Contemporary British Conservatoires and their Practices - Experiences from Alumni Perspectives

Jennie Joy Porton

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Jennie Joy Porton, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date: 23rd January 2020

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Abstract

This thesis discusses contemporary British music conservatoires and their practices, as experienced from alumni perspectives. Using the key themes of notions of 'talent', curriculum, and health and wellbeing to provide a contextual focus, qualitative data gathering is undertaken via interviews and informal discussions, making full use of my 'insider' status as I simultaneously work alongside fellow alumni as a professional musician in the field. An additional key theme of this thesis is that of social background, as I look at social dimensions of pedagogy and learning, social concerns in terms of social status and class, and how social position in wider society determines alumni experience of educational practices.

I apply Stuart Hall's theories of identity (1990) and his concepts of hegemony and articulation to discuss power dynamics in conservatoires using the method of discourse analysis. I also apply the theoretical ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his concepts of habitus, capital and field, and hierarchies within educational settings (1979, 1989), putting these in conversation with Hall and thus generating both a cultural and class-based analysis of the ethnographic data. In doing so, this thesis adds to a longitudinal study of conservatoire-based research through building on existing findings to show that these institutions are shaped by social concerns, and that there are social hierarchies which impact on students' embodied experiences of learning and, critically, their notions of identity.

Within an analytical autoethnographic framework as presented by Leon Anderson (2006), I also critically reflect on my own experiences as a conservatoire alumna and subsequent music professional, positioning my account in relation to those shared by my interview subjects.

The overall aim of this thesis is to discuss alumni experiences of UK conservatoire practices spanning almost three decades, from 1990 to 2018. This is to ascertain how these institutions are responding to alumni concerns regarding changing pedagogic practices for the future, given their rich knowledge of the field as working professional musicians. Ultimately, this thesis critically reflects on these issues to address the gap between intent (in institutional delivery) and reality (in student experience) in conservatoire training and how institutional practices affect students' notions of identity, both within and beyond conservatoire walls.

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LIST OF DIAGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the practices of contemporary British music conservatoires (in England and Wales, specifically) from alumni student perspectives. It has a specific focus on these institutions as social, cultural and embodied learning environments, and reflects on the short and long term effects of the conservatoire experience on identity. This is considered within the context of the key themes of notions of 'talent'[1], curriculum, and health and wellbeing, which respectively, form the subsequent chapters of the thesis. A focus on the social background of the alumni runs through the study as a fourth key theme.

This thesis is driven by ethnographic data and at its heart are the empirical findings from interviews with conservatoire alumni. These empirical findings are supported by data from informal discussions and observations from the field. My motivation for undertaking this study emanates from my own personal motivations, and my experiences and observations as an alumna of the conservatoire system. Self-reflexivity therefore, was my starting point at the outset of undertaking this research, providing an informed backdrop from which this study developed.

The issues considered in this thesis have, whether through choice or inadvertently, shaped my musical studies, cultural and social experiences, career expectations and conception of my self-identity more generally, both within and beyond the institutions' walls. They arose gradually as my studies progressed and have become increasingly more relevant and important to me as I now work within the music profession after leaving the conservatoire, and as I now reciprocally teach in one such institution. They are, I believe, important issues that need be addressed in the discussion of the contemporary practices of these institutions and the direct effects of these on their student inhabitants (who should remain at all times the focus of the powers that be within the conservatoire), both in the short and long term. Therein, the aim of this study is to discuss alumni student responses to conservatoire practices spanning three decades of attendance dates, from 1990 to 2018. This is to ascertain how these institutions are responding to alumni concerns regarding changing pedagogic practices for the future, given their rich knowledge of the field as working professional musicians.

To discuss dynamics of power in conservatoires, I apply Stuart Hall's concepts of identity (1990), hegemony and articulation. I also apply the theoretical ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his concepts of habitus, capital and field, and hierarchies within educational establishments (1979, 1989). I put these into dialogue with Hall and thus

[1] I consciously place the term 'talent' in inverted commas throughout this text to signal that evaluations of ability are contested.

generate both a cultural and class-based model for analysis of my empirical data. I use the method of discourse analysis to critically reflect on the alumni testimonies, resonant with the methodological approach used by both Hall and Bourdieu. This thesis adds to the academic discourse within the field of conservatoire studies, primarily, and the broader music higher education pedagogic field, secondly. I build on existing findings to show that these institutions are shaped by social concerns and that there are social hierarchies which impact on students' embodied experiences of learning and, critically, their identity. I also consider how institutional practices can affect students' notions of identity throughout the course of their studies. Additionally, I reflect on how the conservatoire experience continues to shape the identity of the alumni beyond their time at the institution, as they navigate the profession thereafter. Ultimately, this thesis critically reflects on conservatoire practices from the experiential perspective to address the gap between intent (in institutional delivery) and reality (in student experience) in conservatoire training.

0.1.1 Literature review

Research on conservatoires has seen a marked, global growth within the last three decades in particular, notably since ethnomusicologist Henry Kingsbury's publication 'Music, Talent & Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System' (1988). In this ethnographic study, Kingsbury explored the cultural dynamics within one American conservatoire, with a particular interest in the ways in which staff and students within the institution conceived notions of 'talent' in Western Classical music traditions. In the years since this publication, as the conservatoire research field has continued to expand, multiple branches of research specialisms have developed. These include (but are not limited to) concerns over the purpose of contemporary conservatoires (Tregear et al. 2016, Ford, 2010), the culture of learning at the conservatoire (Perkins, 2011, 2013 and Davies, 2002, 2006), health concerns surrounding conservatoire students (Williamon and Thompson 2006, Clark and Williamon 2011, Musical Impact project 2013-2017[2]), pedagogy particularly in relation to the one-to-one teaching model (Gaunt, 2006, 2009, Mills, 2002, Presland, 2005, Carey et al., 2013, Carey and Grant, 2014) and debates surrounding the curriculum (Carey and Lebler, 2012a, 2012b, Duffy, 2013, Ramnarine 1996). The growth of interest in conservatoire-based research is also reflected in the number of journal special editions (e.g. Arts and Humanities in Higher Education Journal 'Special Issue on the Reflective Conservatoire', edited by Gaunt, 2016) and reports commissioned (e.g. Musical Impact project 2013-2017, London

[2] Musical Impact. Accessed 9th August 2019. http://musicalimpact.org/

School of Economics report on the Economic Impact of London Conservatoires, 2012). Also, through specialist conferences organised (e.g., Guildhall Reflective Conservatoire Conferences[3]) and professional bodies formed (e.g. Conservatoires UK (CUK)[4] and Innovative Conservatoire (ICON)[5]).

Perkins (2013: 197), whose research takes place within a UK conservatoire, acknowledges that 'in recent years, there has been increasing focus in the music education literature on what and how students learn at conservatoires of music.' However, she also states that 'as educational institutions, conservatoires remain largely unresearched and, crucially, relatively unchallenged. In particular, research has paid little attention to in-depth studies of culture, so that not enough is known of the cultural practices that characterise and shape a conservatoire education' (2011: 1). Even more so, analytical and critically reflective studies of student perception of such practices, remains under-researched, with conservatoire alumni remaining a relatively untapped source of research focus (aside from their place in Cottrell (2004), in which he presents an ethnographic study of professional music making in London, and in the London School of Economics report of 2012, which looks at the economic impact of three London conservatoires). In particular, alumni are an under-used source of insight within the field of conservatoire studies, in which my study is predominantly positioned. In this literature review, I seek to locate my research concerns within existing debates regarding the nature of conservatoire study. That is, regarding the practices and cultures of these institutions and student perceptions of these.

There are four key themes central to my study, those of: social background, notions of 'talent', curriculum, and the health and wellbeing experiences of conservatoire alumni. The primary literary sources that provide the roots from which this study is developed, and reciprocally contributes to longitudinally, are Davies (2002), Ford (2010) and Perkins (2011), whose respective research is situated within the field of conservatoire studies. An additional key literary source for my thesis is Scharff's 'Gender, Subjectivity, and Cultural Work: The Classical Music Profession' (2018), which helps to frame my own study within the professional music field as well as that of conservatoires. This is particularly insightful given that my alumni informants are speaking from this field position as they currently

[3] Guildhall School of Music and Drama. "Reflective Conservatoire Conference 2018." Accessed 3rd February 2019. https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/about_the_school/research/whats_on/reflective_conservatoire_conference/

[4] Conservatoires UK. Accessed 5th June 2016. http://www.conservatoiresuk.ac.uk

[5] C. Duffy. 2016. "ICON: Radical Professional Development in the Conservatoire." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15(3-4): 376-385

work as professionals. The respective findings of these primary literary sources are threaded throughout my entire thesis and whilst reference to their approaches and general views are provided in this review section, the central chapters that follow reflect on a more pertinent elaboration of their findings, in conversation with my own research. The work of Cottrell (2004), undertaken in the professional music field of London, and Kingsbury (1988), within an American conservatory, are additional though no less insightful, key texts frequently acknowledged in this thesis. This is particularly due to their focus on ethnographic enquiry amongst Western Classical musicians and their respective context within the conservatoire field (Kingsbury) and the professional field (Cottrell). The former resonates with my study given that conservatoires are my field of research focus also and the latter, given that as my alumni offer their testimonies, they are presently situated within the professional field.

The first theme considered in this literature review is the concept of 'talent' in relation to the conservatoire student, particularly how this links to self-identity. In so doing, I draw on key texts by Kingsbury (1988), Davies (2002), Cottrell (2004), and Perkins (2011, 2013). From here, I move to the theme of 'curriculum', considering current debates regarding issues such as the ethos of contemporary conservatoire training in response to the changing professional field, drawing on the research of figures including Perkins (2011), Carey and Lebler (2012a), Cottrell (2004), as well as the London School of Economics report (2012). Finally, reflecting on Presland (2005), Nettl (1995) and Kingsbury (1988) once again, I consider the social aspects of conservatoire study within the broader context of health and wellbeing. This includes reflection on the nature and dynamics of relationships formed within the conservatoire environment.

0.1.2 Notions of 'talent'

Cottrell (2004: 34) attributes great significance to the matter of musical 'talent', stating that 'in the Western world the concept of being 'musical' or 'musically talented', or transversely the stigma attached to being described as 'unmusical', is an issue of importance matched in degree only by the ambiguity of what is actually meant by such a description.' He continues 'all too often, then, 'musicians' are musical, others are not. However, while this thumbnail sketch may be broadly true, it also represents something of an over-simplification' (Cottrell, 2004: 34). The discussion of whether musical 'talent' or 'musicality' – the two are frequently used interchangeably in the field literature - is a form of 'gift' bestowed upon the selected few, or whether impressive musical feats are a direct result of a process of physical and mental development and perseverance, has long been a topic of discussion in

Western society. As Kingsbury (1988: 82) adds, 'in spite of the fervently held "truth" that "all men are created equal," talent is very much a positive value in present-day Western culture.' And as Cottrell points out, there is no finite definition of the concept of musical 'talent', with Levitin (2012: 633) agreeing, that 'the concept of musicality...is underspecified and not well understood'. Cottrell observes that for professional musicians then, 'the concept of musicality and the degree to which it may be said to be held, is necessarily more complex than the physical execution of musical tasks...musicality is something completely separate from an ability to play an instrument' (Cottrell, 2004: 35).

Thus, this raises questions regarding power dynamics and hierarchies. This is because one cannot be deemed 'talented' or 'musical' without the judgement and acknowledgement of another, which, in numerous musical genres (including traditional Western Classical), 'are to a great extent matters of social power and authority' (Kingsbury, 1988: 77), and 'inextricably linked to power relations (Kingsbury, 1988: 79). The validity of a pronouncement of one's 'talent' is also dependent upon the professional standing and reputation of the 'master'. This implicit or explicit (for it could be either) assessment of a young musician's ability is important, for it will frequently determine the direction, quality and intensity of musical learning thereafter. The theoretical concepts of Bourdieu (1979) regarding power and habitus within educational settings are especially insightful here. Bourdieu suggests that higher education establishments and their alumni are responsible for the reproduction and perpetuation of traditions, cultural practices and tastes, subsequently serving to maintain social classes and the elite. This critical analysis provides my thesis with a strong foundation from which to research conservatoire practices from alumni perspectives, for almost all one-to-one conservatoire teaching staff are themselves products of the same system. Chapter 1 discusses the relevance of Bourdieu's concepts and my broader theoretical approach in depth.

Related to the concept of 'talent' within the conservatoire is the idea of 'favouritism' (a word often heard whispered amongst students in corridors). In interviews with students, Perkins (2011: 11) found that musical hierarchies are 'an assumed part of conservatoire life. Crucially, the positions available in these hierarchies appear to centre around musical 'favourites'. One particular telling quote from one of her interviewees reads: 'I think it, like any place would probably prioritise – oh, it's got its favourites do you know what I mean, and I think it seeks to put them on pedestals and give them all the glory that they can, which is probably the same with all of them, all the musical institutions.' (Perkins, 2011: 11).

The notion of 'favouritism' is acutely felt by a proportion of conservatoire students, and that if it is perceived as being an active factor within the institution, this has a profound effect on the students' overall experience. Cottrell (2004: 37) agrees with the presence of a hierarchy, for in discussing his own ethnographic experiences and findings alongside those of Kingsbury, he suggests that both conservatoire students and professional musicians alike 'are equally engaged in a discourse which ascribes musicality to some more than others, thus creating a sociomusical hierarchy.' In her study looking at the students' perceptions and experiences of learning at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Davies (2006) underlines Kingsbury's statement, clarifying that 'despite claiming to offer a diverse student body every possibility of achieving professional standards and the opportunity of building successful music careers for the twenty-first century…the conservatoire discursively constructs its musical training as something from which only the most 'talented' and dedicated students can benefit.' (Davies, 2006: 804). Furthering Kingsbury's observations, Davies is able to suggest that 'students' musical ability may be shaped by the cultural resources, values and skills that they absorb within their particular social class and which determine their access to and familiarity with music from an early age.' (Davies, 2006: 805). Her findings regarding hierarchy and inclusion/exclusion provide a key foundation, along with the work of Scharff (2018), for the presentation of my own research.

0.1.3 Curriculum

As defined in this Introduction chapter, music conservatoires are traditionally centres for musical excellence, heavily specialising in musical performance in the Western Classical genre. However, particularly since the introduction of BMus degree qualifications (in the early 1990s[6]) and higher, there has been an obligatory academic component to conservatoire training for all students (with the exception of postgraduate diplomas). Thus begins the ongoing struggle between the academic and performance demands of a conservatoire education and dynamically and creatively engaging students in both pedagogic pathways. Ford's study of the discourses of purpose in a modern-day UK conservatoire (i.e. Guildhall School of Music and Drama) specifically, how institutional discourses are constructed, confirmed and contested, underlines this issue of curriculum balance. She demonstrates that striking this balance between academic and performance

[6] Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. "Our History." Assessed 27th August 2014. https://www.bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire/about-us/our-history
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. "Timeline of Trinity College of Music." Accessed 28th August 2014. http://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/about-us/our-history/timeline-trinity-college-music

obligations is a matter of both institutional practices and cultures, she explains 'within the conservatoire setting, it was also evident that students complained about having to do certain activities, for instance, academic work, or activities organised by the professional development department designed to make students aware of the range of jobs involving music that could also be available to them. Whilst expressing a clear aspiration to be part of the music profession, and making a definite link between conservatoire studies and this aspiration, students seemed very selective in what they defined the music profession to be.' (Ford, 2010: 13).

Whilst Perkins (2011) underlines the hierarchical dominance of performance at conservatoires (as befits their traditional ethos) and shows that it is practiced in numerous ways, she discovered that 'across the data set, evidence points to multiple ways in which learning cultures privileging performance – and learning how to be an excellent performer – are constructed.' She draws on observation, documentation and interviews with students and staff at one conservatoire (i.e. Royal College of Music) to conclude that in 'capturing the tensions between performing and 'other stuff', these data illuminate strong dispositions towards performance as a central and dominant facet of conservatoire life' (Perkins, 2011: 9) and that 'examining this further, we see that it is not simply performance that is privileged. Rather it is *specialised* performance, facilitated by expertise in an instrumental or vocal specialism' (2011: 9).

Perkins' findings are not surprising, given that the conservatoire institution has traditionally always been a centre for training aspiring performers and staff only admit those they deem to have the ability, potential and desire to become a successful performing musician, as a primary career choice. Carey and Lebler (2012a: 27) agree, 'although at most conservatoires, students are required to enrol in academic courses, it is assumed that performance is the dominant way they will experience music in their lives.' As is typical of all higher education courses, conservatoire students have compulsory curriculum requirements alongside a range of modules from which they can choose, the first year of undergraduate study being more rigid, and the following years becoming increasingly more flexible and allowing for greater individual agency. However, as Freer and Bennett (2012: 10) write, 'the ability of faculty to engage students in a broad range of learning opportunities remains a problematic issue'. Though nowadays conservatoires analyse their curriculum content more frequently than ever before, my research highlights historic and ongoing issues regarding the transmission and reception of academic and supporting modules in pedagogic practice.

Despite the conservatoires' apparent slowness in actually modifying their curriculum for the current career demands of the musician (given that over eight years had passed between Cottrell's research and the LSE report, and that alumni interviewed for both studies gave alarmingly similar responses), Perkins (2011: 2) suggests that it is not a forgotten subject amongst researchers, that there is currently 'increased debate among higher music educators as to the purpose, function, relevance and pedagogies of conservatoires.' Concluding her findings, Perkins states that it is 'imperative' for the conservatoire 'to continue moving away from the narrow and specialist in favour of the broad and diverse' (Perkins, 2011: 14). If the conservatoire were to acknowledge this, they would arguably be required to readdress their traditional ethos, 'for a shift in long held and deeply embedded values' (Perkins, 2011: 15).

Scharff (2018) echoes Perkins' point; in her dual qualitative and quantitative study published last year in 2018, Christina Scharff looks at the classical music profession in the two metropolitan cities of London and Berlin, specifically, the characterising working cultures that pervade in these cities through the lenses of race, gender and class. Her research is undertaken via interviews with sixty professional female early-career musicians. In response to the contemporary job market, she looks at three key areas: inequalities in cultural work, entrepreneurialism and the notion of precarious work within the profession. Her statistical findings are of great use to my study and are discussed in the relevant chapters that follow, particularly chapter 2 (social background).

One of Scharff's (2018: 1) central questions is 'how do classical musicians negotiate ongoing hierarchies, privileges and exclusions' and she contextualises this by first setting the scene for her fieldwork findings with a reflection on statistical conservatoire data, which also reflects persistent inequalities. As part of her study, Scharff summarises the ongoing argument within the research field for changing the learning cultures of conservatoires as 'having trained in classical music for many years, passed an audition to get into a conservatoire, and finished a degree, music graduates "enter ill-defined, complex labour markets with rapidly transforming employment contexts." (Bennett 2016: 386). Studies suggest that music graduates are aware of the difficulties associated with a career in music (Comunian et al., 2014). However, they still struggle with the transition into work because they feel unprepared (Bennett, 2007; 2008; Bork, 2010; Gembris and Langer, 2005)…' (Scharff, 2018: 22).

In recent years, following the economic recession of 2008, ongoing austerity measures and current widespread economic uncertainty, there is now more than ever less certainty regarding employment in the field of music performance due to funding cuts to

the Arts and the increasing state pension age. In response to these times of uncertainty, this thesis will argue that there is a greater moral obligation by conservatoires to reflect accordingly on their pedagogical practices and offer their students a broader range of musical and life skills required for survival in the changing profession. Chapter 4 (curriculum) will show in greater depth, that even though conservatoires have in recent years been actively attempting to address these calls for change to the curriculum, response in the form of action by these institutions has been largely slow to unfold, with my alumni interviews confirming feelings of unpreparedness in transitioning (as Scharff references). I will also show that this transition process can also serve to effect notions of self-identity and their identity as a musician, as they struggle to develop a sense of belonging in the professional field.

Carey and Lebler (2012a: 27) also agree that conservatoires are currently faced with a dilemma, given the increasing reality of their students working a protean (or portfolio) career, 'the portfolio career does raise many challenges for music institutions as they seek to balance traditional performance goals with the need to prepare students for a diverse and sustainable career.' They also argue that in failing to adapt their curriculum to consider this, they are not successfully raising awareness amongst their students of the realistic nature of the career the majority of them will likely undertake. According to Carey and Lebler (2012a: 27), 'the overwhelming view expressed by presenters at the International Society for Music Education World Conference in Beijing 2010 was that being a professional musician consists of multiple roles, including the ability to undertake a broad range of activities and being able to adapt to changing circumstances.'. The London School of Economics report on the Economic Impact of London Conservatoires (2012: 36) also confirms the continually evolving careers that the typical conservatoire graduate can presently expect to undertake, stating 'what might have been a natural progression from student to performer twenty years ago had now become more of a minority route, with the majority taking on a portfolio career...Only a small minority of respondents held a regular or permanent post with a single orchestra or ensemble (HEFCE 2006).'

In her discussion of the link between higher education and employability, Ford (2010: 40) highlights that (at the time of her writing) to qualify for HEFCE's criteria for 'premium' funding, the conservatoire must prove that 'more than 75% of graduates are working primarily in professional music performance, as performers of music, within five years of graduating from the institution (HEFCE, 2006, 17).' With this in mind, therefore, one might argue that from a business perspective, it would be in the institution's interest financially, to ensure their graduates are trained in a variety of relevant formats and

genres, so that they become perpetually employed performers whether or not they become concert soloists. Traditionally, conservatoire training prioritises solo performance, with major examinations centred around solo recitals (such was the experience of all of my alumni interviewees). Cottrell (2004: 44) notes that 'there is, therefore a tension to be resolved between the training most Western musicians undergo, which deliberately fosters a soloistic attitude, the development of the conscious musical self, and the performance situations in which they frequently find themselves, where this tendency towards individualism must be restrained or modified for the purposes of collaboration with other equally self-conscious musical individuals.'

In her position as a staff member at the conservatoire in which she undertook her research, Ford (2010) observed that 'it was not just students who were articulating sets of values, but also their teachers, and aspects of the organisation of the conservatoire itself. Talking to a colleague who had been pondering similar dilemmas, he suggested that conservatoires had something 'seeping through the walls' that made people act in a certain way and adhere to certain values. Set against a government drive to put employability at the forefront of the higher education experience, it seemed that a conflict was in place between different concepts of purpose, with some supporting the concentrated study of a narrow performance specialism whilst others believing in a broader education, even though all seemed to share a concern with some sort of employability.' (Ford, 2010: 13).

There is little doubt that the conservatoire, as with all higher education institutions, is currently going through a turbulent period whereby it must continually readdress its purpose and validity (particularly given the large increase in student fees over the last twelve years). However, it is perhaps useful to consider that the London School of Economics report (2012) concluded that the three London conservatoires on which the study is based (Royal College of Music, Royal Academy of Music and Guildhall School of Music and Drama) 'are a key factor in the development and sustainability of London as a world music centre. Their graduates are heavily involved in the classical and modern music production which is crucial to London's role as a leading centre of the arts. London's position in the global music hierarchy is probably only equalled by New York's' (London School of Economics, 2012: 4). In addition, 'London's music conservatoires are one of the key factors' in contributing to this global position (2012: 40). The report is overwhelmingly positive, suggesting that 'the existing modest investment in the conservatoires provides a strong base for sustained expansion in a sector with the potential to develop further in the years to come' (2012: 41). Their importance to the British and global music scene and to the economies of London and the UK as a whole, are validated and supported by this

report. The matter of conservatoires' ongoing existence therefore, is not raised in my study, but instead within the context of curriculum, I join in the ongoing debate (amongst others) surrounding issues of content, relevance and delivery of training these institutions offer their students, in consideration of a continually evolving job market. As my alumni data spans almost three decades of attendance dates, this thesis offers new discoveries on the short/mid/long-term effectiveness of these traditional pedagogical practices from those best placed to reflect. That is, reflection through the voices of musicians who have been through the conservatoire system and are now positioned within in the context of the professional field.

0.1.4 Health and wellbeing: Social aspects of the conservatoire experience

Debates surrounding the health and wellbeing of conservatoire students and how to address and facilitate this issue both in a pastoral sense and formally within the curriculum, grow increasingly louder. This is as these institutions are encouraged to reflect more critically upon their own pedagogy and practices as discussion of this topic becomes more prevalent within society at large. In this literature review, I hone in on academic discourse surrounding conservatoire health and wellbeing concerns within a social context, whilst Chapter 5 outlines a more in-depth, holistic discussion which predominantly reflects on the output of the Musical Impact project (2013-2017) and in which I shall engage in discussion with my empirical data.

The subject matter of music students' social experiences is under-researched, for as Dibben (2006: 94) in researching a British university music department (i.e. at Sheffield University) states, 'information on students' socio-cultural experience is scarce', with research relating specifically to conservatoire students even more so. As Perkins (2011: 1) writes, research which 'relates culture to learning in order to understand what *is* or *can be* learnt at conservatoires' is scarce. My study aims to address this by adding to Davies's (2002) work with a longitudinal debate on how alumni experienced learning practices differently depending on their social status and class, and how notions of identity are affected by such practices. Within a health and wellbeing context, in chapter 5, I show how individual's experiences are greatly impacted by institutional practices and cultures, and importantly, by staff-student relationships.

'No two performers enjoy musically equal status' (Nettl, 1995: 43) – it is this idea which underpins Nettl's discussion of the societal order within the music building in his publication *Heartland Excursions – Ethnological Reflections on Schools of Music* (1995), which focuses on the university music departments of institutions within the Midwest area

of America. Acknowledging the presence of a hierarchical environment – as also noted by Kingsbury (1988), Perkins (2011, 2013) and Cottrell (2004) – Nettl (1995: 45) suggests that the 'most important' relationship within the department is the tripartite grouping of student-teacher-administrator. For Kingsbury (1988), it is the student-teacher partnership within the conservatoire which is crucial, stating that 'the formal teacher-student pairing must be considered as a fundamental element in the production of Western art music. One simply cannot, does not, and will not become a "classical" musician through only informal learning' (Kingsbury, 1988: 167). Carole Presland (2005), in her research within UK conservatoires exploring the student perspective on their relationship with their instrumental professor, is also in agreement, that this pairing is at the core of the conservatoire experience, 'a successful relationship between the young classical player and his or her instrumental professor is vital within the intense, demanding and rarefied environment of the conservatoire' (Presland, 2005: 237).

There have been a number of research publications within the last 15 years focusing specifically on the nature of one-to-one instrumental tuition at the core of conservatoire training, including those by Mills (2002), Presland (2005), Purser (2005), Gaunt (2006), Creech et al. (2009), Carey et al. (2013). All support the notion that a 'successful' student/teacher relationship is central to students' conservatoire experiences; for as Kingsbury (1988: 39) observes, 'a positive relationship between the student and the individual teacher was felt to be a necessity by almost everyone.' However, there is an absence of in-depth alumni-based studies which discuss the impact of this student/principal study teacher relationship from a position of retrospection, which can provide distance and clarity in reflection. This thesis provides such critical reflection from the first-hand, experiential perspective, at a time when the conduct of teaching practices is under intense scrutiny in the wake of a handful of child sexual abuse and teaching misconduct cases in a small number of musical-specialist (secondary) education facilities in the UK.[7] Thus, this highlights the intense nature of elite musical training and that a bond of trust is imperative and central (and must be reciprocated by both parties) to the one-to-one teaching model traditionally adopted within music performance pedagogy.

[7] V.Ward and N. Britten. 2013. "Music School Abuse Scandal Alleged to Involve Five Top Schools." *The Telegraph.* Last amended 8th May 2013. Accessed 10th June 2013. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/10045117/Music-school-abuse-scandal-alleged-to-involve-five-top-schools.html
M. Ritchie. 2013. "Abuse Scandals: Britain's Elite Music Education in Crisis." *Channel 4 News.* Last amended 9th May 2013. Accessed 10th June 2013. https://www.channel4.com/news/sex-abuse-scandals-britains-elite-music-education-in-crisi

Given that this thesis considers the experiences of conservatoire alumni from three decades, it is perhaps insightful to consider Presland's (2005) research observation that student expectations of how they foresee this student-principal study teacher relationship forming and what they hope to gain from this, have changed over time. Following her semi-structured interviews with twelve piano students at a UK conservatoire[8], Presland (2005: 240) states 'perhaps the comments of current students reflect a change in the general education ethos over the last 20 years or so, namely that students should learn to question and interact in lessons, whilst teachers should open doors and enable, rather than provide information to be absorbed wholesale and without question.' My research provides reflection on changes in attitudes to principal study teaching expectations and lived experiences, and in part considers the obligations of staff and institutions versus the concept of student self-responsibility.

Kingsbury (1988) and Nettl (1995) remain key texts in considering the social experiences students incur amongst their peers whilst at the conservatoire. 'The patterns of social organization [sic] of the conservatory must not be dismissed as simply the "political" underbelly of an "artistic" process. To believe otherwise is to retain a commitment to an insidious cultural bias', comments Kingsbury (1988: 46) in light of his own personal experiences of study at a conservatoire and also as a result of conducting research within a selected institution. This quote serves to highlight the importance of the varying social layers which knit together to effect student's conservatoire experience. There are inherent social challenges faced by students attending conservatoires, who must find the balance between making friendships and developing professional contacts alongside competing with each other for position within the conservatoire hierarchy. The notion of tactical 'game playing' amongst conservatoire student relationships is also discussed by Kingsbury (1988: 42), who references a particular student that felt this acutely: '"Being a student here has been very hard for me," said an undergraduate who had transferred into the conservatory[9] from an Ivy League university. "I wouldn't say it's so much a social difficulty," she continued, "as political. I've never experienced politics before, all this cordial chit chat, but people always have their ulterior motive".' In chapter 5, I demonstrate that the perceived social positioning of the alumni within their peer groups had the potential to negatively impact their self-confidence. Which, if detrimentally effected in this context, had the potential to equate to feelings of inadequacy and not

[8] Presland (2005) does not confirm in which conservatoire her field work takes place.
[9] 'Conservatory' is the term used in the USA (the country in which Kingsbury's research takes place) but has the same meaning as the word 'conservatoire', which is principally employed in Europe.

'fitting in' to the conservatoire setting. Conversely, a confident social positioning could also serve to positively affect alumni's notions of health and wellbeing, i.e. their feelings of social belonging. In turn, this meant that they were more positive in their general reflections of the conservatoire experience as a whole.

Royal College of Music alumna and recording artist Laura Wright also alluded to the intense and competitive environment of the conservatoire and how this can affect the individual on various levels. Reflecting on an interview conducted with Laura by the Metro (2012)[10], the newspaper wrote: 'her extracurricular success has caused some difficulties at college. 'I've heard crazy rumours from other students, like I'd had a boob job,' says Wright, rolling her eyes, then giggling. 'Some people disagree with what I'm doing and the college hasn't always been supportive. So I've had to really knuckle down – work on my final exam pieces, write my repertoire dissertation on Schumann, all that stuff.' Here Wright suggests that she experienced difficulty on an educational level, implying that due to (her perception of) the opinions of staff at the conservatoire regarding their disapproval of her external musical activities, she had to 'prove' herself to them in her preparation and performance of her final recital and dissertation. Not only this, but it is clearly implied that she was also faced with an uncomfortable social situation whereby the attitude of her peers was a potential cause for concern and discomfort, as they grappled to come to terms with her public success. Whilst her teaching staff, rather than overtly offering support, made Wright aware of their apparent disapproval of the career path she had chosen to take. Thus, she confirms my argument that the conservatoire experience is not one solely of pedagogical learning, but is multi-layered, with complex social and cultural practices to navigate that are clearly connected to student's identity conceptions.

The following section of this introductory chapter discusses the ways in which I have undertaken this ethnographic study.

0.2.1 Methods

I begin this methods discussion with a brief reflection on the term 'ethnography' and how this method is understood in relation to my study. This is followed by an outline of the specific conservatoire institutions to which my study relates, followed by a reflection on general alumni attitudes in response to taking part in this study. From here, a broad look is taken of the ethnographic literature that places the individual musician at its core, and why

[10] J. Lewis. 2012. "Laura Wright: God Save the Queen is Actually Pretty Straightforward." *Metro.* Last amended 11th December 2012. Accessed 13th March 2014. http://metro.co.uk/2012/12/11/3310423-3310423/

such an approach is appealing. A discussion of practical methodological good-practice and ethical considerations follows, with reflection on my position/role of researcher as a pre-existing and ongoing member of the community under study. I continue with a discussion of the data-collection options explored in the initial stages of this thesis before settling on alumni as the sole focus group. Thereafter, I discuss the alumni interview process and how the qualitative testimonies were collected.

A theoretical description of ethnography which fits all concepts and applications of this methodology across disciplines is complex. Hammersley (2018: 1) states that 'there has been increasing variation in what the term is taken to mean, and a growing number of labelled varieties of ethnography.' Empirical research cannot be undertaken in isolation, removed from the context of the constantly evolving world in which ethnographic research is positioned, hence research practices and demands are inevitably continuously shifting in response. For example, several changes to research attitudes and practices in the last ten years include a greater emphasis on accountability, engagement and quantitative research methodologies, acute time pressures on researchers to gather their data, and increased ethical concerns regarding data collection practicalities (e.g. data protection) (Hammersley, 2018: 2-3). Hammersley (1990, 2018) argues, therefore, that given the inevitable change over the course of time in research practices and demands, it falls to the ethnographer to clearly define their respective commitment to and application of this methodology. Hammersley (2018: 12) takes issue with over-simplification in defining ethnography and argues that 'the current situation, and the foreseeable future, represent a very challenging context for ethnographic work' and 'in order to survive the challenges, we need to be clearer about our ethnographic commitments and the grounds for them' (Hammersley, 2018: 12).

In response to Hammersley's call for a clear outline of the researcher's approach to ethnography, therefore, I present here my understanding and application of ethnography in relation to music. More specifically, in relation to my studying and writing about people making music. As such, I turn to Rice's (2003) discussion 'Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography', with which my own research approach resonates. In this paper, Rice proposes an ethnographic approach with is subject-centred, and takes place within a three-dimensional space of musical experience, and which is comprised of time, location and metaphor (Rice, 2003: 158). To summarise very briefly here, this concept assumes that 'time and place are foundational for human existence, and by extension, musical experience' (ibid: 159), and that 'to account for specifically musical experience we need a third dimension…[which] consists of metaphors that make claims

about the nature of music and bring music closer to other domains of human existence' (ibid: 159). These metaphors are beliefs that 'become the basis for discourses about music, musical behaviours (including all aspects of creativity, reception, performance, and institutionalization), and strategies for deploying these beliefs and behaviours in self-interested ways' (ibid: 163). This clearly resonates with the research aims of my own project which seeks to locate the individual experiences and behaviours of conservatoire musicians within the broader institutional context, honing in on their specific practices. The aim of Rice's three-dimensional ethnomusicological approach is to answer questions related to and responding to our understanding that music making today occurs in a complex, mobile, dynamic world (ibid: 151, and is described by Rice, thus:

> These metaphors ideologically ground the behavioural, interpretive, and discursive strategies that put those claims into practice. Using such a three-dimensional model as a heuristic position or lens through which to view musical experience from different subject positions and to follow the life histories of individuals encountering the social in an ever-lengthening and often changing dimension from the local to the global (and back again), we should be able to ask and answer [these] kinds of questions. (Rice, 2003: 159)

Conservatoires represent the field in which my ethnographic research is situated. There are presently eight widely acknowledged music conservatoires in the UK, these are: Royal College of Music (RCM), Royal Academy of Music (RAM), Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD), Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (TLCMD - NB. all of these four institutions are located in London), Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM, in Manchester), Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS), Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC) and Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD). The Leeds College of Music and London College of Music may also be described as conservatoires given their focus on musical training with an emphasis on performance. However, these will not be referred to in my own research as it is widely assumed (though not entirely correct) that these two institutions focus predominantly on popular music and not Western Classical (which has traditionally been the remit of the other eight conservatoires). In addition, none of the alumni spoken to in conducting my research have attended these two establishments and so they are not included in my study. Furthermore, I decided to focus only on conservatoires in England and Wales, thereby excluding the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, for two reasons. Firstly, and primarily, because no alumni interviewed happened to have attended here (this was coincidence and not pre-planned). Secondly, neither do I

have any autoethnographic experience[11] of the Scottish conservatoire system, therefore, in absence of both empirical data and personal knowledge, I decided that I could not rightly make research arguments and subsequent institutional recommendations for an establishment of which I have no representation. When referring generally to 'conservatoires' in this thesis therefore, I infer the seven English and Welsh institutions grouped together in the above list.

My motivations for wanting to address the issues presented and how my personal experiences have resulted in my being placed both professionally and socially amongst those subjects who form the core of my research are outlined here. Over the course of the eight years undertaking this research, I have been and still am, a professional freelance instrumentalist and currently teach at higher education institutions including one conservatoire, on a part-time basis. My existing positions in the field have allowed for research to be conducted not only in formal interview settings, but also through informal discussions amongst peers and colleagues, as well as observation as a pre-existing member of the environment and group of people in question. Discussion of my position in connection to my research is especially relevant, given my background and current working commitments, in that I inevitably bring a level of experience and preliminary insight to this research (the pros and cons of which are reflected upon in chapter 6, in section 6.5). Furthermore, this study began with an interest in looking at the structural issues surrounding my own conservatoire experience. Therefore, I have taken the decision to share my own testimony in chapter 6 of this thesis, given that I too am a conservatoire alumna and a subsequent conservatoire staff employee. As with the individuals whose voices I have heard in conducting this research, I too have a relevant personal account to share in regards to my experiences of conservatoire practices, particularly in relation to my social background and notions of self-identity.

This thesis, therefore, employs a qualitative, ethnographic methodology with an added self-reflexive layer through applying the principles of Leon Anderson's (2006) analytic autoethnographic framework. That said, I emphasise that the alumni testimonies collected for this study are the dominant voices, and my own critical self-reflection is presented solely in the autoethnographic sixth chapter.

[11] Autoethnography as method is discussed in detail in chapter 6. Briefly summarised here, for context, it is a methodological approach which presents critical analysis of the researcher's personal testimony in order to understand particular cultural and social experiences.

0.2.2 Alumni attitudes

The conservatoire alumni with whom I shared my research endeavours (whether through informal conversation or interview) were all, without fail, genuinely interested in my research concerns and they had immediate thoughts to share in response to initial discussions on the broader subject matter. Furthermore, all of the alumni who provided testimonies put themselves forward to be interviewed more formally without needing any persuasion. The strength of opinions held on the issues addressed in this thesis was remarkable. The verve with which the alumni have spoken strongly suggests that the subject of musicians' experience of conservatoire practices and the knock-on effect this has had on them as professionals in the field, is a dynamic and heated one. It is apparent that they wish their voices to be heard in relation to the discussion points raised here, and that they agree these are indeed relevant and important considerations in the training of young musicians. In addition, each person with whom I spoke confirmed that attendance at a conservatoire is not only an educational process, but a complex, multi-layered experience of social, cultural and embodied learning practices. Collectively, their testimonies confirm that the time spent studying at a conservatoire has the potential to directly effect a young musician's sense of self-identity and their identity as a musician, both in and beyond the conservatoire. This reflection on my methods will show that a focus on individuals within the conservatoire community, and their personal accounts, is vital in order to successfully reflect both the fragmentation and the shared experiences of those within the same cultural group, for a greater understanding of the effect of institutional practices.

0.2.3 A methodological focus on the individual

The voice of the individual musician appears in the ethnographic literary field. The articles 'Toward an Ethnomusicology of the Individual, or Biographical Writing in Ethnomusicology' by Stock (2001) and 'The Individual in Musical Ethnography' by Ruskin & Rice (2012) provide overviews of the focus on the individual musician within the ethnomusicology field over the past forty years. As I attempt to address questions as to why a focus on the accounts of individuals is important in reflecting my own research concerns regarding the practices of an institution, these articles by Stock (2001) and Ruskin & Rice (2012) help to provide an insightful response. There is much ethnographic literature which has a focus on the individual, and both Stock (2001) and Ruskin & Rice (2012) acknowledge an increase in the amount of publications in this vein over the time period. They suggest potential reasons for the growth; Ruskin and Rice (2012) state that there are at least four

motivational factors pulling ethnomusicologists towards the study of individuals[12] of which it is their first and fourth points which are of relevance here: 'first, when conducting fieldwork, they [ethnomusicologists] work with and rely on individual musicians who are sometimes – but not always – among the most exceptional individuals in a given musical community...fourth, interventions in theory and method over the last quarter century have led ethnomusicologists to highlight individual agency and difference, and acknowledge their own roles in the musical communities they study.' (Ruskin and Rice, 2012: 299).

My research resonates largely with both of these 'motivational pulls' to focus on the individual. To address the latter point first, I am conscious of my own position within the musical community, and seek to acknowledge the similarities and differences in musician's individual experiences (including my own) within the musical communities of conservatoire institutions. My motivation is to help improve understanding of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between these institutions and their students, and the short- and long-term effects this relationship can or may have on both parties. In many ways this also resonates with Ruskin and Rice's initial point of exceptionality, in that the students of a conservatoire are all arguably deemed to be remarkable, or have the potential to become so, in their being invited to study at such a specialist institution in the first place. It is the culture of the specialist, elitist nature of the conservatoire, and how their practices effect these exceptional young musicians, which is at the very core of my research. However, this is tempered in that these students are within a community of likewise individuals, and so their 'exceptional individual' status might not be as evident and has the potential also to be taken for granted (by student, institution and myself as researcher also).

Ruskin and Rice (2012: 308) state that individuals within a shared social or cultural community experience difference, i.e. they do not always share the same experiences in the same way. An approach in registering such fragmentation in shared experiences, is, they propose, 'to claim that culture is defined as much by contestation between and among people operating from different social positions such as age, class, occupation, education, and urban-versus-rural residence as it is by shared understandings and practices.' My research takes this premise as its starting point from which critical reflection is given. For, by also taking into account how students' social backgrounds may also consciously/sub-consciously impact their institutional experience, I acknowledge that 'societies are not happily homogenous but fragmented along lines of gender, social class,

[12] These four factors presented by Ruskin and Rice (2012: 299) resonate entirely with the three motivational points as suggested by Stock (2001: 10).

and ethnicity, and that, as a result, cultural ideas and expressions will be similarly fragmented.' In so adopting this vantage point from the outset, I am also fully in line with the social and cultural theory frameworks of Hall (1990) and Bourdieu (1979, 1989), which are discussed in chapter 1 that follows.

