

Piano Pedagogy in the 21st Century Conservatoire: reflections on current developments in the United Kingdom and their significance for Australian practitioners.

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In recent years strong currents of change have been discernable in the attitudes of British Conservatoires towards career building, fuelled partly by government requirements for them to engage more meaningfully with the community in promoting the cause of music. Evidence suggests that pedagogy programs are benefiting from these changes since they are seen by management as significant agents of social outreach and enhanced musical awareness in the community. As a result a number of Conservatoires now appear to view pedagogy skills as significant components of a portfolio career in music.

Winds of change have swept Britain's nine conservatoires during the opening years of this century, bringing in their wake altered perceptions and strategies from both management and students. A confluence of three particular imperatives for change has caused this latest trimming of sails and, indeed, the manoeuvring still continues. A buoyant UK economy has seen rising standards of job readiness required from those entering the workforce, coupled with increased legal accountability in the jobs market from employers and employees. A fluid Europe-wide student population, likely to increase its fluidity following the implementation of the Bologna Accord in 2010, is demanding undergraduate and postgraduate study programs of greater relevance and sophistication. Thirdly, concerns about the place of music in the community and a perceived decline in its significance to the population at large, and schools in particular, led to a plethora of reports and declarations such as the Blair government's *Music Manifesto* (2004) and the Associated Board's *Research Report on Instrumental and Vocal Tuition in Private and State Schools* (2006).

The Guardian's Polly Curtis reported on July 6 2004 "Mr. Miliband [Schools Minister] described the manifesto as a route map for the future of music in schools and confirmed that the government would continue its ring-fenced funding for music of up to £180m by 2008" and added "Ms Morris [Arts Minister] said: "Today's children are tomorrow's talent. If we are to remain at the forefront of global music making, we must ensure we offer the widest possible music education for young people" (Curtis, 2004).

The Blair government's expectations from its music conservatoires and their approximately 6000 students have been colored by these concerns and contexts for some years. Following recommendations contained within two reports completed in March 1996, *Review of Music Conservatoires* chaired by Sir John Tooley and *The Funding of Specialist Institutions* chaired by Sir Stewart Sutherland, the per capita funding of conservatoires was confirmed at a premium rate to meet extra costs incurred through one-to-one teaching and other special aspects of conservatoire training, a generous provision by Australian standards. It comes as no surprise therefore that strings attached to this funding can reflect the government's view of the conservatoires' social and artistic responsibilities. The Association Européen des

Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC) document *Overview of Professional Music Training System in the United Kingdom* includes the comment “government funding can be manipulated to further causes which it sees as strategically important to society”. An example of this is the UK government’s desire to widen participation in higher education by encouraging those students from less privileged backgrounds to enter higher education (AEC, 2004, *Music Training*, p3).

This government attempt at social engineering engendered enormous controversy in all quarters and caused serious financial repercussions for conservatoires that opposed it. Unsurprisingly conservatoires are now especially conscious of their social outreach in every area and actively pursue policies that lead to further engagement with the community at large.

UK conservatoires are also acutely conscious of government expectations and the possible effects of the implementation of the Bologna Declaration concerning the employability of their graduates. To retain premium funding they must demonstrate that at least 75% of their graduates have careers based primarily in music. According to the AEC report “where conservatoires have started to publish their figures relating to this, the data suggests that the actual percentage is nearer 85%” (AEC, 2004, *Music Training*, p6). Maintaining and improving on these percentages involves close scrutiny of professional career pathways and the adoption of training models that promise optimum success in the real world of music.

Although their total funding is generous by comparison with their Australian counterparts, UK conservatoires have been seeking to increase their modest slice of the government’s research funding allocation in a bid to balance ever rising costs and to establish their credentials more firmly in the university sector. For example, Higher Education Funding Council allocations for England during the period 2007 - 2008 indicate research funding for the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music to be in the region of 300,000 pounds out of a total recurrent grant for each of approximately 4,400,000 to 4,700,000 pounds (EducationGuardian, 2007). The research component of these figures represents the fruition of considerable effort and understandably the conservatoires are keen to increase this proportion, especially as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2001 saw a reduction in the overall scores for these institutions from their 1996 RAE level.

