

# Empowering the Portfolio Musician: Innovative Chamber Music Pedagogy for the 21st-Century Artist

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## 1. Introduction

The portfolio musician is not a 21st-century concept. Any history of western art music, for example, reveals numerous performers whose careers entailed multiple and various musical sources of income, ranging from George Frederic Handel to Fanny Mendelssohn to Béla Bartók to Yo-Yo Ma and to Terence Blanchard. 21st-century performers also see themselves as multifaceted, socially conscious individuals, rather than technicians on a singular path to artistic success. For the most part, however, this is not what traditional conservatory education imbibes in young artists today (SNAAP n.d.), who are nevertheless profoundly cognizant of the role conservatoires play in their careers. Confronted by an oversaturated market and the immediacy of income required to pay exorbitant student loans (particularly in the United States), sole employment in an established organisation is less viable—and perhaps even less desirable. Faced with the realities of competitive work environments and financial burdens, 21st-century emerging professionals often experience identity crises and receive little assistance from their respective conservatories (SNAAP n.d.). In response to such crises, Stepniak and Sirotin (2020) recently chided US music schools for “pretending they are serving classical music performance students”, pointing to the deficit of “training and [preparation for] the needs of the marketplace” (*ibid.*, p. 3). Yet, the crisis goes beyond that of professional identity, sinking deep into the psyche of the artist. For many musicians, professional failure is tantamount to personal failure. Furthermore, performing musicians who do not already see vast and widespread acceptance of themselves—or of people who look, talk, or live similarly—in classical musical institutions may view professional failure as a confirmation that this is an industry in which they do not belong.

The dissonance created between performance-training and marketplace needs is further emphasised by social movements progressing at a rate far beyond the adaptability of the conservatory. The demands for racial equity in response to US events in the summer of 2020 prompted new calls for a radical rethinking of how musicians are educated in ways that are essential to 21st-century lives. Visible movements, such as Black Lives Matter, continue to apply pressure and demand accountability. In response, classical musicians are holding institutions to their

word regarding oft-cited diversity, equality, and inclusion statements posted on their websites and other promotional materials. Nina Sanchez, CEO of Enrich Chicago, has elevated efforts in her city to combat systemic racism within the arts and culture sector (Sanchez 2021). The theatre and music conservatoires within our own Chicago College of Performing Arts took part in the anti-racism workshops and seminars Enrich Chicago provides in order to train institutions to actualise such inclusion statements. Loren Kajikawa (2019), in his chapter on the legacies of white supremacy in US schools and music departments, already called for such efforts well before the summer of 2020, warning that

we can no longer tolerate a discipline that prioritises aesthetic objects over the people who create, perform, and listen to them. As a discipline, music needs not only to become more diverse and inclusive but also to come out into the world and help to create spaces for everyone to play (*ibid.*, p. 171).

In accordance with Kajikawa, new centres, committees, and faculty/staff positions focused on equity in higher education pedagogy are germinating throughout US academia, all in the hope of producing more spaces for everyone to play. Additionally, these equitable training spaces can be musical. Housed within the School of Music and filled preferably by someone with a PhD (or Masters) in music history, theory, or ethnomusicology, Yale University's recent allocation of a Director of Equity, Belonging, and Student Life is one manifestation of the merging of equity and professional music training into one entity.

Engaging curricular diversity, interdisciplinarity, equity, and inclusion—with an astute eye on the realities of the marketplace—have become paramount for educating music students. Celia Duffy (2013), for example, detailed major curriculum reforms undertaken at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, advocating for inter-conservatory approaches to music training. Sarath et al. (2017) recently put forth a new manifesto for North American music educators built upon creativity, diversity, and integration that charges educators to “break out of the traditional ways of doing things” (*ibid.*, p. 3). However, which traditions do we value as relevant today, and which keep us restricted to exercises that no longer support students to grow in ways that encourage their careers? Following this line of questioning, Stepniak and Sirotnin (2020) implore us to see the classical music industry as more than a seat in an orchestra and reimagine a new kind of training. In this chapter, we reveal how progressive chamber music training, in various guises, can be a vessel for 21st-century portfolio musician training.

## **2. Chamber Music Training as Civic Training: Recognizing Invisible Values and Denied Borders**

Recent calls for a re-evaluation of music training have not come without precedence. Henry Kingsbury (1988) was perhaps the first to formally explore

conservatory training from an anthropological perspective while teaching piano at Midland University during the student unrest over the war in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a music educator, he became “increasingly concerned with the importance that music and music making played in the personal lives of these young adults” and later set out in his book, titled *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (1988), to reconsider the role these socio-political matters can play within higher music education (ibid., p. 3). Along similar lines, a committee formed by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) in the 1980s found that chamber music, in particular, has “specific educational attributes that can contribute to students’ professional or non-professional training”, pointing to possible “sociological and economic implications” (NASM 1982, p. 1). NASM’s account of chamber music training is one of the earliest that fuses, through proposed curricular reform, economics with socio-politics. Until relatively recently, though, economic and socio-political implications have had little effect on the practical training of emerging professionals (SNAAP n.d.), especially in the context of the musical aesthetics imprinted onto such training.

However, in her ethnographic research on music training as a signifier of (white, mostly male) middle-class values, Anna Bull (2019) recently pointed to a critical re-evaluation of aesthetics, in particular, as one of the starting points for (in)fusing social equity within classical music training. In this regard, Bull is worth quoting in full:

Classical music education can be understood as a cultural technology for forming a middle-class self. The value of classical music is invisible partly because those who are attributed value because of it do not realise that this is happening [...] it is only those who have had to fight against being positioned as valueless for whom this value is visible. Classical music’s value is upheld through a quintessentially middle-class practice: closing off spaces where it is stored. However, unlike in other spaces of middle-class boundary-drawing such as private schooling or gated communities, the boundaries are denied. Rather than existing in physical space, they can be found in the aesthetic of the music which requires years of investment of time, money, and effort to be able to successfully embody, and which is seen as ‘autonomous’ from the social world rather than doing this political work of exclusion (Bull 2019, p. 175).

Two intertwined points stand out in Bull’s account of classical music’s cultural technology: (1) only those who have had to fight against being positioned as valueless see the (problematic) values of classical music, and (2) the boundaries that encircle these values are laden in the aesthetics of the music. These phenomena are embedded in conservatory training, which centres primarily on cultivating a sonic aesthetic.

Conservatory training, however, is really only the end of the line. Indeed, as Bull points out, the pathway to admittance to a conservatory requires years of investment of time, money, and effort, making the conservatory demographic, due to the social-economics of US society, predominantly upper middle-class and white—and, until recently, profoundly unaware of such privilege. Not all institutions are the same. Recent surveys of music conservatory students at the Chicago College of Performing Arts, for example, revealed that 40% identified themselves as a person of colour. Nonetheless, the curricular emphasis on technique, interpretation, and a narrow sonic ethos preserves such middle-class white values, which are perceived as colourless, classless, and genderless absolutes. From our own institution, we heard common tropes such as “Dominant chords don’t have colour” or “Wagner’s *music* influenced every composer after him so we can’t cancel it”. Often validated with historical authenticity or notions of developmental lineage, these autonomous, aesthetic stances are reinforced and engrained in emerging professionals through conservatory training.