Therefore, my research reflects the similarities and differences of individuals' experiences of conservatoire practices and correlations between accounts, accepting that no two accounts will be the same for people will likely not process and make sense of shared experiences in the same way, nor experience identical emotions. By acknowledging that cultural and social factors can serve to both bond and fragment members of shared communities, I hope that students may be supported as needed for a more positive, 'successful' conservatoire experience and that the ongoing formation of their identity (which is vital for the self-confidence and belief needed in moving into and through the profession thereafter), is more carefully and informedly nurtured. In order to address these issues, a focus on the personal experiences of individuals who have been through the 'same' shared experiences, and an analysis of their discourse, is the most effective approach for a true understanding.

0.2.4 The fieldwork process

Not only must my methodological approach allow me to address my key research concerns (regarding institutional practices) directly, but it must also address a number of vital questions with which the researcher is faced. Key issues in the presentation and reflection of the fieldwork process and in the documentation of subsequent results include: to what extent and in what way does the researcher discuss their relationship to the research subjects? What, if any, are the personal motivations for addressing these research issues? Does the researcher share their thought processes which occur during field work? How does the researcher potentially influence the interviewee and should/how might this be acknowledged in the written documentation thereafter? How do I successfully apply ethical procedures to protect the privacy and anonymity of my interview subjects?

Ethnographers have stressed the contingency of knowledge, a tendency that encourages the documentation of individual perspectives and thus also (auto)biographical writing. At their best, such works are deeply memorable, making a virtue of their literary fictiveness.' Given that the motivations to conduct this research stem from my own personal conservatoire experience and that I wish my own account to be considered alongside those interviewed, there is then an inevitable autobiographical strain to my

research and in its presentation (though I reiterate once again that the collected accounts of my interviewed alumni are the main focus of this study).

Lofland and Lofland (1995) provide a useful summary of the three main tasks associated with undertaking research. Their advice regarding the analysing of social settings is applicable. They group the undertaking of field study research into three general overarching tasks (1995: 1). Though these appear to be numbered chronologically they acknowledge that these three elements rarely occur in a linear fashion and in reality, most often overlap and interweave:

1. *Gathering* – collection or assembling data;
2. *Focusing* – asking social scientific questions about these data; and
3. *Analyzing* – developing and presenting a social science analysis of the data (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 1. Italics in original)

The 'gathering' element of my research, i.e. the actual data collection for this thesis, was undertaken in two ways, firstly and predominantly through semi-structured interviews and secondary to this, informal discussions. In establishing a methodology that would both resonate with my research aims, was logistically feasible and would be most likely to provide original insights that could most effectively address my research aims and thereafter contribute to the academic field, I first began but later discounted a handful of approaches, which I share here for interest. At first, my intention had been to collect data from both alumni and current conservatoire students in a two-pronged approach. Approximately three/four years into this eight year project, I contacted all conservatoires in England and Wales to determine if they would be interested in meeting with me in person to discuss the themes of my research, and also to enquire whether they would consider circulating an online questionnaire (which had been passed by the Conservatoires UK[13] Ethics Committee) to their students. However, my attempts to reach out to these collective institutions were met with an array of responses, ranging from a resounding no (from one institution), no response (from two institutions), tentative interest (also from two conservatoires), to an enthusiastic 'yes' (from two also). Upon further reflection on my aims, and the existing literary field, and that there already exist multiple studies undertaken within a (singular) conservatoire setting which look at current student

[13] Conservatoires UK. Accessed 5th June 2016. http://www.conservatoiresuk.ac.uk
The CUK REC Certificate of Ethical Approval for this initial field work intention (regarding the circulation of an online questionnaire to current conservatoire students) was issued to me on 10th June 2016, via personal email communication with Dr Liliana Araujo of CUK.

discourse, I subsequently decided that the data-rich alumni demographic would become my sole research focus.

Thereafter, there were naturally difficulties in locating conservatoire alumni who did not follow a career in music, but steps were taken to attempt to appeal to a wide range of alumni, which included:

- Asking my acquaintances/peers whether they were in touch with any of their conservatoire contemporaries who they are aware did not enter the profession
- Meeting and conversing with conservatoire staff in charge of alumni relations for their thoughts (and to discuss the nature of details kept by institutions regarding career paths upon graduation)
- Publishing appeals in a conservatoire alumni magazine (RCM)
- Through alumni reunions whereby guests were invited to submit their contact details for further discussion (RCM)
- Making use of online social networking tools such as Facebook

The decision was eventually taken, however, to only interview those conservatoire alumni who subsequently work within the music profession specifically those who specialise as performers. This decision to only speak to those who have followed a career in music was made for a number of reasons: given that the aim of conservatoires is to prepare their students for a successful career in music thereafter, I wish to know from those who have followed this path how their conservatoire experience effected them and related to their subsequent career choices, success or failures thereafter. In addition, to what extent their conservatoire experience effected and/or impacted on their sense of 'self' (i.e. their identity, notions of self-confidence, etc) and conception of themselves as a musician and their aspirations in the short- or long-term as they navigate the professional field.

Though I initially aimed to sample a larger data set, I discovered that a more modest-sized sample, with volunteers procured via word of mouth, would work best for me both in terms of my position as researcher and professional in the field, and my research aims. Of the twenty alumni interviewed, three can be categorised as existing friends, twelve were professional acquaintances and five were unknown to me prior to undertaking this study. There are strengths and potential flaws with 'insider' access and only in the final stages of the research process, when I was really able to reflect holistically, was I able to fully appreciate that different constituents may well have provided different results, on which I reflect in my thesis conclusions (chapter 7). Of a wide age range, and spanning

twenty-eight years of attendance dates, collectively the alumni who took part in the interview process represent a key period of change for conservatoires.

0.2.5 Conducting the alumni interviews

I was particularly mindful with those alumni who were an existing friend/professional colleague/acquaintance to adopt the appropriate interview tone and level of formality with which they would feel most at ease and appreciative. This was especially important to me on two levels, firstly, I envisaged that they would be more likely to 'open up' and provide more in-depth, reflexive accounts in their responses to my questions should I not suddenly change the dynamics of our existing relationship. Secondly, I was also conscious that with informants who were professional colleagues and with whom it was highly likely I would work alongside for years to come, I did not want to detrimentally affect our ongoing professional relationship by judging the formalities and tone of the occasion incorrectly and thereby causing unnecessary tension or mistrust.

The interviews took place at venues of mutual agreement (i.e. public coffee shops or their respective homes) where it was felt the informal atmosphere would help the interviewee to feel relaxed and less self-conscious and therefore more willing to talk freely and openly. With the permission of each of the individuals, interviews were recorded using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder (model VN-732PC) and were transcribed verbatim after the event. For ethical purposes, interview subjects were given a document (passed by Royal Holloway University ethics committee) which they were required to sign before the interviews could take place. This provided an outline of the research aims and an ethical commitment regarding how their information would be used. That is, they would remain anonymous research participants in my written thesis and identifying information would be excluded. This document also stressed that they could get in touch and rescind their account at any time, if they so wished. In this vein, I ensured that all interview subjects were given my contact details to take away with them.

In these interviews, I did not wish either the informant or myself to feel restricted to following a set list of questions in a specific order, for I did not feel that this would be the most advantageous approach in encouraging someone to discuss their personal experiences and feelings. I wished the subjects to feel able to lead their testimony in any direction they felt they wanted or needed to in order to express themselves fully. However, I was, though, also mindful that I had specific research areas which needed to be addressed. Therefore, I adopted a semi-structured interview approach (a methodology also favoured by Bourdieu) with four main areas of discussion that I wished to cover, which

reflected the main themes of this thesis, that is: social background, notions of 'talent', curriculum and health and wellbeing. These four themes would not always be discussed in as cut-and-dried a fashion as they appear listed here. Often, these themes were addressed respectively, and then referred or returned to as the interview discussion developed, either due to the natural route the conversation took, to my changing the subject once a particular discussion point had come to a natural end, or if the informant needed asking directly about a certain thing (i.e. they did not cover a certain point of their own accord). My alumni interview data was collected over a course of seven years, with the interview questions and general focus of the conversation reflecting inevitable change and progression in my research focus as I continued to hone in on my key aims. The semi-structured interview approach, therefore, allowed for an appropriate level of flexibility during this process in that these verbal exchanges had a welcome malleability. That said, the key interview questions which featured remained relatively unchanged over the course of the field work and are presented here:

- What is your educational and musical background?
- How and why did you choose to study at a conservatoire and subsequently choose the one you attended?
- Did you ever consciously think of, or were made aware of your social background?
- What class do you identify as?
- Did you feel like your peers came from a similar or different background to you?
- How did you financially support yourself throughout your conservatoire studies?
- What were your experiences regarding purchasing instruments or any other course-related necessities?
- Was 'talent' ever spoken of at the conservatoire?
- Who is the most influential/powerful figure during conservatoire studies: principal study teacher or head of department (the answer for both of these labels can be the same person, but does not have to be)?
- What are your reflections on the curriculum, e.g. the academic and performance modules you experienced?
- What was the most valued style of performance?
- Did anyone mention a portfolio career or freelancing?
- In retrospect, now that you are a professional in the field, do you feel that the conservatoire successfully trained you to be employable or is there anything that you now feel was missing from that training?
- What are your thoughts on the transition from conservatoire to profession?

- Was health and wellbeing a formal part of the curriculum when you attended the conservatoire?
- Do you remember being encouraged to think about the long-term importance of health and wellbeing for musicians?
- Did you know who to turn to for support if needed?
- How confident were you when you arrived at the conservatoire and how did this change throughout your studies?
- Did you feel you fitted in, socially?
- What are your general reflections of the conservatoire, i.e. pros and cons, did the experience live up to your expectations, what do you think these institutions do well and what could they do better?
- Are you proud to say you studied at [the name of their conservatoire]?

In the process of conducting these interviews, I was also simultaneously acting as a participant observer, taking note of body language and non-verbal reactions to the questions raised during the interview. However, I ultimately decided in the process of field study that these cues, as used in analyses such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, were not to be my chosen technique. I chose instead to only analyse the discourse, which was also the approach employed by Hall and Bourdieu in their own numerous, varied studies on culture, social status and people.

In my study, I also reference two specific instances of informal discussions in the field with other fellow alumni (i.e. not my interview subjects), that took place as I worked as a freelance professional performer with orchestras and musical theatre bands. In providing this context I hope to give an idea of the invaluable access to conservatoire alumni who are working professional musicians that my position has enabled. Though I only refer to two specific occasions in the data-heavy chapters that follow, I have been a part of or an observer to numerous informal conversations in relation to 'the conservatoire' (for it is a topic which arises naturally in conversations amongst professional musicians far more frequently than might be assumed).

During this research process, it became very clear in my interactions with my fellow musicians that they also wanted me to share some of my own experiences with them, so that there was a reciprocal emotional investment and a stronger bond of trust. I felt it was especially important that I respond to the wishes of my colleagues in this regard, given our ongoing professional relationships. This experience reinforces the appropriateness of qualitative ethnography as the prominent methodology in this research process, with

analytical autoethnography as secondary (due to my position in the field, relationship to the research questions and my own presence and reflections in the data gathering and analysing process). An analytical autoethnographic methodology is discussed in detail in chapter 6, but summarised in brief, this is a commitment to and an emphasis on critical analysis of the researcher's personal cultural and social experiences. As such, this approach strives to apply the same analytic rigour to the researcher's own testimony, as is applied to those ethnographic accounts collected specifically for the purpose of the respective research study.

My invaluable position as an existing member of the community under study and autoethnographer ensured a rich, in-depth insight into the social and cultural considerations at the heart of my research. For, as Lofland and Lofland (1995: 3) advise, 'the epistemological foundation of field studies is indeed the proposition that only through direct experience can one accurately know much about social life.'

0.2.6 Conclusion

This Introduction has provided a context for my research within existing debates on conservatoires. I have outlined the bibliographic foundation on which this thesis is grounded, and how this research contributes to a wider, global and longitudinal study of conservatoire cultures and practices. Therefore, I have demonstrated that my study is a timely research output that builds on current conservatoire research traditions. Additionally, I have noted that there is a lack of focus on conservatoire alumni as a data-rich group in existing research.

Moving forward, chapter 1 that follows this Introduction discusses the theoretical lens applied to my study. I reflect on the concepts of Hall and Bourdieu and show how these can be brought into dialogue with each other. I present a new conceptual framework which incorporates these ideas and reflects how they are connected, calling this a 'conversational model'. In so doing, I demonstrate how and why this model will illuminate my empirical data. The chapters that follow thereafter bring the ethnographic alumni interview discourse to the fore. Chapter 2 thus introduces the alumni and presents an in-depth discussion of their social backgrounds. In this chapter, I look at social dimensions of pedagogy and learning, social concerns in terms of social status and class, and how social position in wider society determines how you experience educational practices. My research illustrates that there are social hierarchies within institutions, which impact on students' embodied experiences of learning**.** Additionally, I outline how alumni articulate a

perceived 'them and us' divide amongst their peers when they arrive at the conservatoire, which relates to educational and familial backgrounds.

Chapter 3, notions of 'talent', discusses how this concept is understood and expressed by those within the conservatoire setting. I build on existing findings on hierarchies and meritocracy to further debate dynamics of power, the role of the head of department and the principal study teacher. In reflecting on these practices, I also look at the direct impact these have on alumni's notions of identity, both in the short and long term. In chapter 4, I explore issues of pedagogical practice within the context of curriculum. Particularly, regarding the traditional ethos of the conservatoire (solo performance training, the dominance of the traditional Western Classical canon) versus the moral obligations for students to be as employable as possible, within an ever changing and more challenging professional field, and with drastically rising tuition fees and an increasingly unstable job market. This is presented alongside alumni debates on the need for conservatoires to adapt their teaching staff cohort to reflect a greater variety of performance experience for mentorship.

Through my empirical data, I show that conservatoires are shaped by social concern, and that these directly impact students. Specifically, on their conceptions of 'self' and of their ability as a musician, both in the short and long term. Therefore, chapter 5 discusses the mental and physical health and wellbeing of conservatoire students, considered through the lens of alumni. A relatively new research field, the focus on health and wellbeing within the conservatoire setting has enjoyed a notable growth in the past two decades in particular. However, there is limited study undertaken within this context which looks at the transitional gap between the two key stages of a musicians' life, i.e. between that of a conservatoire student in full time education and a full-time professional musician. This chapter in part hones in on this research concern to reflect on alumni discourse regarding the impact on this transition on their health and wellbeing.

Following this, and given my emphasis on reflexivity (thus resonating with Hall and Bourdieu), in chapter 6 I critically reflect on my own experiences as a conservatoire alumna and subsequent music professional, positioning my account in relation to those shared by my interview subjects. In so doing, I apply my dual Hall-Bourdieu framework to my own experiences of conservatoire culture and practices and present a further developed version of my conversational model, from an autoethnographic, experiential, perspective. I end this chapter with a self-reflection on the research process, how this has effected my initial research motivations and concerns from which this study emenated, and how my present role as conservatoire educator has and continues to be informed by this process.

My conclusions chapter brings the threads of this study together to reflect on the implications and recommendations of my findings, to show that contemporary conservatoires are critically reflecting on their practices and engaging in wider pedagogic and cultural debates regarding their purpose. However, I discuss how my cultural and class-based discourse analysis of the alumni testimonies has shown that despite outwardly responding to calls for change in this regard, they have longitudinally been exceptionally slow or in some instances, have failed, to modify their practices to the degree required. Vitally, my data also shows that conservatoire practices and cultures underestimate the importance of student individuality and autonomy in their experiences, and the impact their practices can have on musician's identity in the longer term, beyond the years of institutional study. I also discuss limitations of study and areas for future research which would further engage with the issues presented in this thesis.

CHAPTER 1

APPLYING A THEORETICAL LENS: A CONVERSATIONAL MODEL

This chapter presents and outlines a new conceptual model inspired by Hall's 'Circuit of Culture' (1997b: 1). In this circuit, Hall clearly shows the relevance and reciprocal relationship of individual cultural elements and demonstrates how these are connected to reflect a broader, more encompassing understanding of culture. I have applied this approach to the theoretical application of my study, that is, how individual concepts can be connected to reflect the bigger picture of an overarching issue. In so doing, I have constructed a new conceptual model that combines the key concepts of Hall and Bourdieu, which allows for both a cultural and class-based analysis and is thus applied to the ethnographic data in the chapters that proceed this.

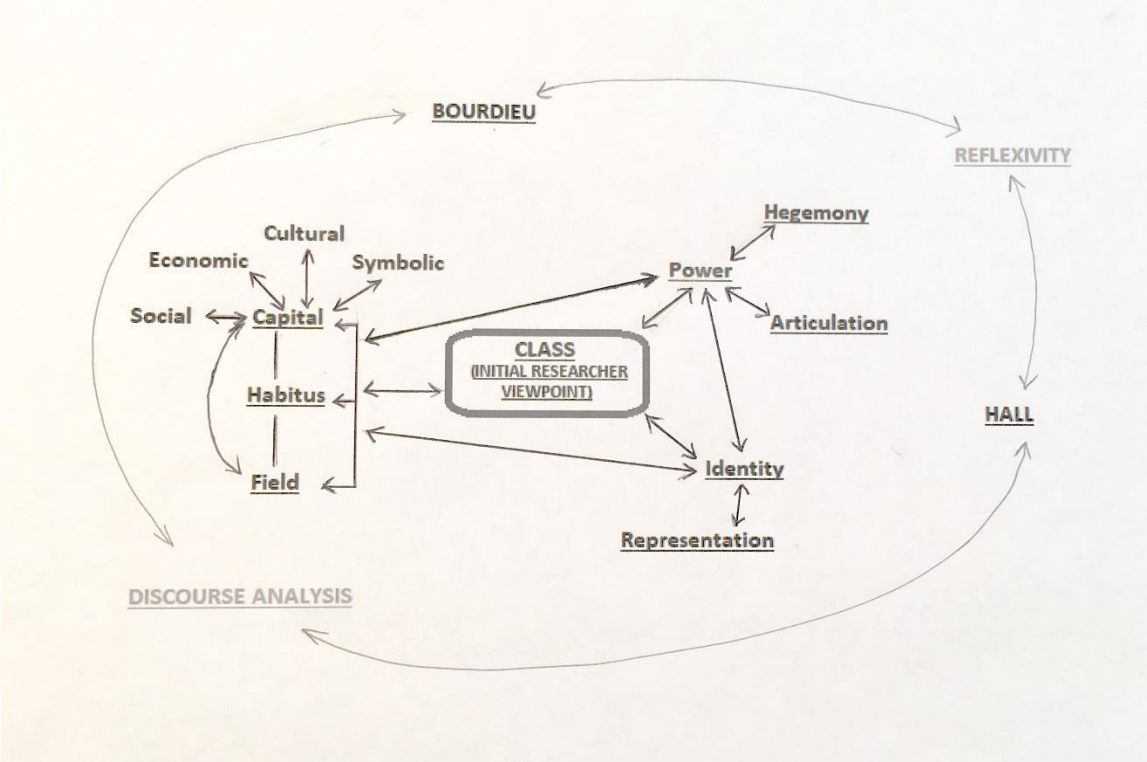
These two thinkers can be brought into conversation with each other on multiple issues. For example, both figures were concerned with access to culture in relation to issues of class and shared a key interest in the dynamics of power regarding cyclical, reproductive practices. In so doing, they also linked these concepts of class and power to notions of identity. An emphasis on representation through discourse and reflexivity is also a meeting point of both thinkers.

Therefore, I begin this chapter with an introduction to my new conceptual framework, which combines these meeting points of Hall and Bourdieu, and which I call a 'conversational model'. To present this new model and deconstruct for detailed discussion, I dissect the four main themes on which these two figures intersect and show how their respective conceptual thinking can be brought together for my study. The first of these is class, which is the central pillar around which the work of both figures circulates. Predominantly, in this section (1.1), I outline Bourdieu's tripartite framework of capital, habitus and field, which can be applied to social and cultural settings to show how practices are reproduced to maintain hierarchical structures. Secondly, I look at the notion of identity, specifically Hall's concept of identity (1990) and explain how this is the concept on which my ethnographic analysis is built.

The third theme on which the two thinkers are linked is that of representation through discourse, and how power dynamics operate. In this discussion, I consider Hall's concepts of hegemony and articulation and why these are relevant to the critical analysis of my ethnographic data. The fourth theme presented in this chapter is discussion on the importance of reflexivity, of which both Hall and Bourdieu were proponents, and which is a central focus of this thesis. I conclude this chapter with a reflection on how these four

thematic threads can be connected, as demonstrated in my conversational model, to analyse institutional practice, social concerns and individual identity, within the cultural and pedagogical setting of the conservatoire.

Diagram 1: Hall and Bourdieu: A conversational model



The conversational model above is representational of how the theoretical ideas of Hall and Bourdieu can be brought together for both a social and class-based analysis of my ethnographic data. On this framework, I display the names of Hall and Bourdieu nearest to those concepts with which they are most closely associated, and clearly show that discourse analysis and reflexivity are the key elements which encompass both of their work.

This conversational model is entitled thus given that it is representative of dialogue on multiple layers. It is not only reflective of conversation between the ideas of Hall and Bourdieu, but also one between this framework and my alumni. For, as I tie this model to the insights from the alumni discourse throughout the thesis, the empirical data and this conceptual framework are thus both illuminated. As such, dialogue between the two is mutually enlightening. In presenting my own theoretical road map in this chapter, I am also acknowledging that this proceeds from my own specific perspective as an educator, professional performer and conservatoire alumna. This conceptual conversation is, therefore, thus mediated through and by my own experience and so I have thereby visibly

and literally placed myself on and in this model. I have appropriately positioned myself in the central box along with "class" given that this issue was my starting point at the outset of developing this study and is therefore the point from which dialogue with my research concerns began.

During the course of the research process, I came to the work of Hall and Bourdieu separately, exploring their concepts and frameworks respectively, before determining that a common thread could be drawn between the concepts which most closely resonate with my research. This model, therefore, reflects how lines of connection can be drawn between these concepts and how they all relate to class, as the larger issue around which they all pivot. Collectively, these concepts all resonate with my study, which considers social background, i.e. class, as a running theme throughout the ethnography and, specifically, how this is connected to alumni's individual experiences of the broader cultural system that is the conservatoire. This conversational model, therefore, is particularly useful for my research because in bringing these concepts together in this way, it allows for an analysis within a cultural, pedagogical setting that focuses on social background and identity of the individual, whilst also looking at institutional practices and cultures at a broader level. Specifically, the hierarchies and dynamics of power that operate, which this study will show, effect this notion of individual identity. This model is also useful because it is encapsulated by reflexivity (which is vital for me as researcher, particularly given my existing position amongst the community under study) and discourse analysis (which is the most appropriate method of critical analysis for this study). To discuss this framework in more detail, I now will look at the different dimensions of my conversational model in more detail and explain how each concept is rooted in the critical thinking of Hall and Bourdieu.

1.1 Class

One of Bourdieu's key concepts central to his work is that of habitus, which concerns the way that within social and cultural spheres, and in the differing social classes, certain behaviours, dispositions and ideas exist and perpetuate through subconscious inculcation. As Bourdieu (1989: 3) explains, 'Habitus is thus at the basis of strategies of reproduction that tend to maintain separations, distances, and relations of ordering, hence concurring in practice (although not consciously or deliberately) in reproducing the entire system of differences constitutive of the social order.' Karl Maton (2008: 53) offers a helpful reflection of this concept, in that '*Habitus* [italics in original] links the social and the individual because the experiences in one's life course may be unique in their particular

contents, but are shared in terms of their *structure* [italics in original] with others of the same social class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, occupation, nationality, region and so forth.'

Two distinct phases of habitus can be attributed – the primary habitus describes the family environment/structure, whilst the secondary habitus is located within the educational setting of the school (Reed-Danahay, 2005: 49-50). Therefore, habitus is an exposure to a socio-cultural environment, one that is not fixed but is forever transforming and fluctuating to a greater or lesser degree, and is connected to social and cultural capital. Capital concerns cultural and social exchange, exposure to and the accumulation of knowledge and/or accomplishment(s) in these areas, with four categories: cultural capital (in the conservatoire context this would equate to musical knowledge and exposure), social capital (positions and relationships within the social network of the institution), economic capital (personal finances) and symbolic capital (things that bring honour or prestige, e.g. winning a competition, being selected to represent the conservatoire in an external performance or learning with a teacher of high esteem). Capital and habitus, therefore, are related concepts which must be understood respectively and in relation to each other in order to apply Bourdieu's framework effectively.

Bourdieu believed that habitus determines one's trajectory thereafter, however the extent to which the individual makes use of the social and cultural capital they have accrued, and their willingness and ability to follow up on the opportunities one is offered in life, is dependent upon the individual. Reed-Danahay (2005) whose book 'Locating Bourdieu' attempts to position Bourdieu within ethnographic and autobiographic frameworks, suggests that Bourdieu was an example of his own theory, for 'he was a product of his habitus, took advantage of certain opportunities that crossed his path, and thus made the most of his inherited dispositions in order to succeed in academic life...' (2005: 35). In relation to my study, these key concepts of habitus and capital provide an illuminating foundation from which I can better position and critically analyse my own research findings. Exploring the notion of the conservatoire as a habitus (i.e. as a place of higher education) and relating this to student's pre-existing experiences of habitus (i.e. the family unit, school pre-higher education) serves to better understand the relation and impact of their social backgrounds on their time at the institution. The 'conservatoire as habitus' is also a framework from which issues such as traditionalism, reproduction and hierarchy can be determined within these establishments.

The concept of education featured heavily in Bourdieu's work and he conceived that as the secondary habitus, the school proceeds to reproduce and inculcate class factions and perpetuates the dominance of the dominant class. For those students that

have acquired a high degree of cultural capital through their primary habitus of the home, amongst their family, there is an advantage and they are therefore privileged. This concept has also been extended to higher education institutions including conservatoires (Davies, 2002 and Perkins, 2011, 2013). In Bourdieu's works 'Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture' (1977) and 'The Inheritors: French Students and their Relation to Culture' (1979), he focuses on the act of reproduction and self-preservation which occurs within these dominant classes to maintain their position and which therefore creates a cyclical effect, and preserves the social position of the respective social classes. Bourdieu concluded therefore that those who would benefit most from the (French) education system were those with a higher level of cultural capital. He argued that these institutions and their alumni use their power to perpetuate class distinctions through their practices, in their aim to maintain elite standards and tradition (Reed-Danahay, 2005: 50).

In particular, the concept of 'talent' within the conservatoire has been explored by researchers including Kingsbury (1988), Davies (2002) and Perkins (2011), with both Davies and Perkins using Bourdieu's theoretical framework in the analysis of their findings. Confirming Bourdieu's theories of existing hierarchies within educational settings, Perkins (2011), in her study of learning cultures of one UK conservatoire using Bourdieu's constructionist theories, uses his 'three pillars' of capital, habitus and field, and confirms the presumption that 'talent' is an assumed commodity within the conservatoire (2011: 113) and that hierarchies are an assumed part of conservatoire life (2011: 195). Davies (2002), whose thesis is the critical discourse analysis of 'Conceptions of 'Talent' in Official and Student Discourses within a Music Conservatoire', draws upon poststructuralist and feminist critiques of essentialism in parallel with Bourdieu's findings. She agrees with his overarching theories of class, taste and meritocracy in that conservatoires perpetuate hierarchical value systems that most benefit the middle class, to the detriment of the working class (Davies, 2002: 232-235).

Acknowledging and building on these insights from Davies (2002) and Perkins (2011), who employ the concepts of Bourdieu to discuss hierarchical systems within conservatoires, I apply the lens of Hall to my empirical data. Whilst for Bourdieu, class is the central concern regarding the construction of social and cultural practices and processes, for Hall it is also hugely important, but an issue to be treated with care, to avoid falling into essentialist tendencies. He considered that too heavy a focus on class would neglect or distract from the question of how class intersects with race and gender, and that it would encourage a focus on unity (e.g. shared similarities), rather than difference (Davies H., 2004: 177). The notion of difference is something of great importance in Hall's work,

specifically, he considers how difference (cultural, racial, class, gender) is represented through practices and the discourses employed by people and places (e.g. society, media, institutions). In doing so, he reflects how people and places context, stereotype and/or encourage difference.[14]

In bringing together the thinking of Hall and Bourdieu, I therefore apply Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field, and reproductive hierarchical practices within educational institutions to my analysis of the alumni discourse, but I am consciously reflective in my application of class to heed Hall's essentialist warning. In addition, my work places particular emphasis on individual's experiences of difference, also resonating with Hall's focus.

1.2 Identity

In connection with their personal trajectories and subsequent research interests of access and acceptance, both Hall and Bourdieu experienced questions of belonging and strangeness/familiarity – i.e. identity - which informed their research pathways. The subject of identity is complex, with Hall stating 'there has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of 'identity', at the same moment as it has been subjected to a searching critique.' (Hall and du Gay, 1996: 1). It is a concept with which Hall had a lifelong academic engagement, and he determined that identity formation largely centres around class, race and gender intersections, and are politically, socially and culturally constructed. I begin this section with a discussion of culture and identity, given that the conservatoire is a both an educational *and* cultural field. I follow this by bringing Hall and Bourdieu into conversation regarding their understanding of the effects of class on identity, before reflecting on how I will apply this understanding to my own study.

In considering identity within the cultural habitus of the conservatoire, it is helpful here to deconstruct the term 'cultural identity' as found in the theoretical literature, for it is one which, as Hall reflects in his many writings, has the potential for multiple (mis-)interpretations. In order to do so, I must first take a small step backwards to look at the broader notion of 'culture' and the position of the Centre for Cultural Studies, from which the academic discipline was born, before moving on to the understanding of 'cultural identity' as presented by Hall and applied to my data analysis in the chapters that follow. As Hall makes abundantly clear, 'culture' is one of the most complicated notions for society to articulate, and to explore this complexity in depth is not the purpose of this thesis.

[14] Hall (1997: 225)

Therefore, I acknowledge that I am providing an extremely abbreviated discussion of the above terms here, in line with Hall's approach, for context.

Historically, 'culture' is viewed as 'the sum of the great ideas' (Hall, 1997b: 2), found in the high arts of society. Expanding this idea, modern interpretations of the term would be more widely encompassing to also include popular entertainment and activities. 'In more recent years, and in a more 'social science' context, the word 'culture' is used to refer to whatever is distinctive about the 'way of life' of a people, community, nation or social group…Alternatively, the word can be used to describe the 'shared values' of a group or society' Hall (1997b :2) explains, and continues: 'Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of *things* [italics in original] – novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics – as a process, a set of *practices* [italics in original]…Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways' (Hall, 1997b :2).

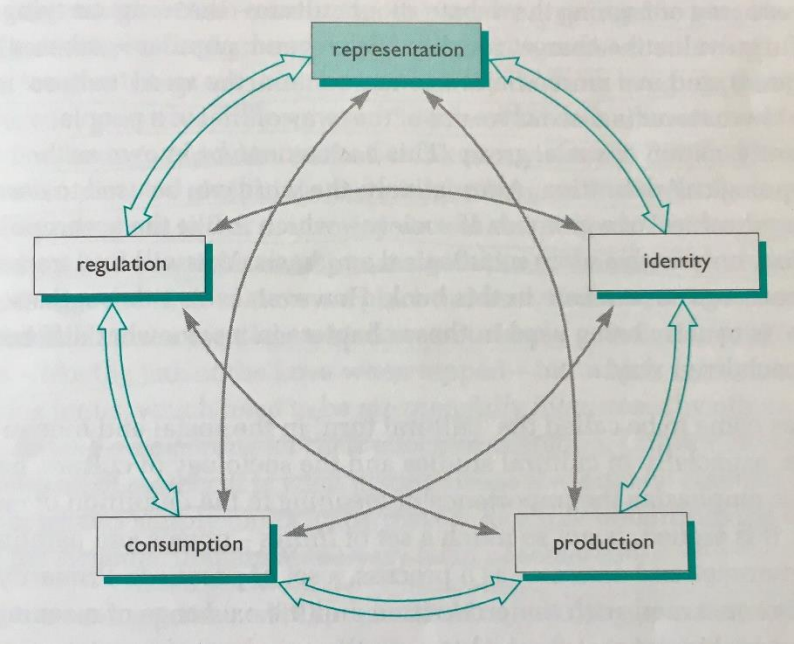
The 'Centre for Cultural Studies'[15], of which Hall is acknowledged as a founding member alongside Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, therefore, was a space where interdisciplinary academics came together with the common aim of understanding these cultural processes and practices (as in this latter understanding, above) in their many forms within societal settings. In part, the verve to explore this new disciplinary field (the centre was founded in 1964) was a personal response from its founders, for 'the British university system was, to put it mildly, elitist and classist, in terms of its student population and in its isolation, aestheticization, and limitation of culture to the field of the arts. Many of the influential early figures in cultural studies were working class or immigrant students attending university on scholarship, who were driven to look for other accounts of culture that both expanded its referent and took it more seriously.'[16] The aim of cultural studies is to help understand the realities of relations, processes, practices, values, behaviours and struggles within broader society and how these are reproduced, aims which are shared in this thesis as I look at the conservatoire habitus. Cultural studies is therefore firmly linked to questions of subject positioning and the production and dynamics of power, issues which are viewed through the lenses of race, class and gender, amongst others (this also falls in line with Bourdieu's research concerns). Hall suggests that the study of culture is

[15] University of Birmingham. "About CCS: History and Project." Accessed 2nd May 2019. https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/about.aspx

[16] Encyclopedia.Com. "Cultural Studies." Accessed 3rd May 2019. https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/other-religious-beliefs-and-general-terms/miscellaneous-religion/cultural-studies

constructed of five key, interlocking elements, which he collectively entitles 'The Circuit of Culture' and it is this diagrammatic model which has inspired my own hybrid conversational model:

Diagram 2: 'Circuit of Culture' (Hall, 1997b: 1)



As stated in the introduction to this chapter, this study focuses on two of these diagrammatic elements: representation and identity. In his essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' (1990), Hall opens a dialogue on representation and identity. Specifically, he takes as his focal point here the 'new cinema of the Caribbean' and the question of who the emergent subject is at the centre of this new media, for 'identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think' (1990: 222). The concept of identity that he presents in this essay however, transcends beyond this particular subject matter and can be applied to other contexts; it is one of the key conceptual foundations on which this thesis is positioned.

Here, Hall outlines two identity concepts that relate to the way in which identity is conceived and perceived, and which relate to the emphasis that is placed on historical, present and future positioning of the individual within cultural society, and/or their cultural community. The first of these identity concepts is defined as a focus on one's identity as predominantly rooted to a single shared ancestral culture or history, that imposes a notion of a collective 'one true self'. Hall says:

> Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (Hall, 1990: 223)
>
> There is, however, a second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* [italics in original] which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'…….Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, 1990: 225)

It is this second understanding of cultural identity on which this study is framed, that conservatoire students share many points of difference as well as similarity, and are in an ongoing process of 'becoming'[17], developing and transforming their sense of identity. That this is directly affected – to a greater or lesser degree, in the long and short term, consciously or subconsciously – by institutional practices, or as in Hall's words above, by the histories (traditions), cultures and powers of these institutions. The alumni narratives of this thesis also present points of reflection on questions of identity beyond the walls of the institution, into the professional field thereafter as they reflect in retrospect on their continuing process of 'becoming'. Thus, resonating with Hall's emphasis on past, present *and* future identity formation, as shown in his words above. In doing so, I also build on the work of Bull (2018: 88) whose research showed that 'young people's identities were formed before entering and during higher education'. I add to her findings by demonstrating that young musician's identities continue to form after this, as they enter the profession and are, to a greater or lesser degree (depending on the individual) shaped by conservatoire practices.

Identity and representation were major elements of Hall's work, whilst Bourdieu's focus on class distinctions and cultural taste also meant that he too considered identity construction. His approach resonates with Hall's theory of 'becoming', above, in that he believed identities are not absolutely fixed or entirely pre-determined by class, race and

[17] Throughout the thesis I will frequently refer to Hall's second concept of identity as outlined here, as his concept of 'becoming'.

gender. However, Bourdieu's emphasis on habitus as a key determiner in cultural and social experience means that he placed a greater emphasis on class as the dominant element in identity construct. This is in contrast to Hall, who, as reflected above, adopts a more balanced approach, concerned with how class, race and gender collectively intersect, stressing that all three are of equal importance when discussing identity. This is, therefore, a point on which Hall and Bourdieu, though concerned with the same overarching issue, do differ in their focus. Like Bourdieu, this study focuses predominantly on class, therefore this is the key lens through which my data is analysed, the main point of reference. However, I do not and cannot imply that this is the primary indicative factor in issues relating to identity formation and navigation, for this study does not include any analysis of race and ethnicity. In addition, Hall's work places emphasis on reflecting 'difference' and individuality within social and cultural settings, whilst the majority of Bourdieu's work looks at larger scale patterns of similarity and unity.

This study aligns with Hall's identity concept of 'becoming', building on the premise that though conservatoire students will share many points of similarity, there will be marked points of difference, in the way that identity forms and changes throughout the conservatoire experience and upon graduation, in response to its processes and practices.

Referring to Hall's concept of identity (1990), Grossman (1996) says 'within cultural studies, investigations of the constitutions and politics of identity are often predicted on a distinction, nicely articulated by Hall (1990), between two forms of struggle over – two models of the production of – identities.' He continues, 'the second model emphasizes the impossibility of such fully constructed, separate and distinct identities.' (Grossman, 1996: 89). As Hall states, 'This second view of cultural identity [of 'becoming', as opposed to 'being'] is much less familiar, and more unsettling. If identity does not proceed, in a straight, unbroken line, from some fixed origin, how are we to understand its formation?' (Hall, 1990: 226). Namely, Hall determines, this understanding can be found through looking at language, i.e. discourse analysis: the analysis of written or verbal communication with the assumption that meaning is constructed through language. Therein, through a focus on language in the discussion of identity, we arrive at the third point of conversation between Bourdieu and Hall, as outlined below.

1.3 Discourse analysis/representation/power

As shown in my conversational model, the work of both Hall and Bourdieu, respectively, is comprised of interconnected concepts, theories and frameworks which are relevant to the analysis of my alumni interviews. I reflect briefly here on Hall's notion of 'representation'

(one of his key contributions to the academic field) and how this is so closely tied to his concept of identity, use of discourse analysis and notions of power:

> What does representation have to do with 'culture': what is the connection between them? To put it simply, culture is about 'shared meanings'. Now, language is the privileged medium in which we 'make sense' of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged…language is central to meaning and culture and has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings…It operates as a *representational system* [italics in original]… language is one of the 'media' through which thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture. Representation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced. (Hall, 1997b: 1)

Here, Hall demonstrates that the way in which different social groups are presented is reflected through discourse, that language is a signifier through which meaning is constructed, through which thoughts are represented. Cultural studies largely acknowledges that there are three theories of representation, which Hall says should be used to answer the key questions 'where do meanings come from?' and 'how can we tell the "true" meaning of a word or image?' (Hall, 1997b: 24): The reflective (language simply reflects a meaning which is already out there in the world of objects, people and events), the intentional (language reflects only what the speaker/artist/writer personally intends to say), and the constructionist (meaning is constructed in and through language) (Hall, 1997b: 25). It is the latter of these three that has become a central theory of the discipline, and on which Hall predominantly focuses. So, through applying Hall's lens, we can say that 'just as people who belong to the same culture must share a broadly similar conceptual map, so they must also share the same way of interpreting the signs of a language, for only in this way can meanings be effectively exchanged between people' (Hall, 1997b: 19). Therefore, to relate this concept to my thesis, what meaning is constructed and implied in the narratives of the alumni? Do conservatoire students from different social backgrounds use/interpret/apply meaning to discourse differently? Thereby, is there miscommunication and misunderstanding between conservatoires and students from certain backgrounds? My study aims to address these concerns.

Through understanding Hall's 'Circuit of Culture' (Hall, 1997b: 1 and reproduced in this thesis as Diagram 2 on page 37) and these (simplified) representation concepts, we can connect to the concept of identity thus: one's identity is represented through the use of discourse, through which meaning is either intended, reflected or constructed. Hall's (and his co-editor du Gay's) own words are best used to elaborate on this summary, and are included in their entirety here for their elegance and relevance to the issues of identity that are discussed in this thesis:

> Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they oblige us to read not as an endless reiteration but as 'the changing same' (Gilroy, 1994): not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'. They arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines the discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the 'suturing into the story' through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmic field. Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity – an 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. (Hall and du Gay, 1996: 4)

My study, with personal testimonies at its core, therefore responds directly to Hall's call here, that identities are constructed within discourse (i.e. the discourse of my alumni narratives) and should be understood as produced in specific historical and institutional sites (conservatoires), with reflections on 'modalities of power' (through looking at the practices of conservatoires), 'difference and exclusion' (for I acknowledge that people will not interpret experience and meaning in exactly the same way; the use of qualitative methods ensures insight into individual experiences).

Like Hall, Bourdieu also believed that discourse was a representation of a wider structure that reflected power dynamics (amongst other things), and consistently used a discourse analysis methodology in his work. A focus on discourse can be considered alongside Hall's concept of articulation. It is the concept by which Hall looks at hierarchical formations and therefore, notions of power, within a social group. That is, within a specific social setting, this refers to an individual, group or institution whose practices (actions, rituals) and discourse (language) are employed (articulated) with the intention of forcing individuals with a set of common shared interests, into behaving as a homogenous group, despite their evident differences which are subsequently not acknowledged.

In the conservatoire setting, this could mean how institutional practices are intended to group students together, assuming their shared passion for and understanding of the subject under study, and the institution's ethos, and failing to acknowledge

differences, and therefore individual identities that don't quite 'fit', within this student body. This in turn reflects a hierarchical power dynamic, a theme central to my alumni discourse. Hall describes: 'in some recent work on this topic, I have made an appropriation of the term identity which is certainly not widely shared and may not be well understood. I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture* [italics in original], between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us (see Hall, 1995). They are the result of a successful articulation or 'chaining' of the subject into the flow of discourse…' (Hall and du Gay, 1996: 5-6).