The results of conservatoire decision-making consequential upon these diverse influences are making themselves felt with increasing momentum. Particularly noticeable is their adoption of the term ‘portfolio career’ to describe one of the principal career pathways for which conservatoires prepare students. The AEC project paper *The Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Europe - an overview per country of regulated music professions* states “State funding for music is decreasing in virtually all European countries and so is the number of formally organized jobs. There is a different attitude towards music styles: whereas classical music organizations dominated the music scenes for many years, other styles of music (jazz, world music, pop, rock, etc) have strongly developed over the years and the employment market for these styles is organized differently from the traditional music styles. The recording industry, another important source of income, appears to be in trouble due to decreased demand. As a consequence, we increasingly see the

emergence of what we call the ‘portfolio career’ in the music profession” (AEC, *Studies and Qualifications*, p2).

As recently as the 1980s the term ‘freelance musician’ might have served, but the newer term is no mere re-badging. It represents a thorough sifting of the constituent elements of such a career pathway in music, with the intention of creating a sum greater than the parts and a viable means of cultural and financial survival for today’s musician. In the MCPS-PRS Alliance’s M Magazine, Clare Stevens wrote “The point is underlined by Professor Edward Gregson, Principal of the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) in Manchester and Chairman of umbrella organization Conservatoires UK, (www.cukas.ac.uk), itself an exemplar of the new environment. Gregson says the aim of conservatoires today is to prepare students for the realities of the working world: “We try to train our students for a portfolio career where they may have three or four strands of work to their income streams” says Gregson. “Typically this may include some teaching, some freelance playing, some work in the community and some personal entrepreneurial work.” (Stevens, 2007).

Social outreach, too, has become a reality. Clare Stevens continued in the same M magazine article “Thank you for the music lessons, you are the funniest people I have ever worked with. I thought it was a great experience. ps the concert was wicked!” If you have an image of a conservatoire of music as a dull, venerable institution populated entirely by neurotic divas and desiccated professors, you should think again. The comment above was made about students and staff from the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), the UK’s oldest conservatoire (founded in 1822), in response to an education project which they ran in the East End Borough of Tower Hamlets” (Stevens, 2007).

Examples of well managed research projects are now not difficult to find throughout the conservatoire sector. The Royal College of Music Music Education Research Team’s (Dr Janet Mills and Dr Hilary Moore) project *Good Management Practice* (2001 – 2002) turned its sights on conservatoires themselves and their teaching practice. They reported “We interviewed over 100 instrumental tutors in eight conservatoires about their work, including the relationship between their performing and teaching, and observed teaching sessions that illustrate this in practice. We held workshops in some conservatoires. At the RCM, we analyzed students’ views about good practice in instrumental teaching, and fed what we learnt about this and the students’ learning styles into the project. We gave presentations on aspects of the emerging findings of the project at the FBC (Federation of British Conservatoires, now conservatoires UK) Conference, at research conferences and seminars elsewhere in the UK, and also in Australia and Sweden. Finally, we wrote articles for publication in research journals. In 2003, a conference was held at the Royal College of Music for over 200 delegates to present our findings and spark discussion within the music education community on our subject. We also published a 68-page final report, entitled *Teaching Performance*, which was disseminated widely and is available from the Royal College of Music” (Mills and Moore, 2003, p1).

Developments in career training, social outreach and research within the conservatoire sector are having an effect on management’s view of piano pedagogy

and its place in their institutions' curricula. With their acknowledgement and adoption of the portfolio career model, conservatoires find themselves confronting a requirement to deal with pedagogy, since it forms an important constituent element of that model. Having grasped the nettle, however, conservatoires are finding there are direct benefits to be derived from the many research possibilities within pedagogy studies, together with the social outreach it engenders through its natural engagement with schools, parents and pupils in the outside community.