Such problematic pedagogical stances are further underscored by the staging of blind or anonymous auditions for orchestral positions, which mask the discipline’s exclusive values and boundary-drawing with a mirage of sonic equity. The screen (and the sound dampening carpet) comprises a materially visible but culturally invisible border that removes all trace of the individual, preserving the so-called universal values of classical music. According to William Cheng (2020), anonymous auditions “bring bodies under erasure, all in order to adjudicate them purely as a vessel of musical production” (ibid., p. 65). Relying on screens can make us “complacent and complicit” in the unjust policies in our training institutions. Cheng warns: “put performers behind screens too habitually, and we might forget why we need to do so [in the first place]” (ibid., p. 68). In other words, the audition screen not only blocks our view of the candidate, but also the exclusive values of classical music nestled deep within a gated community—values which are preserved often unknowingly in the curriculum of conservatory. Years of investment in classical music training perpetuate a single definition of success or payoff, such as winning the orchestra position. Moreover, this single-minded approach to individual and institutional training not only erases the diversity of musical identities but also the individual’s sense of humanity. Lesson after lesson, year after year, the invisible borders of classical music close in, and emerging professionals eventually no longer see the full array of musical possibilities, no longer see music as culture—and even if they were able to see such an array, they may not recognise its value. It is no wonder that in the SNAAP surveys, conservatory alumni report numerous identity crises during their time at the conservatory. It is during this time that those invisible borders—and the values nestled within them—start to materialise. Sarah Ahmed’s (2012) findings support such a materialisation. In her ethnographic study of diversity

workers in institutional life, she claims that a “wall is what we come up against: the sedimentation of history into a barrier that is solid and tangible in the present . . . a barrier that remains invisible to those who can flow into the spaces created by institutions” (ibid., p. 175).

However, as Bull (2019) asserts, those values *are* heard loud and clear by those who feel unvalued within the invisible gates of the conservatory—what one of our own students in CCPA referred to as the “mystical barrier of entry” (CCPA-MCSF<sup>1</sup>). Moreover, recent student town-hall meetings at our institution revealed how people of colour, whose voices were previously ignored, are frustrated by not seeing themselves in their studies and industry. Addressing such issues of identity crises require far more than one approach, and far more than one attempt at each of them. Yet, seeing music as culture, a vision Christopher Small (1998) identified as “musicking” at the turn of this century, has opened doors for performers to connect civic engagement with professional training, providing a highly needed update to Bull’s (2019) lament of the cultural technology of classical music pedagogy.

Realizing music training as civic training can be manifested in various ways, many of them intertwined. First, educators can recognise the artistic and economic value of diverse careers as portfolio artists. Second, seeing community engagement as an integral part of one’s musicianship provides new musical paths for truly authentic civic engagement. Third, when conservatories clear sonic space within their gated walls for cultural plurality, those walls, as well as the exclusive values they contain, can no longer remain invisible. Finally, when conservatories purposely cultivate a sense of inter- and intrapersonal identity for their students, the potential for new avenues expands tenfold. Students become entrepreneurs, political leaders, and freethinking artists with direct connections to their communities. In this study, we find that chamber music (or perhaps more accurately, chamber-musicking)—as a socio-political, economic, and artistic act—plays an integral role in this civic training, some of which is now taking place in select conservatories.

### **3. Initial Research and 2017 Strategic National Arts Alumni Project Annual Report**

In the hope of exploring at a local level the prospects for radically rethinking conservatory training, we piloted a study in 2018 that focused on three case studies from the Chicago College of Performing Arts. This initial endeavour evolved into a multi-national search for innovative music pedagogy, particularly throughout the United States and United Kingdom. With generous support from our Deans Rudy

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<sup>1</sup> Music Conservatory Student Forum, Professional Development Committee, 18 October 2019.

Marcozzi and Linda Berna<sup>2</sup>, in 2019, we shared our findings at the University of Cambridge as part of the Royal Music Association's Study Day for the Classical Musician in the 21st Century. While in the UK, we visited three institutions in London (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Royal College of Music, and Royal Academy of Music) to gain more insight into progressive professional development in UK conservatories. During our brief meetings with the directors and faculty of these institutions, three approaches emerged as pillars for professional development in conservatory settings: artistic identity development, cross-genre collaboration, and local community engagement. These themes led to our focus in this chapter on 21st-century innovations in chamber music ensembles and training in progressive conservatory curricula.

Furthermore, we drew both data and inspiration from the findings of the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP). Since 2008, SNAAP has collected data on arts graduates from across North America and Canada through a web-based survey distributed by the Indiana University Centre for Postsecondary Research. By partnering with arts institutions (music, design, studio art, theatre, architecture, etc.), SNAAP gathers and collates data on graduates' experiences within the following areas:

- Satisfaction with curricular and extracurricular experiences;
- Current and past education and employment;
- Relevance of arts training to work and further education;
- Types of art practiced and how often;
- Support and resource needs following graduation;
- Experiences as teachers;
- Income and support, student debt and other financial issues.

SNAAP findings reveal the portfolio musician as more than a viable path, but more often than not, as the path to artistic success. According to the 2017 SNAAP report, 67% of graduates surveyed are currently employed in the arts. Additionally, 43% of graduates occupy more than one of three professional identities within the arts (artist, teacher of art, and arts administrator) with 11% of those currently working in all three fields.

In one of the questions in the survey, SNAAP asks graduates to rank skills needed for their careers against the skills they acquired at their institution. These data indicate where arts education institutions fall behind in serving students and alumni with regard to career readiness. The 2017 survey found that the six most frequently cited skills needed in the workplace were also the skills cited as the most frequently left out of arts school curricula. These included financial and business management

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<sup>2</sup> Both of them Emeritus since 2022.

skills (81% needed, 58% deficit), entrepreneurial skills (71% needed, 43% deficit), networking and relationship building (94% needed, 32% deficit), technological skills (93% needed, 29% deficit), persuasive speaking (91% needed, 27% deficit), project management skills (94% needed, 26% deficit), and leadership skills (93% needed, 25% deficit). The top three so-called “skill gap categories” were consistently cited among men, women, Asian, Black/ African American, Hispanic-Latino, and white graduates (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Sample from the SNAAP report, relating recent graduates’ skill deficits with regard to their school or conservatory’s curricula in relation to skills they perceive as necessary to their current professional roles.

Skills and Abilities	Acquired or Developed at Institution	Needed for Job	Percentage of Deficit
Financial and business management skills	23%	81%	–58%
Entrepreneurial skills	28%	71%	–43%
Networking and relationship building	62%	94%	–32%
Technological skills	64%	93%	–29%
Persuasive speaking	64%	91%	27%
Project management skills	68%	94%	–26%
Leadership skills	68%	93%	–25%
Clear writing	72%	90%	–18%
Interpersonal relationships and working collaboratively	79%	97%	–18%
Teaching skills	60%	76%	–16%
Research skills	75%	88%	–13%
Broad knowledge and education	90%	96%	–6%
Critical thinking and analysis of arguments and information	89%	95%	–6%
Creative thinking and problem solving	93%	98%	–5%
Improved work based on feedback from others	92%	95%	–3%
Artistic technique	92%	79%	+13%

Source: (SNAAP n.d.).

Collecting data on student debt, the 2017 survey also found that “Compared with 15% of non-recent graduates, more than one third [34%] of recent alumni said the student debt they acquired while at their institution had a major impact on their career and educational choices” (SNAAP n.d.). The considerable increase in the proportion of alumni whose career choices have been substantially impacted by student debt is alarming. Debt debilitates arts alumni and their ability to participate in the arts, both through their work in the arts (by way of cost of auditioning and

having enough time to study their music outside of other jobs and responsibilities) and in terms of the time and financial ability they may have to participate. These data corroborate claims of increasing student debt as well as the professional, social, and personal ramifications it may have on graduates' lives.

Other than student debt, the major area of disparity between recent graduates and non-recent graduates is that recent graduates are more likely to evaluate their coursework as:

- Encouraging acts of ideation or brainstorming (92% vs. 86%);
- Introducing them to a wide swath of career types (83% vs. 79%);
- Including career development in curricula (53% vs. 50%);
- Exposing them to a wide array of paths outside the arts (54% vs. 48%).