Rojeck (2003: 2) explains that Hall's articulation theory approach 'favours widening access, establishing dialogic relationships and exploring the shifting relationships between hegemony, power and articulation.' The former of this trio, 'hegemony' is defined as the dominance, influence or authority of one group over another and is supported through legitimising a particular set of actions and/or ideas so that they become commonsensical and the accepted 'norm' by the group it subjugates.[18] In this thesis, I show that by forcing students at the conservatoire to fit in to set hierarchies and practices, these institutions are inflicting a hegemonic power, an action which, in turn, impacts musicians' notions of self-identity. In that my data shows that such practices can affect musicians' self-confidence, their sense of belonging within the conservatoire (specifically in their respective instrumental department) and notions of their own musical 'talent'. I also show that these instances of hegemonic practice have impacted the identity of some alumni in the longer term, beyond the conservatoire and into the profession.

1.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is central to this thesis, in both the alumni narratives collected and in my own autoethnographic reflections shared in response to the research process. This is a vital element in the works of Hall and Bourdieu and is a key meeting point of both thinkers, and a shared ethos of this study. Given my personal connection to my research, I discuss here how both men were also informed by personal motivations to undertake their work and how this is one of the key ways in which I have been informed by their approaches.

[18]Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Hegemony". Accessed 5th May 2019. https://www.britannica.com/topic/hegemony

Though Bourdieu rarely explicitly termed any self-reflexivity in his work as 'autobiographical', reflexivity was a key concept of his and much of his work has a self-reflexive undertone, though as Wacquant acknowledges, it is perhaps 'not always perceptible to many of his readers.' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 6). He was conscious of how he presented and positioned his own self in his writing and was frequently contradictory on his views of how present the researcher should be in their writings. Though he did not advocate the inclusion of autobiography (in fact, Bourdieu often explicitly stated that his writing was *not* autobiographical, even when his self-reflections were evident (Reed-Danahay, 2005: 24)), Grenfell (2008: 11) states Bourdieu did, however, advise that there 'was the need to apply the same epistemological concepts to the "knowing subjects" [researchers] themselves as to the "object" of research'.

In relation to this consideration, Reed-Danahay (2005: 159) states that Bourdieu's approach to self-reflexivity 'was one that required the writer to be conscious of his or her assumptions, position-takings, and point of view.' Bourdieu was however, very much concerned with avoiding narcissistic tendencies in reflexive writing, perhaps in part given that within the French sociological and anthropological movement during his lifetime, it was not common practice in his academic field for the researcher to include autobiographical elements in their writings. That said however, he did seemingly become more openly self-reflexive about connections between personal life trajectory and his theoretical concepts, towards the end of his career. According to Grenfell (2008: 12), 'at his final lecture at the *Collège de France* (February 2001) [italics in original] Bourdieu talked about the way his work was a kind of "auto-socio-analysis", as a way of making sense of the social forces which had shaped his life trajectory'. My study resonates with this, as the alumni provide me with the opportunity to ruminate on the social constructs that have shaped their conservatoire experiences. Additionally, through my autoethnography (chapter 6), I provide a space for auto-socio-analysis of my own personal testimony. Not only that, but through this self-reflexive penultimate chapter (6), I also provide a space for reflection on how, in hindsight, much of my data has been generated by my own individual concerns.

The reflective attitude of academics was also of vital importance for Hall, for he believed (and lived what he preached) that academics should be ever-conscious to remain continually reflective, open to flexibility of thought and able to candidly express if their thoughts on their research interests change. He felt that one should never be so rigid in their own beliefs that they fail to embrace new ideas, and in light of this, researchers need to continually address and refine their existing findings whilst retaining their principals.

This inclusive approach is clearly evidenced in the numerous transcribed conference addresses, interviews, radio/television discussions and essay publications (these far outnumber the books he wrote) that are available, the vast majority of which are collaborative outputs with fellow researchers, for which he was credited as editor and/or contributing article author. In demonstration of his reflexive researcher beliefs, he openly shifted his stance on some aspects of his research throughout his lifetime. It is clear, therefore, that Hall greatly supported the application of his concepts to fields of academia beyond his own, and that he wished them to be continually reimagined and reframed, particularly as society and culture remains ever-changing with the passing of time.

Consideration of the impact and influences of Hall's and Bourdieu's respective backgrounds on their subsequent research areas are particularly relevant for this thesis, for as with them, it is my own background, and experiences within my primary (familial) and secondary (educational) habitus which initially motivated me at the start of this research process. With them, I also share the complexities of the insider/outsider research position and issues with familiarity and distance, given my personal history, personal motivations for study and pre-existing position in the field prior to undertaking research and that I shall remain an ongoing member of the community under study beyond the completion of this study. To balance this, and strive toward an objective critical analysis, I have purposefully positioned the original alumni narratives on the centre stage and they are the starring roles in the empirical, data-heavy key chapters that follow. For, I acknowledge the difficulties around objectivity during the research process, particularly given that I have inevitably formed hypotheses given my prior connections to and experiences of the conservatoire system. In light of this, though I include an autoethnography in this thesis (chapter 6), I do so within a critical analysis framework to consciously avoid narcissism and to reflect on objectivity concerns.

1.5 Conclusion

The most important task of this chapter has been to outline and detail the four key areas on which Hall and Bourdieu can be linked – (1) class, (2) identity, (3) discourse analysis/representation/power, (4) reflexivity - and demonstrate why and how I have generated my new, conversational model. In so doing, I have shown how this framework is useful for engaging with my research concerns and critically interpreting my data, and that I am able to reconcile these concepts to enable a critical analysis that speaks to social and cultural constructs. Having demonstrated the points on which these two figures converse, I also underline here, before my empirical data discussion that proceeds in the following

chapters, that at times my work will speak more explicitly to the concepts of either Hall or Bourdieu, respectively. In the application of my framework, I both hone in specifically on individual concepts and zoom out to reflect more holistically, when appropriate. This conversational model is, therefore, essentially a road map, with individual pathways that connect to a broader infrastructure.

In this chapter, I have shown that Bourdieu's tripartite framework of capital, habitus and field can be used to consider notions of identity, particularly in relation to class. I align my ethnographic analysis with Hall's concept of identity (1990: 225) that says identity is an ongoing transformative process of 'becoming' and despite intersections of similarity, there are also points of significant difference, and that no two people will identify in the same way. In so doing, I am conscious to avoid class essentialism, even though this is the predominant theoretical focus of this study. Discourse - that is, the language used by my alumni in their testimonies - is the method through which meaning is constructed and represented in this study. My study resonates with both Hall and Bourdieu's approach to discourse analysis in that the ethnographic data will show that conservatoires employ power dynamics through hegemonic and articulation practices. Finally, I offer my own reflective discourse as researcher (chapter 6), which is a central, common link between Hall and Bourdieu.

The following chapter applies my conversational model to the first of my four ethnographic, data-focused chapters. As with Hall and Bourdieu, and my subsequent conversational model, my study pivots around the central theme of class, therefore, I begin a discussion of my empirical findings with an in-depth discussion of the social background concerns of the alumni and how their individual experiences relate to the wider social, cultural and pedagogical field of the conservatoire.

CHAPTER 2

ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES: SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Measuring and defining social class remains a complex issue, with varying constructs available. The UK government uses occupation as its key indicator of class, however I adopt Bull's (2018) broader approach to class definition. In her study of how class inequality shapes the aspirations of young musicians (pre-higher education), Bull draws on thought that also says class involves the interplay of material and cultural aspects of social life (i.e. cultural taste, leisure practices, morality, aspirations and ideas of self-worth) to examine how identities are formed around economic inequalities (2018: 80).

To commence this discussion of how social position in wider society determined alumni's experience of conservatoire practices, I asked them with which class they identified. This elicited a range of responses, from immediate emphatic identification with one class, to uncertainty, to those whose class identity has changed in the time passed from being a student to the point in their life at which they are presently. Thus, setting the wheels in motion for a critical reflection on the alumni's class background, and familial and educational habitus pre-conservatoire, with the aim of discovering if and how these elements impacted the alumni's experiences at their respective institution(s).

In focusing on these two, formative habitus, the alumni discourse shows a clear theme of a 'them and us' division within conservatoire culture, in relation to class background. There were two notable ways in which this was articulated: firstly, in relation to a musical/non-musical familial habitus, and secondly, regarding a state school/private specialist musical school educational habitus. The first section of this chapter therefore looks at this habitus-related division and I apply my conversational model to the alumni testimonies. In particular, I hone in on the central issue of the model, that of class, and the offshoot concepts of the tripartite capital-habitus-field, and identity.

Following this, I consider the alumni's financial situation during their conservatoire studies and reflect on issues of employment and musical equipment purchase, relating this discussion to their social backgrounds. From here, this chapter moves on to address a major issue with which contemporary conservatoires are faced and are increasingly asked to justify; that is, the lack of working-class students attending these establishments (despite widening participation and equal opportunity policies that have been in place for a number of decades). Finally, I offer a brief discussion of admission practices and how this (class) under-representation may be addressed.

2.1 Introducing my alumni respondents

For insightful context and to provide relevant positional information to the reader from which they may better engage with the respective testimonies of my alumni subjects, I provide a general introduction to them here. In particular, I reflect on conservatoire and professional-related patterns across the constituents. Insights and patterns relating specifically to their social backgrounds are not outlined here in this introductory section, but are instead discussed thereafter as this chapter unfolds forthwith. In providing this biographical overview, I have, however, been cautious not to be overly specific given my ethical commitment to the alumni's anonymity. A contextual overview of the alumni interview constituents is therefore demonstrated as follows:

- The twenty interviewed alumni represent the following conservatoires (figures include attendance at multiple institutions for undergraduate and postgraduate and swapping conservatoires mid-course): 27% from Royal College of Music, 27% from Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, 19% from Royal Academy of Music, 8% from Trinity Laban College of Music and Dance, 7.5% from Royal Northern College of Music, 7.5% from Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and 4% from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.
- The alumni undertook this training between 1990 and 2018, representing a twenty-eight year, or almost three-decade timespan, with a break down as follows: 20% began their studies in the 1990s, 20% commenced between 2000-2005, 50% between 2005-2010, whilst 10% began their studies in the 2010s (finishing as recently as 2017 and 2018).
- They are representative of instrumental departments, thus: 55% are woodwind players, 15% string, 15% brass, 10% percussion and 5% vocalists (there are no pianists amongst my alumni, which was a coincidental outcome of the ethnographic research process and not pre-planned).
- As members of the professional community presently, these alumni, at the time of their respective interviews with me, were all fulltime performing musicians or this was the method by which they predominantly earned their living. This was self-categorised by them in the following stylistic pathways: 10% were contracted orchestral musicians, 30% freelance orchestral musicians, 10% orchestral and musical theatre freelance, 5% musical theatre freelance, 15% musical theatre and commercial freelance, 15% contracted musical theatre, and 15% general freelancing.

- The alumni represent a 50/50 gender split, with a directly comparable number of male to female interviewees.

As the individual voices of the alumni first appear throughout this chapter respectively, I introduce their relevant background details relating to their educational and familial habitus' and class identification, along with the pertinent details of the conservatoire(s) they attended, what instrument department they belonged to and their attendance dates. Thereafter, when these alumni voices subsequently appear throughout the thesis, these conservatoire-related details appear in the footnotes, for reference. The alumni are presented numerically, reflective of the order in which their voices are first introduced to the reader (e.g. Alumnus 1, Alumna 2[19], etc.), names which they retain thereafter for the remainder of this study.

2.2 The primary and secondary habitus: 'Them and us' division

With a focus on the familial habitus, I asked the alumni whether or not they were 'first generation HE', a term used to describe someone who is attending higher education, i.e. university or equivalent institution, while their parents did not. For, traditionally, those whose parent(s) have not attended a university are statistically less likely to attend higher education themselves. However, in 2017 reports emerged that for the first time, half of students across the university sector were the first in their family to attend.[20] That said, the number of attendees from this background who were studying 'top' subjects (i.e. competitive subjects requiring higher levels of achievement for acceptance) remained disproportionately low. Whilst these statistics are available for the public university sector, there are none such for the conservatoire sector specifically. Additionally, there have, as yet, been no ethnographic studies undertaken within the conservatoire field in relation to the 'first generation HE'[21] label. Therefore, there are no existing conclusions as to how this relates to student identity and whether this cohort may or may not experience conservatoire practices and cultures in a certain way.

[19] 'Alumnus' refers to a male former student of an educational establishment, whilst 'alumna' refers to a female former student. 'Alumni' is the plural version and is used for a male or mixed gender group, and 'alumnae' for a female group of former students.

[20] H. York. 2017. "Half of Students Starting University Are Now First in Their Family to Do So, New Figures Reveal." Last amended 18th October 2017. Accessed 3rd August 2019. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/10/18/half-students-starting-university-now-first-family-do-new-figures/

[21] Throughout this thesis I employ literary term 'first generation HE' with abbreviated 'HE' for 'higher education'.

Of the twenty alumni interviewed, 40% were first generation HE (therefore this student demographic is arguably over-represented within my alumni interview cohort), and of these at the time of their conservatoire studies, 35% identified as working class and 5% as middle. Interestingly, of those 60% alumni whose parent(s) did attend university (and so they were not first generation HE), only one identified as working class, with the remaining interviewees all self-proclaiming to be middle class. Or to reframe this, working class alumni were overwhelmingly more likely to be first generation HE, whilst middle class alumni were not. Those alumni who were first generation HE expressed no feelings of 'difference' to their peers who were not labelled such, there were no conversations shared on the subject and it was not something that alumni consciously thought about or were affected by on the surface. However, the data reflects that there were patterns regarding first generation HE experiences of conservatoire practices: when asked whether they felt they were treated as an individual or had to 'fit in' to the conservatoire system, 90% chose the latter, with feelings of struggle with perceived conformity in adapting to the accepted cultural practices of the system. This issue of 'fitting in' is further addressed in more depth, in chapter 4, whereby the notion of individualism is discussed in relation to identity and health and wellbeing.

As well as a distinct lack of data regarding first generation HE students, there is also little published data that looks at the musical familial background of professional musicians. Therefore, there is a gap in existing knowledge regarding how and to what extent this impacts individual's experience of the conservatoire and notions of identity. Of the alumni interviewed, 65% said that they came from 'musical' families with varying degrees of musical activity and achievement, from conservatoire trained parents, active amateur musicians to hobbyist players. The remaining 35% had no immediate family members who owned and/or had learnt to play an instrument. However, the majority did express that they had grown up in a 'music loving' family through listening to recordings at home, with many also attending classical music concerts and/or gigs of other musical genres, including rock, folk and jazz. All considered these familial cultural activities to have stimulated and encouraged their increasing love of music as they grew up and contributed to feelings of pleasure and nostalgia in association with music. Of those interviewed, 10% had parents who were/are professional musicians, and were themselves conservatoire-trained. No interview subjects suggested that in retrospect they wished they had received a different kind of music exposure in regards to their familial habitus.

A musical familial habitus was an identifying factor across the narratives, for both those who did experience this and those who didn't. Alumnus 1 articulated a clear 'them

and us' divide upon first entering his conservatoire. This was a clear theme across the interview discourse, perceived in various guises and will be revisited throughout this thesis. For Alumnus 1, this was due to his perception that most people he encountered came from a musical family and therefore had a greater level of (Western Classical music) exposure and knowledge, which having come from a non-musical family, considered he didn't possess at that time. That is, the cultural capital he brought with him to the conservatoire, he felt, did not mirror those of his peers who came from a musical background. For context, Alumnus 1 came from rural Cornwall, attended state school and having spent one year of undergraduate studying at RNCM, left because he did not feel as though he 'fitted in'. Subsequently, he took a year out from higher education and recommenced his conservatoire studies at RWCMD at the age of twenty. He identifies as middle class and is not first generation HE:

> I think a lot of people had been around music since they were born, whereas I wasn't, so sure there's catching up to do [coming from a non-musical family]. I was aware of it but it didn't affect my self-esteem, it made me more proud really, that I had achieved what I did in that time. – Alumnus 1 (RNCM and RWCMD, woodwind, 2007-2013)

Alumna 2 also articulated this musical/non-musical familial habitus 'them and us' divide. This was in relation to perceived advantages those who hail from musical backgrounds have over their non-musical background peers, in relation to practice support and discipline. For her also, this did not appear to have affected her self-esteem upon entering the conservatoire and comparing this element of her background with others. Alumna 2, who identifies as middle class (as with Alumnus 1), was not first generation HE and is the eldest of my alumni constituents:

> The kids who do really well are the ones whose parents are at home and asking if they've done their practice. The real high fliers are the ones whose parents are sitting over them, doing all the work with them and it's also a huge amount of work applying to conservatoires and for scholarships and courses. – Alumna 2 (RAM, strings, 1990-1995)

Alumna 3, too, demonstrated a perceived divide between those from musical backgrounds whose parents played traditional classical instruments and those not, upon first entering the conservatoire:

> Even though my home life was so full of music, different music, nobody really cared because it wasn't the music they were into, their families didn't play it, it didn't matter [to them], "how dare she like something else". It does make you feel they

look down on you because of it. I think it's a classical thing. – Alumna 3 (RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010)

Identifying as working class and first generation HE, Alumna 3 did not come from what would typically be described as a 'musical background'. Neither of her parents could play an instrument however, she did perceive her musical experiences in her familial habitus to have been rich. In her full testimony, she proudly shared her love of rock music, stemming from a childhood bond with her father who was a fan of this genre and reflected how she rebelled against the 'others' at the conservatoire who did not place cultural value on this. This feeling of difference has since become an increasingly important part of her identity, as it continues to transform. She considered that the lower value placed on her musical heritage, as part of conservatoire culture that places Western Classical music at the top of its hierarchy, has directly served to strengthen her 'connection to her roots', in resistance to conservatoire tradition. In applying my conversational model to Alumna 3's discourse, we can see that the concepts of the tripartite capital-habitus-field, identity and class are especially resonant and reflect the student's multi-layered experience of the cultural and pedagogical conservatoire habitus. In particular, her emphasis on the importance of individuality and difference regarding identity, resonates with Hall (1990), who was especially interested in the idea of individualism within shared group experiences.

Alumna 3's experiences resonates with the findings of Bull (2019). In her study of the 'unspoken rules' in youth orchestra and youth choir rehearsals in England with school-age musicians of middle class identity, she discovered that habitual boundaries are drawn which enable and encourage these spaces to reproduce the privileges and values associated with classical music and middle-class society. She states:

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 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 world of exclusion. (Bull, 2019: 175)

Alumna 3's discourse clearly reflects first-hand experiences of aesthetic boundary-drawing by those she deemed as hailing from higher class backgrounds, in which her musical experience and tastes, which did not appear to align with theirs, were not valued.

Both Alumnus 1 and Alumna 3 speak of their pride at having hailed from their respective backgrounds, which they deemed to be non-traditional within the conservatoire habitus, and the individual experiences and personal advantages they feel these

upbringings had provided them with. For Alumnus 1, it was his success at attending the conservatoire and subsequently becoming a professional musician, a career pathway that he felt was not expected of him, given his background, which made him particularly proud. Whilst for Alumna 3, it was her specialised cultural capital that she associated with her background which made her feel different to the others, and strengthened her sense of identity. For both, there was an implication of having achieved somewhat 'against the odds', for they perceived their backgrounds were non-traditional given their impression that conservatoire students largely came from middle/upper class families with a musical heritage, and had likely attended a private school (one that specialises in music education). Interestingly, all but one of my alumni who were first generation HE (i.e. 35% of the twenty interviewed) also came from a non-musical family habitus and the data does suggest that there is a pattern relating to the way they processed this 'them and us' background divide. That is, the self-confidence of first generation HE students who did not have a musical family background was more negatively affected upon arrival at the conservatoire, than their peers who did not share this same background (as reflected in Alumna 3's experience above).

As well as a perceived 'them and us' divide arising from the data regarding musical/non-musical families, there was another reflected in relation to educational background and which resonates most strongly with the central element of my conversational model, that is, class. This feeling was particularly strongest for those who came from a state school background, who felt a key divide between themselves and those from private specialist music schools in particular (e.g. Chetham's, Purcell). It was not, however, a key point of reflection or an issue the other way around (however, only 10 % of my alumni had attended such private music schools, so I acknowledge that the demographic of my interview subjects is not well-balanced, though informal discussions with other fellow alumni do suggest these data reflections are true).

This perception of a 'them and us divide' in relation to schooling and preconceived ideas of class status in connection with this, was a prevalent theme in the data, which arose frequently in the interviews and related to different topical discussions. As such, I return to this notion in chapter 2, in relation to discussion surrounding notions of 'talent', and once again in chapter 5 in relation to wellbeing. In this chapter, I place emphasis on establishing its perceived existence across the discourse with a more general reflection, to show that alumni were concerned with the ways in which their background was different to others.

Alumnus 4 and Alumna 5, below, provide a typical example of the way in which this divide was articulated in multiple forms, in relation to social background:

> There seemed to be lots of people from Chets and Purcell who knew each other, came to London and would hang out in their little groups. – Alumnus 4 (GSMD and RCM, strings, 2007-2011)

> I definitely felt different to a lot of people on my course, I hadn't been through private schooling, I had a very 'normal' upbringing. I thought I had a really nice instrument [but] you had all these people playing on at least £25000 instruments and all of a sudden, I was surrounded by all of these people who had practiced for hours and hours a day by the age of eleven, whereas I'd never been exposed to that. [Before attending the conservatoire] I did an hour every week if you were lucky as I was so busy doing different things and enjoying it, more than thinking about developing the skill and technique. - Alumna 5 (GSMD, strings, 2004-2009)

Alumnus 4, who identifies as middle class, attended GSMD for one year before moving to RCM to maintain study with a particular teacher who was leaving his post in the former institution but retaining his position in the latter. Though he attended a (non-music specialist) private school, Alumnus 4 still articulates a perceived divide in a social sense, which importantly appeared in both conservatoires, between those who went to private specialist music schools and those who didn't. Alumna 5 describes her feelings of inadequacy and disheartenment as she compares her social background and economic capital upon entry to the conservatoire with those of her student contemporaries. She generalises these student peers as being 'not like her' and as having a more serious and intense musical experience centred around practising and technical training pre-HE. Interestingly, this is despite coming from a musical family with both parents being graduates of a UK conservatoire, implying that her identity is strongly connected to her class background (she identifies as working class), most specifically, her schooling and socio-financial background, and not her musical family background.

This was a reflection across the data regarding notions of identity relating to social background. In applying Hall's (1990) identity concept of 'becoming', I consider how history, power and culture come together to shape one's identity. Thus, within this context, the familial and educational habitus are both cultural and historical elements in one's life trajectory, and so are unavoidably connected to notions of self-identity. Throughout the discourse, alumni from state school backgrounds identified more strongly with either their familial habitus (in this case, I refer to musical/non-musical family) or their educational habitus (school), and this was an important element in their reflections on contextualising their conservatoire cultural experience in the first year of study.

Alumnus 6, for example, who is not first generation HE, identifies as middle class, went to a state school and comes from a non-musical family. It was this latter factor, the non-musical family habitus, with which he most strongly identified and this was the

dominant factor across his narrative when discussing his background. Interestingly, he was also a member of a conservatoire junior department where he attended classes on Saturdays for his final two years of secondary education so he himself had a form of specialist musical training, however he attended an inner-city, London state school during the week.

> I did notice there were people who were quite serious, who had gone to Chets [Chetham's School of Music][22], that Chets group I suppose, who had had music as quite a regular thing, but I didn't feel alienated. I didn't feel at all I wasn't as prepared as them, it was fine. And I felt there was no disadvantage coming from a non-musical family, in actual fact I quite like it because it's 'my thing.' My parents were so supportive, what was really nice is there was just less of a pressure I found. – Alumnus 6 (RCM and RAM, woodwind, 2005-2011)

Additionally, once at the conservatoire as a senior student, Alumnus 6 felt the environment of the institution provided him with the impetus he needed to work harder, he consciously made use of his social background in a positive way so that he considered it worked 'for' him and not 'against' him:

> I suppose what you don't realise before you go to a conservatoire is that there are so many good players out there. I was brought up always being the best player because I went to state school, you get used to that and then suddenly you go to an institution where your eyes open, especially because it's international as well, you get these amazing players and sometimes you're just like 'oh my God', but I think that's what I needed. I find you need to have that competition there as something to aim towards and if you go to the institution where you are the best, it's too easy to sit back. – Alumnus 6

This sentiment was also echoed by Alumnus 7 and Alumnus 8, respectively. The first of these voices, Alumnus 7, was also a working-class student of state school background (but unlike Alumnus 6, was first generation HE). In his discourse here, he clearly reflects that for him, the 'them and us' divide was felt in terms of youth music ensemble membership (i.e. National Youth Orchestra, London Schools Symphony Orchestra that he references) and the symbolic and cultural capital with which these were associated. However, as with Alumnus 6 above, he was able to use his feelings of difference as motivation and as a positive factor regarding his transforming musical and self-identity.

> Alumnus 7: At Trinity there were lots of people that did go to Wells, lots and lots that went to the Purcell School, not so many that went to Chets though, as far as I knew in the remit I was surrounded by. But I didn't realise what that was really, but when I went to Academy it was very clear that lots of these people, it wasn't

[22] As and when the alumni refer to 'Chets' in quotes throughout this thesis, this refers to Chetham's School of Music.

about the specialist schools that you went to, it was about what courses you went on. National Youth Orchestra, London Schools Symphony Orchestra and brass academies, lots of people had been there and they knew all the big players from all the orchestras. I really didn't know all the big names of people in orchestras, maybe the London ones by the time I'd got to Academy, but I even remember my steward before I went in for my audition at Trinity, that would have been when I was 20, saying 'so we've got so-and-so from RPO blah blah' and it didn't faze me [because he didn't know of them]. But, there was a big divide because lots of people knew all the teachers that were in, taking masterclasses, brass classes, trombone classes, they'd met them already.
Me: Did that put you at a disadvantage, do you think?
Alumnus 7: Nope. Well I think it did in Academy, but not to me as a person, it was like great that you've done that, you've got a Rolex watch and your trombone isn't falling apart. Everyone had amazing equipment, like outstanding equipment, I mean even the cases they had, I couldn't afford them [at Academy], I had a really crappy old one that the trombone came in…[but, regardless of background] on our *own* volition, we have to get to where we want to, from within.
(TLCMD and RAM, 2009-2012)

Alumnus 8 (who was not first generation HE, identifies as middle class and like alumni 6 and 7, above, also attended an inner-city London state school) also reflects that this 'them and us divide' was indeed a positive, motivational factor. However, interestingly, this was articulated in a different manner, as for him, this motivation was not related to improving his skills in the solo Western Classical tradition. Instead, he used this as motivation to actively use and build on his broad musical experience pre-conservatoire and incorporate this into his conservatoire studies and aspirations, as a means of consciously differentiating his skillset from those who had been to private specialist music schools, whom he perceived excelled predominantly only in the Western Classical tradition. Alumnus 8 is now an in-demand performer for film and television sessions and commercial pop work:

Me: Do you think that coming from a state school background was an advantage or disadvantage?
Alumnus 8: Definitely an advantage because there was no snobbery behind it. Because I did all the local music service stuff, I had all the classical stuff there but then at school, you know, I'm hardly going to go and play any of that to my friends, you know that was around the time that garage was huge. I used that exposure and enjoyment of all the styles I grew up with at school to my advantage though. I felt so many people at College didn't have that, especially the ones from Chets, some of them were incredible players, I'll never dispute that, but they just didn't have that love for other music. I've always felt lucky I had that though and it's been so important to me in my work.
(RCM, percussion, 2007-2011)

Crucially, proactively using social background in a positive manner as a catalyst for motivation during conservatoire studies was a mindset only reflected by the male alumni.

Alumnus 9, who is not first generation HE, identifies as middle class and attended Chetham's School of Music as a weekly boarder for eight years before the conservatoire, confirms the assumptions of alumni 1, 5 and 6 above (who all attended state-school). That is, he possessed a confidence in his ability and seemingly had no trouble adjusting to the practices of the conservatoire and this was directly connected to his private specialist music school background. Furthermore, analysis of his full discourse showed that Alumnus 9 identified more with his educational habitus ("Chets") than he did with his familial habitus:

> I do think my Chets background helped prepare me for the conservatoire environment as it was instilled in me the discipline of practicing and preparing. – Alumnus 9 (RCM, percussion, 2004-2008)

As is discussed in more depth in chapter 4, the alumni who had attended private specialist music schools were more confident of their musical abilities upon arriving at the conservatoire, in contrast to their peers from state school backgrounds. However, some of these private specialist music school alumni also express a lack of appropriate support and understanding, relating to their background and experience, upon first arriving at the conservatoire. They commented on a frustration at having to go "back to basics" and an absence of structure and lack of nurturing and "pushing" by their principal study teachers. Those who have come from this type of educational habitus have in many cases had years of enforced, supervised daily practice time and a great amount of personal contact and interaction with staff, and given that these are predominantly boarding schools, they are extremely immersive environments. Alumna 10, like Alumnus 9 who also attended Chetham's School of Music pre-conservatoire, is not first generation HE and identifies as middle class, describes her experiences below, with the discussion included here in its entirety for its relevance:

> Me: Did you feel your musical knowledge was comparable to those of your peers upon arrival?
> Alumna 10: I think because of going to Chets and having that every day, being so immersed in music all the time, I think I felt fine, quite confident I think, yes.
> Me: Was there anything academically you struggled with in the first year?
> Alumna 10: I think to be honest, actually, when I got to the first year, it was going back[wards] from Chets, in all senses, in terms of like technique classes, everything seemed to shift right back to basics, which was a little bit frustrating in a sense but then I guess you've got to accommodate for people who are, well everything really. I've heard quite a lot of people say this who maybe went to Chets or music schools, that when you get to College it just seems to not be entirely what you thought it was going to be.
> Me: What did you think College would be like?

> Alumna 10: I think I wanted it to kind of continue in the same way [as Chets], it was quite easy to get lazy [at RNCM], like the standard - this sounds awful! - wasn't entirely what I was expecting.
> Me: Was the standard quite variable did you think, were you then expecting it to be more at the top end?
> Alumna 10: Yes. But then, I'm sure if I'd gone to London it might have been different, do you know what I mean?
> Me: When did you start to feel challenged at college then?
> Alumna 10: I think to be honest, I had to do it a little bit myself, to motivate putting myself into various competitions at college and outside of college and that's how I pushed myself. So even from my first year I started auditioning for jobs and competitions and stuff that pushed me, so I think a lot of it came from me. And my teachers were brilliant but they didn't push me, if I'm honest.
> Me: [Later in the interview] So, your social background, did that impact you in a positive way?
> Alumna 10: Yes, I think my Chets experience was definitely a positive one. I mean Royal Northern was also positive but the kind of focus you had at Chets, that was brilliant and that definitely influenced me more than at College. I think it was just the standard of everyone felt better. But people [at Chets] were really supportive as well and I don't know if that was as there at College. Yes, there were figures that were supportive but generally Chets, maybe it's because you're younger they're trying to nurture you more.
> (RNCM, woodwind, 2008-2013)

Alumni were questioned as to whether they consciously thought of their social background, or were consciously made aware of it at any point during their conservatoire studies, as a result of institutional practices or culture; most said that they were not. However, though they were not explicitly conscious of it, all of those from working-class backgrounds proceeded to say that they think this was something that had effected their time there in some form or another and that in retrospect, they felt that certain experiences (emotionally, socially, culturally, educationally) had occurred directly because of their class background, for example:

> Me: Did you consciously think about your background while you were studying at the conservatoire?
> Alumna 3: Not overtly, but I did subconsciously in some respects, when I got to college and realised how much other people had done and stuff they knew, repertoire etc. The area I came from, nobody came from musical backgrounds but I don't feel I was musically deprived. I felt different to other people at college as I have such a passion for rock music.[23]

There was a small handful of interview subjects, however, who w*ere* explicitly aware of their background, which had a direct impact on their adjustment to conservatoire culture, as shown by Alumnus 11 here. For context, Alumnus 11 comes from a farm in rural

[23] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010

Cornwall and growing up had very little access to live music performances and group youth musical activities with other, like-minded aspiring musicians. He is first generation HE and identifies as working class.

> Me: Was your social background different to others then?'
> Alumnus 11: 'Oh God, yes.
> Me: Were you aware of that?
> Alumni 11: I was aware of that, yes, it was massively different in every aspect to everyone else.
> Me: Did it make you feel more or less confident?
> Alumnus 11: Oh, less confident, massively, yes. I've always been massively nervous about playing, especially performance classes, so getting to music college, the first time I'd really played in front of any kind of audience apart from an ABRSM panel, that was my performance class. So, all of a sudden, there was a lot to take in. I mean that's the thing, when I got to music college, first year, I didn't even think I'd make it through the first year, I was so nervous about it, I'd never done it, I was surrounded by brass banders who stood up and did it every week. And ok, I had a brilliant head of brass who was very supportive of it, but you know what it's like, you get in and you're on your own.
> (RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015)

The effects of the 'them and us' divide on Alumnus 11's wellbeing (and the other interviewees) is discussed in chapter 5. Bringing his discourse under the lens of my conversational model here though, he demonstrates that from the outset of his conservatoire studies, he began to question his self-identity in connection with his class background and the cultural capital he brought with him and the nature of the habitus he had thus far experienced, pre-higher education. As first generation HE and a self-identified working-class student, he was a non-traditional student within the conservatoire, who was largely unfamiliar with the cultures that pervaded the establishment. This questioning of identity is resonant with the findings of Bull (2018: 89), who, in her study on youth music education in England, 'yielded many examples of classical music's potential to compound already existing inequalities, from educational scholarships, through extensive networking among the established middle class, to learning the bodily and social confidence that studies show is required to enter many elite professions. However, musicians entering the youth [i.e. school level] classical music scene from outside the professional or upper middle class had to make a heavy investment not only of time but also in reinventing their identity to be able to fit in to this new social world.' My thesis adds to her findings to show that these identity-transforming processes are also true for students at the HE level, within the conservatoire sector.

Another key area for consideration under the umbrella of social background relates to financial concerns. The following section looks at alumni experiences of how economic

support and stability served to impact conservatoire experiences educationally, socially and culturally.

2.3 Socio-economic background and financial support during conservatoire studies

Training to become a professional performing musician is an undeniably costly process, for there are years of instrumental lessons throughout childhood, the instruments themselves, related equipment, music, exam fees, accompanist fees, extracurricular music activities (e.g. belonging to county/national ensembles with membership and course fees), before applying for conservatoire auditions (which always require an audition fee) with the necessary travel costs these auditions entail. Once at the conservatoire, a number of these costs continue (equipment/instrument repair etc), whilst additional economic demands can include upgrading instruments to better models, purchasing additional instruments (woodwind players in particular) and also potentially, accompanist fees. Competitions and recordings are valued symbolic capital within conservatoire culture, both of which require economic commitment. This is aside from the cost of yearly tuition fees, which have been rapidly increasing in the past twelve years.

The issue therefore, is how students obtain these funds and how this relates to social class dimensions within the conservatoire. My data reveals that the alumni's main sources of money were student loans (tuition fee loan and/or maintenance loan), parents and employment (music related or otherwise) alongside conservatoire studies. To begin this focus on socio-economic concerns, I first debate issues relating to instrument purchase, before discussing the repercussions of balancing employment with conservatoire studies. My findings in this regard are considered in relation to Dibben (2006).

Issues regarding the staff perception of the quality of alumni's instruments and the manner in which this was demonstrated, was a concerning point in the data:

> A teacher commented that one of my recital marks wasn't higher because of the instrument I had, which I was really sad about because that was all I could afford…my parents remortgaged to help me buy a new one [eventually] for £10,000. – Alumna 5[24]

Alumna 5 encountered unsupportive staff who showed little understanding in regard to the financial realities of buying a better instrument and how difficult it was for her to find the large amount of money required, given her background. Whilst it is the responsibility of principal study teachers to give honest guidance to students regarding

[24] GSMD, strings, 2004-2009

what is required to advance, she was offered no assistance in where she might apply for specialist loan schemes or scholarships specifically for the purchase of a new instrument (which do exist, see: John Packer[25], the Countess of Munster Musical Trust[26], Loan Fund for Musical Instruments[27], Help Musicians UK[28], Take It Away[29], the Albert Cooper Music Charitable Trust[30], the Tom Acton Memorial Trust[31] and the Radford Charitable Trust[32]). She was, therefore, consciously made aware of her social background and class status given that she did not come from an affluent family, and student maintenance loan would not cover the cost (and regardless, was not intended for such use, as inferred by its title). As such, huge sacrifices had to be made (her parents remortgaging the family home) in order to do what was expected of her and, vitally, what it was implied would raise her chances of success at her conservatoire. Alumna 12 also expressed anxieties regarding perceived links between standard of instrument and notions of achievement. She attended a state school, identifies as working class and comes from a non-musical, first generation HE background, whereby she considered her family "didn't and still don't really understand what I do and why I do it."

> I felt there was an economic competition pressure. For example, my friends were buying £15,000 golden flutes. I always felt like I couldn't compete with it and would never have a career because I couldn't afford the gear my peers had which, at the time, massively impacted my confidence and performance. – Alumna 12 (RBC and RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2012)

Both alumnae 5 and 12 show that there is clear financial pressure regarding symbolic capital in relation to musical instruments and that in retrospect, this can negatively affect the way they envisage their entire conservatoire experience. The lack of direction given to students in how to obtain financial assistance (i.e. grants and loans) for new instruments was an experience articulated by all of my alumni subjects; examples of this are demonstrated here by Alumnus 13 and Alumna 14, below:

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[25] John Packer Limited. "Apply for Funding." Accessed 28th August 2019. https://www.johnpacker.co.uk/apply-for-funding

[26] Countess of Munster Musical Trust. "Instrument Purchase and Loan Schemes." Accessed 28th August 2019. https://www.munstertrust.org.uk/funding-guide/instrument-purchase-loan-schemes

[27] Loan Fund for Musical Instruments. Accessed 28th August 2019. https://lfmi.org.uk/

[28] Help Musicians UK. "Musical Instruments: General Funding for Musical Instruments." Accessed 28th August 2019. https://www.helpmusicians.org.uk/get-advice/funding-careers/musical-instruments/musical-instruments

[29] Take It Away. Accessed 28th August 2019. https://takeitaway.org.uk/about-take-it-away/

[30] Cooper Collection. "Albert Cooper Music Charitable Trust." Accessed 28th August. http://www.thecoopercollection.co.uk/ctrust.html

[31] Tom Acton Memorial Trust. Accessed 28th August 2019. https://tomactonorg.wordpress.com/home/

[32] Radford Charitable Trust Cornwall. Accessed 28th August 2019. http://www.radfordtrust.org/

> By A Level age, I had won a £500 prize that went towards buying a new instrument. Up to that point, I was on a rental still and my parents scraped some money together to pay for a new instrument, along with the prize money. When I got to the conservatoire, I was never explicitly told where and how to look for financial assistance to upgrade this or get the other instruments I needed. I had to get a job and keep entering competitions and hope I got something [financially] from them. – Alumnus 13 (RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003)

> Alumna 14: I went to college on a terrible saxophone. I actually no idea about anything I was doing. I had a really basic saxophone, quite good mouthpiece. I bought my tenor with money my grandad left me…[regarding upgrading] my alto I think my mum helped me out with because I needed a new one. It took me years to be able to get a soprano, which is such a shame.
> Me: Did anybody tell you about any grants of instrument loans?
> Alumna 14: No.
> (TLCMD, woodwind, 2008-2013)

Both alumni 13 and 14 are woodwind players, therefore they felt an added financial pressure given that they were required to obtain auxiliary instruments in order to more fully and holistically develop their skills. Both came from a non-musical family habitus, which was a particular identifying factor for Alumnus 13 whose parents were not from the UK and exposed him to a lot of music of their heritage, but who were "not always fully understanding or supportive of why [he] had chosen to pursue a career in classical music" (he was first generation HE and identified as working class). Alumna 14, though sharing the background experience of a non-musical family habitus, did not have other background traits in common with Alumnus 13. For she was not first generation HE, went to a private school and is middle class. However, regardless of differences in background, both alumni articulated the same concern regarding the struggle to purchase instruments while at the conservatoire.

The collective alumni discourse points to ongoing issues regarding staff responses to the matter, across the conservatoire sector, with reports of little understanding and patience offered to students, with an attitude of "it's not my problem, just do as I suggest". This is a key area in which conservatoire practices can be improved and would most benefit those students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and would go some way towards addressing symbolic capital hierarchies relating to equipment, amongst the student body.

Another area of the conservatoire course in which alumni reported socio-economic issue was with accompanist fees. Chapter 3 will show that value is placed most highly on solo performance in conservatoire culture, and this is the major focus of assessed performances. Though it is termed 'solo', for principal study instruments other than piano, by and large this actually infers instrumental (or vocal) soloist with piano accompaniment.

Some conservatoires set aside provision in their budget for a departmental accompanist and typically allocate a set number of hours per student, so that this is a service provided by the institution. However, my data shows that over the past three decades, in the time that my alumni subjects have attended conservatoires, some institutions did not provide for this. This meant that students had to source and self-fund an accompanist in order to meet obligatory recital requirements and therefore pass their degree. Other alumni reflected a middle ground, whereby the conservatoire made some provision, but seemingly not enough and they felt they had no choice but to supplement this with additional, private accompanist hours which were self-funded.

Alumnae 3 and 15, respectively, reflect here on the realities of economic sacrifice needed to undertake a conservatoire education, particularly in relation to accompanist fees:

> We had a lot of contact time with pianists in the first year, all included in the course, which was cut throughout the course so that in the 3rd and 4th year, accompaniment time had dropped by half. They were making obvious cuts, it was like nothing compared to how it used to be. You felt like you were rushing [to prepare things] and especially for people like me where performing was a challenge. I did end up paying for extra things in the last two years, especially towards the end as I felt they'd cut it back so much and I needed it. At the end of the day, you've got to pass your degree. – Alumna 3[33]

Such practice, therefore, hierarchises those of a more secure socio-economic status and relies on students finding accompanist peers if they cannot afford a professional. For background, Alumna 15 identifies as middle class now but working class when younger (during her conservatoire days), is not first generation HE and attended a state school and junior conservatoire on Saturdays:

> I didn't have to pay for rehearsals with pianists at college, I was really lucky, I met him in my first term and just nabbed him basically! If you don't get that [a willing student pianist duo partner], you're screwed. – Alumna 15 (RCM, woodwind, 2004-2010)

Many alumni also held a job alongside their conservatoire studies in order to address socio-financial concerns. This was more of an assumed and accepted part of independence and the higher education experience for those from lower class backgrounds in particular.