From a historical perspective this represents something of a watershed for piano pedagogy in UK conservatoires. During the first half of the last century and beyond pedagogy remained largely frozen in a European nineteenth century top-down, artist-teacher, master-apprentice configuration, with many hierarchical connotations. Conservatoire staff, bolstered by appointments as grade and competitive festival examiners, appeared in the community to dispense wisdom gleaned from teaching at tertiary level, and amongst their conservatoire students as purveyors of experience gained as examiners. The circle was literally closed. There were undoubtedly strong research elements attached in the influential work of Matthay, Ching and others, and in the fine educational compositions of Swinstead, Dunhill et al, but all were imbued with a focus on technical development and mechanical perfection.

By contrast, the US post WW2 ground-up, pupil-centered, enquiry and discovery learning pedagogy model brought the spirit of free enterprise to piano learning. Within the UK it remained in sharp conflict with the older European model for more than thirty years. Embodying educational research, jazz inspired elements (such as improvisation) and a focus on a holistic music experience through general musicianship, its roots were school and university based. Luminaries such as Clark and Pace ensured it's relevance to 20th century values and, with the advent of the digital keyboard, the lifespan of this approach to piano pedagogy was extended through the remainder of the century.

Unsurprisingly, as the nerve-centre of the UK's grade music examination system, British conservatoires retained many vestiges of the older pedagogy models well into the 1980s. Some external diplomas in instrumental teaching, for example, still focused on demonstrations of correct posture and the ability to recite repertoire lists at that time. Improvements in the educational quality and focus of such examinations have been sustained and substantial since then and now encompass as much as one might be able to hope for within the confines of an external award. Nevertheless the relative weighting and content quality of conservatoires' internal pedagogy courses has only begun to rise more recently. Undoubtedly previous conservatoire thinking placed pedagogy studies outside rather than inside conservatoire walls.

In this context it is tempting to look ahead four or five years and speculate where current government and other pressures outlined so far may lead. In particular, there are interesting developments already at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) and Trinity College of Music, both traditionally associated with innovative curricula that resonate empathetically with cutting edge educational developments.

Having attracted a substantial volume of government funding, the RNCM's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) serves to facilitate research

and development in pedagogy and more broadly. Spearheading the RNCM's push to establish itself at the forefront of conservatoire research, the work of the RNCM Research Centre for the Vocational Training of Musicians faculty members Jane Ginsborg, Antonia Ivaldi and Gunter Kreutz is already yielding interesting results with much more to follow. Their research, and that of others around the country such as RAM Research Fellow Roy Howat, demonstrates the breadth of possibilities inherent in the field of pedagogy when it is embedded in a conservatoire context. Currently the RNCM may have the edge in this arena but it seems likely other conservatoires may adopt similar constructs as CETL's successes multiply.

An example of pedagogy's functionality in providing community outreach as a significant by-product of its normal study pathways can again be found at the RNCM. Its *Supporting Professional Studies* strand, initiated by then Director of Studies Charles Bodman Rae and now directed by Kate Buchanan, includes a pedagogy pathway (defined in the prospectus with disarming simplicity as the science of learning and teaching) that can involve mentoring by suitable private teachers in the outside community (RNCM, 2007, p35). What amounts to a practicum therefore takes place off campus, with many further opportunities for engagement between pupils, students and teachers within and without the RNCM. An *Education and Community Outreach* pathway in the same strand provides opportunities for more extensive community engagement as needed (RNCM, 2007, p34).

Trinity College of Music, in conjunction with the University of Greenwich, provides a creative solution for music students who wish to enhance their pedagogy skills and outreach awareness within a Secondary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) giving Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The one-year full-time PGCE strand *Musicians in Education* (the Trinity components under the direction of Head of Undergraduate Programs Chris Caine and Pathway Leader Tim Palmer) offers the usual 60 days university-based and 120 days school based elements but also encompasses "practical teaching experience outside the school setting e.g. local education authority and outreach projects" (University of Greenwich, 2007, p2). Students can precede this by following *The Creative Musician* pathway within the Trinity College of Music BMus (Hons) Performance program. "Students taking this pathway can opt to specialize in instrumental/vocal teaching or creative education skills (collaboration, leadership, and facilitation of group musical activity)" (Trinity College of Music, 2007, p51).

