

Exploring the Experiences of Former Professional Musicians

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Not present today:

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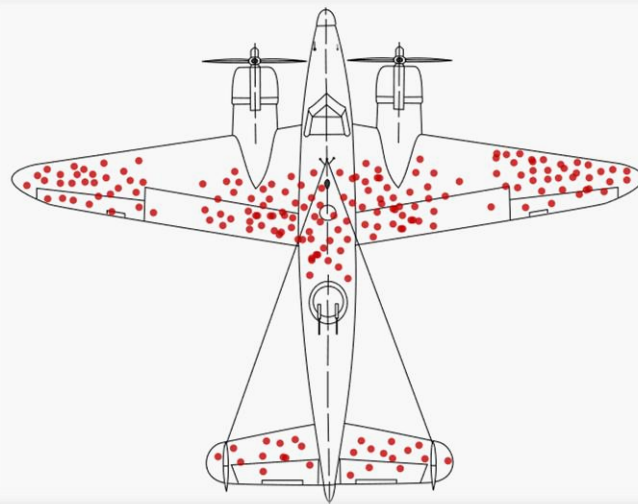
Former professional musicians

- 7 studies found in literature review
- Themes: crises in identity, disembodiment, taboo of quitting
- Studies in child contexts: limited applicability



Musical careers

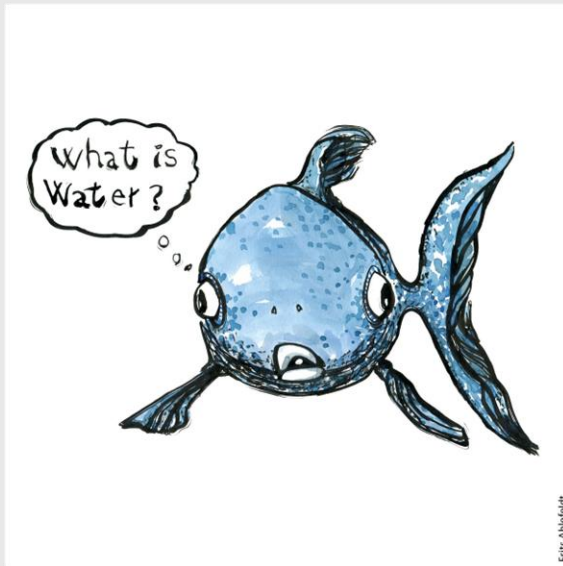
- Active, ongoing research
- Careers: precarious, liminal, portfolio
- Pragmatic, positive outlook
- Survivorship bias?



Bartleet et al., 2019; Bennett, 2008; Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015; Blackstone, 2019; Brook & Fostaty Young, 2019; Canham, 2016, 2021, 2023; Latukefu & Ginsborg, 2019; Miller et al., 2017; Pike, 2015; Rowley et al., 2021; Teague & Smith, 2015

Identities of former musicians

- Music and identity: personal, social, cultural dimensions
- Musicians: core part of identity, high emotional attachment, personal calling
- Commodified society: professional identity intertwined with economy



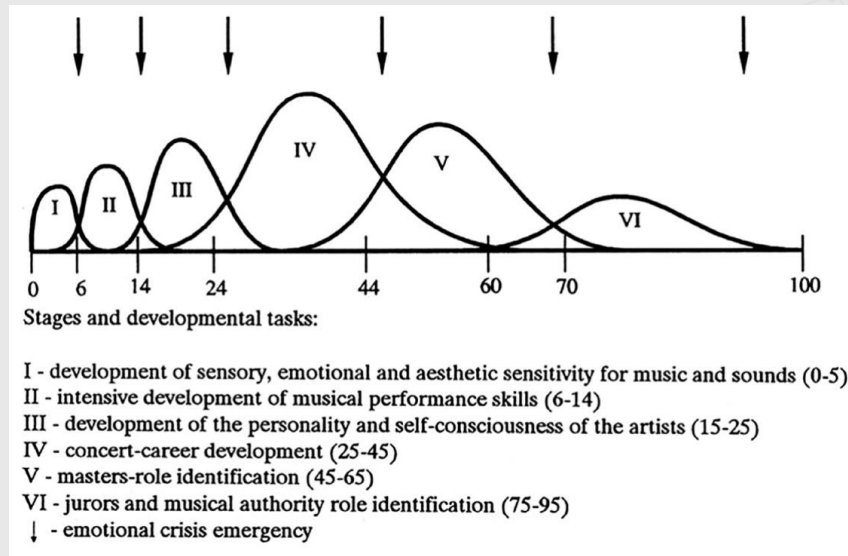
Anderson, 2003; DeNora, 1999, 2000; Frith, 1996; López-Íñiguez et al., 2022; Malm & Lundin, 2024; McPherson et al., 2012; Stebbins, 1992

