality – which it is – or as a problem, but as a chance, an opportunity. In three parallel workshops, we were given the opportunity to look into the content of various aspects of entrepreneurial work in music: translating artistic vision to reality, marketing and PR, and new business models. I could visit only one of them, the one on the new business models, and definitely Gerard O’Donovan teaching me about ‘Dortmund Konzertmilch’ made my day. And in the afternoon, we had a look at the results of the severe boot camp training students suffered from our beloved colleague Helena Gaunt. A wonderful opportunity to see entrepreneurship training at work.

So, a grand two days and the end of a grand project. But let us not only look back. Let us also look forward. What’s next? It is my impression of the discussions I heard those two days that, although entrepreneurship is firmly on the agenda in many places and that in some places knowledge and experience in this domain is massively present, we are still sometimes struggling. Struggling with the idea that we need to pay attention to this; struggling with the ways we may do that; and struggling to get our ideas across to many of our students.

Our work, in a way, has only just begun. Maybe there will be no Polifonia 4, but there **must** be a way to continue the important work that has been started so well now. Because eventually, thinking about entrepreneurship forces us to pose that one question which we often like to evade but which is asked to us with more and more emphasis by politicians, by funders, by the general public, we might even say: by society at large. The question I mentioned in the beginning: who are we playing for?

The era that the answer to this question was straightforward has gone. We now live in an era where music is available to more people than ever and where music is more present than ever. One might say music has democratized. No longer is it straightforward that music in essence is an art work, to be appreciated for its artistry, in silence, outside of this world, doors closed, lights off, mobile phones off.

Music nowadays for many is not essentially that, is even not at all that. And it is my hunch that this might be an additional domain of entrepreneurship where in the future we might be working on. Entrepreneurship is, I grant you that, about advocacy for the existing, beautiful music institutions we all know and love so well, including conservatoires, finding ways to secure a place for them in the future. And entrepreneurship is also about formulating a musical product on the basis of artistic vision for a specific target group identifying a unique selling point using soft and hard skills and contextual knowledge in order to lead to SUCCESS in capitals – I summarize the diagram Gretchen Amussen showed us yesterday.

It must be all that, but it might be something else too. And I would like to finish this little report with a few remarks on this aspect of entrepreneurship, and to encourage you in the next phase of this project – which **must** go ahead – to also look into that direction. I am pointing here to a direction of entrepreneurship where we no longer think about musicians in terms of selling a musical product – be it a performance, an art work, or a creative musical process – on a market. Rather, we might think of professional musicians as offering a service. The service of creating **your** meaningful musical experience.

I cannot go in detail into what this means, but it requires a couple of skills which are maybe not even skills but rather attitudes. The attitude of empathy: an attitude in which the musician is able to say to no matter who: I know who **I** am musically, but I desperately want to know who **you** are musically. Or, as one of the students this afternoon said, an attitude of humility. The listening attitude: yes, I am able to tell you what **I** think is beautiful and artistic and good, but now I want to know what music means to **you**. The attitude of civil responsibility: as a professional musician, I feel responsible not only for my own professional career, but for contributing to the pervasive importance music has in the lives of each and every one.

Ideas like those may slightly change the entrepreneurial diagram that was shown by Gretchen Amussen earlier on. Thinking of the musician as a service provider, the diagram might not begin with artistic vision, with the self of the musician. It might begin with empathy, with interest in the musical other. Artistic vision would not be the starting point but the most important resource professional musicians have at their disposal. And near the end, the unique selling point would be not in the musical product but in the process, in the relationship, in the unique adequacy of the music played for a specific situation and a specific audience. An audience which would not be conspicuously absent from the diagram, but which would be there in the beginning, the middle and the end.

I am not telling you anything new. These days, we have heard examples which go in the direction I mentioned. I was present in the excellent workshop of John Harris of the Red Note Ensemble, and he made quite clear that most of what they do is, I quote, “because other people want us to do something”, and that what they sell eventually is not so much the music, but rather (and I quote again) “the nature of the event”. Other examples might be the classical singer I know who offers herself as a ‘ritual singer’: I can sing, is the message, but if you need singing for a child’s birth, a 50th anniversary,

or a funeral, you may tell me your wishes and I will help you to make them real. Or, in a completely different domain, the musicians of Music for Life in England who do not play a repertoire for an audience consisting of people with dementia, but rather create a musical conversation which expresses not only the musician's artistic personality but also the artistic personhood of the person with dementia they play for and with, thus recalling through the power of music a person which had been lost in such a dramatic way. I would suggest we might have a look into this direction of radical, service-oriented, very personal and communicative entrepreneurship in the follow-up of the great work Working Group 4 performed in those past years.

I congratulate you again, and express the wish that we, as conservatoires, keep working on entrepreneurship. It is not just important, it is vital. And it is not a question of compromising our artistry by 'selling out' to the harmful world behind our closed doors; it is a question of 'selling in' into the lives of that world out there in which music is meaningful in millions of ways to billions of people.

If we would make a SWOT analysis, the world out there should not be in the box of threats, but of opportunities.

Thank you.