It will be observed that these examples of current practice involve pedagogy pathways embedded in complex multiple relationships with other elements of conservatoire curricula. Such pathways exemplify the sophisticated interaction with which pedagogy can operate as a discipline, drawing together disparate layers of musical activity and often helping to form the connecting glue binding them together. At the RNCM and Trinity College of Music the handling of these curriculum complexities demonstrates in practice how, during the next few years, pedagogy may fulfill its role within UK conservatoire study programs leading to a portfolio career in music.

Such pedagogy pathways will require additional dimensions beyond the older European and US models cited earlier. These dimensions may include the exploration

of musical skills that are transferable to multiple situations, the teaching of entrepreneurial competence and imparting awareness of legal and social responsibilities. Occupying the middle ground between the disciplines of performance and music education, pedagogy pathways in a conservatoire context will encapsulate best practice from both European and US traditions. Artist teachers and educators may each bring their goodies to the table...and in the process divisions may become blurred. The portfolio career model certainly has the potential to encourage students to develop as classroom music teachers who perform and for whom teacher training for QTS includes both classroom and studio work.

The means whereby UK conservatoires fulfill government imperatives and student needs in pedagogy are already shaping up towards innovative and cost-effective solutions. Technology is playing a significant role spanning the globe as, for example, the RNCM's CETL directed by Dr Linda Merrick seeks to engage in pedagogy research projects with potential co-researchers across the globe including Australia. The RNCM's generic definition of pedagogy, cited earlier, is evident here in the three areas CETL designates for possible investigation: Training Specialist Instrumental Teachers, Chamber Music Tutoring, and Vocational Training/Entrepreneurship (Merrick, 2006).

With heavier demands on face-to-face lecturing time it seems likely technology will also play an increasing role in enabling pedagogy students to work more independently. Materials-based aspects of teaching methodology, for example, are readily available on the web and no longer warrant extensive classroom review.

It seems cost effectiveness played a part in changes about to take effect in the RNCM's ground-breaking two-year PGCE with Specialist String Teaching, established some years ago in conjunction with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). It is to be recast in September 2007 as a one-year PGCE in Music with Specialist Instrumental Teaching (Strings), making it more nearly related to existing one-year RNCM/MMU PGCEs with specialist instrumental teaching in brass, woodwind and percussion. As Philippa Bunting, Project Director (Strings) explained, the new course will have "three block teaching practices, the first in a secondary school classroom, the second as a peripatetic music teacher alongside carefully chosen subject mentors with professional inputs from the RNCM, and the third combining the two, enabling students to draw together insights gained in both and make powerful links between instrumental learning and the National Curriculum" (Bunting, 2007). It needs hardly be said that while specialist music training is an expensive exercise, studies in pedagogy that tend to operate in group and class-based modes are at the less expensive end of the cost scale and, as demonstrated by the RNCM/MMU PGCEs, can be accommodated within surprisingly narrow fiscal and time margins.

There are many differences between the UK and Australia concerning the development and place of pedagogy studies in music conservatoires, but there are also significant areas of coincidence that indicate possible relationships between the two situations. It may be instructive therefore to revisit the events traced so far in the UK to investigate parallels, points of divergence and what they may promise for the

future. After all, conservatoire pedagogy in the UK is prospering. Might there be similar opportunities in Australia?

Many of the economic and social indicators referred to initially have also existed in Australia for some time. A buoyant economy and a competitive and increasingly sophisticated job market are two. However, Australia's close proximity to Asia rather than Europe may cushion it from the direct effects of the Bologna Accord, although, indirectly, Asian students may be attracted to a more fluid European academic scene from the Accord's implementation date in 2010. Counteracting that effect, Australian conservatoires have been more influenced by US pedagogy models than their UK counterparts, ensuring their pedagogy programs are more in tune with the expectations of many Asian international students. Informal evidence from the Elder Conservatorium, University of Adelaide, indicates an increasing hedging of career bets by Australian music students who are often happier with double degrees or a major in a safer career option than music.