> I had worked from the age of 15 and my parents encouraged it, so I naturally looked for a job alongside my studies as soon as I got there. I originally worked in a shop for three months but had to leave as the hours didn't fit in with my studies as

[33] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010

> college was so intense, so I worked for the conservatoire junior department on Saturdays instead in the end. I needed a job to survive financially. In hindsight, I do think having a job effected my studies but at the time I didn't really feel like I had a choice. I was under the impression that the people with a similar background to me were in the same situation with needing to have a job, but there were a lot of people who didn't need to have one, and they tended to be the people that from the beginning I thought came from a better background. – Alumna 3[34]

Here, Alumna 3 implies that she considered those with a 'better' background to be those who had more affluent beginnings, whose family were able to support them financially with all the costs that surface as part of a conservatoire education – essentially, those who had a higher-class background than her. I bring into conversation here the findings of Dibben (2006), who looked at student experiences in the music department of Sheffield University and considered the influence of students' socio-economic background. A music degree experience at a university is very different to that at a conservatoire, with differing practices, cultures and training aims. Therefore, I do not suggest that her findings are entirely transferable, for example, my data contradicts her findings regarding student attitudes to class (she found that social class was largely invisible to respondents). However, her findings regarding employment are insightful, and I am able to relate this to conservatoires and contribute to a wider debate regarding the social and cultural concerns surrounding music HE pedagogy.

Analysis of Dibben's (2006) survey data revealed differences between the attitudes and behaviours of students from different socio-economic backgrounds in relation to paid employment. The most significant finding was an association between socio-economic background, paid employment during term-time and academic achievement. Socio-economic background was measured using information on the means-tested parental contribution to students' living costs and tuition fees (2006: 107). Statistical analysis of her survey data on working patterns and academic achievement revealed evidence for a detrimental association between term-time employment and academic performance. The academic consequences of financial differences for students were examined by comparing the marks of students who worked during term time with those who did not. On average, students who took paid work during term-time had lower marks than those who did not work:

> These findings are congruent with previous research which has shown that term-time employment is associated with lower academic achievement, and that students from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to take on paid employment, potentially lowering their academic achievement (Hunt et al ., 2004)….It was not the number of hours in paid employment that effected the

[34] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010

> grades, but whether or not a student had a job, which appears to be the case with the students in this study as well (Lim, 2004). One new finding to emerge from this analysis is that those with a job related to music had higher marks (62%) than those with a less related job (59%). (Dibben, 2006: 109).

Though there are no formal statistics available regarding conservatoire student employment and results which would offer formal clarification and on which I can build and also compare directly with Dibben, I asked those alumni who held jobs at the time of their study whether they felt in retrospect this had been detrimental to their conservatoire achievement and commitment. This was Alumna 16's response, regarding her experience as a middle-class student, who was not first generation HE (both of her parents attended conservatoires) and who went to a state school:

> Me: Did you have to get a job while at college?
> Alumna 16: Yes. In my 1st year I got a part time job in a shop on High Street Kensington
> Me: Is that because you needed the money financially, to help?
> Alumna 16: I suppose I could have scraped by, my parents were helping me, they were giving me some money every month but it was literally just enough to live. Because I wanted to go out and stuff, I did that and I worked through the holidays.
> Me: Did you find that that effected your time at college at all?
> Alumna 16: I don't know, I really enjoyed having an outlet, to meet some people that were just not musical and I made really good friends there at the time, but in my first year I didn't get a great mark for my technical or for my recital. I say I didn't get a good mark, I got like a 2:2 or a 2:1 or something and I think maybe it contributed to the half a day I could have gone back to halls and practiced when I was at the shop. And on a Saturday and Sunday I was at the shop all day. It probably did have an impact.
> Me: How long did you have the job for?
> Alumna 16: I did it for a year and in my second year, I stopped and I just worked through the holidays [instead].
> (RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003)

Alumnus 17 worked within the music field alongside his studies, through teaching and playing. He has a state school background, was not first generation HE and comes from a musical family, identifying as working class (i.e. Alumnus 17 is the sole alumni referenced earlier, who was not first generation HE but who identified as working class). His experience of balancing these tasks is overwhelmingly negative and also reflects traditional conservatoire culture of placing the highest cultural capital on the Western Classical canon, something which conflicted with his own notions of self-worth and his aspirations:

> Me: Did you feel like the jobs you had negatively affected your conservatoire studies?
> Alumnus 17: I did. Because I was told off for doing them. I mean looking back as a musician now, they were far, far more important than most of the stuff that I did at college, which had 'fear' written in very large letters over nearly all of it. And I wasn't interested in playing like that. So, I remember the week before my final, I did four education workshops and that's when I didn't drive so I went and got the train to Birmingham for a nine o'clock start and then a train somewhere else and got back and did very little practice in the week before my final.
> (RAM, brass, 1997-2001)

In applying my conversational model, we can see that his discourse demonstrates how his experience of institutional power ("I was told off…") and the types of cultural capital his principal study teacher at the conservatoire did and did not value (i.e. leading education workshops) were clearly hugely impacting on his notions of identity. However, not all alumni felt that their studies were overwhelmingly negatively affected by having a job, there were also positive reflections:

> I had a non-music related job in years two and three and half of my fourth year, working 20 hours a week. In some ways it was good to have something else going on, people get too intense and forget there's a real world out there and it taught me to manage my time well. I don't feel it effected my studies too much but if I'd worked a little less and been able to practice a little more, it might have been better. – Alumnus 1[35]

As alumni 6 below, and 16 previously, show, data suggests that there was a clear social reward when the job was non-music related, that time away from the intense conservatoire 'bubble' was beneficial to wellbeing. In the present day, the greatest financial pressure for students are tuition fees. As expected, those students who were awarded a fee scholarship did not feel as financially under pressure as those who were not awarded with one and it was a key deciding factor in choosing an institution:

> I didn't have a student loan, I lived at home with my family while I was studying at college. I took a Saturday job but never felt any financial struggle while at college, and having to pay for things. – Alumnus 6[36]

> Because I didn't pay for my postgraduate, it was definitely worth it. - Alumna 15[37]

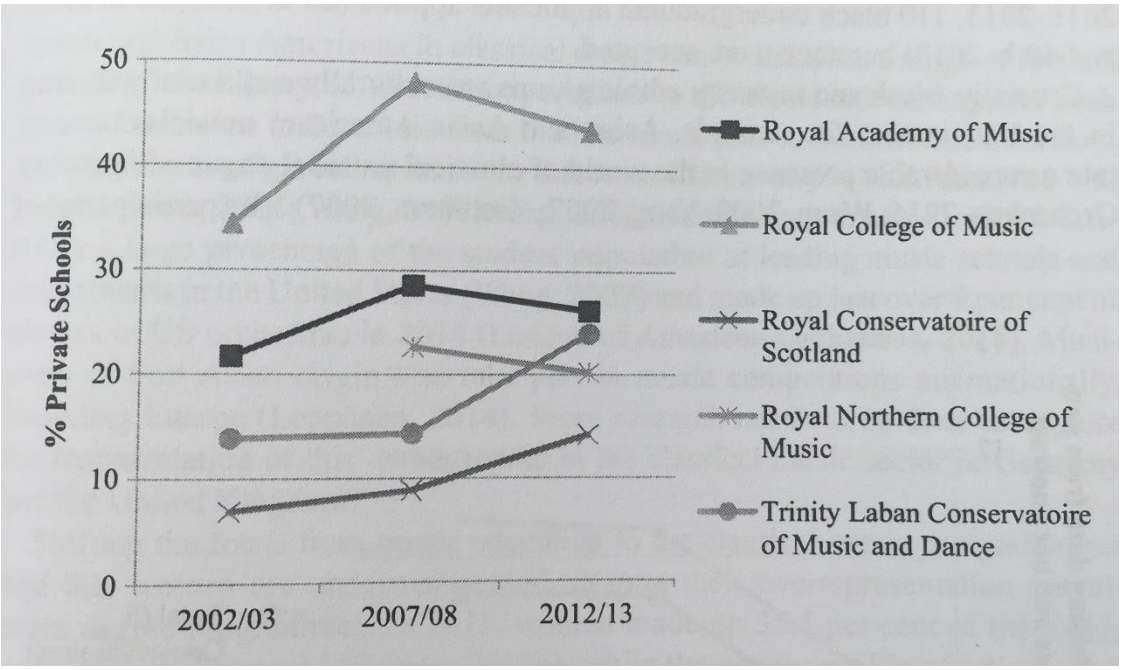
> I chose to go to my conservatoire largely because I got a full fee scholarship, which secured my decision to go there. After my parents paid £40,000 in fees for me to go to Chetham's School of Music [for 8 years], I wanted to be financially independent and not rely on them. – Alumnus 9[38]

[35] RNCM and RWCMD, woodwind, 2007-2013
[36] RCM and RAM, woodwind, 2005-2011
[37] RCM, woodwind, 2004-2010
[38] RCM, percussion, 2004-2008

My empirical data reflects that those who come from a working-class background and who are not awarded a scholarship are more conscious of the financial demands of conservatoire training, from tuition fees, course demands such as instrumental costs, accompanist fees, through to living costs. Furthermore, conservatoire practices and culture actively work against them financially, from flippant staff attitudes regarding instrument purchase, to obligatory, additional financial commitment in order to pass their degree (e.g. accompanist fees). My findings also show a gender divide, with female alumnae largely more aware and more concerned by these costs than males. The females also said that as a result, they became conscious of their social class background, whereas their male counterparts were less so.

Presently, there remains very limited research detailing the class backgrounds of conservatoire students and from which areas of society they are more likely to hail. However, we know that the working classes are still underrepresented in the conservatoire system; Scharff's report released in 2018 confirms the long-held assumption that conservatoires have traditionally been the home of the middle and upper classes (Scharff, 2018: 46-47). Her insightful study showed that as with traditional music degrees at universities, this is a higher education subject that draws more students with higher class profiles than the British national average. In relation to schooling pre-higher education, her data reflected that across the UK, 6.5% of children are privately educated (rising to 18% from age 16), yet these students make up on average 24.4% of conservatoire student intake (across five conservatoires, with data from 2012/2013). As is shown in Scharff's graph, reproduced below, privately educated students therefore make up between just under 15% of the cohort in Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, rising to just under 45% at the Royal College of Music, outlining a huge demographic discrepancy across these institutions. Thus, reframed, though 93.5% of children attend state school, in the worst represented conservatoire – Royal College of Music - they only constitute 55% of students and so, pro-rata, are vastly under-represented:

Diagram 3: Percentage of privately schooled students at five UK conservatoires (Scharff, 2018: 47)[39]



Working class under-representation is found in all of these establishments and serves to perpetuate the reproductive, hierarchical culture of conservatoires with which the middle and upper classes are more likely to align, thus entirely resonating with Bourdieu (1979). Therefore, as is reflected in my alumni data, working class students are more likely to feel 'a fish out of water' in their underrepresentation. My study argues that a broader spectrum of class backgrounds in the student body would further help to change conservatoire cultures, and would also result in more positive outcomes regarding individual notions of belonging and identity.

Following on from the theme of under-representation (in relation to class), I offer some brief thoughts on conservatoire admissions practices. I emphasise that I do not provide an in-depth discussion here and that it is a clear area for ongoing research, however I touch on it here for some relevant final reflections before I conclude my chapter findings. To audition at a conservatoire requires an audition fee, across all institutions however, some (e.g. Royal Academy of Music) offer fee waivers for those from low income backgrounds with the aim of widening access. Additionally, looking at official Royal College

[39] This diagram is reproduced in this thesis with the permission of C. Scharff, given via personal email communication on 10th September 2019.

of Music document discourse on access and opportunities[40] shows an interesting audition practice regarding 'identifying talent'. It is aimed to help those who have not had specialist music school training, or do not have the same cultural capital as those who have, on which the conservatoire places the highest value:

> The College places an increased emphasis on recognising potential as well as existing executant skill when making admissions decisions; we now use contextual data about educational background in reaching admissions decisions. (Royal College of Music, *Access Agreement:* 5)

There is no elaboration on the nature of the contextual data to which they refer and how this is used by admissions panels. Though the term 'talent' is loaded with contention, as will be demonstrated in chapter 3, the concept of acknowledging students' social background and placing a greater value on 'potential', is enlightening and clearly resonates with my own data findings. Reframed, and relating to the overall conservatoire experience, I put this question to a portion of my alumni interviewees, asking whether they thought they would have felt better supported if staff, particularly their principal study tutor and head of department, were more cognitive of their social background. I asked this as a general question (rather than specifying socio-economic, schooling, (non-)musical family, first generation HE as particular concerns) so as not to purposefully direct the answer. An example of the responses is given below, by Alumna 18 from a state school background. She "definitely" thought that it would be beneficial if one-to-one teachers and heads of departments had an awareness of students' backgrounds, so that they could understand why students need a job and/or couldn't afford expensive equipment – for her, as a singer, this specifically related to recital attire. Alumna 18 was the only vocalist that was interviewed and strongly felt that symbolic capital relating to appearance was highly valued in her department. She considered singers to care greatly about general appearance, regularly wearing new, designer clothes around the conservatoire to demonstrate status (for background context, she was first generation HE, went to state school and identifies as working class):

> Economic background had a lot to play in the attention they get from teachers and that was really, really hard…but I like being independent and not relying on anyone [e.g. family]…I wasn't jealous of those people, if I needed for anything I could have asked my parents, but I wouldn't do that to them, to me it was almost vulgar. The

[40] Royal College of Music. "Access Agreement 2017-18." Accessed 30th June 2019. https://secure.rcm.ac.uk/about/governance/strategy/accessdisabilitiesandequalopportunities/Royal%20College%20of%20Music%20Access%20Agreement%202017-18.pdf

> mindset of money in that situation really disgusted me, it didn't sit well with me. My values were different, and for me, that wasn't something that should have been part of an education. – Alumna 18 (RWCMD, vocal studies, 2009-2011)

Alumna 18's response clearly highlights that socio-economic background was of relevance to her during her conservatoire studies, and that she attached a symbolic capital divide between herself and departmental peers. This was also reflected by Alumna 19 and was related to experience and knowledge, i.e. cultural capital, rather than Alumna 18's experience regarding symbolic capital. Alumna 19 (who was first generation HE) identified strongly in her full testimony with her working class, non-musical family habitus and was especially self-driven in her commitment to her conservatoire studies:

> Me: Do you think your social background in any way effected your conservatoire experience or was it something that you never consciously thought about? And in your experience, and reflecting retrospectively as a professional now, do you think conservatoires should be aware of student's backgrounds or not?
> Alumna 19: I think it should matter and I don't know if that's a controversial response. I think it should because I don't think you can treat everybody the same in something as niche as music performance, when you have things like junior college, you know my first performance class was in college and I think they should, I don't know, even if it's just a case of they schedule all the people who come from junior college or Chets or whatever, if they do the performance classes first and let the other people just watch a couple first. And those that are from very musical families as well and have just grown up around it. I remember even in my academic lessons they'd just be talking about academic repertoire that I didn't know, whereas loads of other people would be like 'yes, I saw BBC do that a couple of weeks ago'. So, I think [background] did make a difference to me, I just think it wasn't something I vocalised, but that feeling of 'oh, God, I'm just going to nod and agree and pretend I know what they're talking about'. Same in performance class when people are used to commenting on other people's playing, whereas I didn't make a single comment in performance class until second year because I refused to put my hand up because I felt I didn't have the experience to say anything critical or of any value to a peer, whereas a lot of people who've done that before would be fine. But what can they do? Maybe it was my fault for not doing enough research before I started at college.
> (RWCMD, woodwind, 2012-2018)

Alumna 19 raised the topic of students from private specialist music schools and those who had attended junior conservatoires, as well as musical/non-musical familial habitus, without any prompting. Therefore, she clearly reflects a 'them and us' divide that relates to issues surrounding class, through social background experiences, perceptions and preconceptions (as also demonstrated by other alumni previously in this chapter). In so doing, she confirms that social background is indeed a resonant issue for conservatoire students who came from more non-traditional backgrounds in particular (as established,

that is: state school educative habitus, those who are first generation HE and those with non-musical familial habitus).

Whilst Alumna 10 (as quoted on page 56-57), who attended Chetham's School of Music before the conservatoire, said that she wished she had been pushed more at the conservatoire and that a greater understanding of her background by staff might have encouraged them to do so, given her existing cultural capital and prior experience of a disciplined musical training environment. These responses are examples from people of two different social class backgrounds who outline different reasons why they believe teaching staff should be more cognitive about student's backgrounds.

Not a single respondent thought that tutors having a greater awareness of student background and using this knowledge to offer a more tailored support style would be a bad idea, or would not be helpful. The voice of Alumnus 20, who was first generation HE, attended state school and identified as working class, is used as an example of the more holistic, general reflections that were given by the remaining alumni, in answer to this question:

> I think that it would be a great idea, I think that anything conservatoires can do to help integrate students more successfully, the better. – Alumnus 20 (RWCMD and RAM, woodwind, 2011-2017)

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at existing studies and debates on the matter of social background within the conservatoire setting. I have acknowledged this data and added to these respective findings through applying the lens of conservatoire alumni experience, within my conversational model framework, for a critical, ethnographic reflection.

Whilst in the UK there has been an increasing focus on how all corners of society may have access to higher education over the past three decades in particular, there remains a persistent under-representation of the working-classes in music conservatoires in particular. To be skilled and knowledgeable enough to reach the level required for audition at these institutions demands many years of musical training, instrument purchase and exams undertaken, all of which require a notable financial sacrifice, predominantly by one's immediate family. Therefore, social background is intrinsically linked to the likelihood of whether a child begins to learn to play an instrument or not, aside from additional cultural concerns, with those from a background of higher financial security logistically more able to follow this pathway.

Therefore, my alumni are strongly representative of the working-class minority, in that they equate to 40% of my interview cohort. Not only that, but my interviewees are

also strongly representative of other non-traditional backgrounds within the context of the conservatoire student demographic, in that 40% of the alumni are first generation HE, and 80% of them came from a state-school educational habitus. The answer to the issue of increasing representation of those from state school backgrounds within the conservatoire system is far from obvious or straightforward. These institutions are working on programmes in an attempt to address this, predominantly through outreach work in disadvantaged communities, which helps to inspire and engage those who would traditionally feel that a career in classical music performance would be out of reach due to social and cultural class assumptions.

This study does not claim to provide the solution to the complex issue of under-representation. However, changes to the Royal College of Music's recent audition practices, to have a conscious awareness of auditionees social background and place a greater emphasis on 'potential', is positive action, and something which the findings of this thesis support. My study adds to this debate through an ethnographic, experiential discussion of how students, once at the conservatoire, are consciously/unconsciously affected by social background concerns and how this impacted their conservatoire experiences.

From this, I have been able to reflect on patterns in the data to determine how different groups of students require different types of support from conservatoire staff in order to have a happier, more motivated experience, and the effect this would have on their self-esteem and wellbeing more generally. Whilst health and wellbeing is a focus for the chapter 5 and so I will not dwell on this here, I will conclude that the data reflects there is indeed a correlation between feelings of self-confidence and notions of ability and 'talent', particularly when first entering the new conservatoire environment, that directly relate to educational and 'musical family' background. These are also strongly connected to students' notions of identity, with alumni showing that it is common for students to identify more strongly with one or the other of these two elements. Also effecting identity, those alumni who were first generation HE overwhelmingly reported that they had to 'fit in' to a system of traditional institutional practices, against which, they felt that they were not treated as an individual in terms of notions of 'talent' or aspirations. Thus, collectively, illuminating all the concepts of my conversational model to show that the conservatoire experience is layered with cultural and social concerns and that it is absolutely connected to issues relating to class.

Crucially, the discourse reflected that female alumnae were more consciously aware of their social background than their male counterparts and were also more

concerned by financial pressures in relation to conservatoire study. Additionally, only male alumni proactively used their social background as a catalyst for motivation during their conservatoire studies. I therefore argue that if conservatoire staff were made aware of students' educational background, and incorporate this with the gender patterns reflected here, they could provide a tailored support system more in tune with students' needs, however, this would need to be applied with transparency to limit the opportunity for bias and pre-conceptions in relation to educational background.

Another key issue raised in the alumni interview data was staff incomprehension regarding instrument purchase, whether that be replacing an instrument with an upgraded version, or buying multiple instruments of the same family (this is a particular necessity for woodwind players, with flautists needing piccolos, oboists needing cor anglais, clarinettists needing Bb, A, Eb and bass varieties and saxophonists requiring soprano, alto, tenor and baritone). In the experiences of those interviewed, there were concerning examples of recital marks being lower than they should be, openly due to the instrument not having been upgraded, and a general attitude of not caring how students were expected to find the finances required. This, I would argue, is a major area where staff awareness of students' social backgrounds would enable them to provide more appropriate support and advice. That is, staff could show a greater level of patience to those who do not have the option of asking family for financial assistance, and point them more helpfully instead in the direction of appropriate instrument scholarships/loans. The alumni data also shows that there is an apparent lack of knowledge from principal study tutors regarding what financial assistance is out there for students, for this purpose.

Finally, this chapter has shown that conservatoires are increasingly aware of the under-representation of the working classes at their institutions, and they are attempting to make some headway in this complex issue largely through outreach practices recently put into place, and by beginning to look at their admissions practice. However, they have not yet turned this gaze inwardly, to reflect upon and address how their students, from an array of social backgrounds, experience their conservatoire training differently, how this relates to notions of individuality, and identity, and how they may provide a more effective support system by taking into account students' backgrounds.

CHAPTER 3

ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES: NOTIONS OF 'TALENT'

As Kingsbury (1988), Nettl (1995), Davies (2002) and Perkins (2011) conclude, 'talent' is very much a concept at the heart of conservatoire training and the conservatoire experience. This chapter draws on their existing findings, respectively, to discuss how notions of 'talent' are understood and articulated by those within conservatoire establishments. In light of knowledge regarding conservatoire hierarchies (Perkins, 2011), I analyse the interview discourse to consider the practices involved in attributing notions of success, from alumni perspectives.

Building on Davies (2002) and Perkins (2011), I begin this chapter with a discussion on cultural capital within the conservatoire and what is valued most highly within these institutions. I focus my discussion on 'talent' around two subthemes that were most common across the discourse, that is, favouritism and pigeon-holing, and reflect how this latter practice was found both vertically and horizontally. I also focus on figures of power in 'talent' attribution, that is, principal study teachers and most notably, the head of department, whose role in student experiences of conservatoire practices is under-researched. Crucially, with my longitudinal study, I am able to reflect on whether conservatoires have heeded existing calls (from Ford, 2010, Perkins, 2011) to change their culture regarding their narrow assessment of 'talent'. Moreover, my data allows for reflections on patterns which are prevalent throughout the conservatoire network.

Applying the lens of my conversational model, I use Hall's concept of hegemony to examine power dynamics in conservatoires, honing in on a selected alumni case study (Alumnus 17) for detailed analysis. Through this case study I show how this conservatoire practice is connected to student's identity formation, in line with Hall (1990). To finish the chapter, I consider a new issue which arose from the data, regarding alumni's assumptions of 'talent' horizontally, across the conservatoire sector, relating this to symbolic capital.

3.1 Understanding and using the term 'talent' within conservatoires

Perkins (2011) discusses that 'talent' 'is something of an assumed attribute of those students admitted entry to the conservatoire. Talent though, is also posited as *differentiating* [italics in original] among students (Kingsbury, 1988), as a means of marking (potential) 'superstars'…As well as those who visibly establish their 'superstardom', then, hierarchies also appear to be constructed on the basis of the less demonstrable, and arguably more arbitrary, notion of 'talent'; of a certain 'something' that elevates some

students above others' (Perkins, 2011: 193-194). Davies concludes that within her field work conservatoire 'musical 'talent' is thus socially produced by staff and students rather than a pre-given biological 'fact', as both groups actively define and redefine their understandings of 'talent' within different social contexts and power relations.' (Davies 2002:45). However, Kingsbury (1988: 62-63) says that 'not the least important aspect of an analysis of talent is the fact that it brings us directly to a discussion of inequalities of social esteem, authority and power, something that is a basic element in any social process.'

We know that individuals' understanding and application of notions of 'talent', therefore, are shaped in direct relation to the wider social and cultural world of which they have been (historically) and are (presently) a product (class background), and of which they are currently a part. That is, their position in it, and their relation to and communication with others sharing the same field. This is confirmed across my data set, and is articulated by Alumnus 6 here:

> ['Talent'] is a bit of both [a product of inheritance and environment], you enjoy something because it comes naturally to you, but then it's up to you how far you take it. My parents paid for lessons, they didn't have a lot of money and were sacrificing so I could do it, so it gave me the impetus to practice to show I wanted to do it. – Alumnus 6[41]

Crucially, Davies (2006: 809) states that 'the extent to which students emphasize these components of 'natural ability' and 'effort' when they describe what it means to be a 'good performer' differs depending on their social class background.' She found that middle-class students were likely to attribute their capacity to perform well to 'natural ability', whilst working class students attribute this to 'working hard'. My own field work reflects that students believe initial musical 'talent' to be a product of natural, genetic/biological ability, however they all stress the necessity and importance of environmental factors in their musical education. The majority express that they believe musical 'talent' is largely developed through access to training and equipment, musical exposure, and nurtured with motivation and support from family, teachers and peers. Within the context of attending the conservatoire, there was a sense from all alumni interviewees that regardless of how much 'talent' a student did/did not have, determination and dedication to practise would be needed to develop this further.

My data resonates with Davies's findings regarding working class students placing a greater emphasis on working hard, in attribution of 'talent'. An example of general views

[41] RNCM and RCM, woodwind, 2007-2013

on ‘talent’ from alumni who identify as working class and is representative of the collective narratives, is given here by Alumna 18:

> ’Talent’ is definitely an environmental thing, to give people the confidence to get up and do it, you need a certain amount of cognitive ability to understand a tune, but you also need to know how to communicate openly with people, to not be withdrawn. It’s really interesting how they look at performers and a lot of them are the second or middle child who want the attention, it’s totally subconscious. I think it all comes down to where you come from and your experiences growing up. – Alumna 18[42]

Regardless of how and where students consider musical ‘talent’ to be acquired and developed, my interview data aligns with Kingsbury’s (1988: 59) reflection that the idea of (musical) ‘talent’ versus ‘real talent’ is an issue with which ‘nearly all’ students are very much concerned.

> There are definitely the ‘talented’ ones and they’re made to feel that they’re ‘talented’, and some of them weren’t I don’t think, but they came across that way because they were made to feel that way. – Alumna 3[43]

> I was always questioning ‘talent’, was ‘talent’ real? – Alumna 18 (who posed this question without prompting)[44]

However, there were notable exceptions, for example from Alumna 10 (who attended a private specialist music school prior to the conservatoire):

> Me: Did anyone talk about ‘talent’ or do you think it’s one of those things that’s not actively spoken about but is an unspoken element [within the conservatoire]? Or is it something you’ve never thought about?
> Alumna 10: Oh gosh, no I don’t think…I’m sure people thought about it, but I don’t think it was something that came [up] when I was there.[45]

Interestingly however, in general the alumni frequently had trouble directly interpreting the term ‘talent’ when it was used explicitly in a question. For example, I asked them: ‘did you directly question your own ‘talent’ when first commencing studies at the conservatoire as a result of comparing yourself and your abilities to your fellow students?’ Many subjects had to ask for further clarification, regarding the term ‘talent’ and asked for the inference of my question, and for it to then be repeated or rephrased. Granted, it may be that my interview question was deemed unclear to some of the participants, but it became evident that a large portion of the alumni did not apply the

[42] RWCMD, vocal studies, 2009-2011
[43] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010
[44] RWCMD, vocal studies, 2009-2011
[45] RNCM, woodwind, 2008-2013

actual word 'talent' to discourse about conservatoire practice and culture. Though it was something with which all but a small number of the alumni were concerned and had clear views on, they used other terms in their understanding and responses, in particular 'musicality' and 'natural ability'. In addition, some alumni, when asked about 'talent', replied immediately without prompt with a reflection on 'favouritism', which underlines both the complexity of the term 'talent', and also that favouritism is at the centre of concerns regarding this notion within conservatoire cultures. The confusion and interchangeability of the term 'talent' is demonstrated here by Alumnus 11:

> Alumnus 11: 'Talent' is always talked about because it's this unattainable thing, it's talked about by students, talked about by staff as well, because everyone's wrapped up in their own fears, you know, 'such and such is such a natural 'talent'. And natural 'talent' is the one thing you can't practice, supposedly. So yes, it's talked about a lot.
> Me: Did people actually use the word 'talent' or was it in other ways?'
> Alumnus 11: 'It was always just like a 'natural player' or 'he can just pick it up and doesn't have to practice, he can just pick it up and play', it's the same thing.[46]

To help further clarify students' understanding of the notion of 'talent'[47] within conservatoire settings, the concept of cultural capital can be employed and is particularly relevant in this discussion; interviewees frequently alluded to this concept implicitly, even though they were not conscious of doing so (largely due to the fact that this terminology is not used in conservatoire training and therefore is not a concept articulated by students/alumni).

3.2 The cultural capital students bring with them to the conservatoire

Within conservatoire settings, particularly upon entry, the amount and type of cultural capital one has can include such elements as:

- The type of students' musical education pre-HE (e.g. whether the school attended was a 'specialist music school' or not)
- Who taught them and whether this teacher was connected to a respected teaching or performing lineage
- Musical achievements and experiences including competitions

[46] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015

[47] Having reflected upon the term 'talent' within the conservatoire context, from here on in (with the purposeful exceptions of chapter and section headings, and reference to notions of 'talent' as one of my four key themes), I largely no longer position this word within inverted commas, for the purpose of improved reading flow. However, I continue to treat this term with caution throughout the thesis given that 'talent' is a contested concept.

- Membership of orchestras/ensembles at county and national levels (these latter two are also examples of symbolic capital)
- Whether anyone in their family has experience of the music profession and to what degree
- Their general Western Classical music knowledge.

In relation to the chapter theme of notions of 'talent', exploring accruement and perceptions of students' cultural capital provides a basis for reflection of issues with which students are very much concerned, and which they articulate (some more consciously than others) as falling under the umbrella term of 'talent'. For context, a 'specialist music school' as referred to above can be described in a UK context as a secondary level school which prioritises music tuition within its curriculum so that this is described as a special interest within the school. Such schools are by-and-large independent or private schools meaning that they are fee paying and do not fall within the state education sector. To clarify, for the purpose of my research, the institutions I refer to under the label of 'private specialist music schools' are Chetham's School of Music, Purcell School of Music, Yehudi Menuhin School and Wells Cathedral. These are the most commonly attended UK music specialist schools by conservatoire students pre-HE and therefore the most widely known by both staff and students. Junior conservatoire departments do not generally come under the umbrella term of 'specialist music school' for though they offer specialist music training, they are not schools, that is, not secondary educational institutions providing compulsory general education following government curriculum policies. They are fee-paying training courses offering specialist music tuition on Saturdays in term time and are in *addition* to school attendance during the week. All of the seven conservatoires in England and Wales run a Saturday junior department, and for clarification I refer to these collectively when using the plural label 'junior conservatoires'.

With regards to conservatoire students' possession of cultural capital upon entering the conservatoire, their prior musical training is a primary contributing factor in establishing the volume and composition of this capital. When students first arrive at their respective institutions, they will consciously and subconsciously compare the amount and nature of their previous musical exposure and education (amongst other things) and consider their own cultural capital currency with those of their peers. In her research, Perkins concludes that 'it seems reasonable to argue that those with the largest volumes of cultural capital will move most easily into and within the symbolic community' (Perkins, 2011: 112). In looking at the cultural capital students bring with them to the conservatoire,

how they acquired it, and why this has been acknowledged by figures of power within the institution over-and-above the forms of cultural capital that other students bring with them, we discover what helps to constitute talent in this pedagogic and learning environment. In this chapter, I apply my conversational model, bringing these Bourdieusian concepts into dialogue with Hall, to discuss how to be deemed talented or not, within the conservatoire, effected alumni's notions of identity.

As discussed in Chapter 2, alumni perceived a clear divide that related to the secondary (educational) habitus, more specifically, between those who had attended private specialist music schools pre-HE and those who had been educated at state schools. I also showed that this 'them and us' divide was only perceived from state school students towards their music school peers, i.e. it was not a reciprocal notion. One of the key motivators for this assumption was perceived differences in cultural capital. Effectively, most alumni from a state school background believed those from private specialist music schools to be more talented than them when they first arrived at the conservatoire. Alumnus 11's experience was a typical indication:

> Me: Did anybody talk about talent, the idea of talent? Were you bothered or not if people were seen as more talented than others, was that ever something you thought about?
> Alumnus 11: Yes, coming in first of all you think 'wow these people are really talented', it's more from a confidence point of view. Maybe that's for me personally but I remember sitting in performance class watching people just pick up a cornet – it was always brass – and play this slow melody beautifully, reduced to tears in performance class and you think 'I can't do that, they must be really…' but looking back on it, it was just background, I was never used to standing up and doing it, so I couldn't imagine standing up and doing it well.
> Me: So, your social background is linked to that, you think?
> Alumnus 11: Yeh, possibly. Everyone's is.[48]

State school alumni largely believed that this 'them and us' divide in relation to talent was also perpetuated by members of staff in the department, through acts of favouritism.

3.3 Favouritism and pigeon-holing: Re-assessing/re-distributing 'talent' throughout studies

To rethink Kingsbury's (1988: 59) statement that talent is something which concerns all conservatoire students, my data suggests that the notion of 'favouritism', specifically, is actually the central concern. All alumni, across all attendance dates and different

[48] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015

institutions, considered this to be prevalent in conservatoire practice, in varying degrees. Its prevalence meant that in turn, it was an assumed and accepted part of the culture, that could not be changed. Though there are studies that look at notions of talent in a broad sense within the conservatoire setting, the concept of favouritism, specifically, how this perceived practice effects experience and identity, requires more research.

Conservatoires are traditionally elitist institutions, by nature of their ethos, practices and aims, and students largely relish the competitive environment of these establishments. However, alumni drew a clear link between acts of perceived favouritism and problems with pigeon-holing. This chapter section therefore, considers these two interconnected issues. Alumni considered the same students were continually picked for the most prestigious performing opportunities, and were therefore favoured (and so deemed by the conservatoire to be the most talented). Alumni 20 and 10's responses below are typical of the interview narratives. Here, Alumnus 20 reflects two very different experiences of performance opportunities, in the two institutions he attended and comes to the conclusion – in the assumption that the respective conservatoires' value systems are comparable – that he must have been labelled a 'non-favourite' in the first, yet a 'favourite' in the second:

> Me: Do you believe favouritism is an active thing [within conservatoires]?
> Alumnus 20: I think so. I mean, I think it is, yes, because I feel like I've slightly been on both ends of it. In a sense that I really genuinely feel like I wasn't doing anything that much differently, say from the summer of 4th year [at RWCMD] to the September when I started at Academy, I genuinely don't believe I changed that much in those 6 months as a player, but I felt like – so to stop beating around the bush – I think I'd gone into Symphony Orchestra in [my undergraduate] maybe twice in my whole 4 years there, and obviously that's quite difficult seeing the same people getting in and whatever. You know, I don't know how my playing was being perceived and it could have very well been completely 'I don't think he's ready for it', which is fine, but obviously I think when you see the same faces, you're bound to start to get feelings towards that. And then starting at the Academy, we did an orchestral audition and suddenly I was playing like first clarinet in all of the projects.[49]

As both Alumnus 20 above and alumnae 10 and 19 below reflect, assumptions are made regarding individuals' talent upon first commencing studies:

> Alumna 10: I know people that wouldn't admit to that [favouritism] but I'd say it's definitely something and I'm sure it happens in all colleges.
> Me: If there is favouritism, when do you think they decide the favourites?

[49] RWCMD and RAM, woodwind, 2011-2017

> Alumna 10: I think it's in your first year of college, if you put yourself out there in doing various competitions, promoting the college I guess in a sense, then they're going to be more inclined to like you.[50]
>
> Right from the first performance class in first year, you know who the favourites are straight away. – Alumna 19[51]

Alumnus 11 also confirmed these views regarding talent attribution at the commencement of studies and articulated a perceived 'them and us' divide related to social background, in particular, relating to educational habitus and cultural capital; this resonates with my conceptual model as he draws links between class, capital and identity. Concurrently, having self-identified as working class, he also confirms the findings of Davies (2006: 804-805) relating to working-class students believing talent to be a result of hard work:

> Me: Did you ever feel an element of favouritism?
> Alumnus 11: There's always going to be favouritism, but, yes, of course, from everyone, you know who likes you and you know who doesn't like you.
> Me: Did that bother you or did you just think that was an accepted part of the experience?
> Alumnus 11: An accepted part of the experience. In a way, you try and make the most of people who do favour you, and actually looking back on it, I think the favourites that are chosen are roughly always deserving. So, I was very lucky, the head of brass liked people who worked hard, so as soon as you worked hard, you're a favourite, which I think is how life works, how life should work. Differently, there was a chap in my year who came from [private specialist music school] Wells Cathedral School who was very, very good, and that's a really difficult one as a teacher isn't it, he was always looked upon favourably and would get away with murder because he was going to be the next star.[52]

When the alumni were questioned as to whether they considered 'favouritism' to be an element of their conservatoire experience, the response was overwhelming, with all of the alumni interviewed replying 'yes'. Their main response was that they considered the same students were continually picked by the head of department for the most prestigious performing opportunities, and were therefore anointed as favourites (and thus deemed the most talented). Crucially, students who considered that they were not a 'favourite' felt that it was not possible to alter their position in the hierarchy, that if they were not labelled as such at the beginning of their studies, these most prestigious performing opportunities would continue to allude them for the remainder of their studies.

[50] RNCM, woodwind, 2008-2013
[51] RWCMD, woodwind, 2012-2018
[52] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015

> Everyone knew who people's favourites were from really early on and they kind of stuck that way all the way through. It's quite a bitchy place and people are too quick to criticise, people were too quick to judge and you'd feel like people were more talented and they were the people that were favourited and that pushed them even further away from where you felt they were. When I was there, I felt like I was trying to keep up, whereas towards the end – I much enjoyed my final year – you should just be yourself and focus on the things that you're good at and judge yourself only against yourself, and not others. – Alumna 3[53]

> Heads of departments attribute things to different people, and then if you don't have it, you're ignored, or even if you do improve, they're like 'you'll never do that'. – Alumna 5[54]

> I remember noticing, if anything, there's a hint of favouritism in the first year and then as the years go on it becomes more obvious that that is the case because you've got more examples [of it]. – Alumna 19[55]

The discourse shows that the attributed role of 'favourite' within a department was viewed to be one that could only have positive connotations and rewards, by those who were considered that they were not labelled as such. However, a selection of interviewees who considered that they were attributed this role reported that it was not an entirely positive position to be in, within the hierarchy, and there were some negative repercussions relating to wellbeing and identity in particular.

This was reflected in the experiences of alumni 16 and 13, below, who actually attended the same conservatoire at the same time and were peers within the same department (this was coincidence, not planned, that I would have two interview volunteers whose experience overlaps in this way, but it does make for an interesting comparison). Given that these two subjects make up half of my self-identified departmental favourites, and the remaining half attended different institutions and experienced no negative effects, it is hard to say with certainty whether this shared negative discourse is coincidental or more reflective of an insidious culture in this particular conservatoire. However, it is an interesting coincidence to note.

> People are forgiven when they think you have talent, I think. And I think they decide whether you have talent at your audition, obviously, and then that stays in there and I think other friends of mine - who all have talent - who were told they had talent at the beginning, I say that you're forgiven for things. But, also, I think they excuse stuff as well and then things can sort of regress. I've got friends, in the first year they were like 'you're going to be principal of the LSO [London Symphony Orchestra] when you leave' kind of thing, and they just sort of nosedived because they weren't actually really supported. I think if you're given that kind of stamp,

[53] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010
[54] GSMD, strings, 2004-2009
[55] RWCMD, woodwind, 2012-2018

> it's very clear, they make it clear from the beginning where you are in the pecking order and I think if you're at the top, if can affect your progress in a negative way as well. - Alumna 16[56]

Here, Alumna 16 infers that being labelled as a favourite, and therefore to be deemed as the most talented within a department, creates an unspoken assumption that you will immediately be successful upon leaving the conservatoire and entering the profession. This would be within the most highly prized form of cultural capital, i.e. solo followed by orchestral performance and within the Western Classical music tradition. However, the retrospective interview discourse shows that this practice of favouritism can serve to encourage false promises regarding the ease with which work can be obtained post-study and did not foster a realistic enough preparation:

> Alumnus 13: I think if I was taught with a little bit more sensitivity and empathy, I would have understood that actually making people feel like favourites and then once they're out of the institution, pulling the rug from underneath them and leaving them on their arse, is really irresponsible.
> Me: So, you weren't given the guidance or the tools necessarily?
> Alumnus 13: No, the tools weren't in place.[57]

There was one other strand of negative association with being the favourite which was again common across both Alumni 16 and 13's narratives, regarding peers:

> Alumna 16: It's kind of embarrassing actually [being the favourite], it's embarrassing when your friends are not the favourite and then you can't explain, there's no rhyme or reason why you should be getting something over them.
> Me: You felt like you almost want to apologise?
> Alumna 16: Exactly. It's not fair, I think it kind of breeds that poisonous competitive nature, they kind of keep that alive there.[58]

> Alumnus 13: I was one of the favourites. There was definitely a system, a hierarchy certainly in the department and by that time [another] and I were kind of considered the top of the year, so we got the seatings. And there was definitely, certainly in the years above, there was a lot of, we would call them 'the pedestal kids', there were a lot of them put on a pedestal.
> Me: How did that make you feel? Good or uncomfortable around your peers?
> Alumnus 13: Uncomfortable. And there was a lot of snidey-ness going on from [his peers, one person in particular] what also bled into that was that we had mutual friends…there was a lot of backstabbing going on, so that kind of bled into everything.
> Me: Do you think it's quite difficult when your friends are also your competition?
> Alumnus 13: Yes, it did make it very awkward. Particularly when I was being favoured.[59]

[56] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003
[57] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003
[58] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003
[59] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

Both alumni 16 and 13's experiences show that though the hierarchical conservatoire culture which creates favourites raises one's symbolic capital, given that it is implicitly assumed to be a position of honour and prestige, it is not without its pitfalls and can have a negative effect on social capital. In turn, this raises issues with 'belonging' amongst their peer group and further inflames the precarious issue of friends as competition, which pervades these institutions.