Additionally, recent graduates are 12% more likely to rate themselves as having taken full advantage of career services during their degree (55% vs. 43%). These areas of disparity point to the ongoing implementation of career-based and entrepreneurial values into arts education institutions, while the skill gap categories above suggest that such institutions still have a long way to go.

#### **4. Chamber Music as Portfolio Musicking**

Chamber music has a unique structure that allows artists to collaborate with a level of agency and individuality unparalleled in other areas of performance. Most chamber music ensembles do not use a conductor, drawing, rather, on a mutual, intrinsic artistic prompt. They also operate on a more independent basis. Members necessarily occupy additional professional identities, serving in both business and artistic roles to successfully engage the public and fulfil their mission. Thus, chamber music training is a good blueprint for understanding the changing social and economic norms and necessities as they pertain to the 21st-century music profession.

Chamber music is also uniquely pragmatic for young artists, as it comprises the sonic landscape of weddings, religious services, and corporate events, to name a few, where the symphony orchestra or concert soloist is a practical impossibility. Its flexible repertoire, size, and instrumentation subvert the ubiquity of the canon in relation to other types of musical ensembles. This often means that while young musicians train in conservatories to win competitions and symphony jobs, their careers would immediately benefit most from developing creativity and problem-solving skills inherent to chamber music. Keeping in mind the current concerns for public health concerning COVID-19 in this year of publication, there are several countries in which chamber music is the safest (and often only) answer to how musicians can continue to play with one another in a way that resembles professional music making before an international pandemic. At the time of this publication, String Chamber Music at the CCPA, for instance, is the only class in

the conservatory schedule meeting almost exclusively face-to-face; almost all other practical and academic courses are taking place online.

However, what is chamber music in the 21st century? How do repertoire, personnel, venue, place and space, identity, and listener–performer–composer agency define it? Additionally, how do or can conservatory curricula deliver a new updated definition for their emerging professionals? These questions are key to understanding the innovative role chamber music plays in contemporary collaborative music making. In this chapter, we do not provide a comprehensive survey of chamber music and its role in forming professional musicians within the setting of the music conservatory, but instead focus on how isolated chamber music training in various contexts constructs new relevant and multifaceted approaches for the training of the practice. We do this in the hope of revealing the potential chamber music has for portfolio training. We feel our findings are valuable for scholars, but perhaps even more so for young professionals in the field, and for conservatories hoping to glean more from the training of successful young artists. Our findings are also of value for instructors and curriculum designers at such institutions, who are in the process of evaluating and scrutinizing what students are learning; why they are learning it; and what is truly relevant for creating well-rounded, fulfilled artists. Through such a lens, chamber music in this chapter emerges as a consequence of openness, a tool for cultural questioning, a practice for self-discovery, a mode of community engagement, an interpersonal connector, an identity builder, and a crisis manager.

In order to examine these contemporary elements of chamber music pedagogy, we gathered big data on the state of conservatory training by surveying faculty, students, and alumni of US and UK institutions. To nuance these data further, we conducted interviews with faculty, staff, and students in standout chamber music programs. All except one of them, i.e., Ensemble Connect, are part of conservatoires. We shared a refined draft of this chapter with all of our interlocutors and integrated their feedback into our text. We are especially appreciative of the Paul R. Judy Centre for Innovation and Research at the Eastman Institute for Music Leadership. Their grant enabled us to observe and interview students, faculty, and staff at the New England Conservatory and Boston Conservatory at Berklee. Additionally, we localised our focus by interrogating innovative chamber music endeavours at our present institution, looking closely at the Chicago College of Performing Arts string chamber music program (undergraduate and graduate students) and the first-year professional training course for undergraduates, which requires students to give chamber music performances in the community. First, we turn to Ensemble Connect.

#### *4.1. Openness as Consequence of Chamber Music: Ensemble Connect*

*At the modern offices of Carnegie Hall in January 2020, we met with Director Amy Rhodes and Senior Manager of Education Deanna Kennett of Carnegie Hall's Ensemble*

*Connect Program as part of our weekend trip to attend Chamber Music America's annual conference. The juxtaposition of Carnegie Hall's iconic façade with the contemporary and corporate conference room in which we met set the stage for the many approaches to art that New York City offers. We hoped to learn more about Ensemble Connect (EC<sup>2</sup>), which is structured as a chamber music program for young professionals as opposed to a graduate fellowship program or training orchestra. We spoke specifically about the best ways to define success for young professional musicians and the metrics by which we should establish professional studies curricula in music training programs. A program of Carnegie Hall, the Juilliard School, and the Weill Music Institute, Ensemble Connect is a two-year fellowship for post-graduate instrumental musicians. The program comprises 16–20 fellows and emphasises chamber music over a solo or orchestral repertoire. The live audition for the 2020 cohort required all applicants to perform a standard chamber work for three or more players in addition to the more traditional audition fare of solos and etudes.*

Though conceived as a program that would eventually grow to the size of a full orchestra, Ensemble Connect founders quickly realised that this model was unsustainable (EC). Fortunately, this adjustment led to benefits that define the core of the program today. Small groups yield deep relational connections, both amongst themselves and in their communities. According to Rhodes, “The work that we were doing with our 16 fellows was so deep that we could not imagine how to make that model work with a much, much larger group” (EC). With these guidelines in place (or rather, with a lack of guidelines), fellows focus on six key areas of professional development and their intersection with chamber music:

- In school (fellows work in New York City classrooms);
- Interactive performance development (developing and adapting programs for different audiences);
- Audience engagement;
- Entrepreneurship;
- Leadership and advocacy (which requires fellows to develop personal mission statements, prompting them to consider their place in society, etc.);
- Reflection and connection (processing how all six key areas fit together holistically).

In Kennett's words, “We don't have anything that's as formal as a curriculum. We don't have faculty either, so we're lucky in that we have the flexibility to pull from leaders and topics that we think would be particularly compelling” (EC). Training musicians for the 21st century requires such flexibility in focus. Ensemble Connect

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<sup>2</sup> Carnegie Hall in January 2020, Ensemble Connect, Director Amy Rhodes and Senior Manager of Education Deanna Kennett. In-person interview (Carnegie Hall, 881 Seventh Avenue). 3:30 PM EST on 16 January 2020.

recognises the myriad career options available to their fellows and exposes them to as many of these options as possible. As performers, fellows are expected to play “repertoire from the Baroque Era to written the day of performance” (EC). As teaching artists, each fellow is paired with a New York City public school and their respective instrumental music teacher, where they assist with classroom teaching 25 days a year. Fellows are given the opportunity to curate two shows from start to finish—from the programming to the setup of the performance space to the social media marketing—with an emphasis on thinking through the audience’s experience from the moment they step into the performance space. Additionally, each fellow concludes their fellowship by conducting a presentation to a mock panel focusing on an entrepreneurship project plan that they have worked on throughout their two years. Ensemble Connect fellows will conclude their time in the program having been exposed to multiple disciplines within music and consequently the possibility of diverse income streams, not typically valued by artists of this level who so often fall into the singular pursuit of a traditional performance career. Rhodes and Kennett were quick to add that there is not one definition of success for alumni of Ensemble Connect. Even alumni who go on to pursue traditional performance paths still find ways to incorporate education and/or community engagement into their performing careers. Even ignoring how artistically experienced these fellows must be to gain entry into the program, they are much more adaptable as performers, and some might argue, more broadly employable in the arts by the end of their two years. The benefits of the fellowship program cannot be mentioned without including the value of putting “Carnegie Hall” in one’s resume, and the added advantage of joining a vast network of fellows and alumni.