Identity theory

- Roles: hierarchy of salience
- Emotional and social commitment
- More central identities guide behaviour

Life course perspective

- Lens for understanding shifts in identity over time
- Transitions and turning points
- Agency in context



Representation of Manturzevska's model of professional musician lifespan development
(© 2006 Peter Lang GmbH)

Research questions

01

How do professional musicians experience career transitions to a non-musical field?

- a. How do these transitions impact musicians' personal, social, and professional identities?
- b. After transitioning to a non-musical field, what role does music play in their lives?
- c. How do they perceive this transition as a part of their broader life course or career?

02

How do post-professional musicians view their prior musical training and experiences?

- a. Do they perceive advantages and challenges in their new field due to their previous musical training?
- b. What insights into musical career preparation can we derive from their experiences?



Design and data collection

- **Exploratory, multiple case study design**
- **Cases: individual life and career narratives**
- **Online screening questionnaire (n = 237)**
- **Sampling for variation (n = 5)**
- **Online, semi-structured interviews (up to 2 hours)**
- **Automatic transcription**
- **Editing with recordings**
- **Member checking**

Analysis

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- **Iterative, collaborative process**
 - **Chronological timelines**
 - **Distinct phases, transitional moments/turning points**
 - **Narrative summaries**
 - **Open coding**
 - **Thematic analysis: agency, identity**
 - **Themes mapped onto trajectories within cases**
 - **Case-oriented, cross case analysis**

Participants

	Formal training	Career summary	Primary reason for transition	Initial retraining	New field
Rob	BA (jazz)	Canadian Armed Forces Band	Laid off	College diploma	Information technology
Luke	ARCT (piano) College diploma	Freelance producer Audio engineer	Lack of opportunity	N/A	Restaurant
Ruby	BMus, MMus (string)	Sistema program Pro. orchestra Online studio	Better opportunities in another field	Online ECE certification	Early Childhood Education (ECE)
Daphne	BA (voice)	Freelance singer School music teacher Church musician	Family reasons	Teacher's college M.Ed.	Teacher Administrator Retirement
Cecilia	BMus (wind)	Freelance musician	Performance-related injury	Bachelor's, computer science	Software engineer