Perceptions of favouritism were directly connected in alumni discourse to those of pigeon-holing. I have confirmed Perkins (2013) findings that students inevitably enter the conservatoire with different levels of cultural capital which serve to position them within the hierarchy of their student peers. Additionally, I have shown that this hierarchical tradition gives way to perceived acts of favouritism, whereby the most talented students are favoured with a greater number of performance opportunities, and the most prestigious. This was agreed by all alumni interviewed. To ascertain whether this was a fixed label throughout the course of study or whether alumni believed, particularly in retrospect, that this was a flexible notion, I asked them whether they considered talent to be fairly re-assessed and re-distributed throughout their studies. Over half of those alumni interviewed considered that students were commonly pigeon-holed into possessing/not possessing certain musical talents. They felt that once decisions regarding talent had been made, it was perceived as extremely difficult for this assessment to be readdressed. The following quotes from alumni highlight this concern:

> I think so, yes [that students are pigeon-holed. I do feel that certain moments help someone to build up a picture of you, which might be actually completely valid, but I think that people do change and when you're that kind of age, in an environment where it's just pretty mental, I think you can drastically change in a couple of months, and in a year you can be completely different but I do feel that wasn't always acknowledged, I think there is slightly a sense of 'this is how this person is, how they play, what they do and that is how I see them'. I'm not saying they didn't see progress, I'm sure they did but I think it was slightly biased. – Alumnus 20[60]

> Alumna 16: This will probably be a later question I don't know, but the thing that was so difficult, but worked in my favour, was they pigeon-holed people from year one and if you got put in a good pigeon-hole, you were fine. And I was lucky because I got loads of playing and was put forward for things, it was so easy. The whole thing was really easy for me, but she [the other person who played her instrument in her year] massively struggled, she had a really rough time, you know, just not getting opportunities. I think they decide pretty soon, maybe at audition, maybe it's on paper because I had a scholarship. So, maybe already automatically in their minds they're thinking 'oh well, she must be able to do whatever'. I think

[60] RWCMD and RAM, woodwind, 2011-2017

> technique-wise and stuff, I was slightly ahead of her [her peer] at the beginning. The thing that's really difficult is, people progress at different rates and I progressed quickly whilst at music college, especially from my second year onwards I progressed a lot. And, I think a lot of it is to do with the fact I was given the opportunities to do so, and wonder whether she was given the opportunity to do so, she would have progressed at the same rate.
> Me: Do you think they readdressed abilities over the four years, or did the pigeon-holing stick?
> Alumna 16: Stick. It stuck, yes. They decide that in first term, definitely.[61]

Here, Alumna 16 brought up the topic of pigeon-holing without any prompting. It was also a practice articulated by Alumna 5, below, in relation to the hierarchical value of solo performance, for which she was not deemed talented enough. For her, the resultant experience with conservatoire staff directly contributed to performance anxiety problems which she had never encountered previously, and which proceeded to affect the duration of her studies:

> I think they'd just pigeon-holed me and instead of really looking at individuals…they had 8 people to really nurture in the violin department in my year, and we were all different people, different players with different needs and what they didn't do was nurture that, as individuals. So what I found was that 'she's got raw talent, natural ability, a nice sound etc, however she's not a soloist, so let's just shove her to one side for a minute and focus on the people that when they arrived were amazing players', what I found then was a complete lack of encouragement and a sense of nurturing. And what happened then was even though my teacher was brilliant, I really suffered and for the first time…It took the enjoyment away from performing and what happened then was I really suffered with performance anxiety. - Alumna 5[62]

The prevalence of judgements surrounding talent and the subsequent pigeon-holing was not solely found in the vertical staff to student direction, but also horizontally between students, as a response to measures of symbolic capital such as scholarships, and cultural capital such as schooling pre-higher education. This was reflected, for example, by Alumnus 13:

> It wasn't apparent until we had to play on platforms and stuff, you know, where I kind of sat within the spectrum of things. The guy from Purcell was a scholar, the guy who went to [Junior] Academy was an Exhibitioner so half scholarship/fees or something, and certainly the guy who went to Purcell presented himself, he was nice but very confident of his abilities. I found the guy who went to Junior Academy a bit of an anomaly because when I heard him play, he had all these mannerisms going on, I thought he played in a really odd way, his sound wasn't particularly nice. But, I assumed because they'd offered him this Exhibition [scholarship] there must be something in his playing. And the guy who went to private school, if I'm honest,

[61] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003
[62] GSMD, strings, 2004-2009

> once I'd heard everyone, probably sat myself right in the middle. And I'd already kind of done a pecking order myself, that it went: Purcell, Junior Academy, me joined up with this [private school] girl, because I felt like she made a nice sound and technically I thought that perhaps we were in a similar region. Then, this guy who made a really weird, tiny sound, well, he was sort of bottom of the pecking order. I'd sort of done that [a mental pecking order] after we'd all played in performances and after the orchestral auditions at the beginning of the year and seatings. – Alumnus 13[63]

Alumnus 13's discourse shows that he pigeon-holed people in relation to their talent, clearly based on their social background, in particular their educational habitus. In so doing, this helped him identify as not being at the bottom of the pecking order, and therefore, the least talented.

3.4 Figures of power

Under the broader notion of 'talent', I have thus far established the prevalence of perceived favouritism and pigeon-holing (both horizontally and vertically) within conservatoire culture, and that both of these practices can negatively affect musicians' self-identity (as well as the assumed positive connotations).

Connecting these notions of capital and identity to another strand of my conversational model, the question therein lies *who* are the figures within conservatoires that attribute talent, i.e. who is wielding this power and by what practices are they able to shape/dominate students' experiences in this way? To ascertain this, I asked alumni who they thought were the most influential and powerful people in their conservatoire experiences, and made it clear that these could be the same or different people. In response, my ethnographic data shows that there are two figures, the one-to-one principal study teacher and head of department.

There have been many studies which hone in on the nature of the one-to-one student-teacher relationship (see introduction chapter, section 0.1.1) which is central to a conservatoire education (mostly these have been in relation to pedagogic practice and curriculum). However, there is no ethnographic study from a retrospective position that looks especially at how this dominant figure in the conservatoire experience effects students' notions of their ability, and in a broader sense, their identity, and how the impact of this relationship can be long-lasting. Additionally, there are no studies which look at the nature of the relationship between student and head of department specifically, and the

[63] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

power dynamics between the two. My thesis, therefore, offers rich insights into these two areas.

The question of 'most influential' figure in alumni's experiences elicited two types of answer. The principal study teacher was typically seen as the most influential regarding personal development and identity and was also considered the 'most important' across the discourse. However, the head of department was typically viewed as the most powerful in relation to 'success' within the conservatoire. Alumna 10 elaborates on this:

> Alumna 10: Our head of woodwind was fantastic. Yeh I think [they are] very important, they can really make your college experience very different, if they like you then it's great but if they don't then it's awful. I was lucky that the head of woodwind when I was at RNCM liked me and gave me lots of opportunities which is fantastic, but I know from other people, their college experiences were really not good because of that figure. So yes, he is very important.
> Me: So potentially your dealings of with head of department can affect your whole experience?
> Alumna 10: Massively, yes.[64]

Traditionally in conservatoires, students are considered more or less talented in relation to the standard, type and volume of performance opportunities they are selected for, thereby reflecting the opinion of the figure in charge of selection, which are the respective heads of departments (i.e. strings, woodwind, brass, percussion, keyboard, voice, etc).

> [The head of department] chose the opportunities. – Alumnus 6[65]

> Heads of departments attribute things to different people, and then if you don't have it, you're ignored. Or, even if you do improve, they're like 'you'll never do that'. – Alumna 18[66]

> Much as I loved my head of department, he was awful for favouritism. And the reason I don't think it affected the saxes is because it showed in who he gave the orchestral places too. Whereas we were all told from the start that any placements were based on marks and even distribution, if you look at the flutes for example, they all got incredible marks yet the same one player in the flutes always used to get the opportunities. – Alumna 19[67]

Here, Alumna 18 expresses her concerns regarding pigeon-holing by the head of department, and issues with reassessment and redistribution of talent, whilst Alumna 19 articulates how this culture may be perceived differently, depending on the instrument

[64] RNCM, woodwind, 2008-2013
[65] RCM and RAM, woodwind, 2005-2011
[66] RWCMD, vocal studies, 2009-2011
[67] RWCMD, woodwind, 2012-2018

family to which students belong. It is important to note here that within every conservatoire the head of department is typically the only figure who is on every performance exam panel throughout a student's four-plus years of study.

> Me: Was it important to have a good relationship with head of department for success there?
> Alumna 3: [without prompting on the subject] There's obviously favouritism, I think it's really important to have a good relationship, they'd have people they didn't get on with and they'd tend to have not great marks all the time. Which may have been them, but then I also think that because they expected them to play that way, even when they played so much better, they were still given a mark they didn't deserve or were criticised wrongly. But, it's a tough one, you can't get on with everyone, but these are the people who'll pass your degree and it's down to them to give you a mark, and if you don't naturally get on it's a problem.[68]

Applying my conversational model, I argue that heads of department inflict hegemonic power, as they are the 'the ruling class [person] that can manipulate the value system [that hierarchises certain forms of cultural capital, and thereby talent] and mores of a society, so that their view becomes the world [departmental] view.'[69] Importantly, power is hegemonic only if those affected by it (i.e. students with less cultural capital or talent) consent to it and struggle over its common sense. Though alumni collectively articulate issues regarding favouritism and pigeon-holing in retrospection, they did not publicly object at the time and it became an assumed part of the culture, though it was an issue with which they struggled to reconcile privately.

3.5 Dynamics of power and identity: A case study

This dominating power dynamic can also be seen in some instances of one-to-one teaching. Presenting a case study from which to explore notions of talent and power dynamics in more detail, I hone in here on an extended discourse from Alumnus 17 and apply my Hall and Bourdieu conversational model to his narrative. Alumnus 17's experience here relates to his principal study teacher:

> I was aware sort of half way through my first year that I really wanted to know the way it was working [the mechanics of playing] and I wasn't getting that from my teacher. And the second year just got worse and worse, the second year was a real low point. I did Top of The Pops in my first term at the Academy and I was getting a lot of gigs with him [the pop artist]. And I got into a ska band touring over the Easter of my second year, I think, and had to rearrange a lesson with [principal study teacher] and I came back and he said 'well, where were you?' and I told him,

[68] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010
[69] Wikipedia. "Hegemony." Last amended 8th September 2019. Accessed 10th September 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemony

> and he ripped two strips off me. And I think he said something like 'if I catch you doing any more jazz gigs again then I'll kick your teeth in', is my recollection of it. Also, at some point, it was really railing against not knowing what the hell it was I was doing. I knew I had to do eight hours practice a day but I just couldn't mindlessly go and bang my head against the wall in the hope that'd make it better. So, I spent hours in front of a mirror trying to find out what it was that would make my playing worse, I spent hours watching other people, I had the piss ripped something chronic. But I wanted to find out how it worked so I could make it better. – Alumnus 17[70]

Alumnus 17's experience acutely reflects the conservatoire culture hierarchical system in action. This places the highest value on music of the Western Classical tradition, therefore, his teacher exerted power to diminish, or de-value, Alumnus 17's most pleasurable genre of performance pre-conservatoire; his existing cultural capital was not seen as acceptable to his teacher.

In addition, the teaching method was not accessible to Alumnus 17, who found that he needed a different approach that emphasised mechanics and processes in the physical and technical aspects of playing. As a teacher who carried a high prestige value (i.e. to be taught by him carried a high symbolic capital), this meant that his views on student's ability and commitment were accepted by the other students in his cohort (i.e. Alumnus 17's peers) seemingly without question. Thus, reflecting the link shown in my conversational model between the concepts of power and identity. Alumnus 17's discourse shows that this hegemonic practice greatly affected his self-identity, leaving him with questions about his own ability, and importantly for him particularly, his musicality. His sense of belonging amongst his peers was also questioned, given such behaviour as described here:

> Alumnus 17: One night I remember we were in the bar and a guy got my head in his hands and said 'you need to learn how to play the [expletive] trombone, you [expletive]' and shoved me around a bit. Which was pleasant, I enjoyed that. You know, so those things weren't acceptable and it was that kind of rugby sort of atmosphere.
> Me: Do you think that had any relation to the background you came from or just simply because of the pathway of your playing?
> Alumnus 17: I think it was the pathway of my playing and the relationship with my teacher at that point. I didn't fit their stereotypes and actually now, looking back, I genuinely feel quite sorry for them because they didn't have the range of experiences that I had doing pop stuff, and they didn't really value those as styles of music. One of the other guys that did a postgrad there was not seen as being very good is now doing fantastic work as a commercial trombone player and now suddenly everyone's coming out of the woodwork to say hello to him again. Socially, with the people you weren't close to, there was an overwhelming thing of

[70] RAM, brass, 1997-2001

> 'if you're a good player, we like you, and if you're not a good player, you can go [expletive] yourself'.
> Me: And for them, their context of a "good player" was orchestral?
> Alumnus 17: Yes, was very certainly described by that.
> Me: And also, was their definition based on [your shared teacher's] definition of a "good player", if you like?
> Alumnus 17: Yes. Although I mean to be fair to them, I wasn't very good, I was shit for a large period of time at college, it's just I didn't know what I was doing but I knew I was trying all these odd approaches, different ideas and stuff. I've got a cornet method from my time at college and it's full of drawings and scribbles and stuff of just me trying to work out what the hell it was I was meant to be doing. So, socially, that's kind of where we sat.

Here, in his perception that he was "shit for a large period of time at college", we see Alumnus 17's identity, with regards to self-confidence in his playing ability, was detrimentally effected as a direct result of both his teacher and his peers. However, the root of this culture is the former of these two. These are issues to which he voluntarily returns later in the interview, a reflection of the great effect this had in the formation of his identity as a performer:

> Alumnus 17: There was a social capital associated with being one of [his principal study teacher]'s golden boys and by the end of my second year, I was definitely on the shit list and that's followed me around, to this day actually. Yes, I bumped into one of the trumpet players I was at college with a couple of weeks ago and there was a real element of 'I remember you, you were crap'. There are a few players I still see from that time and I've got a chip on my shoulder, I'm aware it's there but it's under control, but I'm not sure I'm that happy about it. But that's life, we all have those things.
> Me: Do you think if you'd have gone down a more classical route [in career post-conservatoire] that you might have had a more positive experience [of the institution]?
> Alumnus 17: I think the Academy's overwhelming focus on that course at that time was on orchestral playing and the only way you could be a success is if you're first trombone of this, or first trombone of this. That's not the way the world works and also that's a very narrow definition of success and I think it's one – if I had to make any recommendations to the college sector – it's one which they need to take a serious [expletive] look at. Because not everyone is going to get those jobs, and that's not what music is about, they are not vocational courses in orchestral playing, they're degrees in music and there's very little music that takes place. There's the things they do very well but there's not encouragement that stems beyond those things. I remember doing some practice with one of the jazz trombone players at the academy and got told to 'stop [expletive] around' [by his teacher], quote, unquote. But I'm playing music that I'm interested in.

Beyond the conservatoire, sixteen years after graduation, Alumnus 17 is now in one of the most successful musical theatre shows in London's West End. Though he has undoubtedly achieved great success, and in spite of his discouragement at the conservatoire from performing in styles including shows, this overwhelmingly negative

experience within his department has shaped, and to a degree continues to shape, his identity. For, he actively avoids any orchestral work (his teacher was a renowned section leader with an orchestra) for the "fear" this invoked in him during his time at the conservatoire. This short and long-term impact on Alumnus 17's notion of self- and musical identity contradicts the findings of Burland (2005), who looked at the transition out of music higher education, comparing the responses of a set of university and music college students, and why some students choose to become performers whilst others do not. For, she stated that 'the music college students…had close personal relationships with their peers and teachers but if the relationship had a negative impact, the students in the group were able to perceive the situation with objectivity and distance. It did not seem to have a detrimental effect on their progress…[they] were less effected than the university students by negative experiences and feedback from others.' (Burland, 2005: 109-110).

Alumnus 17 was not the only interviewee who demonstrated a clear connection between perceived student talent (attributed by the two dominant power figures, the head of department and/or principal study teacher) and subsequent social experiences within the institution. This was also felt by Alumnus 7 – who in fact attended the same conservatoire as Alumnus 17 and was a member of the same instrumental department - and provides another example that the conservatoire experience is a web of interconnected practices and cultures whereby one directly impacts another:

> Alumnus 7: The vibe there was very different, if you weren't good enough it meant categorically people - staff and your peers - did not like you. That was categorically it.
> Me: So, talent, in inverted commas, was really important in the Academy, more so than in Trinity?
> Alumnus 7: Yes, more so than in Trinity. Trinity was 'everyone's here to do their best and your best will always be accepted. It may not be the best mark, you won't be as good as so-and-so, but you are valued regardless.' Can I tell you a little story? So, we were doing Mahler 5 in low brass class [at Academy], there are four trombone parts, the fourth one being bass trombone and a tuba part. So, we go through each section and there'll be two on every part. I think there were about eight trombones in Academy at that time and a couple of tubas. The head of trombone or whatever he is, goes around and asks everybody 'what's your favourite recording?'. [Replies were] 'LSO Bernard Haitink, Vienna'. So, he gets to me now and I'm playing third tenor trombone, goes past me, smiles at me and moves on to the next person. And everyone looked. It wasn't because I was black or gay, or anything, because the person next to me, he was black! And I thought 'that was a bit rude, I have listened to recordings, I have got a comment and I do know which one I like, I've prepared this.' And that was one of many instances where I was treated very differently.
> Me: And do you think that was to do with your perceived ability?

> Alumnus 7: Yes. Because I was shit in their eyes, you weren't worthy of being in that classroom, and given the same attention.[71]

He continues, later in the interview:

> So, our normal trombone class was one evening a week and at the end of it, no-one ever invited me for a drink. Their principles [at Academy] were if you're talented, then you're a good person. If you're not talented that means you're a bad person, which as we know is not true. - Alumnus 7

Here, Alumnus 7 has demonstrated as with Alumnus 17, that to be deemed talented within the conservatoire can have the potential (in some institutions) to not only determine position within the cultural and symbolic capital hierarchy of the conservatoire, but it is connected to social capital also. Thereby, clearly connecting the capital-habitus-field tripartite with power dynamics and identity concepts of my conversational model.

3.6 'Talent' and hierarchies across the conservatoire network

Before I conclude my chapter findings, I offer some reflections regarding other talent related concerns across the narratives. A final theme to arise from the data shows that there was one more perceived 'them and us' divide, which has not been reflected in existing studies, that is, perceptions of 'talent' between different conservatoires. There were two ways in which this was articulated. Firstly, from those outside of London, who assumed that the standard of performance, i.e. talent, was higher in the capital than in their institutions outside of this location:

> I make a big thing of it when people say where did you go, I go 'Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama' and not apologising about it. But, secretly…. [when people ask "where did you study" and they respond with] 'Oh, Cardiff? Why didn't you go to Guildhall?' I always get asked that, especially Guildhall. And I'm never going to hide it [where he studied], but you can see what they're thinking. It's a difficult one because you feel like you want to say afterwards, this is a really horrible thing to say, 'but I'm one of the good ones' or 'but I studied with such and such', or 'but I go in with these people'. And yet, I love the college, I absolutely love it.- Alumnus 11[72]

These opinions regarding the hierarchy of conservatoires across the country, particularly in relation to inside/outside London were also echoed by Alumna 10, a graduate of another institution outside of the capital. Like Alumnus 11 above, she too also expresses the need to "justify" to others in the profession now, why she didn't study in London:

[71] TLCMD and RAM, brass, 2009-2012
[72] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015

> There is that thing between Manchester and London and because I was very aware of that coming from Chets and my teacher decided that I should go to London [but she didn't], that was the next step, and looking back, yes I probably should have gone to London musically and it might have made a bigger difference now because of what I was saying about going to the Northern and not feeling that I was really pushed, it might have been a different situation in London. And when I say that I went to the Northern, I would probably say 'because [her husband] went there' because I feel people look at you differently. So, I would say 'I went to the Northern, studied with lalalala' and then I would say 'my husband also went there and that was what…' which maybe that's just me, wanting to justify it. – Alumna 10[73]

This sentiment is also echoed by Alumni 19, who attended a different conservatoire than Alumna 10, further reflecting that this perceived broader institutional hierarchy is a common thread across the sector:

> I think there's a lot of stigma about RWCMD compared to other colleges, you know, like Royal Welsh, as much as I like to think it is up there and it offers some fantastic teaching or whatever, in the rankings it's not up there with Royal Academy and Royal College. I think I like to fight the corner for RWCMD and not be ashamed to say I went there. I love telling people that I chose to stay there for postgrad, I wouldn't have voluntarily paid to stay there if I didn't want to go there. And to help kind of increase the reputation of RWCMD, will tell people all the good things about it. – Alumna 19[74]

The second perceived divide is articulated as being *within* London, that the four conservatoires in this city do not have the same level of talented students. This cross-conservatoire comparison across the London scene was articulated by Alumnus 7, throughout his testimony, as he compared his experiences between the two postgraduate conservatoires that he attended. An example of which is included here:

> In Trinity, it was always 'you're here to do your best, whatever that may be, to be encouraged', whilst in Academy, it was 'you are the best, the cream of the crop, everyone knows that only the chosen few are allowed in'. – Alumnus 7[75]

A cross-conservatoire hierarchy within the city of London is also demonstrated by Alumna 14 below. Importantly, in Alumna 14's case, this particular hierarchical discourse is attributed to a principal study teacher, further underlining the reproductive hierarchical culture that pervades on an even broader scale than has previously been reflected in

[73] RNCM, woodwind, 2008-2013
[74] RWCMD, woodwind, 2012-2018
[75] TLCMD and RAM, brass, 2009-2012

existing literature, and attributes different amounts of symbolic capital to different conservatoires:

> Me: Did you feel that favouritism was prevalent, yes or no?
> Alumna 14: Yes, yes it was. There was one teacher I think was really terrible at that and was quite explicit, and kind of said 'oh you're too good for Trinity'.[76]

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have applied all elements of my conversational model to the alumni discourse. In so doing, I have also built on Kingsbury's (1988) claim that talent is the central concern for (American) conservatoire students, to show that across the British contemporary conservatoire network, favouritism (primarily) and pigeon-holing (secondarily, as a direct consequence of favouritism) are actually the predominant concern. Specifically, I show that the attribution of talent directly leads to perceptions of favouritism. Additionally, alumni predominantly perceived that 'favourites' were chosen at the outset of conservatoire studies. Furthermore, the interviewees felt that favourites were therefore selected based on assumptions and perceptions regarding individual's cultural and symbolic capital that were unequivocally connected to their social background (e.g. educational habitus, previous instrumental teachers, membership of youth ensembles).

Additionally, I have demonstrated that the symbolic capital students attribute to the position of favourite serves to heighten tensions within their respective departments, and that as a result, peer relationships can be detrimentally affected. Additionally, alumni who self-identified as conservatoire favourites also reflected that they were, to a degree, more ignorant to certain realities of the profession thereafter, subsequently underestimating the rejection and disappointment that comes with being a professional musician. They considered that this was due to their having not experienced these emotions and learning how to deal with them whilst at the conservatoire, given that they'd been seemingly favoured in performance opportunities. Therefore, conservatoire practices that imply notions of favouritism, are directly connected to students' notions of identity and can have both positive and negative effects for those in both groups (i.e. favourites and non-favourites). Thus, this culture of favouritism can be connected to issues surrounding health and wellbeing (discussed in chapter 5).

My findings show that the dominant figures of power in attributing talent through perceived acts of favouritism are firstly, the head of department, and secondly, principal

[76] TLCMD, woodwind, 2008-2013

study teachers. I have offered new insights, building on existing knowledge regarding the role and influence of head of department, through alumni discourse, to show that these figures inflict hegemonic power through their practices. In applying my conversational model to the ethnographic data, I also argued, through an alumnus case study, that hegemonic practice can also be found in the one-to-one teaching dynamic between principal study teachers and students. I showed that this practice could be particularly detrimental when these teachers carry high prestige (i.e. a high symbolic capital) and that the effects can subsequently filter into student's social experiences too. In addition, it was clear that as a consequence, there can be long term effects on alumni's wellbeing and identity conception.

Finally, I showed that the perceived 'them and us' divide, which was introduced in chapter 2, and elaborated on here in this chapter through discussion of favouritism, also extends to the broader conservatoire network itself. That is, there are clear assumptions regarding the level of student talent associated with each conservatoire, with those outside of London assuming that the general standard in the capital was higher. Additionally, there were also multiple examples of conservatoire-to-conservatoire comparison within the city of London itself, articulated by both students and instrumental teaching staff, which points to a general hierarchical value system relating to notions of talent and symbolic capital, across the network.

CHAPTER 4

ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES: CURRICULUM

This chapter contributes to current discourses centred around the conservatoire curriculum. Specifically, I add to debates on the prevalence of the hierarchical musical canon and what a contemporary conservatoire education 'should' look like. This discussion is in response to the changing demands of the profession and increased calls for higher education institutions to reflect on the issue of 'employability'.

The alumni accounts in this thesis allow for a longitudinal reflection on conservatoire curriculum change over a twenty-eight-year time span, crucially, from a first-hand experiential perspective. Their voices provide a rich insight into the range of skills needed for the modern musician to survive, and ideally thrive, in the music profession as it exists in the current age. Vitally, with their knowledge they are ideally positioned to reflect on bridging the gap between conservatoire training ideals and the realities of the professions' demands, a transitional process which arose as a key issue across the alumni discourse.

Academic discussion of conservatoire curriculum content and the changing face of the profession has become increasingly engaged over the last twenty years in particular. Concurrently, there has also been a rise in specialist conventions promoting active discussion amongst research figures on the remit and ethos of the contemporary conservatoire, such as the Guildhall School of Music and Drama 'Reflective Conservatoire Conferences'[77] which have taken place every two years since 2006. Professional groups such as the Innovative Conservatoire (ICON)[78], formed after the first Guildhall Reflective Conference and consisting of conservatoire teachers from across Europe and Australia, stress that discourse on curriculum focus is not limited to British conservatoires, but is a global concern for all such institutions.

Some of the dominant global voices within conservatoire curriculum discourse are found in Australia, through Gemma Carey, Don Lebler and Catherine Grant, respectively, who look at one-to-one pedagogic practices (Carey and Grant, 2014) and the process of reforming a bachelor of music programme at an Australian conservatoire (Carey and Lebler,

[77] Guildhall School of Music and Drama. "Reflective Conservatoire Conference 2018." Accessed 3rd February 2019.
https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/about_the_school/research/whats_on/reflective_conservatoire_conference/

[78] C. Duffy. 2016. "ICON: Radical Professional Development in the Conservatoire." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15(3-4): 376-385.

2012b). In European contexts, a focus on curriculum concerns is demonstrated by researchers including Tina K. Ramnarine, in her study of the processes of institutionalisation and innovation in the transmission of contemporary folk music at the Sibelius Academy in Finland (Ramnarine, 1996). Whilst in British contexts, discussion of conservatoire curriculum is reflected in the work of Helena Gaunt, who as with Carey and Lebler, looks at the nature of the one-to-one teaching structure at a UK conservatoire (2006, 2009) and Biranda Ford's (2010) discussion of the discourse surrounding employability within the conservatoire field.

Curriculum focused debates are also active within the broader music higher education field globally, demonstrating that this is a concern for all researchers and practitioners within the music profession, not necessarily limited to the conservatoire sector specifically. For example, this is reflected in the UK by researchers including Stephanie Pitts (2003) and her study of the "hidden" curriculum within a music degree at a British university, and in Australia through Dawn Bennett's work on developing employability in higher education music (2016). Special edition journal issues such as the Arts and Humanities in Higher Education 'Special Issue on the Reflective Conservatoire'[79] (2016) also encourage this curriculum-focused conversation and reflect the current academic interest in the purpose of the contemporary conservatoire, from the wider pedagogic field.

This chapter extends discussion on conservatoire curricula. In so doing, I begin with consideration of how the rise of the 'portfolio career' has thus far been debated amongst academics and been practically considered within conservatoire curricula, in conversation with the alumni's experiences. This leads to debate on the traditional musical hierarchy within conservatoire culture. Linking this to my conversational model, I show that the conservatoire inflicts institutional power which places different amounts of symbolic and cultural capital value on the varying types of performance within the institution (and thereby, the profession at large) and in so doing, I reflect how this is linked to alumni's notion of identity.

The effectiveness of academic module content, delivery and engagement, is then considered with alumni suggestions for improvement. There follows a discussion of the transition process between conservatoire and the profession, with reflection on whether conservatoires can and should do more in preparing students for this process. In so doing, I consider Burland's study (2005) of the career transitions of undergraduate music students.

[79] H. Gaunt. 2016. "Introduction to Special Issue on the Reflective Conservatoire." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15(3-4): 269-275.

The chapter concludes with a consideration of the recent curriculum reform process at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (Duffy, 2013) and how this speaks to the findings of my alumni data.

4.1 Portfolio career

In her 'Introduction to Special Issue on the Reflective Conservatoire', Gaunt (2016: 270) states, 'it is vital that we further champion the interface between education and professional worlds, increasing two-way influence and exchange, challenging rigid conceptions of transmission/apprenticeship or one-way traffic from professional to student.' Gaunt refers to the need for students to also be involved in discussions regarding content and methods of conservatoire training. The empirical data at the core of my study also shows that the alumni collective are a rich, relatively untapped source of experience and vital knowledge within the context of pedagogical learning in the conservatoire sector. In focusing my study on the alumni demographic, therefore, I help to address the need for improved 'interface between education and professional worlds', as Gaunt (2016: 271) advocates. She directly continues:

> The sense of urgency around this agenda [to bring research and practice together to stimulate and support change within the sector] is gathering momentum, and in 2015 particularly addressed some interwoven challenges: [including but not exclusive to]:
> - In preparing the next generations of professional artists, "excellence" continues to be a key mantra. However, as contexts for the arts diversify and relevance to context is increasingly understood to make a vital contribution to excellence, the concept itself is becoming more fluid. It is therefore essential to extend and enrich traditional understanding of excellence and to embrace the reality of multiple excellences (Lerman, 2012; Renshaw, 2010)
> - Within curriculum change and enhancement of learning and teaching, ownership of the learning process for emerging artists is essential to empowering them to meet unknown future challenges. This includes championing the potential of peer and informal learning, and the richness of engaging in communities of practice, alongside the process of assessing specific expertise of individual master teachers.

Both of these action points centre around broadening the curriculum and the need for conservatoires to address the soloist agenda which has traditionally been at the core of their practices. They also relate to the essence of traditional conservatoire culture, which it is proven has hierarchical systems that place different values, and therefore notions of 'excellence', on different forms of cultural capital (Perkins, 2011 and chapter 3 of this thesis). The need to encourage these institutions, both the staff and students within them, to widen their understanding and encouragement of different performance career pathways, is stressed here by Gaunt.

This need for broadening the curriculum was echoed across the alumni discourse, whereby the occurring opinion in every interview – bar one - was that their respective institution had failed to effectively promote the concept of a 'portfolio career' and in many cases, it was not explicitly mentioned or alluded to at all. My data shows that according to those involved in my study who have been through the system, conservatoires have by-and-large failed over the last three decades to provide students with the awareness that almost every musician in contemporary society will find themselves in the position of needing to sustain a portfolio career. That is, that their income is highly unlikely to come from one single source, as a performing musician, and that almost all of them will work in a freelance capacity at some point in their lives (if not their entire career), with the multiple job pathways and related skills this status demands. All alumni considered solo performance of the traditional Western Classical music canon to be the most valued form of training within conservatoire culture, followed by chamber music and orchestral performance. I argue that this is underlined by the positioning of all three forms of specialisation as compulsory core assessments, throughout the undergraduate course. For, traditionally, instrumental students are assessed through a: solo recital (this is the biggest source of course credits), technical exam (consisting of scales, sight-reading, studies), chamber performance exam and an orchestral excerpts exam (pianists often an exception to this one).[80]

Alumna 15 attested to solo performance as the dominant focus of conservatoire training, additionally outlining that hierarchical values of performance genres can be attributed differently, according to department:

> Me: Do you think the conservatoire needs to shape people for this portfolio career or do they need to push people to be a soloist, or an orchestral player, do you think they realistically train...
> Alumna 15: [Jumps in] I think the string players are seriously underprepared for playing as orchestral musicians. I've sat in [conservatoire] orchestra rehearsals before where the back of the viola section's been asleep and nobody's noticed! And the violinists will often walk in late to rehearsals and it's very, very clear that 90% of the string section haven't looked at their parts. Whereas, if you're a wind player, you're playing a more exposed part, there's a bit more pressure and you also want to be an orchestral musician probably when you leave, so they tend to be more prepared, more enthusiastic. But, the string players need to realise and as do

[80] That said, there is presently a growing trend in some conservatoires towards offering students greater flexibility and autonomy in their final undergraduate year of study. All conservatoire institutions require students to undertake an obligatory, solo, final recital, however in some institutions this can be classified as either major or minor in the accredited course weighting, according to the student's choice. With this comes greater flexibility for the student to choose other, complimentary options, e.g. a research dissertation or chamber music performance, as major or minor, in combination with and in respect of their final recital weighting decision.

> I think the pianists, the saxophonists, that they're not all going to be soloists and they need to look at other options.[81]

This is also echoed by Alumna 5, who described a lack of awareness within her department by both staff and students about the "real world" and felt a definite emphasis on solo playing. She remembered vaguely of some "interesting lectures" about a portfolio career in her final year of undergraduate and wishes they'd have scheduled that in the first year, so that she could engage with her studies in a less blinkered, more wholesome way. Whilst Alumna 3 keenly felt that the soloist agenda was thriving during her time at her conservatoire, which had a profoundly negative effect on her general experience and subsequent awareness of music career options aside from performance:

> They all think you want to be a solo player and I don't agree with that or think it's realistic, I don't feel they were open. They didn't even suggest other things that you could be involved in, in music, really. It would have been great if they'd got people in who were doing different jobs in music. It wasn't until fourth year that there were things like arts admin modules. You're not really given any other option or any other things to think about, you're just thinking about the next exam, which isn't realistic. – Alumna 3[82]

Alumnus 11 agrees with Alumna 3 here, in that he felt an institutional emphasis on solo (and chamber) performance:

> Me: Did you feel like they opened your mind to this portfolio career?'
> Alumnus 11: 'It was definitely geared towards solo and chamber work and if I hadn't had [name] as my head of brass, teaching wouldn't have been covered either, really, so that was quite good. But what's the point, we all sit in orchestras, sit in show bands.[83]

Alumna 18, however, was of the opinion that conservatoires think that if they train everyone to be soloists, as the accepted highest obtainable level of performance, then they all have that fallback of a portfolio career, saying:

> There's a flood of students and there's not a job there for them, which is not at all made clear when you go there, which is very unfair and a massive downfall in the government. But on the other hand, it's creating a lot of teacher jobs. We come from a generation where our parents can afford to send us there [the conservatoire, without the assurance of a performing career at the end], which wasn't the case a generation ago. - Alumna 18[84]

[81] RCM, woodwind, 2004-2010
[82] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010
[83] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015
[84] RWCMD, vocal studies, 2009-2011

Alumna 18's views did alter somewhat from the other interviewees in that she considered the skills needed to sustain a portfolio career are "more up to the student to do themselves" however, "it's not at all clear that it's up to them to do so." By that, she means independent research into the culture of the professional field (i.e. networking) was an unspoken task left to students. It is relevant to contextualise that Alumna 18 was a postgraduate student within a vocal department, having received training at a university at undergraduate level. Alumna 18's view regarding students needing to take responsibility in adapting the skills needed for a portfolio career is also echoed by Alumnus 7:

> It's up to you to take responsibility for yourself with your learning at music college, they can provide the structure but at the end of the day you need to think for yourself about what the future might look like and not be blinkered to only one thing. – Alumnus 7[85]

Interestingly, as with Alumna 18, Alumnus 7 also attended a university at undergraduate level so there are a number of factors to consider, contextually, here. Firstly, in attending conservatoires as postgraduates, they are both older in age and therefore arguably more independently minded having already experienced higher education level pedagogy, which has inevitably shaped their identity and the direction of their aspirations. Secondly, the experience of attending university institutions would have allowed for a different perspective on their conservatoire training (than those who have only experienced the latter institutions), given the inherent differences between these two types of institutions in their curriculum focus and institutional cultures and practices. Regarding this study's aim of addressing the gap between institutional practice intent and experienced realities, I note two key things here in this discussion of a curriculum that acknowledges and explicitly trains students for a portfolio career. That is, aside from these two interviewees, the discourse of the remaining 90% of alumni reflects that they place blame on a lack of awareness and appropriate training for the portfolio career that subsequently confronts them once in the profession, on the conservatoire institution and do not take explicit self-responsibility in this matter. In so saying, the data also shows therefore, that those conservatoires that *do* provide for this protean career need to be far more open and explicit in the importance of this type of broader preparatory training, and the extreme likelihood of such a career beyond the institution, given the current professional climate. Conservatoires could also be more aware of linking the training pathways they offer to the individual, as the alumni discourse reflects that feelings of

[85] TLCMD and RAM, brass, 2009-2012

individual identity, aspiration and autonomy are important for students (and musicians more generally).

Alumna 18's views above allude to employability as a central issue concerning the contemporary conservatoire (and indeed all higher education institutions, particularly given the present cost of tuition). Whilst Alumnus 8 suggested that a greater tuition fee directly impacts the way a conservatoire education should be viewed, by both the institutions and students themselves, and that this should make them ever-more concerned with the notion of employability. As a result, he strongly considered this means conservatoires changing their practices to ensure students graduate with a broader set of stylistic skills and knowledge:

> Alumnus 8: You know what, if you're going to pay £9000 a year, that's a joke. £36,000 to go for 4 years. That doesn't include living costs. If you go somewhere for that, you've got to be taught everything that you need to be taught. It doesn't matter what you play, if you're a flautist you need to be exposed to classical even through to a bit of jazz and not necessarily coming out of it being the best jazz flautist but coming out going: 'okay if I was playing in the concert orchestra and there was one bit at the beginning of the songs that was a flute thing that's written above it 'jazzy', instead of going 'oh shit, how do I do that?', you go 'ok, fine, this is not necessarily my thing but that's no problem.' It's so important and if you're paying all that money, it's a joke! Unbelievable! I don't know how people can afford it and that's the other unfair thing, you're getting all this debt and if you're not teaching them enough – because they've got the facility to do that, they have. The one thing the percussion department have got really well is you do have to learn everything. You might not necessarily come out as a drummer or whatever, but you'll be exposed to it so you can give it a good old go and I really think that's so important. There's not enough work going 'I'm just going to play this.'
> Me: 'At the end of the day you want to be able to say yes to any phone call you get in?
> Alumnus 8: Yes! You've got to, if someone offers you x amount of money and you're around, you can't just go 'you know what, I can't do that because I just don't play that style of music.' It's like no, people have got families to feed, and actually, when you boil it down to that, it sounds a bit blunt, but it's true.[86]

To summarise, all alumni interviewed – apart from Alumnus 7, as quoted on the previous page - expressed a retrospective desire to have been provided more training options in order to have broadened their musical skill set. This is particularly true for instruments that are not traditionally orchestral, such as the saxophone, as expressed by Alumna 14 who felt that the conservatoire culture, in particular the attitudes of principal study teaching staff, were largely responsible:

[86] RCM, percussion, 2007-2011

> Alumna 14: I think there's quite a lot of resistance, a lot of old-school teaching that goes on, and thinks this is all fad-dy [other styles of performance], that kind of thing. There's a lot of egos in amongst the staff and I don't think they'd want to be told they need to do something.
> Me: Stylistically?
> Alumna 14: I almost think they should do a pop course or something like that.
> Me: As part of the 4 years of sax?
> Alumna 14: Yes, why not.
> Me: Do you feel, as a sax player then, it should be principal study saxophone but without so much emphasis on the classical recital repertoire, and more of a general saxophone training, stylistically?
> Alumna 14: Yes. I think so.
> Me: And, maybe that they kept the recitals but there were other modules that were available, stylistically, other projects?
> Alumna 14: Yes, it's not even a saxophone thing. I think generally it's important to be versatile. I think there's so many purists there and I think that's quite dangerous because you come out of college and you feel like you don't really know anything and that's quite scary. I think you can feel really out of your depth if you do something [in the profession] and someone asks you to, I don't know, improvise, but you've never seen [chord] changes and are like 'what's going on?!' And then because you have an attitude of being quite scared of failure, it's quite daunting and [you're] hard on yourself.[87]

Through Alumna 14's discourse, we can see that once in the profession and faced with performance demands on which students have received none, or little, conservatoire training, there is anxiety (at a time when musicians are arguably at their most vulnerable, at the outset of their career) and with a real concern with failure. Applying my conversational model to Alumna 14's narrative, it is therefore evident that this can in turn effect new-career musicians' self-confidence at a time when they are trying to come to terms with their transforming identity as professionals. Moreover, application of this model within the curriculum context also allows for a line of connection to be drawn between identity and representation through discourse, to cultural and symbolic capital, and which I discuss in the following section.

Thus far in this chapter, I have shown that the alumni almost all express dismay at the lack of preparation they received, through formal curriculum content, for a portfolio career. Additionally, longitudinally, conservatoires have by-and-large been very slow to reflect on this pedagogic practice. Or, to reframe this, if such training has been offered, students have evidently failed to engage with it and/or its purpose and value has not been made explicit to them.

[87] TLCMD, woodwind, 2008-2013

4.2 Musical hierarchy

In connection with discussion of portfolio career engagement and promotion, conservatoire cultures perpetuate a Western Classical music canonic hierarchy which places less value on other genres of music and stylistic playing. This traditionally entails the exclusion of musical theatre training[88] from the undergraduate curriculum. Over the course of this study, conservatoires including the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama[89], Trinity Laban College of Music and Dance[90] and Royal Birmingham Conservatoire of Music[91] have begun to offer postgraduate courses (which are predominantly led by woodwind departments, at present) which focus specifically and importantly, formally, on musical theatre and are led by professionals from within that field.

Presently, these specialist musical theatre postgraduate courses have experienced various levels of success and continue to find their feet (a claim made, for though none of my alumni interviewees have direct experience of attending these specific programmes, I have personally been involved in the RWCMD woodwind tripling MMus, currently in its fourth year). Alumnus 7 did not follow one of these musical theatre specialist MMus pathways, but even so, as part of his postgraduate training, was immersed in a variety of musical styles, an experience which was hugely beneficial and positive for him. He is a positive example of the experience of a wider-encompassing curriculum and the career opportunities and autonomy such inclusive conservatoire practice and culture can provide:

> Yes, I had varied training, particularly at Trinity, varied stylistic learning was really encouraged, you heard different specialities down all of the corridors and I never felt like that was demeaned. – Alumnus 7[92]

Alumnus 7 always had aspirations to work in both the orchestral and musical theatre professions. He was extremely positive that this varied training he received, that explored a range of genres and that he implied went some way towards breaking down the

[88] Musical theatre is one example of a musical genre that is not positioned within the Western Classical tradition and is traditionally excluded from formal conservatoire training. I acknowledge that there are many other genres that can also be described as being in this under-represented category. However, I focus specifically on musical theatre in this chapter discussion of musical hierarchy within the context of curriculum.

[89] Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. "Postgraduate Multi Instrument Woodwind Performance." Accessed 2nd August 2019. https://www.rwcmd.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate_multi_woodwind.aspx

[90] Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. "Single Reed Theatre Doubling Pathway." Accessed 2nd August 2019. https://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/study/music/mmus/single-reed-theatre-doubling-pathway

[91] Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. "Instrumental Performance – MMus/PG Cert/PG Dip." Accessed 8th August 2019. https://www.bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire/courses/inst-perf-mmus-pgdip-2020-21

[92] TLCMD and RAM, brass, 2009-2012

cultural capital hierarchy of a traditional conservatoire education, helped successfully prepare him to travel both working pathways; he currently has a permanent orchestral position and also freelances in musical theatre productions in the West End. That said, there remains across all conservatoires a distinct lack of general education and guidance in this genre amongst undergraduate students. The Royal College of Music and Royal Academy of Music are also noticeable by their absence in this list of conservatoires attempting to formally diversify their training with this genre, with specialist modules or course pathways, that is despite the Royal Academy running an MA in 'Musical Theatre and Musical Direction and Coaching' for drama students.[93]

I propose that there are two key reasons for the general lack of support for musical theatre in conservatoires: firstly, as I state above, it does not connect with the Western Classical music canon, on which a conservatoire education is traditionally built. Secondly, musical theatre musicians are frequently required to play more than one instrument (particularly the case with wind players), something which is still frowned upon and actively discouraged by many staff members, who consider students should focus solely on their principal study instrument to strive towards perceived notions of excellence and resonating with the soloist agenda of this culture. This attitude can permeate throughout these institutions and is then absorbed by students, who continue to reproduce and perpetuate this musical hierarchy, a process outlined by Bourdieu within the educational fields he researched. Thus, in overlaying my conversational model atop of this discussion, we can clearly see that dynamics of (institutional and hierarchical) power, the tripartite capital-habitus-field and notions of identity, are especially resonant in this discussion of formal curriculum structures and values.

Regarding the prevalence of a stylistic cultural capital hierarchy within the formal curriculum, Alumnus 11 - who graduated only 3 years ago - underlines the absence of musical theatre from the curriculum at his respective institution, at which he studied for both an undergraduate and MMus:

> Me: Did anyone ever mention the idea of musical theatre to you?
> Alumnus 11: No. Never. And that's bizarre. Because if you want to be a player, it's either orchestra or show bands, you're never going to make enough money as a chamber musician, and I'm never going to be a soloist. You know, I only thought about music college when I was 17, it's not going to happen is it.[94]

[93] Royal Academy of Music. "MA in Musical Theatre." Accessed 2nd September 2019. https://www.ram.ac.uk/study/postgraduate-programmes/musical-theatre-ma
[94] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015

Alumnus 17, now in the musical theatre and session recording profession, confirms:

> Yes, that is what they should be doing [encouraging a portfolio career that incudes musical theatre], you know, not everyone harbours aspirations of going to be a soloist and actually some of the guys who are working are versatile. Particularly the area that I'm involved in I suppose, it's very much commercial, so a lot of those guys in the commercial side, they're the ones that go on and do the Royal Variety Show or this, that and the other, the awards ceremonies and stuff. So it's not like there's no avenue for it, but it's like college is being too stubborn and I don't get it. – Alumnus 17[95]

This negligence acutely underlines Gaunt's (2016) findings, that:

> Pedagogy has not kept pace with artistic, wider educational and societal developments, and has relied largely on a natural but gentle evolution of embedded traditions as they are passed from one generation to the next. This is problematic in many contemporary contexts where long-held assumptions about the purpose and value of the performing arts are being challenged. (Gaunt, 2016: 270)

When asked about the lack of stylistic diversity in curriculum content, Alumna 16, who has much experience in both orchestral and musical theatre worlds, shared the following thoughts. Though lengthy, the entire quote is included here for its relevance, clearly defining the musical hierarchy that is rife, from the roots of the conservatoire, right through to the branches of the profession:

> Me: Stylistically, having worked on West End tours as well as orchestral stuff, do you wish that you'd had more tuition on that?
> Alumna 16: Yes! Yes, definitely.
> Me: You didn't get any on it?
> Alumna 16: Nothing. And also the fact that – this is the other thing, this is the thing that's hard – you go in [to the conservatoire] and basically you're working towards this goal which is getting a job in an orchestra, and you feel if you don't achieve that you're a massive failure. So many friends of mine, and myself included, there is that sort of feeling when you leave 'oh God, I haven't got what I wanted.' I don't want a job in an orchestra now, but there's still that kind of thought that you're not as good, that you haven't succeeded. There's no value put on working in West End shows, in fact you don't even know about it [when you're at the conservatoire]. You certainly don't know how to get in to it or anything, and it's the best paid work you can do! It's very narrow, very limited [conservatoire career pathway guidance] to one thing. And I remember even when I told my Mum and Dad that I got a big musical theatre tour and they were like 'oh, ok' and I was thinking 'this is good, this is really good and I think I'm really pleased about this' and I want a proper reaction! And you know if I was playing like 3rd flute in some concert at the Barbican or whatever it'd be like 'oh, that's so great!'.
> Me: Do you think there's a difference generally, that value is placed on different styles of music?
> Alumna 16: Yes

[95] RAM, brass, 1997-2001

> Me: So the more traditionally classical it is, the higher the value?
> Alumna 16: Yes, which is bullshit and you only realise that when you start [in the profession]. Also, the thought that you can't actually make a career just doing one thing, in what we do. The fact that you have to do lots and lots of different things, now more than ever, and you're not taught the importance of that and also how to do that, and being creative with ideas of what you can do and how you can make money.
> Me: And how being self-employed means you are a businesswoman?
> Alumna 16: Yes, exactly.[96]

Based on the alumni insights, it is my argument that only by changing attitudes from the conservatoire upwards, and placing value on a far wider range of musical skills, and redetermining the definition and parameters of 'excellence' (one that includes musical theatre given its primary role in employability), can conservatoires truly give their students an experience and training that will provide the strong foundations for a lengthy and successful career.

4.3 Academic and performance module options

Building on the discussion of a portfolio career, I asked alumni to list specific modules that they felt, in retrospect, were either of particular relevance and practical use in their subsequent performing careers, or of none at all. This is especially enlightening data for it reflects that though conservatoires have for a number of years claimed to be aware of the need for a proactive curriculum that relates directly to the skills needed to thrive in the modern profession, many of them have been exceptionally slow putting this into practice. As an example, as little as ten years ago, it was still compulsory for students at some institutions to study figured bass on the keyboard, regardless of their principal instrument (it is extremely unlikely that a saxophone player would ever need this skill in the field, as an example). This was shared by Alumna 15:

> Me: Classes such as aural, harmonisation, keyboard skills as another one, figured bass at the keyboard – in hindsight now you're in the profession, how relevant were they?
> Alumna 15: [Laughs] Not relevant! Keyboard skills – what?! [laughs] I don't even remember what we did. Were we trying to play vocal scores? And Figured bass! Why would I want to play figured bass on the keyboard? I'm a clarinettist! What would have been more useful is just to have a twenty minute lesson to play some fundamental music, because I need to accompany my students now as a teacher, it would be great if I knew how to play the piano a little bit better generally, but no student of mine has ever turned round to me and said 'oh miss, I need you to play figured bass for me now.' I think the theory is so outdated, like they're going back

[96] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

> to the time when people would still maybe compose like that. Wow, you could take that budget right there couldn't you, and put that somewhere else.
> Me: Did you find that frustrating at the time?
> Alumna 15: I found it funny.[97]

This lack of apparent relevance between the academic and performance modules was a common thread in the alumni interviews. That is not to say that conservatoires are necessarily failing to offer relevant, supportive modules in this regard, for there are many applicable and vital modules in place, but that there is perhaps a miscommunication and haziness in reflecting exactly why the module content has been chosen and its direct connection to the student as a performer, on their specific instrument. Alumnus 17 is in agreement with the sentiments of Alumna 15 above:

> Me: What about the academic side of your training, did that seem to have any relation to your performing?
> Alumnus 17: No, nothing. I mean, it was a bit of a joke. It was almost a token gesture to a degree. I remember I took an elective of jazz history and my friend had just done jazz history at the Northern and gave me one of her essays and I just handed that in, which is awful, but it worked. I skived around so much of that stuff.[98]

Additionally, alumni were asked what topics they wished to see on the curriculum in retrospect, that is, what would have been beneficial in preparing them for employment upon leaving. Recommendations included a greater focus on outreach, so that students remove themselves from the self-indulgent conservatoire 'bubble' and relate their skills and offerings to wider society. The musician's place in society and what and how they should contribute is an increasingly loud conversation in the current climate of funding cuts and the need to justify the relevance of classical music in the modern world. Alumna 3 felt particularly strongly that an outreach module should be compulsory, not elected:

> [The module 'community music'] makes you remember why you like doing music in the first place. It became fun making music again. That changed my perception, when I came back after that [into fourth year] I saw things better in college as well, I was much more relaxed and thought 'I'm doing this because I love it', it was getting way too serious. - Alumna 3[99]

Alumna 3 continued to say that she wished this had been on the curriculum before her third year and that it should be compulsory for more students to take part in this, 'working with real people in the community'. Given that arts companies (e.g. professional

[97] RCM, woodwind, 2004-2010
[98] RAM, brass, 1997-2001
[99] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010

British orchestras) now have an obligation to contribute to society through outreach work in order to receive certain types of funding, and schemes such as Live Music Now[100] (in which students/young professionals who successfully audition will perform in community settings including nursing homes and prisons), there is a very strong case for such specialist skill training to be compulsory in all conservatoires, and not simply an elected module. Indeed, in recent years in particular, the majority of UK conservatoires have developed outreach modules, and even whole departments dedicated to the practice. Within the curriculum, I argue that more emphasis should be placed on the social and cultural responsibilities in becoming a musician, and more debates encouraged amongst the students regarding who they are performing for and the purpose, i.e. where they are placed within the wider social context. This also resonates with the broader reflections of Tregear et al. (2016) who, in their essay reflecting on the role and responsibility of conservatoires within society, determined that these institutions should continually seek to position and maintain their relevance, within realistic boundaries, and reframe themselves as public institutions that are always actively engaged with society at large.

I must stress that not all alumni expressed overriding negativity at the curriculum they experienced (by-and-large, these were male alumni), though they still had some recommendations when asked:

> I'd only say little things, like working out your tax. I found the bigger shock is the professional side of things, like this and being able to manage as self-employed people, how to find work and I did a module in teaching which was great, but I felt I could have done more of it. I do feel they need to put a little bit more emphasis on teaching, it's such a good education [conservatoire training], it's such a waste for it to stop there and you've almost got a duty to pass it on. – Alumnus 6[101]

Alumnus 6 completed his conservatoire education in 2011, since when, most institutions offer increasingly more in-depth modules discussing teaching skills, with some also providing students with the opportunity to take additional qualifications in this area through ABRSM.[102] However, musicians have typically always supported their performing income with instrumental teaching, so the perceived lack of guidance and training for students on how to improve this skill, could be seen by many as a longitudinal training failure.

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[100] Live Music Now. Accessed 20th August 2019. http://www.livemusicnow.org.uk/

[101] RCM and RAM, woodwind, 2005-2011

[102] Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). "Instrumental/Teaching Diplomas." Accessed 30th April 2019. https://gb.abrsm.org/en/our-exams/diplomas/instrumentalvocal-teaching/

When asked to volunteer the general pros and cons of their conservatoire experience, without prompting on the topic, Alumnus 17 shared the following with regards to the lack of teaching training they were provided with:

> I remember we got a snapshot of a seminar on how to teach beginners, which is like an hour, one week. There needs to be more importance and value put on teaching because people just assume you can do it. - Alumnus 17[103]

Another curriculum suggestion came from Alumna 16, who expressed concerns that there was a real need for more a general, practical knowledge-based set of workshops that is entirely interactive. She also thought that these should be informal sessions, in which the smaller, unspoken traditions, behaviours and rituals of working in the profession (which are seen as not major enough to be included in the official curriculum, but are vital for acceptance in professional circles), could be spoken of.

> Alumna 16: What would have been good is if they'd have had some sort of weekly classes – you know like they have general studies when you do A Level – to have something like that which is like a seminar every week. With a new topic and revisiting stuff and people can ask questions or maybe people can put in a box questions they're nervous about, anonymously and then have them answered.
> Me: It's even small things like if you're in a section as a freelancer, you offer to get the tea for the whole section in the break, it's small things like that that nobody will tell you about.
> Alumna 16: Exactly.
> Me: And like how you have to be quick then getting to the canteen to be first in the queue for it, It's silly, but it's so important.
> Alumna 16: So important, yes.[104]

Thus far, I have shared examples of a selection of key training elements that alumni said they would like to have been included in the curriculum, or that they would like to have had the opportunity to explore further. The five outstanding of these, however, and the most frequently raised in interviews are:

1) Side-by-side orchestral projects - whereby students take part in rehearsals and often performances with a professional orchestra in specially arranged projects with the conservatoire, thereby giving an invaluable insight into the practices and demands of the life as an orchestral musician. I acknowledge that there are obvious difficulties in the practicalities of this practice, which also question the inward/outward looking gaze of orchestral culture

[103] RAM, brass, 1997-2001
[104] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

2) Teaching - more structured training on how to teach their respective instruments successfully, with a greater acknowledgement that this will almost certainly become a key source of income for the majority, fluctuating over the course of their career
3) General skills/life classes – regularly, led by different musicians each time, including a focus on freelance musicians, and issues such as networking, dealing with rejection, and the practicalities of working as self-employed
4) Exposure to the musical theatre genre in particular – NB. this was raised by those alumni currently working in this field and also by an alumna who is currently a full-time orchestral player, who expressed a wish to have explored this material so that the door was left open should she wish to alter her career path in the future
5) Health and wellbeing training - as discussed in the next chapter, this should be both formally in the curriculum and informally in the recommended general skills classes.

4.4 Staff: Content and delivery

A key insight from my data is alumni concern over engagement with curriculum content. Alumni claimed that they felt an acute tug of war between academic and performing departments, whereby staff on both sides place demands and pressure on the student, who is often almost solely focused on their individual performance and practice (sometimes this is to the detriment of their other pedagogic learning). This dichotomy results in students often not dedicating serious time and thought into their academic studies (at the alumni's own admission). An issue frequently raised by alumni is the lack of guidance they felt in choosing academic modules that would be most appropriate for them, given their individual goals and skills. Once again, this highlights the importance across the alumni discourse of the individual and autonomy, in the conservatoire experience. In this case, an inferred 'why is this module important to *me* and *my* performing career aspirations?' If greater support were given, it would in many cases encourage students to broaden their focus and help them engage with other training elements, beyond their solo repertoire, principal study demands, much more effectively. Alumnus 6 confirms a lack of guidance in this area:

> I was always really bad at this stuff [academic work] and from the start I kind of had no idea what was going on. Some of the modules I did, on reflection, were pretty random and because I was in this dreamy student state, I wasn't making the best decisions in terms of choosing these, like I did history of music, music and literature and I was so overwhelmed by it and didn't know anything at all. In some ways, I felt really silly doing it, I could have done something that was more tailored to me.

> Really, I was too focused on practice and the clarinet [to do something about changing to a different module]. – Alumnus 6[105]

A commonly held opinion amongst the alumni is that not only are the academic staff failing to guide students appropriately onto the elected modules most suited to them as individuals, but also that the dry delivery of academic courses too frequently fails to engage students effectively. As discussed, most alumni failed to see the relevance of many of the academic modules open to them, in relation to their identity as a performer. This was coupled with responses which indicated that academic staff often failed to make it abundantly clear how the content of these supporting modules were intended to improve skills, broaden knowledge and enhance musicianship in a more holistic sense:

> I can't remember almost anything of the lectures I went to. I must have just switched off. I certainly don't remember thinking 'oh I can see the importance and relevance of this to my performing and to my long-term career.' The teachers who gave the lectures were pretty much all academics I think, and it was as if they'd written them for that crowd, which we weren't. The lectures were dry and pretty much never engaging. So many friends didn't bother even going, we just collected a set of notes for them and signed the register on their behalf. If they had had someone who was a performer as well as an academic, or someone who gave an exciting and inclusive set of lectures, then things might have been different. I also don't think, perhaps controversially, that all the staff seemingly being in their fifties-plus seemed to help. I don't mean that to sound mean or ageist, but it just perpetuates this sense of a barrier. Whereas, perhaps if we'd have had at least one younger lecturer, slightly nearer our age, it might have been more of an inspiration and motivation. In my conservatoire I don't seem to remember many younger staff members at all, and that was not actually an encouragement. – Alumna 16[106]

These findings resonate with those from the wider music education field at the higher education level, regarding questions of critical pedagogical reflection. In her investigation into the 'hidden' curriculum in a university music department, Pitts (2003: 290) illustrated the 'need for staff to be aware of students' attitudes and approaches to their learning.' In the context of this thesis, my alumni discourse resonates with Pitts' suggestion here, in that alumni strongly demonstrate that had they been given more one-to-one mentoring regarding their academic and performance module choices, and so staff were therefore more cognitive that students sought guidance that was tailored to them as individuals, they would have engaged with these training elements more successfully. These supporting curriculum modules in a conservatoire education are hugely important for the well-rounded training of young musicians, in developing the necessary skills needed

[105] RCM and RAM, woodwind, 2005-2011
[106] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

to sustain a freelance, portfolio career. For, as Burland and Pitts (2007) in their investigation of the skills and attitudes of students beginning a music degree, state:

> In a highly competitive industry, musicians need to possess more than simply exceptional levels of technical skill. Music courses in higher education need to equip students with extra-musical skills relating to self-management and communication, and embedding such skills within the curriculum will ensure that students acquire the personal and psychological tools to progress into a career (musical or otherwise) after graduation.' (Burland and Pitts, 2007: 305)

Therefore, discussion of curriculum content is, of course, vital. So too however, is engagement with course content and pedagogic delivery. For, regardless of how relevant and appropriate the curricula may or may not be, if students do not engage with the pedagogic content or grasp its crucialness, the alumni discourse shows that a key function of institutional intent (i.e. training that provides a multi-layered, holistic education and experience, comprised of both academic and performance components) will fail.

Lack of engagement in academic delivery was a common theme amongst the alumni and signifies an issue which conservatoires seemingly fail to acknowledge in recent studies. Given the span of my alumni attendance dates, my study also shows that this has been a longitudinal problem, and across the conservatoire sector. The absence of younger staff members is an interesting observation by Alumna 16 above, but in a profession where finding employment in a performing context becomes ever-more competitive as the economic climate continues to become tougher for musicians, it is particularly insightful. For, whilst experience and growth as a musician comes with age, and therefore, one would on paper have more wisdom and skills to pass on, it may be that a greater balance of this with younger staff members, including more freelancers, encourages a greater sense of motivation. That is, promotes a 'can do' attitude amongst students, who can see that 'success' as a younger professional musician is achievable.

That is not to say of course, that conservatoires fail to employ freelance principal study teaching staff, but that they are under-represented, particularly on 'traditional' instruments, whereby full-time, contracted orchestral musicians commonly make up the vast majority. Affirming this recommendation for a greater representation of freelance staff at the conservatoire, Alumna 16 volunteered the following (interestingly without any prompting from me on this subject matter) which reflects her views on performance-staff engagement and links with aspirations beyond the institution:

> I think they need to have more freelancers teaching there, you know everybody there seems to have a position in an orchestra, which is great because it means they can give you opportunities hopefully afterwards. But, I think they need to

> have at least more seminars with freelancers, because you will come out being a freelancer - so you can know what is expected, what to do, so you're more well-equipped. – Alumna 16[107]

4.5 Transitions: The conservatoire 'bubble' pops

The transition between music higher education training and the profession has been considered by Burland (2005), who conducted two years of qualitative and quantitative research with eighteen students from a university and fourteen from a conservatoire (she does not state which institution), who were in their penultimate or final year of study. She was specifically concerned with the factors that contributed to why young musicians did or did not pursue a career in performance. Of relevance particularly to my discussion on curriculum and the transition period into the professional field, is her finding that:

> Performers felt unprepared for their transition into the performance profession in terms of the practicalities and emotional impact that it would have…it seemed that the music college in particular had prepared its students to be skilled technicians, but not how to be professional musicians, with all that entails…there appeared to be a void between the kinds of support that the musicians seemed to need and those that the institutions [the singular university and music college of her study] were providing. (Burland, 2005: 229-230)

For context, given the point in their studies at which the field subjects were engaged in this study, it is assumed from the information provided regarding her constituents that some may have been interviewed in their first year post-graduation, and thus were first year alumni, however Burland does not make this explicit. As such, her study hones in on the immediate transition period and she acknowledges that 'it has only been possible to speculate about the nature of the transition, rather than statistically validate my hypothesis' (2005: 231) and that:

> The time limitations of doctoral study did not allow me to fully capture the entire career transition of the participants, and so future research could attempt to discover their career choices…examining the entire duration of the training to work transition may provide deeper insights into the career transition of musicians.' (Burland, 2005: 232).

As such, my study builds on her findings in two ways: firstly, I demonstrate that the alumni discourse strongly resonates with her conclusion above, in that they articulate an unpreparedness for the profession and that there is a clear gap between institutional intend and delivery. Secondly, my research in part responds to Burland's call for a

[107] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

longitudinal reflection on musician's careers, thus reflecting on the transition between education and career more holistically, given that my alumni are, respectively, at different stages in their careers.

The collective alumni discourse raises key questions concerning the obligation of conservatoires regarding the transition process between training and finding employment in the profession thereafter. This appears to remain a very grey area according to the alumni, and prompts reflection on vocational obligations. Every single alumnus questioned, across the three-decade attendance span, articulated that they considered their respective conservatoire(s) should have done more in some capacity, to navigate the transition between study and profession. Therein, once again, one of the key issues with which this thesis is concerned presents itself; that of the gap between institutional intent and experienced realities. In this matter, it relates to institutional intent that a conservatoire education is a holistic and embodied learning process of intellectual and (crucially) cultural development, at the highest level of pedagogic practice and with no institutional promises or guarantees of employment within the performing area of the profession, thereafter. This is compared with the actual realities of the empirical data that was collected for the purpose of this study, whereby the alumni clearly demonstrated an overwhelmingly one-sided view, that according to them, conservatoire institutions are duty-bound to explicitly help students develop the knowledge to practically find work in the profession and more effectively prepare and support them in the transition period between education and profession. Therefore, the alumni discourse strongly implies that even if conservatoires may not consider themselves to be vocational establishments, many of the students that attend, do so and look to the institution to fulfil this role.

That said, conservatoires do all currently have official alumni departments which offer, depending on the institution, varying amounts of transition support and/or benefits. For example, the Royal College of Music advertises a career support system available until five years after graduation that includes one-to-one career sessions on preparing effective applications, performance opportunities in and around London, a private teaching service, and guidance on self-management and self-employment.[108] Whilst, formally, the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire simply offers alumni concessionary ticket prices for concerts at the institution and a discount on hire of rehearsal space.[109] Therefore, in taking these two

[108] Royal College of Music. "Alumni Benefits." Accessed 1st July 2019. https://www.rcm.ac.uk/alumni/benefits/

[109] Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. "Membership and Joining." 1st July 2019. https://www.bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire/music/alumni/stay-in-touch/join

institutions as examples, a somewhat stark contrast is outlined regarding the practical support alumni services offer to students in the transition process, dependent on the institution. However, no alumni interviewed in this study even acknowledged the existence of these departments and none referred to having proactively used any of the facilities offered. Thus, this raises questions regarding the purpose and potential under-use of these official alumni departments and facilities, and student self-responsibility in taking advantage of any support that is formally in place.

For, despite these conservatoire facilities, the alumni overwhelmingly expressed a lack of understanding in where and how to find work in the field upon immediately leaving their institution, which was evidently detrimental to concepts of their transforming identity as they embarked on their professional journeys. Particularly, in a performing sense, alumni stated that there was an absence of clear guidance in how to find work in a field where lack of professional experience equates to lack of opportunities, thereby beginning a vicious circle that requires great perseverance, determination and luck to break:

> It felt exactly like the bubble had popped [when she left the conservatoire] but it didn't prepare you at all for coming out of college, the only ones who seemed to know what they were doing were the ones continuing on with their studies. We were given absolutely no guidance with how to get work. – Alumna 3[110]

> They prepared you to be able to have a career and get work, but not how to get the work in the first instance…[There was the occasional seminar, but it] wasn't emphasised enough, it should be a module or something, where it's really drummed into you what to do. Also, it's not delivered in a good way, you can't really take much from it. – Alumnus 1[111]

A number of interviewees stressed this idea of the conservatoire 'bubble', a metaphor which can be used to describe most educational institutions. However, given the smaller number of students at a conservatoire and the intensely pressurised and competitive atmosphere, this sensation is arguably heightened. Alumna 10 echoes the sense of illusion the conservatoire experience can create. Crucially, the collective discourse shows that finding employment in the profession immediately after the conservatoire and 'successfully' transitioning was seen as a matter of luck, not as a matter of talent:

> Me: So, as a professional now, working full time, what do you think about the performing training you received? Was it absolutely bang on, the right method, or could it have been more…
> Alumna 10: [Jumps in] Varied? The thing that they don't prepare you for is the real world, basically, so you know again, you go from this bubble for music college, and

[110] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010
[111] RNCM and RWCMD, woodwind, 2007-2013

> then suddenly the bubble pops and you're just like 'what happens now?' and I was just lucky that my teacher sort of managed to get me some opportunities and that was all great and everything.
> Me: If they hadn't have done that, do you think you'd have known what to do next?
> Alumna 10: I can see that I would have sent my CVs out to people and got no reply and then been like 'what happens now?'. So, no, I don't think they [conservatoires] prepare you. I don't think they prepare you for how to behave. You know, if you do get an opportunity, how to be. I was lucky I had people that took me under their wing, but they don't teach you what to ask when somebody rings you up for a gig, all of that sort of really basic kind of stuff.[112]

Whilst, Alumna 19 reflected:

> Maybe it's because I'm so soon after finishing college but it would be nice if I felt a little bit less confused and lost now. Physically, I am determined and I do want to pursue something in this industry somehow, as opposed to someone who comes out of college a bit confused but feels they lost their interest in music in the second year, I didn't. But I'm still lost, and don't know what the end destination is, or could be, what is out there and options, I guess. God, I feel less confident now. – Alumna 19[113]

Applying my conversational model and honing in specifically on the concept of identity, Alumna 19's discourse here shows that when the insular conservatoire 'bubble' does pop, these young musicians are left questioning their musical- and self-identity, and where and how they can gain a sense of belonging within the profession. Her use of the word "lost" reflects her feelings of insecurity, whilst not knowing "what the end destination is" was not articulated as an exciting prospect, but instead as something of worry and stress, implying the loss of an anchor (the conservatoire). However, Alumna 19 was also aware that this current feeling of confusion relating to her place within this new field and how to identify as a professional musician therein, do not have to be long lasting concerns. That is, across her full testimony, she was able to position these questionable, unsettling feelings regarding her place, position and sense of belonging in the professional field, within the temporal context of being a recent graduate. Thus, Alumna 19's self-perception and understanding of her identity naturally resonates with Hall's concept of 'becoming' (1990) which accepts that identity is never fixed, but is constantly transforming, according to the social and cultural position and experiences of the individual.

Echoing the collective voices of the interviewees, Alumna 10 felt that the conservatoire does, but should not, exist in a vacuum and needs to be viewed within the

[112] RNCM, woodwind, 2008-2013
[113] RWCMD, woodwind, 2012-2018

context of the profession so that useful survival skills are imbedded for the particularly precarious time immediately post-graduation:

> Me: Did RNCM train you to become an employable musician or now you're in the profession, was there something they missed that they should be doing?
> Alumna 10: Tax would be good. I think networking, but then again, that's a very broad topic, how to do it and everything. I think it would have been good just to have it pointed out that from the beginning of college is when you start your professional career, and it's not just a little four-year thing, it's actually the start of your work really.[114]

Alumnus 6, who considered his overall training was good, agreed with his fellow alumni and once again, used the term 'bubble' of his own accord. He also connects his views to the fact he now leads a portfolio career but was not directly led onto that pathway during his conservatoire training, alluding here to a lack of awareness of the realities of the job market:

> When you're at the conservatoire and are practising, it's almost like a little bubble. And there'll be loads and loads of jobs, and unfortunately the reality is, there aren't that many jobs. I think they [the conservatoire] had this mindset of 'you're here to get really good at your instrument, and that's it.' I suppose there was less of a thing about what you're going to do afterwards, and I know now, working in the profession, that it's really varied. I do a lot of different things, teaching, workshops, conducting and I know if I told myself at College that I'd be doing all these things, I wouldn't believe it because you're just mainly in a bubble focused on playing. It's very specialised, you're there to practice and play, focused on that present moment. – Alumnus 6[115]

Interestingly, only one alumnus questioned the role of student independence and self-responsibility regarding the transition to the profession:

> [As he retrospectively reflects on students transitioning into the profession] I don't know, you think maybe they just have to learn for themselves when they get on their feet. – Alumnus 7[116]

These alumni accounts provide new insights and perspectives on the issue of how and whether conservatoires should aid students at the end of their studies in the transition process into the profession. Their voices are in unison in suggesting that for decades, conservatoires have been failing in some way to explicitly provide the transitional skills students need upon leaving the conservatoire, specifically *how* to gain employment in the field, especially in relation to performing work. Feelings of confusion and lack of direction

[114] RCM, percussion, 2004-2008
[115] RCM and RAM, woodwind, 2005-2011
[116] TLCMD and RAM, brass, 2009-2012

that almost all of the alumni articulate regarding this transition period was also shown to negatively affect their notions of identity for a period after their graduation (for a greater or lesser time frame, dependent on the individual).

I therefore argue that principal study teachers and heads of department (i.e. those with the greatest knowledge of the complexities of sustaining a career on their respective instruments) have a greater obligation to be more aware that students most often fail to pick up and put into practice the implicit signals and information they are given throughout their study that are intended to arm them with the practical knowledge to pick up work in the profession immediately after leaving. This is particularly true when students are in their final year, when they frequently fail to see beyond their final recital. Conservatoires may also reflexively consider how their official alumni departments are promoted, whether these can support and engage with students and alumni in a more successful manner and critically reflect on the current discrepancies across the conservatoire network in the nature and amount of support that they formally offer their alumni. On the other side of this debate, however, it is also clear that students need to take far more ownership of their learning and the practicalities of their aspired future professional pathways and as such, take advantage of the alumni (and therefore, transition) facilities in place.

Before I present a final overview of my chapter conclusions, I reflect on my alumni findings alongside the discussion of major curriculum reform implemented at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, as presented by Celia Duffy (2013). This was rolled out in 2012 following a three year period of consultation and planning and one of the key aims of this reform was to 'open up the traditionally narrow conservatoire curriculum: to provide more flexibility in terms of student choice' (Duffy, 2013: 169) and to give students more autonomy (Pegg, 2014: 21). During the process, value was heavily placed on student feedback and collaboration, to encourage engagement with the task at hand, and in attempting to change the conservatoire culture from the student core, outwards, to the staff. This was in response to recommendations such as this advisory board member, that:

> The music profession is in flux and as the professional world changes we must change what and how we teach; students know this better than we do and don't want to be trained in such a narrow band, but this doesn't mean eroding standards. (Duffy, 2013: 169)

As has been shown, my alumni data agrees with the mission statements as set out in this curriculum reform, regarding broadening conservatoire curriculum (i.e. engaging more actively with the realities of the profession regarding the commonality of a portfolio career), and in so doing, requiring change in conservatoire culture so that the traditional

musical hierarchy is challenged. However, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's insistence that students are the most appropriate people to consult regarding the music profession and how this is changing (as directly quoted above) raises issue. For, students are able to express their individual preferences and aspirations for curriculum content, and future work specialism, but this cannot be based on career knowledge and experience, for they have none at that stage. However, their individual thoughts regarding the conservatoire, are of course valid, and resonate with the ethos of my study relating to autonomy and individual agency. Although I acknowledge the conservatoire did work in combination with both staff and students on this process of change, I would also argue that though current student voices are vital in this debate, a greater engagement with alumni discourse would further enrich their knowledge regarding effective change. As yet, there has been limited reflection on the success of this large-scale reform. My research therefore, builds on the positive, outward gaze of the Conservatoire of Scotland in relation to their attempts to adapt their practice and culture and I eagerly await future reflections on the longer-term outcome of this reform.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at existing debates on conservatoire curriculum and also relevant discussion at the broader higher education level, whilst applying the empirical data of my study to underline experiential successes in training reform and illuminate ongoing failings. In using the voices of those who have been through the system, transitioned successfully into and are currently active in the profession, I add a unique longitudinal retrospective lens to this debate (with a focus on individual narratives) which has thus far been lacking.

Whilst conservatoire institutions and academic researchers have for the last two decades in particular been markedly more reflective regarding the content of their curriculum offered, my alumni data proves that any discussed adaptations/'improvements' to training have largely been slow to be implemented, and accepted, amongst the institutions, and crucially, have not been widespread. Conservatoires are increasingly more concerned with the issue of employability and now more than ever, are turning their gaze ever-outward, to look at the profession and subsequently reflecting on their own practices with a critical lens. However, there remains indecision amongst conservatoires regarding the definitions of excellence, and how narrow or broad this concept can be whilst not diluting the traditional focus and standards of achievement associated with these establishments and this method of education.

There are also questions over the accountability of these institutions to appropriately prepare their students for successful, long term employment within the profession, in a more realistic, and crucially, wider, understanding of how the profession exists in today's society. The dramatic rise in tuition fees over the past decade cannot be overlooked either, and this thesis suggests that now more than ever, conservatoires have a greater duty to better guide and inform their students on the realities of the field. This includes a better understanding of the wide range of skills that may be required of them (the portfolio career), and the practicalities of how to gain some form of immediate employment in the field upon graduating, whilst also offering their experience on how they may go about getting their first foot on the ladder in their performing pathway of choice. In this vein, the alumni insights clearly show that conservatoires need to look reflexively at the intent of their alumni departments and whether student/alumni engagement with these facilities may be improved. Whilst conversely and crucially, alumni need to be more aware of such support structures in place and be more pro-active and independent in using these facilities.

The alumni discourse demonstrates that the lecture-style delivery of academic courses within the curriculum is at odds with performance activity and that this lack of student engagement, from the alumni perspective, is longitudinal and cross-conservatoire. Additionally, a key finding from the alumni discourse is the importance of individual aspirations and autonomy in relation to curriculum pathways, whereby students need to feel that their goals are supported and they can develop the necessary musical skills accordingly. As such, this study shows that students need greater mentorship in choosing the supporting modules that will most resonate with them and their direction of study, and in so doing may be more engaged with additional skill development which will greatly benefit them in the profession.

When considering curriculum reform, many conservatoires now frequently consult individuals within the music industry (such as orchestral managers and classical genre record labels[117]), in an attempt to have a 'finger on the pulse' of the profession and draw relevance to their modules. Whilst this is positive action, which this study wholly encourages, I also show that by-and-large conservatoires have still failed to acknowledge and consult with two collectives in particular whose voices of experience are vital if they are to effectively train the modern conservatoire student for fruitful employment:

[117] In discussion with Kevin Price, Head of Music Performance at Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Details of this discussion are referred to in this thesis with his permission, given via personal email communication on 6th September 2019.

freelance musicians who are actively living a 'portfolio' career in a full-time sense, and musical theatre professionals, coincidentally of which neither group traditionally feature heavily amongst teaching staff.

Instrumental conservatoire staff are frequently guilty of not successfully encouraging performance genres and employment outside of those which they have personally experienced. This could be connected to a simple lack of knowledge or an issue with ego, whereby teachers in this mentorship role do not wish to show vulnerability or lack of expertise, and so thereby do not actively encourage their students into a musical arena in which they feel less control as the person in the position of power. I argue, therefore, for a broader spectrum of teaching staff, including more freelancers and musical theatre specialists in particular, to work alongside the more traditional conservatoire teaching staff of contracted orchestral musicians and soloists. This would help to change the culture of the conservatoire from the inside-out, in challenging prevalent and recycled hierarchies relating to the traditional canon.

The inclusion of compulsory, regular 'general studies' sessions in an informal, interactive question and answer form of delivery would be advisable, led by working musicians from a variety of performance specialisms, for sharing knowledge and skills about some of the more intangible and practical realities of the profession, beyond reading the music on the page. Conservatoires may also consider inviting younger, 'successful' guest visitors, to help students stay motivated that a full-time performing career is achievable. There is also strong support for more formal requirements for health and wellbeing awareness.

The pattern in the data interestingly, and importantly, also reflects that female alumnae were generally more negative in their views about the quality of their overall training and were able to give more explicit opinions regarding the training improvements they felt should be made, in relation to their own experiences. This chapter also suggests that there is now also a need for students to receive training in community outreach work, as compulsory. Not only does this help to pop the conservatoire 'bubble' by teaching them about a musician's role in modern society and culture, but it reminds them in the self-absorbed, inward-looking student culture of the conservatoire that music should first-and-foremost always be about the audience, and not the performer.

CHAPTER 5

ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

This chapter discusses the mental and physical health and wellbeing of conservatoire students, considered through the lens of alumni. In the past two decades, research focusing on the topic of health and wellbeing in the conservatoire sector has experienced a period of notable growth, with an increased rate of publications over the last ten years in particular. Concurrently, there has also been a rise in research undertaken in this topic with professional musicians, which though slower to build than that within the conservatoire setting, is still an increasing field of study. Ongoing debates within the conservatoire context predominantly swirl around two key strands of this topic, that is: the purpose, nature and amount of health and wellbeing support that should be provided for conservatoire students, and its place as a taught subject within the conservatoire curriculum.

The transitional period between pedagogic study at the conservatoire and the professional field requires more study. Qualitative discussion of retrospective alumni experiences in the health and wellbeing context, which looks specifically at the tools the conservatoire instilled to help maintain mental and physical wellness for their subsequent career, is under-researched. Publicly funded higher educational institutions (which includes conservatoires) are presently required to undertake feedback processes including the National Student Survey[118], which asks final year undergraduate students to engage in reflective response regarding wellbeing (amongst other things). This particular feedback requirement has been in place since 2005, so fifteen years after my eldest alumni interviewee began their conservatoire studies. It is demonstrative of the increased focus on critical reflexivity regarding practices and cultures at the broader level across HE establishments, and placing greater emphasis on the student experience.

Crucially, however, there is little research which reflects on the health and wellbeing experiences of conservatoire students from a longitudinal perspective, and across the conservatoire network. Additionally, there is an absence of data on the long-term effects of this pedagogic and cultural experience on the individual. That is, how conservatoire practices and cultures are directly connected to, and impact, musicians' notions of self-identity and of their ability (talent), not only during their studies, but beyond, into the profession also.

[118] National Student Survey. "What is the National Student Survey?" Accessed 2nd September 2019. https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php

Therefore, this chapter joins in with ongoing discourse and builds on existing findings, predominantly those from the culmination of the Musical Impact project[119] (2013-2017). I begin the chapter with a brief discussion of the concept of 'wellbeing' in general terms and what this can mean, contextually, for musicians. There follows an overview of key health and wellbeing studies and existing findings within firstly, the music profession, and secondly, the conservatoire setting. I structure my chapter contextualisation thus for it mirrors the position of my alumni, who are currently in the profession but reflecting retrospectively on this earlier stage in their musical progression.

Thereafter, my alumni become the key focal point as I divide the chapter into three sections which highlight my ethnographic data, centred around the interrogatives of 'what', 'who' and 'how', respectively. The first of these sections reflects on the reported instances of health and wellbeing highs and lows during their respective conservatoire journeys, particularly in relation to self-confidence and impact on notions of identity. Here, I apply my conversational model for critical insight to show that the capital of the individual, structures of power (namely articulation processes and hierarchies) and identity, are interconnected within this chapter focus. The second section, 'who', looks at the key figures and relationships which effected alumni's personal wellbeing, asks who they would turn to in times of challenge, and whose responsibility it should be to provide support to students. The third section of this chapter which reflects on the question of, 'how', discusses the taboo of showing signs of struggle in conservatoire culture and how this might be addressed, how alumni coped during the transition process from education to profession, and finally (the subject around which much of the academic discourse is centred), how alumni feel this topic can be most effectively taught on the curriculum. To conclude, I reflect on alumni thoughts on the longer-term effects of the conservatoire experience on their health and wellbeing, beyond institutional walls.