With Ensemble Connect, chamber music as a flexible form ultimately becomes a unique vehicle for larger socio-musical 21st-century questions: How do we serve our community as artists? How do we create connections as musicians amongst ourselves and for our audience? How do we make relevant connections for any audience into the music? How do we fit into the world? Musicians are less likely to confront these questions in standard realms: standard repertoire, standard ensembles and instrumentation, and standard curricula. The route of challenging the traditional with curiosity and creativity provides fellows with greater opportunities to learn about music as they learn more about themselves. Rhodes concurs: “They’re seeing a lot of different options, learning about a lot of different approaches, and then coming out of it with at least some thoughts about what they really want to do, or the things they don’t want to do. And [they are able to] make those choices themselves with purpose” (EC). Although not housed within a conservatory, Ensemble Connect’s focus on connecting performers and local communities—giving emerging professionals experiences that foster conscious career choices—provides a compelling model for conservatory curricula.

#### 4.2. Chamber Music as Cultural Questioning: Boston Conservatory at Berklee

*On Tuesday, 10 March 2020, we made our way to a large rehearsal space in the Boston Conservatory at Berklee. We situated ourselves on the tiered seating in the back of the room, directly behind an arch of students positioned in front of a massive projection screen (Figure 1). The class was running late, as the IT staff was busily trying to set up a video conferencing session for the special guest. With instruments in hand, the students waited anxiously for the session to begin with no sheet music, music stands, or conductor, but this was not the reason for the tension in the room. We were on the cusp of the COVID-19 epidemic in Boston, which had reported cases and deaths over the weekend. None of us knew that the epidemic would become a global pandemic. At that moment, though, we looked forward to observing the Silk Road Creativity Lab class. Michi Wiancko and Judith Eissenberg lead the Lab: the former is a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, while the latter is the second violinist of the Lydian String Quartet. The Lab enables conservatory students to explore music beyond the Western canon through non-traditional ways of ensemble musicking, such as improvisation. The picture in Figure 1 captures this moment. Guest speaker Kinan Azmeh could not travel to speak in person due to the pandemic-related precautions in New York City. Here, students improvise together with Azmeh via video-chat for this week's topic, "Music in the Arab World". Early the following morning, over bagels and coffee, we sat down with Judith Eissenberg in the bustling Pavement Coffeehouse, just around the corner from the Conservatory. We were eager to talk with her about the ways the Creativity Lab contributes to chamber music training.*

Drawing on Kofi Agawam's assertions (2003), Judith Eissenberg reminds us from the outset of our conversation that "Western harmony is one of the most powerful colonizing forces" (BOCO-JE<sup>3</sup>). Eissenberg is one of the two instructors for Boston Conservatory at Berklee's Silkroad Creativity Lab. The lead instructor of the Creativity Lab, Michi Wiancko, is an artist of the class's namesake ensemble, Silkroad Ensemble, founded in 2000 by Yo-Yo Ma to deepen cross-cultural understanding through music. Eissenberg is the Chamber Music Coordinator at Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and the chamber music connection runs deep in the Creativity Lab, but not via instrumentation or canon. Students are asked to improvise and respond to one another on their instruments, a pedagogical tactic which systematically breaks down the most preserved aspects of traditional classical conservatory education, including the expectation that students create and repeat what they are told to do without questioning. With the goal of each student cultivating their own "musical citizenship", the class is predicated upon interaction with a revolving door line up of guest artists. These artists are Kayan Kalhour, a

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<sup>3</sup> Judy Eissenberg. In-person interview (Pavement Coffee Shop, 1096 Boylston St., Boston). 8:00–9:00 AM EST on 11 March 2020.

Kurdish kamancheh player, representing classical music of Iran; Sandeep Das, an Indian tabla player and 2017 Guggenheim fellow who frequently expands upon conventions within Indian classical music; Judd Greenstein, American composer of music that often features variable instrumentation and influences, as well as the founder of the ensemble The Yehudim; Gabriela Lena Frank, composer-in-residence at the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, and the winner of a Latin Grammy; Mazz Swift, an American self-proclaimed “Violin/Vox/Freestyle Composition Artist”, and Kinan Azmeh, a Syrian clarinetist, improviser, and composer.



**Figure 1.** Last face-to-face session of Boston Conservatory’s Silk Road Creativity Lab in 2020 with Syrian clarinetist Kinan Azmeh zoomed in from New York City. Source: Photograph by authors.

Eissenberg describes the chamber music training in this classroom as an analogue for civic engagement within any profession:

I think the conservatory is a great place to have a firm foundation in musicianship, skills, and listening. And then, because we’re all meeting each other online [and] in person it’s like whatever the world’s doing we should be doing. In fact, we should be leading it, and we should also be leading initiatives for social change like climate change. They need to have skills like talking to people who live somewhere else, [whom] maybe we’re

in conflict with. And you can't just go in and speak English, you have to learn the other languages. Or there's no respect, right? (BOCO-JE)

For a class that aims to imbibe its students with a scepticism of western art music's ubiquity in their respective lives, students are expected to sincerely engage in their guest's art.

In the opinion of Eissenberg, the upshot of this cultural scrutiny is courage. She says "[At first] Michi and I were wondering if this class was working. We always ask that question. We could tell in that class cause not only are they more courageous, they have more skills to improvise all different ways" (BOCO-JE). Additionally, while professional trajectories are broached in this class, for the students of the Creativity Lab, this line of questioning is secondary to a healthy musical citizenship, unencumbered by an unthinking adherence to the classical music of a small region of the globe. For this class, teaching chamber music is teaching a set of values, most notably, listening. In the Creativity Lab, knowing enough to listen and perform outside of one's own culture is the highest form of chamber music, perhaps the highest form of musicianship.

The Lab's multicultural yet conscious non-colonizing creative engagement with musical worlds outside of classical music provides one viable response to Marianna Ritchey's (2019) sobering critique of entrepreneurial approaches to the field. Looking at collaborations between artists and global corporations, Ritchey explores how "neo-liberal capitalism has [not only] profoundly shaped contemporary ideas about classical music ... [but also] how the idea of classical music itself has been useful to contemporary capital" (ibid., p. 1). According to Ritchey, the effort to "drag artists into the real world" has essentially created new artistic currency minted from the keywords of neoliberal theory: innovation, entrepreneurship, disruption, and flexibility, while at the same time, corporations such as Google and Intel draw on historical ideas and stereotypes of classical music to "appear virtuous to the populations they plunder" (ibid., p. 2). Though both artists and corporations have benefited from their interactions, Ritchey asks what the cost of this relationship is and, in particular, the cost to classical music. The neo-liberal cost is even embedded in the evaluation of the field, with Ritchey stating that much of the discourse surrounding the decline in classical music is essentially a neoliberal tact. Conversations seeking solutions for this decline often point to the "need to eschew traditional funding avenues and instead pursue new performance and branding tactics calculated to appeal to wider, younger audiences", which represents a "democratisation of the art form" (ibid., p. 3). Ritchey asserts that "the *notion* of opening a practice to free market competition [as] a means of ensuring democratic freedom is perhaps the *central tenet* of neoliberalism" (ibid., p. 3). Most pertinent to this chapter, Ritchey laments the "extent to which neoliberal theory has become naturalised in US culture as common sense", pointing to attitudes about training that encourage artists to

become “flexible, adaptable, and self-managing individuals skilled at identifying and serving market opportunities” (ibid., p. 4). Ritchey warns that such ideas “deepen precarity and labor instability in the musical work-force and enable people to accept those conditions as natural, as simply the results of some musicians’ lazy refusal to capitalise on their potential” (ibid., p. 20). Rational entrepreneurial action, “in which all decisions are made via an assessment of potential profitability, rather than being grounded in moral or ethical concerns” (ibid., p. 4), is the crux of the problem. If art is created under such free-market circumstances, how can it challenge the circumstance in which it is made? Nonetheless, due to the lack of alternatives in the United States, a neoliberal framing of 21st-century classical musicking leaves the chamber music performer little choice. To make a living, one must play in and, thus contribute to, the world of neoliberal capitalism.

