"Creating a Functional Musician: A Performance Workshop Model."

Abstract

This paper examines the innovative re-alignment of one Australian tertiary music program in response to economic imperatives and a rapidly evolving marketplace.

A "functional musician" is technically sound, versatile, adaptive, collaborative, empathetic, creative, and capable of adapting to most professional situations. Conservatoire training models designed to produce classical musicians specialising in performance or education do not necessarily meet industry needs in twenty-first century Australia. Following changes to the secondary school music curriculum, undergraduate students are arriving at University with different musical skills. Responding to these changes, the University of Southern Queensland has adapted its tertiary classical music degree programs to create a new "workshop model" for Music Practice courses to produce employable music graduates with adaptable skills suitable for the diverse Australian musical sector.

The new model had its initial implementation in semester 1 (February-June) 2012. Data was collected from two student surveys and from student reflective journals; it is intended that these form the beginning of a longitudinal survey. Analysis of the initial data indicates the workshop model is successful in many of its aims, but shows some areas needing refinement.

Introduction

For some time there has been recognition in Australia that traditional tertiary music teaching models for training professional musicians are no longer able to accommodate industry needs (Hannan 2001; Liertz 2007; Logan 2007; Lebler, Burt-Perkins and Carey 2009) and that some change in teaching

methodologies is desirable (Mitchell 2010). The trend away from conservatoire-style training is also evident in other countries such as the UK (Ritterman and Wright 1994).

Adoption of a workshop model occurred organically at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) in Australia following a restructure of undergraduate degrees in Music, Theatre and Visual Arts which were replaced by a more generic but flexible Bachelor of Creative Arts (BCA). New teaching models were developed that would enhance the students' ability to adapt to a broad range of professional situations. Previous teaching styles focused on solo musical skill at the expense of developing interpersonal communication skills specific to students' musical practice. Graduates needed to develop a much broader suite of skills to prepare them for the inevitability of a portfolio career in music.

Currently the BCA comprises 24 courses over six semesters of full-time study. There are six Music Practice courses, in addition to music history, music theory and musicianship courses.

The model and the literature

Implementation began with an experimental approach to the core music course Music Practice 1 in semester 1, 2012. The objective of Music Practice 1 stated in the course's Introductory Book is as follows:

> This course requires students to engage in a combination of learning solid traditional skills in technique, and participate in structured, experimental, collaborative activities aimed at developing prototype behaviours of a functional musician, such as leadership, reliability, interpersonal skills and self-reflection.

We define a *functional musician* as one who is technically sound, versatile, adaptive, collaborative, empathetic, and creative.

The workshop model has three main components:

1. a weekly two-hour workshop attended by all students enrolled in Music Practice 1 (followed immediately by the one-hour Performance Class attended by Music students of every level); this involves team teaching of entire cohort and smaller ensembles;

2. a weekly one-hour instrument specific group class for technique;

3. the use of e-Portfolio for reflective analysis and self- and peer-assessment of ensemble activities.

The initiatives in USQ Music align well with the literature. Liertz (2007) identifies team teaching, self-assessment, peer assessment, small group teaching, and shared/collaborative learning among 11 pyramids of excellence.

There is some evidence that one-to-one instrumental tuition, understood by the authors as a central bastion of the traditional model, may hinder the very attributes that teachers value in students – the development of both self-responsibility and an individual artistic voice (Gaunt 2006 quoted in Liertz 2007). Lebler, Burt-Perkins and Carey (2009) make a case for the complementing of one-to-one lessons with other activities. Liertz (2007) believes that the development of meta skills such as flexibility, creativity and autonomy is not possible in a one-to-one learning situation, while Daniel (2004) reports that the teacher/student power differential has the potential to hamper student independence.

By contrast, small group learning environments that are regular and structured (Daniel 2004) can promote many positive outcomes (Gilbert 1995; Haddon 2011). These include opportunity for increased levels of interaction and critical analysis and the potential for a holistic learning environment (Daniel 2004), a better class atmosphere, improvement in students' self-esteem, an increase in student motivation, better group co-operation skills, and academic learning (Gilbert 1995). Haddon (2011) identifies nine advantages to piano students learning with multiple concurrent teachers. Despite this, Bergee and Cecconi-Roberts (2002) report that, although several studies have been conducted (because of its potential to bring about positive change), techniques such as small group instruction and peer evaluation have rarely been used.

Self- and peer-assessments of ensembles were used in order to sharpen critical and analytical powers and to encourage students to consider the importance to music making of strong interpersonal, organisation and time management skills. Reflection was further embedded in assessment in an e-Portfolio task. As Lebler (2007) notes, reflection is an important aspect of learning in an increasingly complex world – students must learn *how* to learn in order to be adaptable. Lebler, Burt-Perkins and Carey (2009) also make a case for the value of peer- and self-assessment and self-directed learning. Searby and Ewers (1997) document both positive and negative aspects. Bergee and Cecconi-Roberts (2002) note that undergraduate students' self-evaluation of performance correlated poorly with the evaluation of both their instructor and their peers. However, rather than using reflection primarily for performance and skill analysis, our model also relies on reflection to help students better assimilate interpersonal aspects of music making.

The workshops

Workshops were held weekly for the entire cohort in Music Practice 1 (21 students in semester 1, 2012). Each session was two hours in duration. These workshops fell into three categories:

1. Seminar: these seminars were videoed and made available to the students via USQ's StudyDesk, and usually included a guest performance by staff or visiting professional artist; following this, topics which included effective practice strategies, managing performance anxiety, analysing a performance, basic improvisation, stage etiquette, repertoire, communication skills for small ensemble work (some seminars involved a practical element) were covered;

2. Rehearsal: students were placed into small groups of three or four members and were required to arrange set repertoire for an end of semester performance;

3. Workshop/master class: students met as a cohort and each ensemble performed work to date on repertoire for staff and peer feedback on work in progress.

The workshops were team-taught by four staff, of whom two were classically trained (piano, clarinet) and two with a more contemporary practice (voice, piano). Each was able to contribute effectively, and the variety of staff background experience was noted to have enriched the student experience. It is important to note that, despite the disparate backgrounds of staff, discussion on music-related matters always found common ground, regardless of the genre being played or examined.

Instrumentation posed an interesting challenge. Ensembles usually consisted of at least one vocalist, a chordal instrument such as piano or guitar and would also include one other instrument (e.g., clarinet, trumpet, flute). Many students willingly elected to perform on secondary instruments: for example, some played hand percussion or cajon to add another texture to the ensembles; some instrumental students elected to sing; singers elected to play piano or guitar. The small group environment challenged and encouraged students to be flexible and to ensure each member played an integral role in the performance.

Work culminated in a student concert at the end of the semester. The repertoire, drawn from a set list, was largely popular in style and included examples of folk, jazz, pop, rock, country, and musical theatre. Examples of items from the concert include *Send in the Clowns* played by clarinet, guitar and trumpet, and *Fever* performed with voice, piano, cajon and with baritone saxophone playing the bass line. Students, staff and audience alike were thrilled with the inventiveness and the sheer joyful enthusiasm of the student ensembles.

Method

Data was collected from two sources: firstly, a student questionnaire which was administered twice – in Week 3 of the 13-week semester, and in Week 12 – and secondly, the e-Portfolios which contained the students' reflections on the weekly workshops, technique lessons, Performance Classes and concerts attended throughout the semester. The questionnaire was devised with assistance from USQ's Learning and Teaching Support section to ensure that pertinent information to gauge the success or otherwise of the experiment could be collected and assessed. The first questionnaire was

completed in the week that students presented their first small ensemble workshop performances, at

the beginning of the workshop. In hindsight, had these been completed after the performances, the

responses may have been less optimistic; nevertheless, the responses from the second questionnaire

reveal a strong improvement in almost every area.

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions (see Appendix A) designed to elicit information

relevant to the stated objective of the course. Students responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging

from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Results - Questionnaire

Table 1 records the student responses to both administrations of the questionnaire. For each point of

the Likert scale there are three columns. The first records the responses from the first administration

(n=21); the second records the responses from the second administration (n=20 – one student was

absent from this class); the third identifies the difference between the two.

Table 1

Questionnaire responses

	Strongly Disagree			Disagree			Neutral			Agree			Strongly Agree		
	Pre	Post	Diff	Pre	Post	Diff	Pre	Post	Diff	Pre	Post	Diff	Pre	Post	Diff
Q 1	0	0	0	2	0	-2	2	1	-1	17	10	-7	1	10	+9
Q 2	0	0	0	2	0	-2	10	0	-10	8	17	+9	2	4	+2
Q 3	0	0	0	2	0	-2	9	0	-9	11	16	+5	0	5	+5
Q 4	0	0	0	3	0	-3	11	3	-8	7	16	+9	1	2	+1
Q 5a	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	15	11	-4	6	9	+3
Q 5b	0	0	0	2	0	-2	7	2	-5	10	14	+4	3	5	+20
Q 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	+1	19	9	-10	0	11	+11
Q 7	0	0	0	1	0	-1	4	1	-3	10	11	+1	7	9	+2
Q 8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	12	12	0	9	8	-1

Question 1 (My technical skills allow me to perform well on my instrument): At the beginning of the

semester, two students disagreed that their technical skills allowed them to perform well on their

instrument, two were neutral, and 17 agreed; at the end of the semester all except one of these strongly agreed that their technical skills allowed them to perform well. This indicates that nearly half the student cohort believed their technical skills had improved during the semester to allow them to perform well on their instrument.

Question 2 (I have strong performance skills for musical settings ranging from solo to ensembles of different sizes): At the beginning of the semester two students disagreed that they had skills allowing them to perform in a range of settings from solo to ensembles of different sizes, and ten held a neutral opinion; but at the end of the semester all these students had changed their opinion to either agreement or strong agreement.

Question 3 (I feel well-equipped to communicate my performance ideas and needs to another musician using a common musical language): At the beginning of the semester two students disagreed that they were well-equipped to communicate with other musicians in a common musical language, and nine were neutral; at the conclusion of the semester all these had altered their opinion to either agreement or strong agreement. The workshop model appears to have successfully developed communication skills in musical settings for more than 50% of the student cohort.

Question 4 (I am confident in my ability to critically analyse a musical performance): Confidence in critical analysis of a musical performance was initially disagreed by three students with eight students holding to a neutral view; but at the semester's end, all these students had altered their opinion to agreement or strong agreement, indicating that students' perceptions of their ability to analyse music performance improved markedly.

Question 5a (I have an awareness of the importance of correct use of the body when performing): With the exception of one student who held a neutral opinion, all students at the commencement of the semester agreed or strongly agreed they were aware of the importance of correct use of the body

when performing; at the end of the semester three who had agreed they were aware stated a strong agreement, indicating a perceived improvement or this criterion.

Question 5b (I feel confident using my body in this way): Awareness of correct body use does not necessarily equate to confidence in using the body correctly, however. Compared with the 13 students who agreed (ten) or strongly agreed (three) they were confident in using their body correctly when performing, nine students either disagreed (two) or were neutral (seven); at the end of the semester, however, none disagreed and only two were neutral, while 19 were either in agreement (14) or strong agreement (five). It is clear that students' confidence in using the body correctly during musical performance was significantly enhanced during the semester.

Question 6 (I understand the qualities a functional musician possesses): Nineteen of 22 respondents at the beginning of the semester registered agreement that they understood the qualities possessed by a functional musician: at the close of the semester, ten (i.e., just over 50%) of these believed they had a strong understanding of these qualities. The improvement shown here is, however, off-set by a ceiling effect (the large number of "high" responses) evident in the first questionnaire.

Question 7 (I am willing to explore musical boundaries, innovate and improvise): Most students agreed or strongly agreed they were willing to explore musical boundaries, innovate and improvise, and this changed only a little during the semester. By contrast, three were neutral, and only one disagreed; but all of these registered agreement or strong agreement after the semester's study. This question also reveals a ceiling effect which was unexpected by the authors, whose experience led them to anticipate students' unwillingness to explore, innovate and improvise; nevertheless, a small positive perceptual improvement is noted in the result of the second questionnaire.

Question 8 (I understand the ways in which my emotions can affect my performance): Most students agreed (12) or strongly agreed (nine) they understood the ways in which emotions can affect

performance, and this did not change during the course of the semester. The only change that was noted is due to the absence of one student from the second questionnaire.

Results – e-Portfolios

Staff had free access to read the student e-Portfolios throughout the semester. The student are were collated at the conclusion of the semester, and from this reading four clear themes emerged:

1. The importance of peer-supported learning;
2. Learning from lecturers "doing" (i.e., a learning community comprising students and staff);
3. Learning of interpersonal skills;
4. Technical progress despite not having *individual* lessons.

1. The importance of peer supported learning.

Many students remarked on the strong support for each other, and the bonds forged that had positive effects on both personal and musical development. One stated: "the friends and skills I have gained through the process are irreplaceable", while another observed: "it's like none of us can do anything but our best on that stage!" The sense of community, both within the student cohort and between staff and students, was much stronger than formerly, and promoted a personal and professional respect for each other as well.

2. Learning from lecturers "doing".

In the context of the workshop model, students reported on the value of the "model" target performances by staff and invited guests in the weekly workshops, and on attendance at the public staff concerts during the semester. (It is noteworthy that student attendance at public concerts improved dramatically.) These concerts demonstrated not only that the staff actually "practised what they preached", but were acknowledged as being "inspiring" and an integral part of the learning process.

3. Learning of interpersonal skills.

Students became strongly aware of the interpersonal dimension in rehearsal and performance. One illustrative comment: "This course has helped me to learn the importance of being punctual. I started out being late to everything but after realizing that I'm letting people down like my performance group and lecturers, I started to be sure I was on time . . .".

4. Technical progress despite not having *individual* lessons.

A small number of e-Portfolio comments, particularly among the voice students, point to this.

Issues

The student response to the workshop model experiment has been overwhelmingly positive, and students in higher year levels have expressed a wish that they had studied under such a scheme; it was, however, anticipated by the Music staff that revision and refinement would be necessary following the initial trial: some issues have arisen, described below, that are receiving attention already in semester 2.

Firstly, although the e-Portfolio journals were consistently updated throughout the semester by most students, there was very little online interaction (e.g., comments on own and others' performances, other posts from students and staff). In addition, although students received group instruction early in the semester about how to set up and use the e-Portfolio, it became evident that some students require more mentoring on the technical aspects of e-Portfolios (e.g., uploading digital artefacts) and on the rationale and purpose of reflection in learning.

Secondly, there was very little student reflection in the journals on the Performance Class videos. This was a disappointing outcome: the intention had been that this would be an important learning tool as a source for reflection. It seems that students do not yet fully understand the value to their own learning

of viewing and re-viewing performances, and this aspect might need, therefore, to become a stated requirement of the e-Portfolio.

Thirdly, some of the self- and peer-assessments differed from staff opinion, generally by being inflated. Such an outcome may not be unexpected, as it was the first time many of the students had engaged in this practice; but on being asked to reconsider their assessments, students did revise their opinions more honestly and realistically. This supports the observation of Bergee and Cecconi-Roberts (2002) that peer interaction combined with feedback showed initial promise in improving ability to self-evaluate, and that self-evaluation using small groups of peers improves over time.

An additional area of concern is that, although students were observed to be developing a musical vocabulary which they are using with increasing confidence and perception in both oral and written settings, much of the written reflection in e-Portfolios relied heavily on a colloquial, social media language style when it had been hoped this would be more formal.

Conclusion

The adoption of the workshop model was considered to be highly successful. Many positive gains have been observed: a sense of excitement and musical purpose, both individual and corporate, is tangible; interpersonal, executant, perceptive and analytical skills are developing; students are exercising their imagination to a greater extent and taking responsibility for their own learning. Some refinements to the model are needed, most specifically to promote more focussed outcomes in the use of the e-Portfolio and self and peer assessments; but most of the desired outcomes are already substantially evident.

Appendix A – Questionnaire

1. My technical skills allow me to perform well on my instrument.

2. I have strong performance skills for musical settings ranging from solo to ensembles of different sizes.

3. I feel well-equipped to communicate my performance ideas and needs to another musician using a common musical language.

4. I am confident in my ability to critically analyse a musical performance.

5. (a) I have an awareness of the importance of correct use of the body when performing.
   (b) I feel confident using my body in this way.

6. I understand the qualities a functional musician possesses.

7. I am willing to explore musical boundaries, innovate and improvise.

8. I understand the ways in which my emotions can affect my performance.

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