5.1 Providing a context: The concept of wellbeing

Before I begin my data-driven discussion, firstly, it is useful to look briefly at the concept of 'wellbeing' in a broader context and its relevance in the discussion of embodied learning debates, specifically those relating to music conservatoires. The conversation regarding

[119] Royal Northern College of Music. 2013. "Musical Impact – Enhancing Musicians' Health and Wellbeing." Accessed 25th April 2015. http://www.rncm.ac.uk/news/musical-impact-a-study-of-musicians-health-and-wellbeing/

personal 'wellbeing' has grown ever louder in recent decades in general society and within educational debates, with this term found daily from newspaper and magazine articles in print and online, through to academic studies. The concept of wellbeing is frequently coupled with those such as 'mindfulness', which collectively encourage individuals in society to be more conscious of their individual mental and physical health, emotions and perception of happiness, and thought for how we as individuals fit into society. However, Ascenso et al. (2017: 10) suggests that there is 'a general challenge in psychology toward finding consensus on a universal definition of wellbeing'.

The increasing general discussion of this concept is frequently associated with 'millennials' and 'generation z', who are credited with placing particular value and priority on their wellbeing and on self-reflection, and are thus driving the prevalence of these debates. For context, millennials are widely determined to be those born between 1981 and 1996[120], of which 80% of my alumni correspond, whilst generation z, that is those born between 1997 and 2012[121], comprise 10% of my alumni interviewees. The remaining 10%, therefore, were born prior to these two groups and are determined as generation x, born within 1965 and 1980.[122] Consideration of health and wellbeing within the millennial context, therefore, is particularly relevant given the overwhelming representation of this generation within my alumni subjects. As the media increasingly discuss what it means to be a millennial or part of generation x or z, we are encouraged as individuals to reflect on how to interpret and work with the realities of complex contemporary living and working in the twenty-first century. This resonates with the context of my study as I speak with individual musicians who are currently positioned thus, and actively navigating these concerns.

My discussion of the practices of contemporary conservatoires involves reflection on the professional development tools and skills these institutions impart on their students, and whether these are the most effective and appropriate for their subsequent survival and prosperity in the profession thereafter. As such, I relate my research focus to the modern realities of sustaining a career as a musician in contemporary society. The realities and practicalities of existing and hopefully, thriving, in the music profession are increasingly demanding, particularly as portfolio careers become the norm. As musicians are bombarded with constant emails and phone calls in contemporary 'smart phone'

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[120] Dimock, M. 2019. "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins." Pew Research Centre. Accessed 26th June 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

culture, and Arts funding is continually cut in the economic climate of the 21st century, it becomes very difficult for musicians to say 'no' to work opportunities. They are therefore attempting to please multiple influential bosses and peers at the same time, and physically juggle a number of jobs simultaneously. Instead, musicians must find mechanisms to cope with the effects on their health and wellbeing that may directly result in the face of these demands and that are now more than ever, increasingly becoming the accepted "norm" if one is to become a busy ("successful") modern musician.

I therefore outline insights from recent publications on health and wellbeing within the conservatoire and professional music fields, which help contextualise the importance of the issue of musicians' wellbeing. These are explored amongst the backdrop of my own research, as I address the need for change in practice, culture, approach, content and engagement within conservatoire establishments. I begin firstly by conversing with studies which focus on professional musicians in the field, to reflect why health and wellbeing should be such a vital aspect of a conservatoire training. I then move to reflect on a selection of recent studies undertaken within conservatoires themselves and ongoing research projects, bringing my data into this conversation.

5.2 Within the profession: Recent studies

Studies exploring the health and wellbeing of professional musicians highlight the propensity for incurring musculoskeletal injuries, hearing loss, performance anxiety, stress and mental fatigue, amongst others (Ascenso et al. 2017). Such studies also surmise that 'musical activity at a professional level has been widely equated as a threat to wellbeing through several mediators.' (Asceso et al. 2018: 2). In particular, the empirical data of my study supports my focus on the importance of musician's self-efficacy, and the short and long-term effects on self-confidence and self-esteem within the context of conservatoire training, transitioning into the profession and within this thereafter. Recent publications of note to bring into conversation here are those by Gembris and Heye (2014) 'Growing Old in a Symphony Orchestra: The Development of the Age-Related Self-Concept and the Self-Estimated Performance of Professional Musicians in a Lifespan Perspective', Ascenso, Perkins and Williamon (2018) 'Resounding Meaning: A PERMA Wellbeing Profile of Classical Musicians', Ascenso, Williamon and Perkins (2017) 'Understanding the Wellbeing of Professional Musicians through the lens of Positive Psychology' and the Help Musicians UK 'Health and Wellbeing Survey'(2014).

Gembris and Heye (2014) provide a look at how the concept of the 'self' is affected by, and changes, through the experience and duration of belonging to a professional

orchestra in relation to musician's age (their research takes place in Germany, further highlighting these as global issues for musicians). Given that a large number of conservatoire students will spend a portion of their careers within the orchestral setting (precise statistics for this are not available), this makes for relevant and interesting reading in relation to my research. Gembris and Heye (2014)'s exploratory study looks in part at self-motivation, development phases, self-concept and coping strategies in relation to the different age decades of an orchestral musician's life. Combined with my alumni interview data, it allows for debate on the merits of wellbeing training for conservatoire students and what this should entail in order to increase the chances of successfully pre-empting what my new data, and that which already exists, shows is likely to occur throughout a musician's lifetime.

Gembris and Heye (2014) confirm the importance of addressing clear gaps in existing data which fail to look into consequences on musicians' self- and professional-identity in relation to their age and career progression. Clearly resonating with this, my data strongly reflects that the complex relationship between conceptions of ability and aspirations, and musical identity, begins before the conservatoire experience, continues throughout and extends far beyond it. This is also in line with Hall's identity concept of 'becoming' (1990), in that identities are never fixed, but continually forming in direct response to history, power and cultural practices. The Help Musicians UK Health and Wellbeing Study (2014) highlighted key concerns amongst professional musicians as depression, loneliness and relationship difficulties, with fewer than half of respondents admitting to seeking help for these problems. Interestingly, of those who had sought help, the single biggest route they took was in private healthcare, with over half of those who went to an NHS GP saying they had been disappointed with the result. As the report concludes, this suggests that generally, society is seemingly not well informed or equipped to successfully deal with the health and wellbeing problems which are specific to professional musicians. This implies that there may well be more effective avenues of help available to musicians outside of general health practitioners, but that most musicians interviewed in this study did not expect this outcome. My study argues, therefore, that adapting a toolkit to deal with the mental and physical challenges of the profession should begin at the outset of a musician's specialist training, from the first term of conservatoire attendance and continually, beyond. Not only would such a toolkit enable musicians to work towards supporting themselves through health and wellbeing challenges during the longevity of their careers, but it would also outline where professional support is available

aside from NHS GPS, which as this Help Musicians UK study demonstrated, is not always the most effective source of practical help.

Though existing findings from the professional field can seem overwhelmingly negative on first glance, there are, however, some surprising, contradictory findings from the recent Ascenso et al. (2018) study, 'A PERMA Wellbeing Profile of Classical Musicians'. Using the PERMA model (i.e. Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) to analyse their findings, they discovered that, surprisingly, the results were largely positive and the musicians' mean scores were not below those of the general population for any of the PERMA components (2018: 9). Their conclusion was that, to date, the body of wellbeing research that focuses on the classical musician 'is almost exclusively done with recourse to measures of disorder…As a consequence, conclusions can only be taken on illbeing, not wellbeing, and the scope for comparisons between studies remains limited.' (2018: 9)

In presenting the findings of my study, I aim to respond to Ascenso et al. (2018) and also Ascenso et al.'s (2017) call for research moving beyond a focus on the potentially debilitating factors of being a (professional) musician and search for a response to musician's wellbeing experiences within the lens of positive psychology. However, I acknowledge that it is not realistic for all students to expect a wholly positive experience and that the very essence of higher education requires personal growth and development through the range of emotions, celebrations and hardships that this training imparts. In particular, given my interest in differences across the alumni data (in line with Hall), this inevitably entails polarised discourse, from the most positive to the most negative wellbeing experiences.

Therefore, I consciously analyse my data findings with as neutral an approach as is feasible (whilst still presenting the true facts), to offer a balanced reflection. Though my findings offer critical responses, my intention is not to passively add to the number of articles which focus entirely on the negative aspects of musicians' wellbeing, as suggested by Ascenso et al.(2017). Instead, this chapter aims to present the alumni data as an opportunity for critical reflection on what has thus far been lacking in existing research, regarding the effectiveness in the conservatoire process to positively inform young musicians how they may prepare themselves for the mental and physical demands of a lifetime career, and importantly, how they can work towards preventing such issues and where and who to turn to if needed.

5.3 Health and wellbeing research within conservatoire settings

As noted, research on health and wellbeing within the conservatoire sector is enjoying a notable period of growth, since the 2010s in particular. The four-year 'Musical Impact – Enhancing Musicians' Health and Wellbeing' project headed by Conservatoires UK with key contributors including Williamon, Ginsborg, Perkins, Ascenso, reflects the ongoing investment into this area of research focus and is an indication by the conservatoire establishments that they acknowledge the importance of this issue. This project, which begin in 2013, has been a key source of rich research material. The cross-conservatoire project involved contributors from nine UK conservatoires (who are all members of Conservatoires UK) and scientists from two universities, with the collective aim of adding to existing knowledge in this field through new studies. The project focus includes, but is not limited to, the demands of practise and performing, and health promotion in music education and in the profession.[123]

The common theme from across many of the studies from this project is the strong recommendation for health education to be included in core curricular (Matei et al., 2018, Araujo et al., 2017, Perkins et al., 2017), something which is agreed by my alumni voices. This echoes the earlier findings of Williamon and Thompson (2006) and Kreutz et al. (2009), who also recommended its formal inclusion in conservatoire training. Kreutz et al. (2009: 57) found that the levels of healthy behaviour in music performance students at two UK conservatoires were 'lower than might be expected in a group of individuals who engage daily, psychologically and physically, in a highly demanding, specialised set of activities.' These findings are also supported in the more recent study by Araujo et al. (2017), whose report emanates from the Musical Impact project. Concerned with the highly perfectionist, pressurised and competitive culture of the conservatoire, they concluded that 'the need for psychological health education and intervention – driven by both individuals and educational institutions – from early career stages is urgent and should be considered proactively, before health problems arise.' (Araujo et al., 2017: 14).

As is implied in the eight-year gap between Kreutz et al. (2009) and Araujo et al.'s (2017) very similar findings regarding evident health concerns amongst conservatoire students, these establishments have been markedly slow in adapting their approach towards health and wellbeing concerns. This is confirmed by my empirical data, with their three decades worth of retrospection. Perhaps in acceptance of this fact, and to address

[123] Royal Northern College of Music. 2013. "Musical Impact – Enhancing Musicians' Health and Wellbeing." Accessed 25th April 2015. http://www.rncm.ac.uk/news/musical-impact-a-study-of-musicians-health-and-wellbeing/

health and wellbeing concerns preventatively, the Royal Northern College of Music have become the first conservatoire in the UK to appoint a 'Lecturer in Health and Wellbeing', as of September 2018. Their aim in doing such is in part to 'make sure that both physical health and psychological flourishing are at the core of students' experiences' and to ensure students 'experience developmental transitions better.'[124] My study proves that such action would be welcomed by alumni, for even those who graduated within the past 3 years articulate clear concerns and perceived failures in conservatoire practice to successfully support students in health and wellbeing matters.

5.4 What were the health and wellbeing experiences of alumni?

My findings reflect a significant gap between the health and wellbeing knowledge and tools for long- and short-term self-care that conservatoire institutions hope to impart, and the realities of that which is understood, remembered and actually used by these musicians when in the profession. This first alumni-focused data results section discusses what they experienced and what they felt. It reflects on the health and wellbeing highs and lows of their respective conservatoire journeys, particularly in relation to self-confidence, and the impact on notions of identity, on which I apply the lens of Hall, thus relating to my conversational model. I also reflect on other wellbeing related concerns which arose in the discourse, namely, dyslexia and dealing with rejection.

To appreciate the relevance of such questions, it is vital to acknowledge the type of educational habitus which constitutes 'the conservatoire' - one which is very different to the vast majority of other higher education institutions[125] - and acknowledge how the nature of their practices directly affect the students within. For instance, the reader is reminded that a conservatoire education commonly requires students to perform in a solo capacity in front of staff and peers from the very first week they attend their respective establishment. Therefore, exposing publicly their musical talent (and hereto training) for all to hear/see/judge before social and educational relationships have realistically had chance to form and solidify. This is not the case for the vast majority of university students, who are unlikely to be exposed to this type of personal scrutiny and pressure in such a way,

[124] Royal Northern College of Music. "Meet the RNCM's First Lecturer in Musicians' Health and Wellbeing." Accessed 3rd January 2019. https://www.rncm.ac.uk/blog/meet-the-rncms-first-lecturer-in-musicians-health-and-wellbeing/

[125] Additionally, Burland (2005:82) found that conservatoires and universities, "attracted contrasting individuals…perhaps the clearest difference between the two groups of musicians was that they had different musical priorities and goals…and differed in terms of their responses to, and experiences and relationships with other people."

upon their very first week of entry. Of course, this solo performance and self-exposure is a key element of conservatoire training and students are expected to very quickly adapt to this practice. However, in raising this point here, I hope to reiterate how the field serves to naturally encourage students to question their own attributes, abilities and knowledge (i.e. cultural capital) and their sense of self, and inevitably form comparisons to their fellow students, from the very moment they enter.

Self-confidence and identity are key topics for musicians at all stages of life and career, given the intrinsically personal nature of music making, with individual expression at its heart (hence identity as a vital element of my conversational model). Whilst, in considering musical identity in relation to (university) music students, Pitts (2002: 87) confirmed that 'it is important to realise how closely academic and music success are linked with self-confidence and identity in students' minds.' Therefore, building on this and in relation to wellbeing, I asked my alumni interviewees about their perceptions of self-confidence over the course of their conservatoire training, specifically, how confident they felt upon arrival at their respective institution, whether they graduated with more of less self-confidence than when they started, and reflections on the journey in between. Their answers were always clear, with no such replies of "I'm not sure" or "let me think about that", it was a topic on which they had definitive thoughts and opinions.

For the vast majority of alumni interviewed, the conservatoire experience was understandably a journey of ups and downs in this respect and it is undeniably connected to notions of talent (chapter 3) in particular. With regards to the precise ways in which conservatoire practices and cultures effect self-confidence, alumni are the richest source of material to mine. Their position enables them to reflect upon the training process in its entirety, and from a position of distance temporally (i.e. from a point of safety, away from the institution), they frequently contextualise this discussion on self-confidence processes within the framework of an overall positive/negative conservatoire experience – the data shows that the two are most often inextricably linked, particularly in relation to positive outcomes. That is, a more positive conservatoire experience was in large part connected to feelings of marked high self-confidence during their studies. The data also reflects that those who left the conservatoire with what they deemed to be higher levels of confidence were also accepting that their training experience would naturally have ups and downs, this was an assumed part of the training process:

> Of course there are moments you feel insecure about your playing, but that's all just part of training and the profession. I was more of a confident player at the end [of conservatoire studies], you go through a series of ups and downs. So, some

> weeks you feel great about your playing, and others you don't and that carries on in life. I know now I'm able to deal with it a lot better, just because I'm older and more experienced…There are moments where you question if this is the right thing [pursuing a career in music], but I've been quite lucky, I've never felt it [extreme low confidence], really. – Alumnus 6[126]

> You know, you have ups and downs, but there was no massive thing. – Alumna 10[127]

Most respondents were, however, clearly very effected by levels of low self-confidence during their studies. Many were though, able to turn this experience into a positive – crucially, in retrospection - and claimed the process imbued them with beneficial life skills after the conservatoire, as demonstrated by Alumna 3 here:

> Definitely the conservatoire made me feel less confident, but I guess that's because I'd never been surrounded by people at that level. It was like no-one recognised it but there were a lot of people that suffered from it. The conservatoire did nothing to make it better. It wasn't so great while I was there [her self-confidence], I'm not selling my experiences of the college well here, I absolutely loved it, I think it teaches you lots of skills re managing yourself, constantly pushing yourself, really high standards that you have to meet. You've got to feel it and put everything into it, and that's how I approach everything. I apply the same things I did when I was performing at college to everything in life, it makes you quite dedicated, I think. – Alumna 3[128]

Honing in on the class and capital dimensions of my conversational model, as shown by Davies (2002) and confirmed in my own data (chapter 2), those students from a lower social class background, particularly those from state school and who have not belonged to a junior conservatoire training programme, are deemed as having a lower cultural capital. Therefore, my alumni data reflects that it is those students who are more likely to be affected by confidence issues. However, as shown, that does not mean that they are not able to acquire the tools to proactively work through these feelings, and in retrospect, with time and experience many alumni are able to reflect on this process in a constructive manner.

My data also shows however, that for a portion of alumni, there is a longer-term impact on self-confidence and notions of identity, that is directly connected to the conservatoire experience and that has hitherto not been discussed in existing studies. That is, it was apparent from the data that in large part, long term self-confidence issues were connected to perceived conservatoire-attributed notions of talent, and to those of

[126] RCM and RAM, woodwind, 2005-2011
[127] RNCM, woodwind, 2008-2013
[128] RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2010

autonomy and conformity during their training. In respect of this, I asked all alumni whether they felt they were treated as an individual at the conservatoire or had to 'fit in' to the system and practices in place, and to what extent: this is one of the central questions of this study and was an important indicator when reflecting on positive/negative overall experiences.

Overwhelmingly, those alumni who deemed they were not a 'favourite' within their department expressed that they felt they were not treated as an individual person and musician with personal ambitions. Whilst, those interviewed who considered they were treated as a 'favourite' largely felt they were able to give direction to their studies and resultant outcome. This was the case for Alumnus 11, who believed he "probably" was a favourite with his head of department, and who considered he had been allowed a certain level of autonomy in his performance direction during his studies. As in chapter 2, there is also in his testimony here an implied 'them' and 'us' divide horizontally, across the conservatoire network, that certain institutions are associated with certain types of pedagogic practice:

> Yes, I felt like you could adapt it [the course] if you worked hard enough at it, definitely. I don't know, I think Welsh college is very good [at that], because I think if you really want to – it depends from college to college – but if you really want to take it and do something with it, there's enough freedom. Postgrad was great, because there's loads of freedom. Undergrad, it's too structured, there's too many lectures about pointless things. So if I'd have stopped after my undergrad, I would have had a horrible time, not a horrible time but I would have had a bit of a chip on my shoulder. I stayed for postgrad and just started getting work [in orchestras, externally], just brilliant, and that changed it completely, but then I think, I've always said, it's what you make of it. I hate people who complain about music college because, you know, you're given enough tools to make something of it, and if you don't, you're just not working hard enough. – Alumnus 11[129]

Importantly in relation to this chapter, the notion of "freedom" and the sense of not being forced to conform to certain practices, was clearly connected to wellbeing ("horrible/brilliant time") and identity ("I would have had a chip on my shoulder"). Those alumni who wanted to embark on a solo and/or orchestral career post-conservatoire were also markedly less effected by the issue of 'fitting in', given that they naturally wanted to conform to the systems, practices and conservatoire cultures already in place. For most of this group of alumni, it was not a question which they had previously paused to consider.

> Alumna 16: It [the system] worked for me, because I felt like I was helped along the way and I was given opportunities, I felt like it was handed to me.

[129] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015

> Me: And you felt like you were able to say what you wanted to do and what you wanted to focus on?
> Alumna 16: Yes, because I think what I wanted fitted in to what they could provide, basically. I wanted to learn repertoire and do orchestra, and that's what they provided. I think College is difficult, I think university is a better pathway to go if you want to be more creative, because I think for creative opportunities, they [the conservatoire] didn't really help that much. You know I had conductor friends who wanted to start their own orchestra and they didn't get any help at all from college, they had to really do it off their own back. Which is great experience, but a lot of time and effort and with not much help, which would have really been of benefit.[130]

If we compare Alumna 16's reflexivity here - in that she fitted in by a degree of coincidence because she happened to want to comply with the value system of the conservatoire given her orchestral aspirations - with Alumna 12's discourse below, we see an obvious difference. For, Alumna 12 clearly struggled with confusion regarding her transforming self-identity while at the conservatoire and in retrospect, is now able to attribute these feelings to a lack of belonging within her instrumental department. Crucially, she demonstrates that this experience has impacted her notion of identity beyond her training and into the profession. It is important to note that Alumna 12's main aspiration was to enter the musical theatre profession, which as discussed in the previous chapter, is positioned low in the conservatoire hierarchy of valued stylistic capital.

> I felt there were many social conventions and traditions that I didn't understand. Unspoken rules. As time went on, I learned how to adapt to them in order to survive in the system, but I always felt like an imposter. Almost as though I was going to be found out as a fake and shunned from the group. This has definitely stayed with me into the profession, but I have learned ways of managing it now. The social animal in me longed to be accepted and I started to alter the way I dressed and spoke to fit in with the norms. I then also started to try and rebel against it through dying my hair bright colours, getting piercings, going clubbing more, and stuff like that. Looking back, it was almost like a battle of self-expression and identity. – Alumna 12[131]

Therefore, those who entered the profession with a broader musical interest and/or other stylistic interests, i.e. with a different cultural capital (e.g. the conductor friend in Alumna 16's anecdote or Alumna 12's aspirations), were clearly effected by the musical hierarchy of the conservatoire and subsequently made to feel that their individuality was diminished, that they had to 'fit in' to the system or be detrimentally effected in some way. Thus, reflecting the connection as demonstrated in my conversational model between capital, power and identity. This was a common theme

[130] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003
[131] RBC and RWCMD, woodwind, 2006-2012

across the data. Alumnus 17 experienced a musically diverse background prior to arriving at his respective conservatoire, with interests in ska, pop and jazz, as well as classical music. He attests:

> I was meant to fit into the system, I don't think I ever did because I didn't know what it was I wanted, but I knew I didn't want that [orchestral performance]. Their view was 'this is the course, this is what you're doing and you will adhere to that'. So, the general response to 'I want to play some jazz' was 'well why don't you [expletive] off to the jazz course then. - Alumnus 17[132]

As a result of not 'fitting in' to the value system of the conservatoire, Alumnus 17 said:

> By the time I got to the end of my second year, my playing had fallen apart, I couldn't really play anymore, I was truly awful. I was completely disengaged with classical music as a thing, orchestral playing still gives me a little bit of the heebee geebees. – Alumnus 17

Here, Alumnus 17 demonstrates the long-term effect of his conservatoire experience on his sense of self confidence and his identity. His full testimony reflected that he presently still does not feel confident playing in the orchestral genre and has never felt a sense of belonging or acceptance with his contemporaries in this field. He does not identify with this group and now in the profession, many years after graduating from the conservatoire, he actively avoids orchestral performance as a direct result of his negative associations with that culture during that time, thus reflecting a longitudinal impact of this negative conservatoire emotional experience.

In applying my conversational model, I consider here Alumnus 17's experience within the framework of Hall's concept of 'articulation', which put in its most simplified form, is the way in which social formations and alliances are forced – or articulated – by a dominant power, to the detriment of individuality. In so doing, I am able to place these experiences of 'fitting in' within a wider context to reflect on overarching issues of cultural practices, power and ideology within conservatoire settings. Hall's articulation theory can be applied to a given cultural field to examine the actions, speech and organisation which connect individuals through the application of certain practices. In applying this framework to the conservatoire field and examining their practices, I can reflect, therefore, on how these establishments can be seen to force groups of their students into allegiance with each other (i.e. by pigeon-holing), for the benefit of their specific interests (i.e. the more focused they are on those in the 'potential soloist' bracket, the higher the probability that some of these may actually become soloists, which would then bring the establishment

[132] RAM, brass, 1997-2001

good publicity and maintain their status, i.e. ensuring their high symbolic capital). This also resonates with Bourdieu's (1990) thinking regarding the reproductive, cyclical traditions of educational establishments. If conservatoire practices are understood through the lens of articulation theory, we can reflect how those in power, in grouping students in this way, fail to see them as individuals, despite all the indications that the musicians within both of these groups (both the 'potential soloists' and 'non-soloists') act differently. In relation to this chapter's focus on health and wellbeing, it is this process of articulation, actioned by the conservatoires, which directly impacts students' self-identity and self-confidence, with the effects of this practice long-lasting for some.

Though the majority of alumni interviewed expressed clear struggles regarding their identity formation during their studies and that for those who had a particularly negative experience in this context, there has incurred a longer-term impact as a result, this process and resultant outcome was not expressed as negative for all. For example, Alumnus 7 reflected that his conservatoire experience (of two institutions) had taught him how, in the subsequent professional world, to mould his behaviour in order to better 'fit in' to the 'accepted' stereotypical character expected of someone within his instrument group (brass). However, this learnt skill of adapting and shaping his identity, depending on the professional circumstances, is done in such a way that his identity remains secure. That is, he is aware, courtesy of his conservatoire experiences, how to be socially malleable but only to a degree where he never feels insecure about himself and his principals. I have included his full discourse on this theme for the rich, comparative insights it provides:

> Alumnus 7: I'm loud, outspoken, boisterous, gay, a bit different. But I've picked up little traits where I know maybe in this situation, I won't do that, I might just kind of edge towards this. Situations like ok, they're going out for a curry now so I'm just going to go for a nice little salad somewhere and gin and tonic, sort of thing, I'm going to move away from that [curry and pint]. Or this orchestra plays in this particular way and I need to make sure that the day before maybe I won't do as much practice to make sure I'm fresh for that as well. Or this orchestra does a hit and run, I need to look at this music because I'm not very good at that. So, you pick up these things from college knowing that ok, we've got low brass class, right, this is quite intimate so I need to make sure I look at that. Whereas a contemporary ensemble you might go 'ah, I'll just see how it goes on the day because lots of people are going to be in the same boat, don't know how to do these extended techniques, it's fine.' So those are the things you pick up along the way, practically, and then as a person, once again, you think 'I'm going into the West End, I can be loud and singing' or right we're doing Brahms 2 now.
> Me: So, the conservatoire experience for you gave you a lot of skills to be able to mould your identity, depending on what circumstances you're now in in the profession?
> Alumnus 7: I like the word that you just said there, it's not changing who you are, it's just yes, moulding. So [you think] yes, I'm just going to knock that out [of the

way] there for now because that's not quite appropriate [for that working environment], or really bang I'm there [whole personality] now, that sort of thing. So you can still be yourself, but you now are in control and you decide which parts of you that you work with, if you like, that you show. Or, just put the middle finger up! This is me, I don't care what you think about me, I'm here to do a job.
Me: So, did the conservatoire experience then embolden you a little bit to be able to stick that middle finger up then, if you like?
Alumnus 7: Yes, yes it really did.
Me: So for you, the conservatoire experience had a positive effect on you, on your identity and how you perceived yourself?
Alumnus 7: It really did, on my identity, how I perceive myself and how I want others to perceive me. There were moments it went down, but they only made me stronger and equally so, in my professional life, the moments of doubt have only made me stronger and given me a wider kind of palate to deal with negative things. So, I'm still the same in essence, in my core, but as you say, malleable around the sides, just to slot in a bit easier. Because no-one likes to be in that situation where someone's so different it's really hard to get the artistic juices flowing because you're feeling someone's personality is encroaching you or they're not doing anything and so it's really difficult to get your point across. Because there are people who will just be silent and won't do anything, you know play the notes on the page, but that makes it more difficult because you don't know how to work as a team, which you have to do a lot with that person [if you're in a section with them].[133]

Thus far, I have shown that the alumni discourse shows clear patterns in relation to the issue of self-confidence during conservatoire studies, a disposition which is strongly connected to ongoing identity formation, and the effects of this can evidently be far-reaching, into students' professional lives thereafter. Another concern regarding mental health which arose from the data related to rejection. That is, if conservatoire practices overtly encourage the expectation of immediately graduating to a permanent, contracted job in an orchestra or to become a soloist with a recital series and record deal, then they must also balance these longer-term aspirations with the tools to deal with rejection. Given the semi-structured interview approach and the development of my research focus over the course of study, I did not ask all alumni whether they were explicitly told by their respective conservatoire(s) of statistics regarding professional employment, with the purpose of managing expectations. However, the discourse, despite the lack of direct questioning, does suggest that this was not a practice experienced by alumni. Certainly, it was not mentioned in the detailed interviews as an experience which took place within the context of expectations and experiences. Additionally, I have since asked this question in informal discussion with other fellow alumni in the professional field (six, to be precise) and

[133] TLCMD and RAM, brass, 2009-2012

all said that this notion of explicitly managing realistic expectations was absent from their preparatory training.

As was shown in chapter 3, those labelled as 'favourites' were especially likely to report that they had thus felt unprepared for professional rejection. When asked to express the general pros and cons of her conservatoire experience, without prompting on the topic, Alumna 16 said:

> Dealing with rejection. At college I didn't feel I had any big rejections, my big rejection came the second year out of music college when I was working with my old flute teacher's orchestra, BBC Phil, her maternity cover I did for 7 months and then I did an audition to do another maternity cover on a different chair…I did an audition and I didn't get it and that affected me for years. It affected me for about 3 or 4 years, I didn't realise how much it affected me at the time and it's only really in the last couple of years that I've felt like I'm just sort of getting over it. Because suddenly, it's the realisation that nobody owes you anything. Which nobody tells you - *you* have to make something. I had been handed everything on a plate at college and I was very lucky [immediately] afterwards, with people giving me opportunities and that really, really screwed me up [in the longer term]. - Alumna 16[134]

Institutional practices can rarely be viewed in isolation, and this issue of rejection and how to deal with it is intrinsically linked to wellbeing. Once again, Alumna 16's discourse underlines a clear, long-term effect of conservatoire practice on musicians' longer-term health, wellbeing and identity. This experience, and possessing a lack of tools to process it, made Alumna 16 question her own talent and notions of success and failure, and question her sense of who she was. Whilst conservatoires never claim that rejection will not be a part of life as a performing musician, within conservatoire culture, it still largely remains the 'elephant in the room'. The alumni show that this avoidance to discuss the matter makes the realities of rejection once in the profession even more pronounced and confusing.

To conclude this first section discussing what health and wellbeing concerns alumni have in relation to conservatoire practices, I consider here one other aspect which arose in the narrative, that of dyslexia. Three of the alumni interviewed were diagnosed with the condition, two before their studies and one since. Firstly, I reflect here on the experiences of Alumna 16, who had not been diagnosed pre-conservatoire.

> Alumna 16: I'm dyslexic and they didn't know at the time, I don't think I did, it wasn't picked up at school, it's since that I've sort of realised, and there was no support for that. No-one picked up on it. Even with all the essays, I mean I used to send them back to my Dad so he could sort of…I mean it was a mess.

[134] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

Me: Do you think the dyslexia came through in your playing or just your writing?
Alumna 16: It came through in the playing as well, but I'd sort of learned to…I mean sight-reading was always, it used to bring me out in a cold sweat, but that's something I learnt to deal with, just because it's a visual dyslexia, not aural, I learnt different ways to learn pieces. Sight-reading is something just because of repetition, I can do now, but learning pieces, it's like you need a multi-sensory approach to it, so you need to listen to stuff again and again and again. You know, I still use colour in music, post-its, highlighting pens, all that kind of stuff to sort of learn how to approach it in a way that's going to be easier to process.
Me: So did you feel like you were struggling a little bit with the written stuff at college?
Alumna 16: Yes.
Me: And did you feel like you were able to say that?
Alumna 16: No.
Me: So you don't know who you could have said that to, who'd have helped you?
Alumna 16: No.[135]

There exists a taboo within conservatoire culture of admitting to any health issue with which you are suffering, for fear of being judged as not strong enough to cope with the highly pressurised and competitive environment. This worrying culture ensured that Alumna 16 did not feel she was able to admit her struggles publicly, and more so, she considered there was no clear support network to which she could have directly turned and asked for the appropriate form of help. As a result, she was not able to fully engage with the academic pedagogy at the conservatoire. However, as pre-diagnosed with dyslexia, Alumna 14 was offered additional support during her studies, experiencing varying levels of effectiveness:

Alumna 14: The learning support I had was really good, quite life changing actually. Also being explained how I'm dyslexic, because I always just thought 'I'm dyslexic so I'm a bit slow at stuff' and she was like 'no, there are more elements of dyslexia you might not know about.' I now know why I can daydream for twenty minutes or like I'm in a rehearsal and just completely have a shut down and like nothing happens. So, I understand why that's happening. Knowing how you function and knowing where your dyslexia hits you, and it doesn't hit people in the same [way]. But then I felt a lot of the time teachers were going 'it's not ok, you're weak here, you need to get better at it' but I actually can't.
Me: Do you feel like it would have really helped you if your principal study teachers had had an understanding of this?
Alumna 14: Massively. Because [her principal study teacher] said to me 'I've never taught anyone with dyslexia before' so I was his first dyslexic student and he did not understand at all. And was just going 'well this is unacceptable, you're slow, you need to be working quicker than this, you can't sight read like this, you're letting the department down' you know, quite heavy statements to be putting on someone's shoulders when really it's his lack of understanding, and not wanting to

[135] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

> understand really. Because it's not like I couldn't do the stuff, but I felt the way it was being presented to me, I couldn't do that.[136]

It was clear from her full-length testimony that the insufficient support and care she received from her principal study teacher in relation to her (medically proven) learning needs was detrimental not only to the functioning of their pedagogic relationship, but also to her general perceptions of her entire conservatoire experience. Given that only three of my interview sample have the condition, it is difficult to make affirmative statements regarding general effectiveness and success of support for these students, on a wider scale. However, it is worth noting that the alumni here attended different conservatoires, but they expressed that there was insufficient awareness and understanding by staff (firstly, to pick up on the condition if not pre-diagnosed and secondly, regarding assistance). This a particularly vital area for further research, both in academic and one-to-one practical, principal study tuition contexts.

Having established that alumni almost all experienced some form of health and wellbeing problems, I now turn to the question of 'who', for the following section of this chapter debate.

5.5 Who effected the health and wellbeing of alumni?

The second section looks at the key figures and relationships which effected the personal wellbeing of alumni when they were students, asks who they turned to in times of challenge, and whose responsibility it *should* be to provide support to students. There are two main relationships which are crucial to students' wellbeing, according to the alumni data. That is, the one-to-one relationship with the principal study tutor, and that with fellow peers. As has been shown, the conservatoire experience is multi-layered and all of the key themes in these central chapters clearly overlap. Therefore, once again we have here in this discussion a clear link to notions of talent, including favouritism and pigeon-holing, and clear references to the effect on wellbeing and identity. These findings were shown in chapter 3, therefore, I acknowledge them here and swiftly move on to other personnel related to wellbeing concerns.

The question of who to turn to for help and support within conservatoires remains largely unclear for many alumni, even in retrospect there appears to be little or no clarity. This is predominantly due to the aforementioned pervading culture that discourages students from showing any sign of perceived weakness. It is clear from my data that

[136] TLCMD, woodwind, 2008-2013

existing calls to change conservatoires' attitudes to health and wellbeing toward a more accepting and supportive culture that engages in pre-emptive training (Kreutz et al., 2009) have been largely unable to break the taboo, and many students are still suffering in silence for fear of judgement. However, in response to Ascenso et al.'s (2017) call for research that also looks at positive wellbeing data, I reflect here on the discourse of those alumni who were evidently well supported. In these cases, they felt confident that their head of department was the person to whom they would turn, thus further underlining the position of power these personnel hold (as established in chapter 3).

> Me: So if you had a problem at the conservatoire did you feel you could speak to somebody and did you know who you would talk to?
> Alumna 10: Yes, I would always talk to the head of wind and brass [he was] very approachable. I don't know if everyone felt like that but for me personally, I could talk to him about anything and we got on very well, but not everyone. Like I said, there was favouritism and I don't think everyone felt they could talk. The Northern's sounding really nice! [137]

Alumnus 11 aligns with Alumna 10 above, in his confidence that his head of department was the only logical person to turn to in times of concern:

> Alumnus 11: [The head of department] was so good that I wouldn't have gone anywhere else…He was very good, if he wasn't there, God knows who I'd have gone to, because, you know, some of them [staff] are so unapproachable, so I think yes, I was saved by him. So, I wouldn't have gone to anyone else, mainly because there wasn't anyone else, I couldn't s*ee* anyone else.
> Me: Would you have thought to go to student services?
> Alumnus 11: No, I felt the people at student services were very unapproachable.[138]

Whilst these two testimonies reflect positive direction regarding the head of department as the obvious source of support, here, Alumnus 11 raises a relevant point regarding the role of student services in students' health and wellbeing; not a single interviewee stated that they would approach this department in times of stress:

> Alumnus 11: Would I have gone to [head of student services] about anything? God, no! They were crap, so bad, and it's a music place, where people are so vulnerable. This is the thing, I was a gibbering wreck for two years and I would never have thought of going to student services because they were so unapproachable.
> Me: So you think there's more that could be done on that front?
> Alumnus 11: For sure, because you are vulnerable. Music college is small enough for [head of student services] to spend his first term having a one-to-one with every student, simple. Why that doesn't happen, I've no idea.

[137] RNCM, woodwind, 2008-2013
[138] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015

> Me: So the support network could be stronger in terms of wellbeing and making sure students, pastorally, are doing ok?
> Alumnus 11: Yes, 100% yes, because actually, just going back to one of the questions earlier, who's in charge of the student's wellbeing, is it the head of study, the principal study? Really, it's so much pressure on those two isn't it, who are coping with quite a lot themselves. Student services are there for that, yet we don't automatically think of him [the head of student services], he's useless.

The general interview discourse reflects three things within the context of who to turn to in times of trouble while at the conservatoire: (1) alumni attitudes show that they place a great deal of responsibility on their principal study teacher and head of department to observe and subsequently support any personal health and wellbeing concerns (2) conservatoires do have support structures in place, via student services (or similarly titled) departments, which provide appropriate and most importantly, confidential assistance for numerous learning and pastoral problems which students might encounter[139] (3) however, according to my longitudinal ethnographic data, they have seemingly failed to make the function of these student services departments clear to students. Perceptions were that these departments were largely unapproachable, due to reasons such as confusion over their purpose or over-familiarity of student-services staff with students within the social setting of the institution (and thereby raising concerns over confidentiality in using their services in a formal capacity). At the opposite end of this, unapproachability was also perceived as a result of lack of representation or visibility of staff from this department in general classes/seminars/workshops within the conservatoire institution. Hence, some alumni claimed they did not know who the staff members in this department were in person, through observation around the building.

Therefore, reflecting on these findings regarding who to turn to for assistance within the conservatoire, this study recommends firstly that students should take more

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Guildhall School of Music and Drama. "Student Affairs." Accessed 1st July 2019. https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/about_the_school/shared_left_nav/life_at_the_school/student_affairs/
Royal Academy of Music. "Support and Wellbeing." Accessed 1st July 2019. https://www.ram.ac.uk/study/studying-at-the-academy/support-and-wellbeing
Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. "Health and Wellbeing." Accessed 1st July 2019. https://www.bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire/music/further-info/health-and-wellbeing
Royal College of Music. "Student Services." Accessed 1st July 2019. https://www.rcm.ac.uk/life/studentsupport/studentservices/
Royal Northern College of Music. "Student Support and Wellbeing." Accessed 1st July 2019. https://www.rncm.ac.uk/about/college-information/student-support-wellbeing/
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. "Student Experience." Accessed 1st July 2019. https://www.rwcmd.ac.uk/student_life.aspx
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. "Student Support." Accessed 1st July 2019. https://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/student-life/student-support

individual self-responsibility regarding seeking support. That is, they need to expand their gaze outwardly, beyond the one-to-one teaching relationships which dominate their experience and note the value of the student services department that the institutions provide for this very reason. That said, the alumni discourse (including informal discussion with other alumni outside of my interview cohort) demonstrates that the visibility and approachability of these departments remains problematic, thus reflecting a gap between institutional intent and effective delivery.

To build on this recommendation of student self-responsibility, then, I also add that conservatoires need to be more cognitive of explicit direction in their practices with students. That is, they need to ensure that students are clearly aware of the facilities and structures in place that function to ensure their continued wellbeing, and in so doing, establish a bond of trust (regarding the care provided and that confidentiality is ensured). For, it is telling that not a single alumnus across the 28-year attendance time span answered 'student services' when asked who they would turn to in times of stress or trouble. Alumni insights strongly reflect that if staff from these departments were more visible (and therefore seen as more familiar and approachable) through more involvement in formal and informal curriculum components, this would go some way in improving this issue.

5.6 How can the taboo be broken?

This third and final section discusses this problem of showing signs of struggle in conservatoire culture and how this taboo might be broken. Also, how alumni feel this subject can be most effectively taught on the curriculum and how to engage students in the topic. I position my data findings alongside existing studies calling for health and wellbeing to be a core curriculum element (as discussed previously in this chapter).