Concerns about the perceived decline in the significance of music at school and community levels have mirrored the UK experience, however, with Professor Margaret Seares, Chair of the National Review of School Music Education's steering committee, commenting in 2005 "while the submissions and surveys revealed some fine examples of school music programs, they also reveal cycles of neglect and inequity which impacts to the detriment of too many young Australians, particularly those in geographically and socially disadvantaged areas" (Seares, 2005, p iv).

The complexities of Australia's three-tier government system, priorities of the Howard federal government, and the relatively recent timing of this national discussion and report have militated against clearly defined tangible outcomes at this stage. However there are signs of two particular imperatives that may drive pedagogy studies forward.

At the time of writing, the imminent introduction of the Howard government's new Research Quality Framework has turned a spotlight on research funding generated within Australian conservatoires in a similar manner to the commencement of the research debate that took place in UK conservatoires a few years ago. However the context of the debate in Australia is different, since funding constraints for Australian conservatoires are generally more acute than in the UK as they do not receive a funding premium to assist with additional expenses incurred by one-to-one teaching. At the time of writing, there is fierce debate concerning the RQF's Impact Rating Scale and uncertainty about the entire RQF's future, with Federal opposition spokesman Kim Carr vowing to replace it with a metrics system focused solely on quality. Dorothy Illing in *The Australian* quoted Senator Carr as saying "It is unverifiable, ill-defined, badly designed and effectively was part of a government's hostility to the universities" (Illing, 2007). Whatever the outcome of the upcoming Australian federal election, it seems likely the research debate will continue for some time to come, with Australian conservatoires considering, as did their British counterparts, the many potential research openings within the field of pedagogy.

While research possibilities in pedagogy connected with social outreach have proved a fruitful way forward for British conservatoires, and would doubtless prove

quite well suited to the Australian Federal Government's proposed RQF Impact Rating Scale, flow-on effects from the current debate to the Australian conservatoire sector are not yet discernable. Nevertheless it would not be idle speculation to attempt to construct some future scenarios, given the British experience and given the peculiarities of the Australian situation and the fragile hold pedagogy maintains as a viable career option and study discipline in the Australian context. Perhaps pedagogy practitioners could, and should, position themselves to take advantage of possible future scenarios in Australia with the UK experience in mind.

After all, the field of pedagogy is not only a Cinderella in the conservatoire sector, it is also at a relatively early stage of development in Australia by comparison with a number of overseas countries, as well as with long established disciplines in music such as solo performance, orchestral studies, opera studies, chamber music and school music education. Even relative latecomers, such as music technology, have carried a higher publicity value for institutions investing in them owing to the public recognition they engender and the perceived career paths open to IT specialists.

Furthermore, several papers by this writer have suggested that a career in pedagogy cannot currently be deemed a professional career by the standards normally applying to the accepted professions. Pedagogy practitioners lack a central body controlling standards of teaching and conduct, and many do not even comply with the basic requirement of degree level qualifications. Indeed it is doubtful if pedagogy could presently gain recognition as a *para-professional* activity. In these respects there is a similar situation worldwide, and solid arguments are often mounted supporting the status quo.

However this writer has argued on many occasions that the development of a degree based discipline is one of the principal steps that could be taken towards higher teaching standards and towards gaining a firmer foothold within the community. In addition the self-employed, freelance nature of most practitioners' careers is an argument for high quality credentials to be set as benchmarks if the discipline is to flourish in the future.

While research possibilities may render pedagogy studies attractive both to Australian conservatoire students and administrators, it remains to be conjectured whether portfolio careers and social outreach, the other principal means whereby pedagogy is improving its standing in the UK, are such attractive options in the general Australian context. Locked into this equation is the matter of teacher registration.

Undoubtedly, the RNCM/MMU and Trinity/Greenwich PGCE models in the UK are demonstrating how powerful a student incentive professional recognition can be. At a stroke a student can have undergraduate pedagogy studies recognized and enhanced at postgraduate level, and can become an endorsed member of the music education profession. Moreover, these PGCEs elevate the social outreach potential of pedagogy underscoring its position spanning a multiplicity of musical and educational domains, and its centrality as the glue in a portfolio career. Such a situation, if it develops further in the UK, has the potential to render obsolescent efforts towards separate instrumental teacher accreditation. Indeed recent discussions

between the writer and teaching professionals in the UK demonstrated a lack of interest in efforts towards that end.