At the end of her book, Ritchey proposes three questions for critical reflection on music and neoliberalism that resonate in different ways with the chamber music training discussed in this chapter: (1) “What if we stopped thinking of musical production as work that required adequate remuneration from the market?” (2) How might music challenge the “timeworn centrality of radical individualism” and cultivate a “collective vision of agency, which might be potentially counterhegemonic under capitalism”? (3) Could artists “reject, refuse or otherwise critique the imperative toward uniqueness and originality, which lend themselves too well to competitive individualism?” (ibid., pp. 148-49). On their own, each of these questions might ring hollow in a chapter devoted to entrepreneurial chamber musicking but, together, they profoundly resonate and prompt other important questions: Without competition, how do we define success? Without adequate remuneration, what distinguishes the career of a professional musician from an amateur one? These questions challenge us to examine why we chose to make music in the first place, how we can join with others to make that music, and how we can cultivate recognition for such a collective’s success. They are not easy questions and, as expected, they do not come with simple solutions. The collaboration required in the making (and training) of the portfolio musician is one viable path. In fact, Ritchey implores us to seek out “musical practices that explore entanglements instead of celebrating discrete, individualist, or otherwise teleological perspectives to help us envision more humane and communal tactics for survival than the ones currently articulated in mainstream classical musical discourses” (ibid., p. 148). Indeed, the Creativity Lab is one such opportunity to become entangled in a more humane and communal world, all in hope of forging an artistically and financially satisfying chamber music career.

#### *4.3. Chamber Music in Service: New England Conservatory Community Engagement*

*The historic Jordan Hall serves as the heart and soul of the New England Conservatory and the site of our meeting with Tanya Maggi, Dean of Community Engagement and*

*Professional Studies. After meeting at the building's front desk, Maggi guided us through a more casual environment than the acclaimed concert hall where we passed rehearsal studios and practice rooms. As we moved into an old, tiny elevator, we watched as Tanya thoughtfully greeted and checked in with students in casual and personal conversation. As if discussing innovative pedagogy were not sufficient cause for celebration, we met with Maggi in her office on her birthday. Her warm and relational demeanour fit perfectly with the nature of her work, which requires empathy for building partnerships that are mutually beneficial for NEC, its students, and the community organisations with which they work.*

Departments that lead community engagement and professional development programs in higher education have increased in both value and visibility in recent years. The changes in defined roles for these programs reflect the ongoing efforts to effectively integrate these departments. NEC's Community Performances and Partnerships (CPP) department is no exception. Prior to her appointment to her current role in 2018, Maggi was the Director of CPP, which she still facilitates. Maggi views CPP as a complement to the Entrepreneurial Musicianship Department (EM). While both departments work with the same student body and may operate with similar types of ensembles, CPP asks students to evaluate and serve community needs, whereas EM prompts students to consider their personal and professional goals. Maggi notes that

The CPP program from the get-go was designed as a professionally oriented community engagement program where the students are trained at a very high level, and . . . treated as professionals in the world. That means that if a school or senior facility needs something very specific, we are, of course, working with that partnering organisation to figure out who among our students might be a good fit. . . . We're constantly looking at the needs of the community and how to best respond with the resources we have to offer. (NEC-TM<sup>4</sup>)

Student responsibilities to community partners range from a one-time school masterclass to sustained relationships with a single partner. Though NEC, not the students, ultimately bears the responsibility for sustaining relationships, Maggi emphasises that this point does not detract from the greater lesson. Through participation in CPP, students act as part of something larger than themselves and are required to put their personal needs (and in many cases, artistic ambitions) secondary to the needs of the partner institution. To do this effectively requires the musician to be flexible and adaptable, and to solve problems. These developed skills, paired with experiential learning in audience engagement, makes students undeniably more

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<sup>4</sup> Tanya Maggi, Dean of Community Engagement and Professional Studies, Jordan Hall. In-person interview (NEC Jordan Hall Office 311). 10:00–11:00 AM EST on 9 March 2020.

employable. Beyond employability, the satisfaction of fulfilling a larger purpose leads to personal well-being and healthy relationships. In essence, good relationships beget a good professional, social and personal life. This needs to be a greater concern of music education.

Within the department, students are offered opportunities through what Maggi calls a “menu approach”, where students elect to apply for fellowships, performance opportunities, and optional classes. In a class that Maggi teaches during the fall semester, “Performing Musicians and Community Health”, students are organised into eclectic groups, enter into healthcare settings, and perform for patients. Chamber music is particularly conducive to this environment where situations require great sensitivity—initially, a human response to need. Only after understanding a partner’s particular scope of need are ensembles parcelled out and placed within their community locations. Students witness the product of hard work over years of relationships built by NEC staff and take part in the continued growth of these partnerships through their ensembles’ performances and placements. With CPP, music performance exists as a practical solution to the perennial question of civic engagement:

It’s about really sitting down and getting to know people, breaking down barriers and all the cultural baggage that we bring in when we’re bringing western art music into many of the settings we work [in]. We are really mindful of the need to create space for cross-cultural conversation . . . it’s embedded in a lot of the training of students. (NEC-TM)

Through this work, Maggi directly confronts the idea that musical outreach in itself is beneficial to those who experience it. With the focus of addressing community needs, Maggi shares that “Most of [CPP’s partners] are in Boston, and about 75% are under-resourced schools, senior facilities, and community centres” (NEC-TM). The relational approach that this program prioritises fulfils a growing recognition that in community-based performance, audiences should be seen as collaborators rather than as recipients. Rather than a one-time outreach visit from a string quartet to provide what we call a “drive-by Beethoven” concert, CPP builds ongoing partnerships with years of trust, commitment, and growth.

#### *4.4. Chamber Music as Self Discovery: New England Conservatory Entrepreneurial Musicianship*

*After navigating the many winding hallways of NEC’s early 20th-century building, we entered the offices of the Entrepreneurial Musicianship Department, and as some of the last guests to be admitted to the institution with the quickly approaching pandemic restrictions, we sat down with Annie Phillips and Drew Worden. Our discussion centred on the role of professional studies within conservatory training, though the frank nature with which*

*our two subjects spoke allowed us to explore topics beyond the boundaries of this framework. As two of our youngest interviewees, they brought understanding and personal experience to the financial obligations, industry realities, and possibilities for the artistic life currently facing their students.*

The Entrepreneurial Musicianship (EM) Department at New England Conservatory (NEC) is a hub for advising student careers and projects. Though this department does not specifically serve the thriving chamber music scene within NEC, chamber music groups are the ideal fit for many of its strongest offerings, both in terms of distribution of labour and artistic breadth. EM's role within chamber music takes shape largely through awarding seed grants to student and alumni start-ups and does not fall within the realm of compulsory student education. Students and alumni must take initiative to schedule appointments for career advising and professional development support.

As both of these administrators and performers were quick to note, the profession of chamber music is hardly just performance. Annie Phillips and Drew Worden, Associate Dean and Assistant Dean of Entrepreneurial Musicianship, hope to inculcate this in the students who come into their office for advising. EM—both as an office and in its curricular electives—is about emphasizing the skills and knowledge that musical professionals need beyond technical excellence. Project development often focuses on supporting small groups of instrumentalists hoping to find a way to bridge the gap between academic and professional musicianship. Phillips recalls one group in particular:

[There is] one team of students. . . . They each have a job, [like] marketing finance, community engagement, production. They're paid to essentially run a small non-profit together each year. Over the summer they come up with an artistic mission, they invite three people to be members of their board which is also made up of the Dean and me . . . they do an on-campus performance in the fall and an off-campus performance in the spring. Totally without my help, they approached the mayor's office and are going to do a performance at City Hall that will open Arts Week. They have a discretionary budget to hire other students. I think they'll collaborate with a projectionist, maybe a student from [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] they're talking to [in order to] activate the City Hall space<sup>5</sup> (NEC-EM<sup>6</sup>).