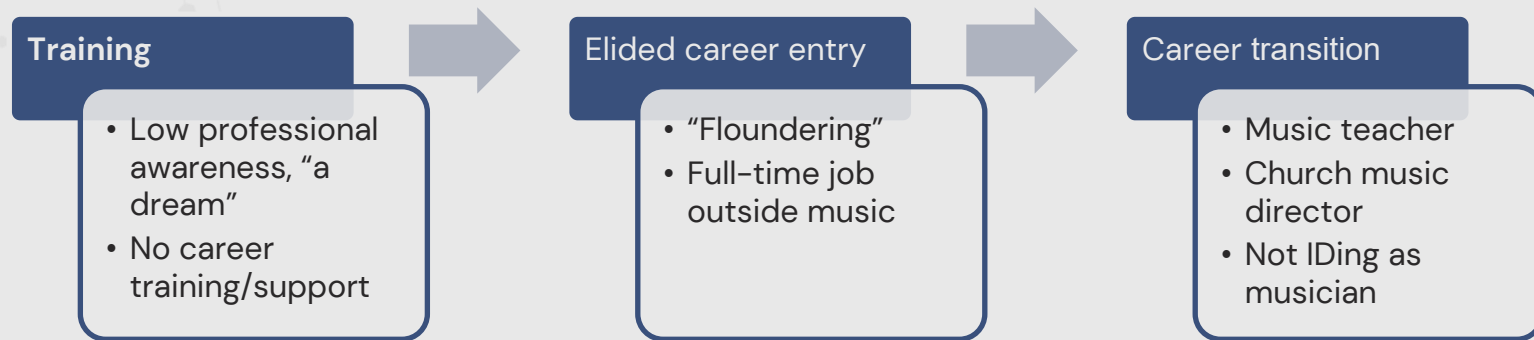
Within-case: Rob's narrative summary

- Full-time position with Canadian Armed Forces military band
- 1994: band closure, military discharge
- Tried to reestablish career as freelancer for one year
- One-year diploma in IT
- Currently academic leader
- Musically active: paid and unpaid performing, conducting, arranging
- Self-imposed professional standards
- Role: "Quasi-weekend warrior of sorts"
- Not relying on musical income "freeing"
- Self-effacing: "I am no different than my friend who played clarinet in grade 10 band."

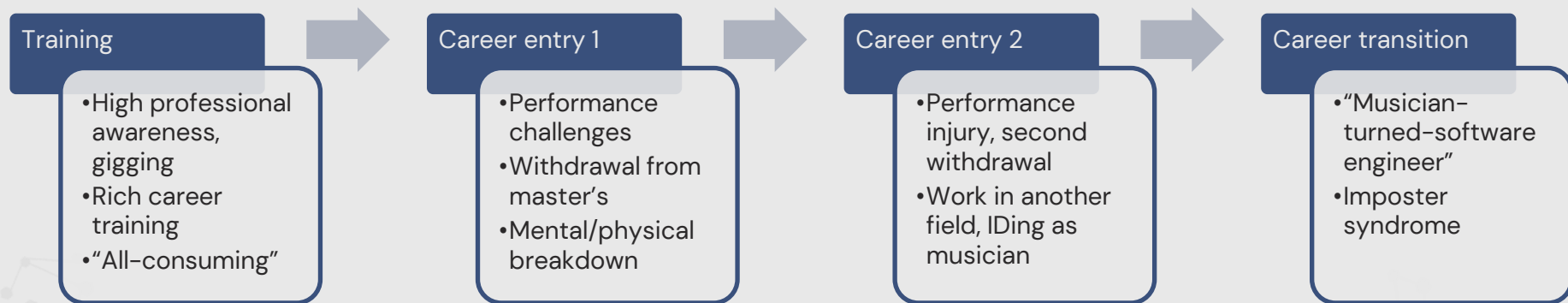
Within-case: Ruby's narrative summary

- Extensive, formal string instrument training from age 3
- Feeling “trapped in the world of performance”
- Won full-time orchestra position, soon realized it wasn't her dream job
- COVID-19 pandemic as turning point
- Weighed family, desired field, economic stability in charting new career
- After work in Early Childhood Education, now a student in Occupational Therapy
- “Think like an artist” asset in medical-aligned field: conceptual and detail-oriented work
- Confidence from past achievements
- Retrospective view on musical training
- Practice guilt, occasional gigs

Daphne



Cecilia



Cross-case: transitions, agency, identity

- Transitions: confluences of events, multiple domains
- Career transitions linked to life event, not always causally
- Greater agency later in life (intentional, planful, reflexive)
- Music-making important, influenced by training, experiences
- Hybrid or transitional identities
- Retrospective points of view
- Role of musical training/experiences in new career:
 - a. Indirect similarities (“creativity”)
 - b. Traits (“attention to detail, self-confidence”)

Discussion

Key finding: agency and context led to different trajectories

Implications: life course more nuanced, adaptable than age-bound life cycle

Key finding: decision-making changed over time, greater agency in later life

Implications: “voluntary/involuntary” is oversimplification. Life stories build meaning

Key finding: rich accounts of identity including hybrid/transitional identities. Music remained central and positive feature of participants’ lives.

Implications: connections between role identities build coherence. Music shapes core aspects of personal and professional identity.

Future research: expanding rounds of research, further narrative inquiry, music training as humanistic or professional, institutional ethics of care, destigmatizing careers outside music

Thanks!

Questions?

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Slides available through QR:

