

The Class of 2012

The first cohort of students from University of Sunderland's BA (Hons) Community Music at The Sage Gateshead graduated in July 2012. Following three years of full-time study, 8 students - ranging in age from early 20s to mid-50s - collected their certificates and proudly donned their mortar-boards as qualified community musicians. But qualified to do what exactly? Some within the broad church that is Community Music might see the professionalization of the profession as running counter to what the work is fundamentally about – musicians applying their skills and experience to working with others in non-formal and informal community settings – and a qualification is neither here nor there. No qualification can be a cast-iron guarantee of quality, and many musicians without formal qualifications will continue to deliver outstanding projects. However, as Lee Higgins observes, "If community music is to flourish as a field of practice in the ways it's growing number of protagonists proclaim, those who advocate for it must recognise the value of scholarly inquiry. In short, those who support the notion of community music would benefit from a greater understanding of the relationship between theory and practice." (Higgins 2012, p.177) I'd therefore like to argue that there is intrinsic value in qualifications like the BA (Hons) Community Music – that as a sector, we can learn a lot about the work itself from the way we structure learning for future generations of community musicians, and by listening to their experiences of that learning.

The Community Music course at The Sage Gateshead came about as the result of a committed strategic partnership with the University of Sunderland, expressed as a shared interest in the ongoing cultural development of the area, including "developing institutional capabilities in scholarship, teaching and learning, research and consultancy and engagement with the community." (University of Sunderland 2009, p.2) This strategic partnership has been the platform upon which the course has been built, and the course has quickly become an important feature of both organisations' programmes, supported by key staff at both delivery and strategic levels.

The course was constructed to support undergraduates to develop as both musicians and practitioners, and therefore the skills being developed on the course centre around David Elliott's notion of "two complementary forms of expertise: musicianship and educatorship." (D. J. Elliott 1995, p.252) By musicianship we mean not just "the subject matter knowledge one must possess to be a professional music educator," (ibid) but the practical skills, attitudes and techniques necessary to enjoy a professional life as a 'gigging musician,' probably as part of a portfolio career: soloists and ensemble members in diverse professional music settings, which vary with students' individual musical identities, ranging from classical to rock / pop and all points in between. And because "musicianship, musicality, virtuosity, artistry, and all the other necessary criteria of being a competent musician are not sufficient criteria for being successful music teachers," (Regelski & Gates 2009, p.8) the students' studies are equally weighted towards 'educatorship' i.e. "the flexible, situated knowledge that allows one to think-in-action in relation to students' needs, subject matter criteria, community needs, and the professional standards that apply to each of these." (D. J. Elliott 1995, p.252)

It is the relationship between these two complementary strands of study which form the basis of the students' development. In the first two years, core modules each semester in Musicianship and Professional Practice run alongside each another, so that the learning from one can inform the

other. For example, in Year 2 Musicianship each student leads a mixed musical ensemble of their peers from across Years 1 and 2, and these ensembles become vital first hand experiences of group process (both healthy and more challenging) for all involved. Reflecting on their personal experiences of leading - and perhaps more crucially of following – in a range of different settings, creates rich dialogue among students and staff which help bring theory to life, and support students to develop a more critical understanding of their own musical and pedagogical ‘accent’ (Swanwick 1999, p.22). Other core modules in the first two years around ‘Music In Context’ (developing critical approaches to musicological, contextual and academic perspectives on music) and ‘Creative and Artistic Practice’ (giving students the space to explore the boundaries of their current artistic identities) provide a broader framework for students to develop professionally and artistically, so that by the end of their second year, they have well-formed professional identities as “musicians who think of themselves also as teachers.” (Swanwick 1999)

In their 3rd year, they then apply these identities to two large-scale practical projects and an academic dissertation. The Major Professional Project is the biggest piece of work they will do on the course, and involves devising, researching, planning, running and evaluating their own 10-week workshop project, with groups of participants in authentic community settings across the NE region, and inside The Sage Gateshead itself. These projects are intended to be indistinguishable from the hundreds of similar projects which The Sage Gateshead’s Learning and Participation workforce of over 120 musicians deliver in the building and the region on a daily basis, so by this stage, the students are well integrated into the organisation’s practices.

The other major 3rd Year project - appropriately-titled Performance Project – is where the students devise, plan, curate and perform in an event which showcases them as musicians, and often (but not exclusively) within both a community and a participatory context. Last year, these included: a one-day folk festival in a Northumberland village, complete with maypole dancing and the resurrection of a long-forgotten folk song; a site-specific performance of new music performed by undergraduates and primary school children in a local National Trust property; an audio-visual ‘History of the Blues’ and a ‘live’ performance of an experimental composition based around a graphic score of The Sage Gateshead’s architecture.

What I hope is clear from this very brief summary of the course is that the students are not learning ‘about’ the practices they hope to subsequently embrace once they graduate. Rather, they are learning ‘inside’ those practices, from right in the heart of a living and breathing international music organisation. This kind of ‘situated’ learning (Lave & Wenger 1991) works in much the same way that a traditional apprenticeship used to work, making the journey from ‘new-comer’ to ‘old-timer’ within a ‘community of practice’ “by actually engaging in the process, under the attenuated conditions of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’” (ibid, p.14) So, students start the course by shadowing practitioners from various disciplines, and progress through co-delivering alongside other practitioners to ultimately delivering their own projects as part of the same programme they began the course observing. Of course, many students have already been involved with The Sage Gateshead as participants, performers, audience, previous training or even as an employee in some cases, so may already have a working familiarity with the ‘community.’

As musicians, the opportunities to perform on the same stages that regularly host internationally-renowned performers start from the moment the students start the course. During Welcome Week,

as part of the Induction process, we ensure that all 1st Year students have the opportunity to perform in the building, and invite the 500+ staff members in the organisation to become an audience who will bear witness to the newest members of our 'community' as they claim their musical space. By the time they graduate, they will have performed in the various halls on a number of occasions, and are curating their own events to sit within the organisation's Performance Programme. Last year, the student choir's collaboration with Imogen Heap for her ground-breaking performance of 'The Seashell and the Clergyman' was not just a personal highlight for all those who took part, it was also one of the artistic highlights of the organisation in 2011-12. Students are not just joining a course; they are joining the Sage Gateshead's extensive and inspirational 'community of practice' (Wenger 1999) which they become an important part of from the moment they arrive. This "set of relations and persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice," (Lave & Wenger 1991, p.98) becomes the professional context for their studies during their time on the course.

And that 'community of practice' certainly is extensive. A leading international concert venue and an important regional RFO; a Bridge organisation; a founding partner of Sing Up; one of the first YMAZs; Creative Apprenticeships training provider; an in-house training programme for over 100 community music 'trainees' since 2002; a significant partner in the region's 'music hubs' and various research projects; an extensive Learning & Participation programme with over 120 community musicians delivering hundreds of workshops every week with participants of all ages and backgrounds, from Early Years and their families through to the extensive Silver programme, and all points in between. Music from (before) the cradle to the grave.

It's worth noting that the 'situatedness' of the degree within the practices of The Sage Gateshead mean that the context of the study is particular to the organisation, which might be seen neither as a strength nor a weakness, but merely as a contextual feature. Because "communities are fluid, porous, negotiated affairs: dynamic patterns of human interaction," and that in order "to understand communities we need to understand the practices that stitch and weave them together," (Bowman 2009) one might infer that it's only possible to fully make sense of *situated* practices, rather than more generalised ones. Perhaps the reason that there is so little consensus about generalised Community Music practices is that those practices are fundamentally 'situated'.

Wayne Bowman goes on to make the point that, "to ask 'What community?' is also to ask 'What kind of practice?', 'What kind of people are deemed capable of engaging in it?', 'What kinds of attitudes, beliefs, and actions does it exist to sustain?', and 'What kinds of attitudes, beliefs, and actions are necessary to sustain and nourish it?'" (Bowman 2009) which chimes closely with Elliott's assertion that "a teacher's decisions about the *why, what* and *how* of teaching and learning cannot be realistically separated from questions of *who, when* and *where*," (D. J. Elliott 1995, p.251) With this in mind, it's worth stressing the point that what is developed on the course is an induction into a set of practices particular to the community of The Sage Gateshead. However, the academic and theoretical underpinning of the course means that hopefully students are also able to develop a critical appreciation of those practices, alongside a conceptual framework for being able to understand how different kinds of practices arise in different communities. And because "communities of practice are engaged in the generative process of producing their own future," (Lave & Wenger 1991, p.57) the particular framework of Situated Learning allows the students to influence and shape the community they join by dint of becoming students within the organisation.

The implication of this is that students are able to develop their practice in relation to a whole range of various teaching-learning situations which the organisation hosts - formal, non-formal and informal - not just 'community' ones. The organisation's mission, to "entertain, involve and inspire each and every person we meet through engagement with outstanding music and creative events," is rooted in the spirit of the music manifesto's call for a more holistic sense of music education, to "build pathways for progression in music so that all young people, whatever their background or abilities, have access to a rich and diverse range of musical experiences." (Department for Education 2004, p.4) This manifests in what I have described elsewhere as a 'pedagogy-in-action' (Camlin 2012): an organisational manifestation of a combination of the principles of knowledge-in-action (D. J. Elliott 1995), thinking-in-action (ibid), reflection-in-action (Schön 1984) and theory-in-action (ibid) where the organisation is able to match an appropriate pedagogy (and practitioner) to the identified musical learning needs of an individual, group, or community.

The sheer range of practices (and practitioners) within the organisation is staggering, which is why the notion of Situated Learning is an important theoretical perspective for the wider course. It emphasises the relational nature of music learning which underpins good practice - "educating and musicking are, first and foremost, modes of interaction – modes of social engagement, relationship and exchange between and among human agents," (Bowman 2009) - and the diversity and unique nature of those practices. Who we learn with is as important as what we learn from them, because we learn much more than just the things they teach us. We learn about their values and their sense of humour, we learn about their approach to learning, and how they interact with other people. We learn about them as people. The most powerful connections that students make on the course are with the more experienced members of that community. Laura, one of our recent graduates, put it like this:

"Studying in the Sage Gateshead has been a very real life experience because it's not based on a university campus. The Sage is a working building and there are professionals going around their work on a daily basis and you're meeting and networking with all of these people. It gives you the sense that this is what I could do with my degree, so there's always that kind of forward thinking as to where I can go and what I can strive towards. The people that you meet help you to get where you want to be, and it's a network that you don't get on a university campus. The Sage itself is such a vast building and a vast amount of things go on there that you can do nothing else but learn a lot from the people you're with."

Ellie, another graduate, adds:

"You are not just doing an academic degree, you're doing a vocational degree based in a working environment, so you're constantly networking with people. We've had visiting practitioners coming in every week that work in the building and it shows you that not only are you learning a trade but how you can then go on to use it when you graduate. You're not just learning the trade, you're doing it."

The curricular approach of the BA (Hons) Community Music course is informed by the success of The Sage Gateshead's own (unaccredited) Community Music Training project which commenced in 2002 as a means of building the workforce for the organisation's extensive Learning and Participation ambitions. To date, this project has trained over 100 musicians in the practices of the organisation

through a similar 'situated' learning opportunity from more 'peripheral' experiences (shadowing, micro-teaching) through to team teaching, individual workshop delivery and ultimately project leadership.

The difference that an Honours degree makes in the approach to learning is that the students are required not only to engage fully in the practices they're studying, but also to critically analyse them and develop theoretical perspectives in relation to them. By participating in, and reflecting on, the practices of the communities they're increasingly part of, and their own approach, they develop the all-important 'praxial' attitude to the work which underpins good educational practice. As David Elliott describes: "Teaching is a matter of intentional thinking-in-action," characterised by "the centrality of thoughtful actions directed towards bringing about learning. Because teaching occurs not in isolation but in relation to students, a teacher's knowledge-in-action is what gives meaning to the teaching-learning situation." (D. J. Elliott 1995, p.251) Or Wayne Bowman's notion of *praxis* as 'mindful doing' i.e. "a more informed and deliberative doing" than the purely technical, and a "more useful or practical kind of knowing" (Bowman 2005, p.53) than the purely theoretical.

