

THE EMERGING 'PERFORMER' IDENTITY

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Background

In examining the development of the professional musician, it is commonly understood that environmental factors, such as the support of significant others (parents, teachers, peers) and type or amount of practice, are significant contributors to musical success. However, alongside these elements, the identity of the individual and how the identity develops and emerges as they approach entry into the profession is crucial.

Aims

The aim of the research project is to better understand the transition from training as a musician to entering the profession. In particular this paper focuses on the emerging identity of the musician and the role it plays in their professional development.

Main contribution

The paper presents quantitative data from a two-year longitudinal study investigating the development of 35 undergraduate conservatoire and university students in their final two years of study. The focus of the current paper is on

the conservatoire student, and the data collected in a fifteen-month period traces the progress and development of the musicians. Initial findings suggest that as the individual matures as a musician, so their identity changes. For example, it seems that music has been gradually incorporated into their concept of self - it is used increasingly as a means of self-expression, and provides the respondents with self-confidence. Furthermore, over time individuals develop a strong drive to fulfil their potential and express utter determination to succeed and overcome setbacks.

Implications

The findings reported provide unique insight into the development of the performing musician and, as such, have potential educational implications for our understanding of how to maximise the potential of musicians in training and how to best aid their transition into the profession.