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<sup>5</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this project became an online festival.

<sup>6</sup> Annie Phillips and Drew Worden, Associate Dean and Assistant Dean of Entrepreneurial Musicianship. In-person interview (NEC 255 St. Botolph SLPC). 1:00–2:00 PM EST on 10 March 2020.

Phillips and Worden have found that musicianship is not, and cannot, be driven by artistry alone. The business and organisational structures bring just as much value as the artistic product. Worden recalls pushing back when students try to

build a structure and *then* fill it up. . . . [Students hoping to run their own small ensemble say] “I’m going to build a 501(c)(3) (incorporated non-profit designation). And things will be great.” Well, [I respond,] you haven’t given any concerts yet. You don’t have a donor basis. Save yourself a little bit, first grow an audience or donor base. Then see if it makes sense for you to become [an incorporated company]. Be a sole proprietor for a few years. They might not be dealing with enough energy yet. (NEC-EM)

In the EM Department, failure is highly valued as an experience in musical education. Worden and Phillips do not see positive experiences as the basic currency of a good conservatory education. Instead, they view failure as a part of understanding their agency, a constructive way for students to develop a musical identity based on a growth mindset. Phillips observes:

We assume that because we’re in a creative field, that we’re growth mindset. But conservatories [don’t work like this]. And if you’re in a fixed mindset, you’re less likely to push through challenges that come to you later. We don’t really throw a lot of divergent challenges at students. Everyone thinks that they’re resilient because they [continue to] audition. (NEC-EM)

Though there are benefits to the power of persistence, auditions ask little personal agency over musical material. Rather the process asks that those involved recreate the ideas of another, requiring little to no representation of the singular identity of the individual. Experiencing failure in an audition based on one’s own carefully considered artistic decisions requires greater self-reflection on what failed and why, prompting problem solving for the next iteration. The contrast between these two types of failures articulates the juxtaposition of growth versus fixed mindset to which Phillips refers. Phillips continues speaking about the student experience in conservatory:

Well, they don’t really fail at producing a concert. . . . That’s a challenge when you get out of school. It’s not how good you are. So [the EM Department is] thinking of ways to provide choices, opportunities to fail, challenges outside the practice room. It’s really important. We want them to be able to push through that outside of school. That’s a human thing, not a musician thing. (NEC-EM)

Phillips’ statement speaks to the trend where conservatories put the art before the humans that bring the art to life. However, conservatories are acted on by

humans, not the other way around. The term “conservatory” comes from the Latin “conservare”, to preserve. If this is all conservatories want to be, they are destined for obsolescence. The data support the need for more human-centric education, citing that primary deficits fall into deeply relational categories: networking and relationship building, persuasive speaking, project management skills, and leadership skills (SNAAP n.d.).

With this in mind, there remains no better test for building relational skills than chamber music and the empathy it requires from its performers. Unlike the aforementioned institutions in this chapter, NEC’s EM Department bears no explicit relationship to chamber music. Rather, within EM ventures, chamber music exists more as a facilitator for testing one’s identity. It is a way of challenging one’s relationship with music, and the longevity of one’s place in the world as a musician. Phillips reflects, “I would love for this to not be called entrepreneurship”. Worden agrees: “Musicianship isn’t a class—it’s everything” (NEC-EM).

#### 4.5. *Chamber Music and the Interpersonal: New England Conservatory Chamber Music*

*With a variety of singing, gifts of fancy chocolate, and a beloved metronome named “Torch” (short for “Torture”, and turned up at an ear-splitting volume), we were introduced to Merry Peckham, the Chair of the Chamber Music Department at NEC. In one of NEC’s rehearsal studios, we had the opportunity to observe her coaching of a graduate string quartet. Peckham’s professional experiences as a founding member of the Cavani String Quartet, a performing cellist, and a renowned teacher seep into the knowledge that she passionately imparts to her students. In addition to her coaching, Peckham leads the NEC Preparatory School’s Chamber Music Intensive Performance Seminar (CHIPS), and teaches the course “Chamber Music Pedagogy”. We had the opportunity to chat with Peckham after the coaching.*

Our conversation began with a discussion of the viability of freelance chamber music today. Peckham feels the portfolio musician, or what she calls the “ultimate freelance chamber musician”, has changed drastically over the last fifty years. “You couldn’t get the same money. There weren’t paying series. You can now . . . There are lots of crossover groups, too. They’ll turn it into jazz—I love that stuff. The whole ability for a quartet to make their living doing new music. I’m shocked it didn’t happen sooner”. Peckham notes that today’s musicians are driven to form these groups in order to voice their personal and political beliefs. She recognizes the power a platform of performance can provide. “Just get your friends together to raise awareness about veganism and play Beethoven!”, she says. Peckham notes an increasing trend in current students’ desire to add cause-based performances and the desire during their training to work with artists who have successfully done so. NEC offers this opportunity through hosting performances of the musician-led initiative for local hunger relief, Music for Food, founded by NEC viola faculty Kim Kashkashian. Peckham observes that students “want to make a difference with social

justice and develop a core ensemble. They're presenters, develop residencies, they might try to educate people. That's huge" (NEC-MP<sup>7</sup>).

Within the context of chamber music coaching, there's a delicate balance to strike between pragmatic discussions of career possibilities and cultivating the highest form of artistry possible. Peckham showed she was keenly aware of the importance of offering space outside of the session to speak to students about their futures. This individualised attention enables a personalised perspective from a trusted teacher that can be pivotal in clarifying viable next steps since the work of bridging artistic training and professional ambitions requires mentorship. Since students lack experience contextualising themselves as individuals in a competitive industry, faculty such as Peckham can help identify areas of potential success within their goals. Two students with the same level of artistic prowess could have two different directions; for example, Peckham observes a difference between being "the ultimate freelancer", who can "play with strangers, be solid, and get on their toes" and being a fastidious artist and chamber musician, who will "try to go into every minute detail of a phrase" (NEC-MP). The differences in these two types of professionals and their subsequent successes come down to personality more than passion. Within chamber music, much of what Peckham sees or hears as unique to success lies first and foremost in its interpersonal requirements.

Observing a chamber coaching of Peckham's allowed us to see first-hand how the training and application of interpersonal skills contributes to music making. To work on valuing each voice and effective listening, a string quartet practiced switching leadership roles. In an effort to create a cohesive embodiment of the music, students were asked to physically move (to clap, to sway, to stomp, etc.) with beats apart from their instruments and to sing their parts with robust musicality. Throughout the coaching, Peckham challenged students to always be mindful of their individual role within the context of the whole. Within this lens, students are able to experiment in a way that allows them to grow in an understanding of the work as a team. In the SNAAP survey, the top two skills cited as important to work life (in or outside of the arts) were creative thinking and problem solving (98%) and interpersonal relations and working collaboratively (97%). Though not specifically musical skills, these skills (sometimes called "transferable skills") contribute to and can be built from the type of music making that Peckham asks her students to do. The classroom then serves as an opportunity to bring students out of their comfort zones in the name of personal development while, perhaps unknowingly, expanding the possibilities of their portfolio. In chamber music, musicians bend and breathe with

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<sup>7</sup> Merry Peckham, Chair of the Chamber Music Department at NEC. In-person interview (NEC main building studio JH104). 4:30 PM EST on 9 March 2020.

one another, and consequently, this interaction is not merely cooperative movement and artistic inspiration, but reflects skill sets needed in the professional world.