This is important not just for the students, helping them to integrate the twin aspects of their professional identities as musicians and educators, which in turn helps them achieve a good final classification in their academic studies. It's also important for everyone else involved, including the teaching staff, guest practitioners and the organisation itself. In a true dialogical sense, the partnership with the University of Sunderland is a way for The Sage Gateshead to refine its own *praxis*, using the learning that arises from delivering an undergraduate programme of study to articulate the various and diverse practices of the organisation, both artistically and educationally. In this way, the learning environment of The Sage Gateshead which the students are part of might be seen to correspond very closely to Elliott's vision of the "*reflective musical practicum*." (Elliott 1995, p.241) The commitment

The diversity of practices, practitioners, settings, musical genres and so forth contained within The Sage Gateshead's 'community of practice' means that the students are exposed to a wide variety of corresponding leadership styles from autocratic through democratic to laissez-faire (Lewin 1944a; Lewin 1944b), and are encouraged to reflect on the relative merits of each, according to the teaching-learning situation they find themselves in. Often it is in their own mixed ensembles, each led by a 2nd-year student, where the challenges of matching an appropriate leadership style to the collective needs of the group becomes apparent. Within these groups - which usually have a mix of graduates from the 'school music' system alongside self-taught musicians who have developed in more informal ways - everyone must work together to find a common ground upon which to build a collective musical practice. The dialogues, discussions and arguments which arise as they co-navigate the terms of musical engagement to work together becomes a rich learning experience for all involved, requiring them to account for the full diversity of musical 'accents' which constitute the make-up of the students on the course.

Notions of 'situational leadership' (Hersey 1997) - with its attendant emphasis on 'follower' behaviour as an indication of the most appropriate style of leadership to employ - become increasingly important. Being able to 'read' a group and respond with an appropriate method for their collective musical development is the *modus operandi* of the effective music educator: "*Teaching expertise is fundamentally procedural and situational*. The dynamics of the teaching-

learning situation inform a teacher's actions as much as a teacher's actions shape the teaching-learning situation." (D. J. Elliott 1995, p.251) The skills they learn, and the insights they develop, from being part of a peer-led group process become key reflective components of their own emerging *praxis*. As Ellie describes:

"To be a good Community Musician you need to be very open-minded and you need to be able to plan on the spot and assess situations very quickly because it's very diverse as to what you might be doing. You're never going to be in one set field of music. You might try to be, but then you'll get into a project or you'll start something and realise that no amount of planning is going to help: you don't know who, or how many people are going to turn up on the day, and what musicians are going to be there - so you need to be very open-minded. You need to be able to think outside the box and relate to as many people as possible in a group."

Combining all of this learning in the design and implementation of their own professional projects in the 3rd year becomes a really exciting process. The marriage of a robust theoretical perspective on the work to an increasingly confident practical implementation results – in the best cases – with projects that are indistinguishable from those 'in the real world' i.e. not just within The Sage Gateshead's 'community of practice' but within the wider freelance world of Participatory / Community Arts. Students use the opportunity of the 3rd Year projects to develop new ideas and bring them to realisation, with the full support of an international Arts organisation not only encouraging them, but making space in its programme for their valued contribution. The impact on the students' learning is clear, as well as on their professional identity:

"I curated my own festival which is something I've always dreamed of doing and I didn't think I would ever have the chance to do. Being able to be given that space to do a completely free-reign Performance Project and do whatever you want with it really was fantastic and it's going to go with me to the day I die, that festival, it was amazing. It took a lot of stress in organising it but I've gained so many skills from doing it that I can completely apply it in any job that I'm ever going to go and do now." (Ellie)