With its state-based education systems, Australia possesses seven Registration Boards, Institutes or Colleges, some having been constituted comparatively recently, each acting under state legislation to implement required standards for teacher registration. There is dialogue between these bodies and therefore an increasing level of reciprocity in the area of recognition and uniformity of required standards. In addition there are isolated, but shining examples in Australia of something approaching the RNCM/Trinity PGCE model although with differing profiles. One such is the Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary) at the Mt Gravatt campus of Griffith University which, with significant links to the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, offers an instrumental music teaching area that can be taken alongside classroom music studies. At the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, another shining example of innovative practice, the significance of pedagogy studies at undergraduate level is recognized with an impressive layout of pathways embedded in a variety of study contexts entirely appropriate to the pursuit of a portfolio career. To complete the picture, the possibility of social outreach through industry and professional experience is available in project form en route.

It is difficult to ascertain whether such examples are likely to multiply from the exception to the rule in Australia, since the conditions outlined appear encouraging but by no means completely favorable. Despite this level of uncertainty, it is worth exploring what attributes cutting edge undergraduate pedagogy programs might display to take advantage of conditions as they may develop.

One of the most significant aspects of training for a portfolio career is the development of transferable skills, knowledge and understanding appropriate to a broad range of contexts. In pedagogy programs, for example, this can scope from a narrow focus, such as acquiring teaching skills appropriate to a wide range of teaching situations, to a broader interpretation such as understanding the imperatives guiding music history in general non-musical terms.

Another significant facet of training for a portfolio career involves the development of entrepreneurial skills. In pedagogy programs this can involve skills that reflect an understanding of small business operations while, more broadly, skills in marketing and promotion can map across to the whole career portfolio concerned. In this connection an ability to operate within a broad range of social contexts is desirable, and skills acquired through supervised teaching of pupils from a wide variety of backgrounds can be rendered suitable for transfer to situations where the student operates in a wide diversity of social situations.

More specifically, transferable skills need to operate in the area of instrumental specialties undertaken. It is increasingly appropriate for pedagogy programs to ensure graduates are familiar with the teaching and performance of a variety of instruments or at least more than one. The registered music teacher of the future needs to be able to meet the demands of school instrumental music teaching services that require their staff to teach related instruments so that small groups can be taught with economies of scale. As mentioned earlier, technological advances enable previously time-

consuming studies in pedagogy to be undertaken with comparative ease, releasing more study time for skill development in other areas.

The study situation for piano specialists is especially rich in this context and can encompass additional fields such as accompaniment, applied or functional harmony, improvising, composing and conducting in addition to another instrument if desired.

Equally, pedagogy students need to be familiar with a wide variety of styles and genres to match the many contexts in which they may operate. Once again, this knowledge and understanding can transfer to other fields within their portfolio careers and will prove invaluable in allowing them to work effectively across a wide social and musical spectrum.

Finally, a number of different teaching modalities need to be explored, with transferable skills again operating from one to the other. Group instrumental tuition, practised for more than fifty years worldwide, is now possible for nearly all beginning instrumental and vocal tuition and is becoming increasingly accepted as a desirable option. Shared lessons, and class musicianship and aural development lessons are now also welcomed in appropriate circumstances. The importance of one-to-one teaching, either for or by pedagogy practitioners, remains undiminished. It continues to evolve as a teaching tool, however, with the wide variety of influences already outlined impacting upon its form and style.

In summary, it is to be hoped pedagogy practitioners in Australia remain open and alert to developments overseas that may impact on their professional area. The UK experience to date appears to underscore the old adage that every cloud has a silver lining and it certainly seems doubtful that UK practitioners would have guessed ten years ago that their government's interventions might have a beneficial effect in their area. It is to be hoped we shall remain ready to take what steps we can to reap similar benefits if similar developments present themselves in Australia.

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