#### 4.6. Chamber Music as an Identity Builder: Chicago College of Performing Arts

*Known for his soft but strong presence, Adam Neiman combines philosophical thought with practical implementation grounded in his own experience as a solo pianist, chamber musician, composer, artistic director, and full-time educator. As an artist who wears many hats, he brings intimate knowledge of what it means to be a portfolio musician today. He applies his diverse professional experiences as the newest Director of the CCPA String Chamber Program. We had the opportunity to observe sessions with students (Figure 2), as well as a chance to speak to him twice about chamber music training in the conservatory.*



**Figure 2.** Adam Neiman coaching CCPA string chamber music students on pre-performance talks. Source: Photograph by authors.

In his newly appointed role as the Director of the CCPA String Chamber program, Adam Neiman built a new curriculum for string students within his course. Considering the classical components of chamber music education that he wanted to uphold, he decided that additional skills should accompany the transmission of traditional chamber pedagogy. Among these skills are conversations of interpersonal relationships and obligations, as well as the distribution of non-musical responsibilities among the students. Students understand each of these roles as innately necessary and compatible from the get-go. Neiman expands:

They are given specific functions to fulfil their duties, and the descriptions of roles are carefully worded to demonstrate how each role serves the overarching needs of the ensemble. In the case of the secretary, for example,

s/he is in charge (among other duties) of collating all ensemble members' research outlines in one document that is passed along to the speaker to assist with the speaker's preparation. In another instance, the secretary collects from all ensemble mates a list of at least five email addresses that are passed on to the publicist for a mass email. They are what makes up the portfolio musician: A portfolio musician is someone who will apply their artistic and creative talents to anything that comes their way. Yes, they have a point of view and desire for a future, but they admit they can't control the future. So they meet that future with their present. (CCPA-PED<sup>8</sup>)

As noted, students in each group are assigned at least one of the following roles: liaison, librarian, publicist, secretary, and speaker. The goal of this assignment is for students to reflect on how best to use the skills they have, and to think about how to build new ones. Whether this applies to their future artistic careers or to an entirely new set of skills and priorities is up to the student. It is not the job of the professor to manage how students choose to process information, nor is it the job of a professor to ask students to divine the course of their professional paths as young artists. In the words of Neiman, "We're all portfolio musicians" (CCPA-PED).

Chamber music also plays an important role within a course that encourages first-year students to explore their identity as professional musicians. The CCPA undergraduate music seminar, entitled Professional Musician in Society, operates in a similar way. Taught by a variety of instructors at CCPA and required for all incoming freshmen students, this is a course that asks students to reflect on the professional landscape that they hope to join. They are asked to learn about notable performing arts institutions and how they serve their respective communities. The hallmark of this course is a project where students visit various Chicago organisations—such as Chicago Housing Authority or the Centre on Halsted—that are notable for their closeness with and awareness of one or few particular communities in Chicago. Students perform for the people associated with these organisations after a process of research and reflection that involves considering what music would best serve the specific needs of the population in question. "I view chamber music as the ultimate vehicle for human interaction", says Neiman: "You have people operating together who need to come to an agreement. They need to come to that agreement not by a dictator making them, but by agreement, and in that they all see the logic of [one solution]. . . . That's not a portfolio musician skill, it's a human skill" (CCPA-PED).

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Neiman, Director of the CCPA String Chamber Program. Pedagogical Philosophy Meeting, 18 December 2019.

#### 4.7. Checkerboard Chamber Music Amid Crisis: Heifetz International Music Institute

*Our visit to violinist Nicholas Kitchen started in the basement of the lobby of NEC's new building amidst sounds of student conversations and happenings in the nearby cafeteria. Kitchen is known for his work with the Borromeo Quartet and recent leadership of the Heifetz Music Institute. The Borromeo Quartet is in residence at NEC and, the night before, we heard Borromeo perform three Beethoven quartets for Boston audiences in Jordan Hall. The ensemble was one of the first quartets to regularly use technology in their performances, employing tablets with page-turning foot pedals that enabled performers to read from a full score, rather than a single part. This performance also included a projection screen, on which Beethoven's original sketches were beamed, enabling audiences to follow along with the performers.*

*Little did we know the extent to which technology would soon play a role in the continuation of musical performance and education during the time of quarantine. In March of 2020, COVID-19 began to shut down public and private institutions, as a months-long lockdown commenced. In fact, our interviews in Boston came at the cusp of NEC shutting down. We were the last visitors allowed in the buildings, and the Borromeo concert was the last performance in Jordan Hall, before COVID-19 protocols took effect throughout the city. Kitchen gave a stimulating talk that night on stage, prior to playing the second half of the performance, about the projection of Beethoven's sketches during the performance, and we were excited about discussing his approach during our session. Moreover, the Heifetz International Music Institute, a program for young string players and pianists, slated to begin that summer, was among the few summer arts programs that elected to operate virtually. Therefore, a number of weeks later, we also asked Kitchen to talk about his plans for the virtual version of the Institute at one of our graduate student seminars at the CCPA. We reconnected with Kitchen in the early spring to find out how the virtual summer session fared.*

Kitchen believes that the opportunity for students to practice chamber music virtually is a gift, a chance to learn skills necessary for musical training, though not the warp and weft of traditional pedagogy:

*Our efforts [have to be] to really think about what are the ways we can make this a substantial learning experience, including the technical training that's going to come from having to do that kind of recording. . . . We're committed to walking them through that every step of the way. Even where they feel a little frustrated with it, we're going to help them get through it. I had to touch [on] that. I made a recording and it's a tutorial for our students about the way they were going to do this. (ONPERF-NK<sup>9</sup>)*

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<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Kitchen, Borromeo String Quartet, NEC, and Heifetz International Music Institute. In-class Zoom discussion "MUS 480-01: On Performance". 12:30 PM–1:45 PM CST on 30 April 2020.

If this process did not work for Kitchen and his own ensembles, he was not going to ask it of the students at Heifetz.

The United States continues to struggle with the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic as we write this chapter. For the most part, chamber music groups are the only way many musicians are able to perform together, either virtually or in person. Here is an example of chamber music not being a single solution, but a special case when it is the only solution. When orchestras record asynchronously, as required by quarantine or shelter-in-place guidelines, standard practice is that all musicians perform their part with a metronome in their ear. Kitchen, however, capitalizing on the intimacy of a small chamber ensemble, developed a system of approximating artistic and collaborative live-time response in the recording of an asynchronous chamber work. This strategy, realised with the Apple program GarageBand, involves the creation of multiple tracks for each instrumentalist, some leading, some following, some in time, some rubato. Kitchen affectionately refers to this process as “checkerboard chamber music” (ONPERF-NK). The final product, a tapestry of smaller recorded snippets, allows for expressive musicality in an asynchronous setting. Students then think critically and collaboratively about which direction they want individual phrases and movements to go.

Before the commencement of the program in the summer, Heifetz administration sent a technology package, called a “tech tool kit”, to each participant, consisting of a microphone, headphones, and a tripod. Faculty recorded instructional videos on how to create collaborative recordings, and virtual meetings were set up to help students understand the technology they were asked to use. As a result, students were encouraged and instructed to establish a deep familiarity with technology that many did not have before. For the 21st-century, Kitchen does not consider this a bad thing:

We would be very foolish if we did not put the prime focus on being a better violinist. The core of that has to do with lessons with their instructor. But to be able to add this extra dimension in a rigorous way really gives them lots and lots of things to think about. It’s like if you ask yourself “What am I communicating when I play, what am I bringing across?” That’s a question you answer for your whole life. (ONPERF-NK)

Overall, the virtual effort was a success. Heifetz participants were layered over twenty chamber works, via the checkerboard method, including music by Mendelssohn, Shostakovich, and Ravel. The institute presented nearly 100 concerts, but the festival’s virtual challenges were more than musical. The Institute hired a life coach focused on personal organisation and wellbeing. Participants formed cooking clubs and played cards. Social activities, therefore, intermingled with the recording and sharing of GarageBand tracks. Kitchen found that students indeed

“started to use some of that organisational skill to help them organise their own practice” (ZOOM-NK<sup>10</sup>). The pandemic has heightened an acute awareness of mental health and personal organisation. Emerging professionals, more than ever, must not only better manage their own schedules but remain in touch with their wellbeing. Ultimately, virtual chamber music brought out the “resourceful side of people”, becoming “a very real medium for communicating things of value—and for valuing each other” (ZOOM-NK).