Michael, another Class of 2012 graduate, already has a strong professional reputation for his work with Learning Disabled participants through The Sage Gateshead's Accessible Learning strand of work. He used the opportunity of the 3rd Year Major Professional Project to refine his own theoretical perspective on his practice, developing Garcia & Alban-Metcalf's model of 'integrated pedagogy' (Garcia & Alban-Metcalf 2005) into a new framework, which he termed a 'facilitated interactive pedagogy', emphasising the particular collaborative nature of the teacher-as-participant in the kind of teaching-learning situations which characterise his practice. The opportunities for existing practitioners to use undergraduate study in this way - to reflect on and define their particular practice - is invaluable, and it helps to establish a high level of discourse amongst the student population, and more widely within the organisation: "Philosophical or theoretical enquiry allows the mind to venture beyond the day-to-day complexities of executing a community music project. Conceptual thinking enables a certain space in which to problematise practice and challenge orthodoxy." (Higgins 2012, p.177)

With 2 of the 8 (25%) degrees awarded to the first cohort achieving a '1st class' award, the bar has been set high for future years coming through. The success of the course lies in the genuine marriage between theory and practice. For the students, that manifests in many things: amassing a range of theoretical perspectives and approaches which can be applied appropriately in a variety of teaching-learning situations; learning to be 'choiceful' about how to approach working with different participant groups; developing both musically *and* socially, and 'learning about learning' (meta-learning) by reflecting on those personal and professional developments; refining their artistic practice and developing the technical and leadership skills to fully realise it. Although students are most keen to be engaged in the practical activities of the course, the academic nature of the Honours degree structure is of equal importance, as it gives credence and weight to those practices.

Therefore, the course provides the opportunity for students to start (or develop) their professional musical careers with a set of skills and experiences firmly grounded in 'real world' situations alongside strong theoretical underpinning. Not just musicians, not just music teachers, but musician-educators, or as Laura put it, "a musician who wants to share their music with others, giving anybody and everybody a chance to experience music, no matter what level or ability they have." For Ellie, it's about becoming "the person that comes in and does music for the sake of doing music: to play it, to sing it, to listen to it, to dance to it, play games with it, to use music in an everyday setting and make it part of your life." The change in their professional and personal identities is sometimes not so very great; more of a reinforcement of an approach to music that has always been part of their practice:

"I wouldn't put I'm a freelance Community Musician if I was saying what do you do for a job; I'm a freelance musician. The fact that I work in the community is just a different bit of it, but I haven't changed to be a 'freelance Community Musician'. I'm a musician first but I want to share what I know with other people and so we talk about pedagogies. I'd say mine's a social pedagogy because whenever I work with people it's all about relationship building and working with them to find out what they want, and do it that way, and I understand that now." (George)

For the staff involved in the degree – tutors, guest tutors, support staff – and for the organisation more generally, it's an opportunity to critically evaluate and contextualise the organisation's practices in ways which help to articulate those practices more clearly, which in turn helps everyone to understand and appreciate the breadth and diversity of its' constantly-evolving 'community of practice'.

The evolution of the course is a constant process, as we reflect on and learn from each previous year's experience. Without losing the strength of the theoretical underpinning required to achieve well in an Honours degree structure, the students clearly value every opportunity to immerse themselves in the organisation's practices, whether as participants, observers, co-leaders, performers or audience members. Providing more opportunities for students to apply the theories and perspectives they learn, within 'real' situations, is a constant process of review, especially as new learning opportunities within the organisation's extensive partnership networks reveal themselves. Being able to respond at short notice to such opportunities while tying the attendant learning in to the curriculum, requires flexibility and a 'can-do' approach.

Similarly, recognising that the students are first and foremost musicians whose musical practice is still evolving, requires structured support and specialist input above and beyond the group learning

in the Musicianship modules. The course is taught alongside its sister programme, the BMus (Hons) Jazz, Popular and Commercial Music, which is a much more performance-focused course, where students receive relatively high levels of 1:1 and small group tuition in their vocal / instrumental studies. The Community Music students, while recognising that the nature of the courses are fundamentally different, can sometimes eye with envy the levels of individual support their BMus peers access, and we are constantly refining the opportunities for students to receive specialist musical support from the ranks of the organisation's musicians. In 2012-13, this will include: a specialist musician 'mentor' from within the organisation's professional workforce for each student-led ensemble; a new programme of whole course ensembles (percussion, steel pans, brass / wind, vocal) building on the success of last year's TSG student choir; a range of small group Study Groups in areas of particular musical interest, ranging from advanced vocal skills and music technology training through to additional music theory sessions and 'beginners' groups in guitar and keyboard, for example.

The success of the 3rd Year programme of Performance Projects in May this year has also helped us to recognise the value of this critical mass of student-led activity contained in a short time period. For May 2013, this mixed programme of themed musical evenings, culmination of community projects, academic reflection and dissemination, assessment, seminars and celebrations will frame a Festival of Community Music around which the organisation's wider programme of community-based activity can also be celebrated, and provide a platform for a national Symposium on Community Music which we hope can become a regular annual event.

To return to the original question of what difference an undergraduate qualification in Community Music makes, I hope I've been able to communicate some of the reasons why we value ours. If we are to secure the importance of 'situated' pedagogies within the broader context of music education, courses like the BA (Hons) Community Music are essential in helping to create a new generation of musicians, with the skills and knowledge to be inspirational and transformational catalysts within communities of all shapes, locations and sizes. Not just with a repertoire of suitable material and the skills to deliver it, but with the critical faculties to be able to contextualise their work and develop it for a new music educational landscape. I'll leave the last word to Ellie:

"My degree in Community Music has been life-changing. It's completely changed my perspective on what I want to do with my career, how I want to do it, and have my confidence to be able to go and do it. I've seen that there is a huge amount of work that you can do as a musician working with people, working in 1:1 settings; you can work with the old, the young, in music therapy and I feel that through the degree I've got the skills to be able to go and do it. I sing in all different styles now. I still do a lot of classically trained singing and I still teach classically but I think of myself more, if I'm teaching now, as a vocal coach rather than a singing teacher because I've very much more aware of the physiology behind the voice now which was fantastic through the voice workshops that we did during the course."

"My career is going to develop into a bit of a portfolio career I think. My mum said to me yesterday 'variety is the spice of life,' and that pretty much sums up what I think I'm going to be doing in my career. It's never going to be one set thing and I'm not going to predict what is going to happen and what is going to be. I just booked a ticket to Australia for six months

and I'm not planning on going to do the back-packing holiday, I'm planning to go and work in community projects in Australia, so I've got school work lined up to do, working with young people. I'm going to take what I've learned to different countries and different cultures and see if I can learn more from them and then eventually I will come back here and hopefully I'll still have a job in the building - it would be nice."

Resources

- Bowman, W., 2009. The Community in Music. *International Journal of Community Music*, 2(2/3), pp.109–128.
- Bowman, W., 2005. The Limits and Grounds of Musical Praxialism. In D. Elliott, ed. *Praxial Music Education: Reflections and Dialogues*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 52 – 78.
- Camlin, D., 2012. The Sage Gateshead's Community of Practice as a "pedagogy-in-action." *awaiting publication*.
- Department for Education, 2004. *The Music Manifesto*, Department for Education.
- Elliott, D.J., 1995. *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education*, OUP USA.
- Garcia, S.M. & Alban-Metcalf, J., 2005. The Need for a New Model. In M. Nind et al., eds. *Curriculum and pedagogy in inclusive education – values into practice*. pp. 31–40.
- Hersey, P., 1997. *The Situational Leader*, Center for Leadership Studies.
- Higgins, L., 2012. *Community Music: In Theory and In Practice*, OUP USA.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E., 1991. *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge University Press.
- Lewin, K., 1944a. A Research Approach to Leadership Problems. *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 17(7), pp.392–398.
- Lewin, K., 1944b. The Dynamics of Group Action. *Educational Leadership*, 4, pp.195–200.
- Regelski, T.A. & Gates, J.T., 2009. *Music Education for Changing Times: Guiding Visions for Practice*, Springer.
- Schön, D.A., 1984. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* New ed., Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Swanwick, K., 1999. *Teaching Music Musically* 1st ed., Routledge.
- University of Sunderland, 2009. The Sage Gateshead Strategic Partnership Agreement.
- Wenger, E., 1999. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* New Ed., Cambridge University Press.