## **5. Engaging the Identity Crisis: A Four-Pronged Approach to Portfolio Chamber Musicking**

The identity crisis is legendary at music conservatories. Kingsbury (1988) found in his pioneering study that “for many students, there was a great deal of ambivalence, concern, and social or personal tension relating their musicality to their most elemental sense of self and identity” (ibid., p. 3). Each previous generation of music graduates has its own unique set of economic and social baggage in a nation that does not provide much support for the arts, unlike many European countries. While it is good for graduates to realise their paths at any point, it is best if conservatories endorse this pathfinding exploration from the beginning. SNAAP data, much of which have been cited throughout this chapter, should be spoken of at all arts institutions. Without access to or knowledge of these data, students and their instructors may continue to see the portfolio musician as a backup plan (or a sign of failure—a less desirable alternative), largely ignoring its potential as a viable career path, complete with its own social role and power to influence the world in a meaningful way. We have explored above different avenues through which instructors may broach this topic with their students, either directly or tangentially. These avenues require teaching in a way that acknowledges that students are more than vessels for technical training. Through chamber music—or the act of chambermusicking—students explore courageous spaces for connecting to the world as they progress through conservatory training, in order to not only grow artistically and socially, but also to be able to provide for themselves financially. Such pathfinding, so to speak, can be represented as curriculum development, ultimately making chamber music training a professional development map to guide instructors and students as they forge artistically and financially sustainable careers that address the socio-political challenges of a changing music industry (Figure 3).

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Kitchen. Zoom interview 11:00–12:00 PM EST on 13 March 2021.



**Figure 3.** Current curriculum–professional skills model introduced to CCPA faculty and staff by Centre for Arts Leadership.  
Source: Graphic by authors.

Moreover, institutions can support more enlightened pathfinding by scrutinizing those who provide portfolio instruction. Position titles, especially those including the prospects of tenure, reflect value and status. Entrepreneurial, interpersonal, or career mentoring of students are values that rarely fall within the explicit criteria strongly considered in the tenure process. The adeptness at, or teaching of, these skills rarely appear in the job descriptions of prospective tenured faculty lines. A cultural shift within the conservatory requires new faculty tenure or full-time norms that adopt these values to integrate portfolio training into the curriculum. Though there may be offices in conservatories dedicated to these priorities, they infrequently receive adequate funding, job security, and strategic attention from their overarching institutions. The offices fall as outliers to the academic core of their institution.

Some conservatories choose to enact these values with degree programs that are more open for portfolio careers. In our initial pilot study and foundational survey of performing arts institutions across the United States, we found that most portfolio institutions fit one of four modes. We refer to them as:

- Centerisation: the creation of an office for these values, such as the CCPA Center for Arts Leadership;
- Parallel Focus: offering possibilities for pursuing two degrees simultaneously, such as the Indiana University Bachelor of Science and an Outside Field (BSOF) dual degree;
- Institutional Partnering: collaborating with a professional institution, such as Carnegie Mellon University and the Pittsburgh Opera “Co-Opera” program;
- “Do-It-Yourself”: a “create your own major” degree program, such as Berklee’s Interdisciplinary Music Studies.

These programs do not prescribe any single path to success through the romanticisation of one type of performance career, nor do they define failure. Alternatively, these programs encourage individual pathfinding by asking students to think critically and comprehensively about what they really want in their own lives, without giving them answers or prompts during their first year. We believe this model is especially useful because although young people do not make these decisions without guidance and support, it is the earnest investigation into one’s own life and interests that cultivates the confidence, curiosity, and excitement for a fulfilling professional life. Mark Rabideau’s (2018) book *Creating the Revolutionary Artist* recognises the value of such self-reflective models for 21st-century musicians with chapters devoted to “exploring curiosity”, “thinking about creativity”, “problem-solving”, and “diversity and inclusivity”. Entrepreneurship is framed and made personally authentic by these values. Indeed, we have found frequently in our first-year seminars that young people do have an ideal vision for their career but are less likely to understand the means by which they will achieve those goals. We now

read Rabideau's book in the first-year seminar in the hope of providing, early on in the curriculum, more insight into what it means to be a 21st-century musician.

Finally, the fluidity of the chamber music canon—barring professional template ensembles, such as the string quartet or piano trio—inherently cultivate prospects for diversity, equity, and inclusion that are much more difficult to enact in larger ensembles, which are frequently fixed in their historical spaces, repertoire, and audience base. Chamber music patronage is more fluid, and there is a degree of intimacy between patrons and ensembles that nurtures an open dialogue on how repertoire, representation, and identity in music can respond to the world at large. Now more than ever, emerging professionals are challenged to produce socially relevant and financially sustainable performances, whether they be face-to-face or virtual, in which conservatory chamber music training plays an integral role.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualisation, David Kjar, Allegra Montanari, and Kerry Thomas; Methodology, David Kjar, Allegra Montanari, and Kerry Thomas; Software, Kerry Thomas; Validation, David Kjar, Allegra Montanari, Kerry Thomas, and Roosevelt University Institutional Review Board; Formal Analysis, David Kjar, Allegra Montanari, and Kerry Thomas; Investigation, David Kjar, Allegra Montanari, and Kerry Thomas; Resources, David Kjar, Allegra Montanari, and Kerry Thomas; Data Curation, David Kjar; Original Draft Preparation, David Kjar, Allegra Montanari, and Kerry Thomas; Writing Review Editing, David Kjar, Allegra Montanari, and Kerry Thomas; Visualisation, Kerry Thomas; Supervision, David Kjar; Project Administration, David Kjar; Funding Acquisition, David Kjar, and Allegra Montanari.

**Funding:** Research funded by Roosevelt University Chicago College of Performing Arts Deans Awards; Roosevelt University Office of Student Research Fellowship; Paul R. Judy Centre for Innovation and Research, Ensemble Innovation in the 21st Century, Eastman Institute for Music Leadership, Eastman School of Music.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors thank the program committee of the Royal Music Associations' Study Day for the Classical Musician in the 21st Century for their invitation to the 2019 conference at the University of Cambridge. The authors appreciate the Chicago College of Performing Arts Emeriti Deans Rudy Marozzi and Linda Berna and Roosevelt University Office of Student Research & the Policy Research Collaborative Director Laura Nussbaum-Barberena for their support in completing this project through the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the authors are most gracious to our interlocutors at the Chicago College of Performing Arts, New England Conservatory, Boston Conservatory at Berklee, Ensemble Connect, and Heifetz International Music Institute—as well as faculty and staff at Guild Hall School of Music and Drama, Royal College of Music, and the Royal Academy of Music. Without the voices of these interlocutors sounding in this chapter, our findings would most likely ring hollow through the halls of academia. Finally, the authors dedicate this chapter to the committed students, faculty, staff, and administrators who have made, over the years, the Chicago College of Performing Arts Centre for Arts Leadership what it is.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no other conflicts of interest besides acknowledging their past or current employment or enrollment at Roosevelt University.

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