The issue of voicing one's personal problems within the conservatoire is a complex one, for vulnerability is not a celebrated attribute within the conservatoire, nor in the profession thereafter, whereby people still go by the adage 'you are only as good as your last performance', thus stressing the importance of always appearing to be in good health. My ethnographic discourse suggests that in order for the professional culture to change, this must begin at the earlier training stage, in the conservatoire. One way in which the alumni considered this could be addressed is through general skills classes, therefore, further building on this suggestion from chapter 4. An example of the type of candid discussion these classes might include, within the health and wellbeing context, and in

helping to build a realistic toolkit for their future selves, is demonstrated here by Alumna 16:

> Alumna 16: Okay, so mental health, mental and physical wellbeing, they could do much more about that. And also, I think, in the long term, you're going to come across periods in the profession, ten, twenty, thirty years down the line, it's feast or famine, you know, where you're going to need to look after yourself one way or the other… you know, it's putting a value on *you.* You know, we all do stupid things, we say yes to stupid things like being in Newcastle and then being in London the next morning and you just say yes. You're programmed to say yes, yes, yes to everything. But it's the reality of doing that drive, coping with that exhaustion, doing the best job you can when stressed out. And also, the other thing is that the people in the rehearsal in the morning, if you've done that job, they don't care if you've been to Newcastle [the night before], nobody cares. And you can't even mention it really because everybody does it, nobody cares and you're the one that says 'yes' to it and you learn that the hard way I think.
> Me: You have to learn that on the job, the ways of coping with that?
> Alumna 16: Yes, definitely. Making sure you don't exhaust yourself one way or the other. You know, about the mental health stuff, I think it needs to be so much more present.[140]

In his previous quote on page 140, Alumnus 11 suggested that a one-to-one session with head of student services in the first term of every year, and obligatory for all, could be a way of addressing 'unapproachability' regarding that department, as there would be no choice but to make contact and establish relations with that team. Following my interview with Alumnus 11, this concept was supported by all alumni to whom I put the suggestion, in subsequent interviews, for example with Alumna 20 here:

> Me: Are there clear pathways to get support if needed?
> Alumna 20: I guess the most difficult thing is the dichotomy between the fact that you know, you are told, I'm pretty sure I remember being told, that your first port of call is your principal study tutor. But, you know, especially when you get older, you're looking towards these people as a [future] professional colleague and so, they're kind of being like your mum and Dad a*nd* your boss at the same point in time?! And that's really strange, because it's very hard I think to be trying to basically, impress somebody so that they think of you as somebody who'd be good enough to work in their orchestra , and also then go up to them and say 'do you know what, I'm really struggling'. Because you think maybe there's not space for this weakness as a professional player, or if there is, you don't say anything about it. So that's difficult.
> Me: So, do you think an obligatory one-to-one session for everyone, fairly regularly, with a wellbeing specialist, would be a good idea?
> Alumna 20: I think that would be brilliant, because I think if everyone's doing it, there's no stigma, that's the first thing. So, step one if everyone is doing the same thing then no-one's left out, or no-one's different. And then the second thing is if they are a genuine third party, who have no bearing on anything to do with your

[140] RWCMD, brass, 2009-2015

> college or professional life, then I think that's definitely what should happen. Basically, I think anyone you speak to at college, they all have potential to influence your career in a positive or negative way, I think almost without exception. So, if there was a genuine third party, then that would be much better I think.[141]

An obligatory one-to-one approach was also suggested, unprompted, by Alumna 16, who had been to see a cognitive behavioural therapist (for a non-music related problem) and could envisage the benefits of this practice for her conservatoire peers:

> Me: Do you feel that's something that could be promoted more then, physical and mental wellbeing?
> Alumna 16: Yes! Yes! Mental wellbeing, definitely! Because, you know, we all have suffered, or know somebody who's suffered at college. I mean I definitely suffered at college, I went to see a CBT [cognitive behavioural therapist] person at Imperial College, it's a weird sort of transition time and it's all just so overwhelming. Not just stuff at college, but how to deal with life as well, it's a really tricky age. And in London, you know, it's a big city…[seeing a CBT specialist] made the *biggest* difference. I'd sort of forgotten about it [until this interview]-it was quite a difficult time actually. Anyway, so I went to talk to someone about that, I had about 10 sessions or something and it was fantastic. That really helped.[142]

Alumna 16 strongly suggested that conservatoires should employ their own cognitive behavioural therapist or counsellor, who (resonating with Alumnus 11's idea) would see every student once a term on a one-to-one basis, to support in whatever way was needed and this would be an obligatory practice for all students. In so doing, there removes the stigma of being seen booking an appointment to seek support and students are meeting with a member of staff who is not a music specialist. Thereby, crucially, this non-music member of staff would be perceived as being somewhat removed from the day-to-day conservatoire culture and from the close-knit music staff cohort.

Building on the alumni insights, I therefore argue five action points which collectively aim to address the taboo of asking for help within conservatoire establishments. These are inspired by my fieldwork findings and as such, I recommend would encourage greater and more candid conversations regarding health and wellbeing, within these institutions.

Firstly, providing heads of departments and principal study teachers with obligatory specialist support training for students who may be prone to vulnerability (e.g. have been diagnosed with anxiety) and for those who require a different teaching approach (e.g. dyslexia). For, discretion, approachability and a nurturing sensibility were seen as central to effective relationships with these two figures. Secondly, general skills

[141] RWCMD and RAM, woodwind, 2011-2017
[142] RCM, woodwind, 1998-2003

classes led by visiting guest musicians, which include a reflexive, truthful discussion on the health and wellbeing 'toolkit' that has been most effective for addressing any related issues and maintaining good health in the profession. Thirdly, obligatory one-to-one sessions with a wellbeing specialist, e.g. counsellor or cognitive behavioural therapist, who sees all students on a regular basis (albeit realistic in terms of frequency).

As a penultimate recommendation, the Royal Northern College of Music's appointment of a lecturer in wellbeing marks a huge positive step forward in openly prioritising these conversations. Given that this is a very recent occurrence (less than twelve months), it remains to be seen just how effective this position is in changing conservatoire culture. However, it is something that on paper, I argue should be extended across the conservatoire network, in that all institutions employ a specialist member of music staff whose main focus is this issue within the formal curriculum and who is at the forefront of such discussions within the conservatoire setting. Such an appointment also publicly underlines the importance conservatoires are placing on the discussion of musicians' health and wellbeing, implying that it is a priority of their institutional focus. My final recommendation relates to health and wellbeing as an obligatory part of the curriculum. Conservatoires – with the exception of the Royal Academy of Music[143] - have now seemingly heeded the call to formalise this training, with all UK institutions listing the subject (in different capacities) on their online course content pages that are available to the general public.[144] This is a hugely positive and encouraging action which my empirical data supports.

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Royal Academy of Music. "Batchelor of Music – BMus." Accessed 3rd September 2019. https://www.ram.ac.uk/study/learning/studying-at-the-academy/programmes-of-study/bmus-undergraduate
Royal Academy of Music. "BMus Handbook 2017-18." Accessed 3rd September 2019. https://www.ram.ac.uk/public/uploads/documents/3274a8_bmus-handbook.pdf

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Guildhall School of Music and Drama. "The Batchelor of Music Honours Degree." Accessed 3rd September
2019.
https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/music/courses/undergraduate/bachelor_of_music_honours_degree/
Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. "Music/Instrumental and Vocal Performance/Composition/Music Technology/ - BMus." Accessed 8th August 2019.
https://www.bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire/courses/music-bmus-honours-2019-20
Royal College of Music. "BMus(Hons) Programme at a Glance." Last amended 4th June 2019. Accessed 3rd September 2019.
https://www.rcm.ac.uk/media/RCM%20BMus%20Programme%20at%20a%20Glance.pdf
Royal Northern College of Music. "Batchelor of Music with Honours." Accessed 3rd September 2019.
https://www.rncm.ac.uk/study-here/what-you-can-study/undergraduate/bmus/
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. "BMus(Hons) Music." Accessed 3rd September 2019.
https://www.rwcmd.ac.uk/courses/bmus_music.aspx

However, the formal inclusion of health and wellbeing as an obligatory subject on the curriculum has been a slow process, and as the websites prove, it is still not a compulsory module at all institutions; the vast majority of my alumni did not recall having received any formal training on this subject, even those who have graduated within the last ten years, since Kreutz et al.'s (2009) publication. For many there was lack of clarity as to whether there had been none offered, or if in fact, it was simply not remembered as part of their experience. We can attribute a number of reasons as to why alumni express a failure to recollect and/or connect with this training content during their conservatoire training, with those presented by alumni including: dry module content with lack of engagement with students by seminar leaders, too many links to written academic publications on the topic and not enough links drawn to example stories of real musicians in any given health/wellbeing scenario under discussion.

There are other issues to consider here also, in the effort to present as balanced an argument as possible, namely we must acknowledge that in the process of retrospection, particularly for those who attended their conservatoire some time ago, there can be memory loss, and/or a distortion of accurate recollection. Also, it should be noted that students by nature often have an air of indestructibility and can fail to see the importance of long term self-health and care when they are still teenagers and in training, thus may not have paid significant attention in the seminars, hence not retaining detailed recollection of its content and relevance. In reflection of the growth of focus on musician's short-and long-term health and wellbeing over the past three decades, the older alumni in particular are emphatic in their recollection that there was no discussion on this topic either formally or informally, and no official curriculum content on the matter.

5.7 Conclusion

Central to this chapter are the narratives of the alumni interviewed, whose openness about their personal experiences regarding their health and wellbeing was commendable, for these are not always easy topics on which to elaborate and discuss with candour. However, all of those interviewed were keen to discuss these matters and it became clear that for all, these were issues on which they had never been asked before. This in itself can be seen as a reflection of the barriers that have been in place around issues of self-health in

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. "BMus Programme Specification." Accessed 24th April 2018.
https://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/sites/default/files/bmus_programme_specification_1.pdf

conservatoires and the music profession alike, though it is acknowledged that the former (i.e. conservatoires) are attempting to address this topic of health and wellbeing in response to ongoing studies examining this field.

In this chapter, I have reflected on existing findings, particularly those from the Musical Impact project, regarding repeated reports of ill health as a result of the intense atmosphere of the conservatoire, and its practices. These included prolonged problems with self-confidence, on which I add to existing debates with a focus on the importance of individuality and autonomy. Through applying my conversational model, I showed that conservatoires, namely heads of department (and some principal study teachers) apply articulation practices, which puts students into labelled groups for the benefit of the institution's symbolic capital and fail to see/treat people within these groups as individuals. In so doing, student's identity is detrimentally affected, and this has the potential to continue to effect musician's identity beyond the institution and into the profession.

My findings demonstrate that all conservatoires provide health and wellbeing assistance through student services departments (or similarly titled), which facilitate confidential support pathways for the individual student. However, students largely do not take the level of self-responsibility required to independently seek help from these welfare teams. This was reflected in that not a single alumnus interviewed reported that they had used the facilities of this department, instead claiming they did not know who to turn to in times of trouble. Therefore, the alumni discourse strongly suggests that these departments are not as visible and approachable as they need to be and their function not explicit enough to students, and as such, they are underused.

I have also shown that though conservatories are taking positive action in the area of health and wellbeing through curriculum content and ongoing research within this field, there are still clear concerns regarding preparing students with the most appropriate self-help kit to support themselves beyond the establishment, in issues such as rejection. Additionally, there are concerns regarding the support needed for dyslexic students, particularly in relation to principal study teachers, on whom a 'successful' conservatoire experience and levels of fulfilment can often hinge, as well as identity formation. Therefore, the alumni discourse collectively shows that though conservatoires are increasingly looking critically at their own pedagogic practice to address calls for a more prevalent and formal focus on the issue of health and wellbeing, they have been firstly, extremely slow in doing so (my data spans 28 years of attendance, including graduates as recently as 2018), and secondly, failing to engage students on the subject and impressing its importance to them as musicians in the short- and long-term. In so doing, within

conservatoire culture, this issue continues to remain a taboo. In order to break the stigma, this chapter suggested five ways in which the institutions could engage with both students and staff to begin to encourage conversation and action: (1) Obligatory specialist support training for head of departments and principal study teachers, with a particular focus on wellbeing support (e.g. spotting signs of anxiety or struggles within the context of social 'belonging' in their respective instrument department) and how to observe signs of learning challenges such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. As well as training tutors to have increased awareness of such matters, and how to offer appropriate initial support, such training would also have the purpose of informing tutors at what point they should recommend students seek other, more appropriate support if necessary. (2) General skills classes with guest visitors which include reflection on wellbeing in the profession. Such practice would help to encourage an atmosphere of candour within the institutional environment, and have an additional aim of encouraging a longer-term self-reflection on health and wellbeing (and so, encourage pre-emptive self-care), as students move into the profession thereafter. (3) One-to-one sessions with a wellbeing specialist, obligatory for all students. Thus attempting to remove the stigma of being seen using supportive services for self-help (given that everyone would be scheduled for discussion(s)), and also underlying the importance of maintaining good health and wellbeing, pre-emptively, not only in a reactionary manner. (4) Staff appointments of specialist music staff with research or professional focus in wellbeing. (5) Health and wellbeing as an obligatory part of the formal curriculum. These final two action points serve to emphasise, formally, institutional commitment to the importance of health and wellbeing matters, and ensure a continued focus on the latest research findings in this field.

CHAPTER 6

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Thus far in this thesis, I have discussed the ethnographic data from my alumni subjects, whose discourse is the focal point of my study. In this chapter, I position my field work findings alongside and in conversation with my own testimony, as a fellow alumna of the conservatoire system. This chapter, inspired by the reflexivity of Hall and Bourdieu, reflects on my own experiences and understanding of conservatoire culture at the outset of this study, and how these were my personal motivations that led me to asking questions about the practice and cultures of these institutions. I also come full circle to reflect on how this research process and my field work have subsequently affected my own outlook and caused me to retrospectively view my own conservatoire experiences in a new light.

To begin this reflection, I follow on from my discussion in chapter 1, of the reflexivity of thinkers Hall and Bourdieu, to consider the parallels in how their respective personal histories directly motivated their subsequent research concerns. Taking inspiration from them, I consider how both thinkers acknowledged and demonstrated that the researcher's personal history cannot be completely detached from the research process. In so doing, particularly, how this previous experience can be used as an insightful platform from which to begin asking critical questions, avoiding self-indulgence and bias.

Following this, I share the personal history of my connections to the conservatoire and my ongoing position within the system, for context. There follows a discussion of autoethnography as method, whereby I outline the two main approaches and why I have chosen an analytical autoethnographic methodological framework (Anderson, 2006). Thereafter, I consider my own experiences of conservatoire practices and cultures within the four main themes at the heart of this thesis; social background, notions of 'talent', curriculum and health and wellbeing, respectively, under the conceptual lens of my Hall and Bourdieu conversational model. I conclude with a final reflection on the research process as a whole and present a further developed, autoethnographic conversational model that speaks to my own testimony in relation to these main themes.

6.1 Parallels with Hall and Bourdieu

Central to both Hall and Bourdieu is the vitality of reflexivity in their respective work. Both men rose to the echelons of their respective fields, despite respective cultural and societal hardships, experiences which directly impacted their subsequent areas of research interest. Awareness of Hall's and Bourdieu's biographies helps give understanding as to how and

why they developed their theories as they did and how they have approached reflexivity in their thinking.

Some researchers have acknowledged a biographical link between Bourdieu's life trajectory and experiences and his subsequent research pathway, though Reed-Danahay (2005: 18) states that Bourdieu's autobiographical reflection in his work is an aspect that has 'been overlooked'. In discussing Bourdieu's background and subsequent theoretical interests, she suggests that 'it is easy to understand his preoccupations with education and social class in terms of his own social origins and education' (2005: 151). In a more specific example of a suggested direct link, and one that addresses the vital issue of reflexivity, Cécile Deer (2008: 124-125) considers that the publication of Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* (1988) 'signals the beginning of a more reflexive conceptualisation of the specificities of the intellectual field in relation to other social fields...[and] came largely as a result of his own reflective thinking on his scientific practice, as well as his professional and intellectual trajectory from philosophy student to sociologist at the *Collège de France* [italics in original] via self-taught anthropologist during the Algerian war.'

An example of an autoethnographic admission by Bourdieu himself can be found in 'In other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology' (1982), as Bourdieu reflects:

> It is clear that my vision of culture and the education system owes a great deal to the position I occupy in the university, and especially to the path that led me there (which doesn't mean that it is relativized by this fact) and to the relationship with the school institution – I've described it several times – that was favoured by this path. (Bourdieu, 1982: 23)

Referring to his work 'Homo Academicus' (1988) in an interview with Loïc J. D. Wacquant, Bourdieu said that 'this book is indeed both an attempt to test the outer boundaries of reflexivity in social science and an enterprise in self-knowledge' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 213). Reed-Danahay (2005) considers:

> Moreover, the experience of having made this transition [from his childhood in a rural, traditional society to that of inhabiting the most sacrosanct of positions within the French university system] was one that prompted much of his research, provoking questions about French education that, he believed, were those of an "outsider" to the system. (Reed-Danahay, 2005: 38)

Hall, meanwhile, left Jamaica, his country of birth in 1951 on a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford University (arriving in Britain only three years after the large-scale Windrush migration), a diasporic experience which left him questioning feelings of familiarity,

difference and belonging for the rest of his life, and which deeply informed his analytical thinking. Hall's personal history led him to exclaim:

> One always begins to grapple with and analyse difficult political situations using one's experiences and understandings. But one draws upon theories to break into experience, to open up to investigation of the problematic nature that such political situations present to us in order to better understand what is going on and how to respond. (Hall, 1983: 2).

The personal motivations with which I began my own research arose from a desire to better understand my individual position within the wider social and cultural educational setting in which I was placed. Thus, my experience resonates in some way with Hall's quote here, and my life trajectory can draw parallels with Hall and Bourdieu, to a degree, in that I found myself questioning issues relating to class, culture, identity and belonging.

6.2 My personal connections to the conservatoire

Given that my desire and focus to conduct research on conservatoires is the direct result of personal experience, it would be remiss of me not to make clear my connection to the questions I am asking. To clarify my relation to the topics under scrutiny here, and the nature of those relevant personal experiences which I share throughout this thesis, I shall outline a brief biographical history of my connection to conservatoire institutions to provide a context from which my personal testimony (sections 6.5 through to 6.9) may be better understood by the reader.

Whilst attending a state primary and secondary school, I attended a junior conservatoire on Saturdays from the age of nine. At first as a complete beginner, I attended only my instrumental lessons before moving on to the advanced course there at the age of eleven. On this course, I received musical tuition on my principal study, a second study (which eventually became a second principal study, so that I was classed as a 'joint principal study' student) and a range of other related musical activities for almost eight hours every Saturday during term time. At the age of sixteen, I auditioned at four different conservatoires in the UK for entry onto their BMus(Hons) course. Having received placement offers from three of these institutions, I subsequently accepted a place aged 17 at a different conservatoire to the one in which I had received my junior training, in a different UK city, embarking on a four-year undergraduate course on a joint principal study pathway (thereby studying two instruments to equal level). Having completed my degree, this was followed by two more years of training for an MMus at a different conservatoire from that of my undergraduate studies – coincidentally returning to the same one that I

had attended as a junior conservatoire student – once again for a joint principal study qualification.

Throughout this research, I was for some time an instrumental tutor at the junior conservatoire department where I myself attended at that level and again as a postgraduate (a position I have since left), and have for the past 4 years been an instrumental tutor within the conservatoire's senior department. In addition, I am a freelance performer working across the UK, predominantly across the orchestral and musical theatre scene. I am clear in the acknowledgement that my position as researcher is inevitably shaped by my history and passion for the issues in question.

Therefore, my search for an appropriate methodology which would enable transparency in all areas (from motivation for conducting the study, the research process itself, consolidating my findings and in the presentation of this thesis), and would also allow me to be a member of the community under study as an active professional in the field amongst those conservatoire alumni who are the focus of this research, led me to autoethnography. This approach encourages use of the rich primary insights my historic and current position allows. I therefore hereby discuss autoethnography as method, proceeding this with my autoethnographic testimony.

6.3 An autoethnographic methodology

'Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005)...Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.' (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011: 1). As such, it is the most resonant method for ensuring the reflexivity that I require. There is also an interesting parallel between the process and product that is autoethnographic method, and that I have personally been through the process under study (conservatoire training) and am therefore a product of my research field.

There is no clear date or publication as to when autoethnography as a research methodology began, for as Anderson (2006: 375) reflects 'there has always been an autoethnographic element in qualitative sociological research.' However, a defining moment, he suggests, was the tone and presentation of a selection of literature published post World War I, with scholars and writers taking an interest in 'biographically opportunistic research' (with a strong association with sociologists at the University of Chicago, notably under the tutelage of professor Robert Park). However, there was little

explicitly reflexive self-observation in the published works at the time, and importantly, the position and relation of the researcher to the study in question, remained largely unclear.

Anderson (2006) indicates that autoethnography as a methodological framework, with an emphasis on clarifying the researchers' position in connection to the research, and thus clearly reflexive in its presentation, did not begin to take form until the 1980s. However, Reed-Danahay (1997) suggests that the word 'autoethnography' itself was first used in the mid-late 1970s. The method developed as a result of a number of researchers, namely anthropologists and social scientists, seeking an approach which allowed them to discuss their position as researcher in relation to the societies and cultures under study (rather than consciously trying to remain emotionally separated from the research group/topics). Autoethnography provided a methodology which encouraged reflection of the field work process, acknowledging that researcher neutrality presents an ever-present challenge and that the researcher can consciously or subconsciously affect or be affected by the research process. As such, 'autoethnographers recognize the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process' (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011: 2). In addition, autoethnography concerns the concept of representation and self-representation, and the related issues of voice, identity and authenticity (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 3). Importantly, the developing autoethnographic methodology[145] aimed to position the researcher and their critical reflections on their personal experiences, amongst the wider social field, to enhance understanding.

Within this autoethnographic methodology, the extent to which the researcher shares their personal experiences, the amount of emphasis placed on conducting research amongst individuals within the social/cultural group in question, and the subsequent balance of these two strands in the presentation of research findings, can vary largely. Butz and Besio (2009: 1665) suggest that there are five forms of autoethnography methodology: (1) autoethnography as personal experience narrative (2) autoethnography as reflexive or narrative ethnography (3) autoethnography from below or subaltern autoethnography (4) 'indigenous' ethnography (5) 'insider' or 'complete member researcher'. Anderson (2006) suggests that there are two overarching autoethnography approaches, that of 'evocative or emotional autoethnography' and 'analytic autoethnography'.

From these categories, this thesis shall discuss Anderson's argument of evocative versus analytic autoethnography, before explaining why the latter is an appropriate

[145] Key figures in the development of autoethnography as a research method in recent decades include Carolyn Ellis (2002), Arthur Bochner (2012a, 2012b), Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997, 2006), Butz and Besio (2009) and Leon Anderson (2006).

methodological framework for my own study. In addition, my position as 'insider' researcher or 'complete member researcher' is considered.

6.4 Evocative autoethnography versus analytic autoethnography

Anderson (2006) proposes that prominent autoethnographers Ellis and Bochner (respectively), have been instrumental figures in the growth of autoethnography as research method since the 1980s. They are the figureheads of an 'evocative autoethnography' approach. The style of writing they frequently employ, and advocate, is akin to that of fictional narrative (though the content is non-fiction), with some of their publications in the format of letter writing (Ellis, 2010) and narrative stories (a word used by the writers themselves (Bochner, 2012: 535)) and in the present tense (Bochner, 2012). Notably, they frequently only offer details of their own experiences and do not employ any kind of research within a wider community or relate their personal accounts to the wider literary/research/social/cultural world.

Given the unconventional approach to and the style of writing used to share research in the evocative autoethnographic way, it is not difficult to understand why this methodology is often dismissed by many. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011: 7) admit that '...autoethnography is criticized for being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful.' They continue:

> As part ethnography, autoethnography is dismissed for social scientific standards as being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic (Ellis, 2009; Hooks, 1994; Keller, 1995). Autoethnographers are criticized for doing too little fieldwork, for observing too few cultural members, for not spending enough time with (different) others (Buzard, 2003; Fine, 2003; Delamont, 2009). Furthermore, in using personal experience, autoethnographers are thought not only to use supposedly biased data (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 1997; Gans, 1999), but are also navel-gazers (Madison, 2006), self-absorbed narcissists who don't fulfil scholarly obligations of hypothesizing, analyzing, and theorizing. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011: 7)

Leon Anderson, himself an advocate of autoethnography as method, is to some extent in agreement with such critics, as he writes: 'I am concerned that the impressive success of advocacy for what Ellis (1997, 2004) refers to as "evocative or emotional autoethnography" may have the unintended consequence of eclipsing other visions of what autoethnography can be and of obscuring the ways in which it may fit productively in other traditions of social enquiry' (2006: 374).

6.5 Methods: Analytic autoethnography

Analytic autoethnography, Anderson suggests, is a possible response to 'the dominance of evocative autoethnography [which] has obscured recognition of the compatibility of autoethnographic research with more traditional practices' (2006: 374). Anderson, in his attempt to 'sketch the contours' (2006: 392) of an alternative vision to this evocative approach, proposes five key features to an analytical alternative: (1) 'complete member researcher' (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis' (2006: 378). Through this framework, Anderson is aiming for the 'reclaiming and refining [of] autoethnography as a part of the analytic autoethnography tradition' (2006: 392).

In clarifying the concept of CMR status, Anderson discusses the two main types, "opportunistic" and "convert" CMRs - it is the former of these two which most closely describes my position to and within my own research, for I 'have acquired intimate familiarity through occupational, recreational, or lifestyle participation' and, my 'group membership precedes the decision to conduct research on the group' (2006: 379). As Adler and Adler (1987) observe, 'CMRs come closest of all...to approximating the emotional stance of the people they study' (1987: 67). Whilst, in their description of 'insider' or CMR researchers, Butz and Besio (2009: 1668) state that 'its practitioners are academic researchers who study a group or social circumstance they are part of, and use their insiderness as a methodological and interpretive tool.'

There are of course disadvantages and potential issues to being a member of the cultural and social group one is also researching. Concerns include:

1) Whether clarity of research focus is affected due to the close proximity of the researcher to the subjects under scrutiny
2) Whether existing social relationships between researcher and subjects affects the research process and the responses given (e.g. tension due to concern for potential repercussions for the existing relationship)
3) Concern for research repercussions (i.e. responses given are what the subject feels they *should* give rather than what they truly think)
4) The possibility that interview subjects may assume the researcher understands their meaning, because of their shared cultural membership, therefore raising the risk of an inaccurate understanding or interpretation of responses by the researcher, for as Kingsbury (1988: 29) discovered in his own research within a conservatoire setting, '...an important analytic point should be clear: explanatory

accounts made to a researcher...by “informants”...are contingent upon the “informant’s” perception of the researcher.’

5) There is potential for a less focused approach by the researcher, who is not confined by time constraints in the same way that one might likely be in undertaking research in a more unfamiliar community or in a foreign country.

However, there are also many positives in holding a CMR position, including:

1) The potential for a wide range of research tools
2) Strong contacts with those situated within the researched community providing easily accessible material
3) Strong personal motivation to undertake research effectively
4) First-hand knowledge and experience of the issues under scrutiny
5) Accurate understanding of the use and context of terminologies used by the group in question
6) The researcher’s position within the group under study engenders continual observation
7) Given the existing relationship with the researcher, it is likely that the subjects could be more relaxed and ‘natural’ in their regular activities (and less aware of being watched than if it was a researcher from outside the community under study), so that results are potentially more accurate
8) It is also likely that there is a bond of trust already formed between researcher and community or individual, given the shared identity between the two, so that there is less potential for a ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality, and instead the sense of a shared goal for all at the end
9) As Anderson (2006: 383) suggests, with autoethnography, ‘there is a shift to more obvious and potentially deeper informative reciprocity between the researcher and other group members. As a CMR (in contrast to a more detached participant observer), one has more of a stake in the beliefs, values, and actions of other setting members. Indeed, the autoethnographic interrogation of self and other may transform the researcher’s own beliefs, actions, and sense of self.’ There is then, arguably an ‘incentive’ for the researcher to undertake their research with focus and precision, as the findings will be especially relevant to them, given their shared cultural membership with the group under research.

Through using this methodology, therefore, the researcher has the opportunity to discuss with transparency how their own views and understanding have potentially changed throughout the research process, and how interaction with fellow cultural members in the research context has affected them personally. Anderson advocates, autoethnographers 'should openly discuss changes in beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork, thus vividly revealing themselves as people grappling with issues relevant to membership and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds' (2006: 384). Given my position within the professional music field, and that I shall remain a part of this community beyond the undertaking of this research, this consideration is particularly relevant. For, in adopting this methodology, there is potential for a direct impact on my own long-term thinking and understanding of the cultural, social and working environment which I inhabit (alongside my fellow cultural members). Transparency, therefore, is a vital consideration for me as researcher and continuing member of the group under study. As Anderson points out:

> Autoethnography is somewhat unique in research in that it is particularly likely to be warranted by the quest for understanding. Some scholars bristle when I say that: it sounds too Freudian to them. But self-understanding does not need to be Freudian, or Rogerian, or new-age mystical. The kind of understanding I am talking about lies at the intersection of biography and society: self-knowledge that comes from understanding of our personal lives, identities, and feelings as deeply connected to and in large part constituted by – and in turn helping to constitute – the sociocultural contexts in which we live. (2006: 390).

In acknowledgement of my situation and the personal connection to my research focus and involvement in the research environment, the methodological approach that autoethnography supports may have the potential to resonate with a wider audience. This is because it provides a foundation which allows me to clearly express my relation to the questions raised in this research, whilst also employing an ethnographic, qualitative methodology with others within the field.

> The autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people (Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006; Hooks, 1994). (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011: 4)

Through using an autoethnographic methodology therefore, I am able to openly include my own self as one of the individuals of my ethnography, placing myself within the conservatoire field setting and making use of my existing complete member researcher

position. I have also shown that it has been concluded that presenting research using this method can prove more accessible to the reading audience, which from the outset, has been an important aim of this study, regarding its reach and application thereafter.

In the analytic autoethnography that follows, I apply my Hall and Bourdieu conversational model to reflect critically on my own testimony, which is given here and put into dialogue with the findings from my empirical data. I do so under the corresponding chapter themes of social background, notions of 'talent', curriculum and health and wellbeing, respectively and reflect upon the same semi-structured interview questions that were presented to my alumni subjects.

6.6 Autoethnographic testimony: Social background

In chapter 2, I considered two elements related to the primary habitus, that is, the 'first generation HE' label and the notion of a musical/non-musical family background. Those who do not have parents who attended university and those who do not come from a musical family are statistically more likely to be working class (learning a musical instrument is widely accepted to be an activity associated with the middle and upper classes, due to cultural taste and the economic capital needed to learn[146]). Prior to attending my undergraduate conservatoire, I had never paused to consider my class identity and these questions associated with that. However, as my first year progressed, the cultures and practices of the institution led me to feel somewhat different to many of my peers, and I could connect this to elements of my social background.

I now know that my undergraduate conservatoire has a tradition of the highest under-representation of students from state school backgrounds, across five of the major conservatoires in the UK (using data available since my graduation and assuming this was reflective of my attendance dates previous to this, also). As first generation HE, with a non-musical family habitus and having attended a state school, I can consolidate that in light of this statistical data available regarding schooling pre-higher education, and the findings of my study, I was in a clear demographic minority in my conservatoire. My own experience also resonates with those of my alumni subjects in that during my studies, I identified more strongly with one of my habitus than the other, for me, this was my educational habitus rather than my non-musical familial one.

As reflected in the outlining of my personal connections to the conservatoire, I had attended a junior conservatoire programme for eight years and so had been exposed, in

[146] Bourdieu (1979), Bull (2018)

some degree, to the environment and had a flavour of the ethos of this type of establishment. Prior to arriving at the conservatoire, I had assumed a certain level of self-confidence from this musical training and acknowledge the cultural capital this likely afforded me (although my findings regarding cross-conservatoire pigeon-holing would suggest that this capital would be viewed as lower, coming from a conservatoire outside of London, than it would be had I attended a junior department in the capital). However, upon arriving at my undergraduate institution, almost immediately, I began to question my sense of belonging and level of self-confidence, and did perceive, along with my fellow state-school peers, a 'them and us' divide with our private specialist music school contemporaries.

In considering why I may have responded in this way to commencing my training at the conservatoire, the Sutton Trust (2016) report 'A Winning Personality: The Effects of Background on Personality and Earnings'[147] provides some insight. This report considered the links between personality, social skills and earnings, and in so doing, found a clear correlation between them. Whilst I do not consider earnings, in relation to this study, this report asked, in part, whether 'children from more disadvantaged backgrounds [are] more likely to develop potentially beneficial non-cognitive characteristics like high extraversion and an internal locus of control', a question 'which has received very little direct attention.' (2016: 8). Their research did not look at educational background, their focus instead was familial background and to what extent an 'advantaged' or 'disadvantaged' home life (defined in this report by parental occupation and economic status) effected these personality traits. Their research found that 'the experience of higher family status and prestige may have direct positive effect on children's wellbeing and confidence' and that 'better off parents may therefore be 'handing down' characteristics which helped them become successful themselves.' (2016: 8).

This Sutton Trust report uses the standard UK government's understanding of class to determine its description of 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged', which I dismissed in chapter 2 as too narrow an understanding for this thesis, and in addition, I acknowledge that my study does not contextualise social background in terms of 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged'. However, there is transferable knowledge between their report and my study regarding social background and disposition, which can be applied to my

[147] This document is listed in my References under the names of the authors of this report: Vries, de R. and J. Rentfrow. 2016. "Report: A Winning Personality - The Effects of Background on Personality and Earnings." The Sutton Trust. Accessed 18th February 2016. http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Winning-Personality-FINAL.pdf

autoethnography. That is, my social background suggested that I was more likely to have a lower level of extraversion (which can be seen as a disadvantage when the highest value in conservatoire culture is placed on solo performance) and self-confidence. This goes some way to explaining why my self-esteem and sense of belonging were questioned when I commenced my conservatoire studies, in comparison with my peers from private specialist music schools, who constituted a large percentage of the student demographic at my conservatoire.

The alumni discourse showed that those students from a lower-class background were more disadvantaged regarding additional financial commitments (i.e. those on top of tuition fees), in relation to instrument purchase and potential accompanist fees. This echoed my own experiences, for in my own undergraduate conservatoire education, I had no alternative but to pay for the services of an accompanist for my exam recitals as the conservatoire had absolutely no provision for this. Therefore, in order to pass my recitals, on which the majority of the course credits were attributed, I had no choice but to acquire the finances needed to engage a pianist of the necessary standard (i.e. I could not book a cheaper musician of a lower ability for it would be reflected in the overall quality of the performance. Additionally, many accompaniment parts are especially demanding, particularly if contemporary in style as most saxophone repertoire is). Given that I undertook a specialist course whereby I studied two principal instruments (granted, this was unusual as students normally only study one), I was required to pay double the amount in accompanist fees than other students. This large expense, which was entirely unavoidable given the practices of the institution, served to make me directly question my social background and financial situation. In my first three years, I was not able to take on a job in addition to my studies, given that I was on a joint principal study pathway which required a huge time commitment, and so lived entirely off my student loan. In order to meet these obligatory costs, therefore, I had to rely on parental support, although I knew they had already sacrificed as much as they could to get me to that point in my musical studies. I considered at the time that I was in the minority and that most of my peers, the majority of whom would not have identified as working class, did not experience this financial necessity to be as much of a concern as I did.

My postgraduate institution did, however, provide a departmental accompanist, with an allocation for the year provided for each student. Placing all students on the same level playing field financially in this regard ensured that there was no distraction from studies in finding an appropriate, available accompanist. It also, in turn, did not become an

identifying matter separating students further into ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, or ’them and us’ factions.

In both conservatoires, I did share my fellow working-class alumni’s experiences regarding attitudes towards the symbolic capital of instruments. That is, I respected the advice of my teachers regarding the upgrade and acquirement of additional instruments. However, not one of the five principal study teachers that I had, across two establishments, were knowledgeable about loans, finance schemes and grants that exist specifically for this purpose. Therefore, particularly in the woodwind department of my primary conservatoire, an obvious divide developed between those students who could buy their own, additional instruments, and those who couldn’t, who were left to share the department-owned, auxiliary instruments (if they existed). Whilst students are fortunate to have access to such equipment, and conservatoires never claim that such provision is an entitlement of study there, it is also another instance in which conservatoire practices favour those who come from a higher socio-economic background. For, if students are reliant on departmental instruments to hone their skills on these extended family, auxiliary models, they will inevitably encounter competition to book the instrument out on loan, have limited loan time, and encounter instruments in varying degrees of working order. Hence, these auxiliary instruments are less likely in all practicality, to receive the same level of attention and not be studied as a ‘solo’ recital instrument, than if students are able to purchase their own. Such were my experiences of conservatoire practices that led to this discussion with my alumni contemporaries, who, as the discourse shows, all shared similar experiences.

Thus far in my autoethnographic testimony, I have reflected that my initial entry point to these research considerations was a concern over my sense of belonging, which was unequivocally rooted in issues surrounding class. Therefore, as is reflected in my conversational model, this factor is the central stone around which my own experiences pivoted. In further applying this model, I have shown that Bourdieu’s tripartite capital-habitus-field are crucial concepts in critically analysing how and why my social and cultural background effected my subsequent experiences. I have also shown how my identity was shaped by these, particularly by my secondary (i.e. educational) habitus, for in applying Hall (1990), I acknowledge that though identity is always transforming in the present and future sense, it does have a certain attachment to the past. I continue henceforth with a discussion of notions of talent and consider how the power and identity aspects of my model in particular, can be applied to my testimony.

6.7 Autoethnographic testimony: Notions of 'talent'

As chapter 3 showed, the notion of talent is central to conservatoire institutions and is a key component of institutional hierarchy. The alumni discourse also contradicted Kingsbury (1988), to a degree, in that many of the respondents, regardless of class background, did not claim to speak or hear of the actual word 'talent' around the conservatoire building. Instead, they stated that this notion was implied through use of the terms 'musical' or 'natural player'. Furthermore, this was evidently symbiotic with notions of favouritism and pigeon-holing.

My own experiences, both as an alumna and current member of conservatoire teaching staff, is in line with these findings. It is also true to say that my own training aligns with Kingsbury in that though it was not something I overtly articulated or attached with a label, I was indeed concerned with how my ability, my strengths and weaknesses, seemingly compared to my departmental peers (it was never a thought or comparison that extended beyond my contemporaries who played the same instruments as me). However, given that I had attended a junior conservatoire and that this was the only type of one-to-one tuition I had experienced prior to the conservatoire, one could argue that I was already labelled as talented due to this existing cultural capital and also that I had belonged to several (regional) national youth ensembles. In light of analysing the alumni discourse, I acknowledge that I may arguably have been seen by some of my fellow undergraduate peers as having had a higher cultural capital, something which I had not considered prior to this study. Additionally, as I reflect on the alumni data that shows talent attribution horizontally across the conservatoire network, in moving from a London establishment to one outside of this city for my postgraduate, my peers in this latter establishment were highly likely to have made presumptions about my talent and cultural capital, given that I had previously attended an institution within the capital.

However, in both of these instances, these likely peer assumptions regarding my knowledge and ability, based on elements of my prior musical training, did not align with my experienced reality, in that my identity was strongly connected to my working class roots and state-school habitus, and not with my junior conservatoire education. Therefore, as my data findings showed, in light of this, I was highly likely to consider myself as less talented than those who had come from a private school, specifically, specialist music private school backgrounds, despite the advantages that a junior conservatoire training affords.

Regarding figures of power and the attribution of talent within the conservatoire (the health and wellbeing impact of these relationships is discussed in section 6.8 of this

chapter), in my own experience, the principal study teacher was the key figure that became intertwined with how I conceived of my abilities, my prospects and aspirations, and subsequently how my identity continued to form. This was particularly the case during my undergraduate studies. Here, I am able to show the distinct connection between identity and dynamics of power, as is demonstrated in my conversational model. As with my case study of Alumnus 17 in chapter 3, it was the issue with teaching method which overrode my experience with this hegemonic figure of power. In an account that strongly resonates with Alumnus 17's, my principal study teacher's approach was one which did not work effectively with my learning style, needs, or my stylistic aspirations. Whilst I tried to adapt and prove to both him and myself my talents and potential, and establish my place within his student cohort, these efforts were misread or not acknowledged, resulting in a very clear clash of personalities and an ineffective pedagogic experience.

This particular teacher was responsible for the vast majority of students who played this instrument and, as with Alumnus 17's experience, carried a high level of symbolic capital. Therefore, our misfunctioning and failed relationship resulted in my directly questioning my own talent and potential. Additionally, it most certainly effected the way I was perceived, or pigeon-holed, by those peers who were also taught by the same teacher, when I requested a change of personnel mid-way through my studies. The negative impact on my self-identity and the plummeting notions of my own talent were only addressed and counteracted through external study abroad during summer holidays, whereby I was educated in the different global schools of playing associated with my instrument. As a result, I subsequently understood that my level of talent should not in fact be questioned, only my understanding of where I 'belonged', for I simply did not naturally adhere to the school of playing with which my British conservatoire teacher aligned and had a symbolic lineage/heritage. Further resonating with Alumnus 17's case study, this experience hugely effected my conservatoire experience and had a long-lasting impact on perceptions of my talent for many years beyond the conservatoire.

It was this specific relationship with this dominant power figure that was one of the original motivating factors in commencing this study. This was further boosted by other teaching experiences I had, in opposition to this, which I found to be inspiring, encouraging and which were supportive of my efforts and aspirations, thus making my initial one-to-one experiences and subsequent self-doubt about my talent even more pronounced. Having experienced how transformative these relationships can be (in both extremes), I was moved to think critically about the pedagogical and cultural practices of these creative powerhouse institutions, and the different experiences of the individuals within.

In turning my attention to the other powerful figure within conservatoire culture that was highlighted in the alumni discourse, that is, the head of department, I once again can report polarising experiences (also addressed in section 6.8 of this chapter, in relation to health and wellbeing). In line with the alumni discourse, I did perceive acts of favouritism and pigeon-holing during my time as a student, particularly in my undergraduate institution. The former of these was perceived by students (including myself at the time) to be actioned through specific practices. As an example, once every year, a handful of students across departments were selected to represent the institution in a solo recital at Wigmore Hall. This was advertised on public posters as a "Stars of Tomorrow" recital and students were chosen by respective heads of department. There was no audition for this selection process, but instead we assumed this was based on the head of department's personal choice, for there was no clarity given regarding the selection requirements. In turn, this opaque process and the pointed labelling and public advertising of this led to perceptions of favouritism. From the perspective of personal identity and notions of one's own talent, those of us who were not selected (i.e. the vast majority of the department) were left questioning our own abilities and aspirations as a result, and how to change the head of department's perceptions of these when such practices were not transparent.

In so discussing, I acknowledge that conservatoires are elite institutions who must single out students for prestigious external performing events and that such events carry high symbolic capital. In turn, there will always be unavoidable rejection attached to such decisions, for those who are not selected. However, conservatoire practices such as these, that are perceived by students as 'typical' and opaque, and that employ such suggestive terminology, are directly related to practices regarding talent attribution and subsequent effects to identity. These practices are therefore also enrobed in power dynamics, whereby lack of clarity (according to students) serves to mystify and strengthen the dominance of the head of department and his power in perceived individual success/failure within the conservatoire (this was certainly the case in my own experiences). Thus, further highlighting the link between power and identity on my conversational model.

6.8 Autoethnographic testimony: Curriculum

In chapter 4, I considered conservatoire practices regarding the direction of training, namely, the cultural capital hierarchical system that prioritises solo, followed by chamber and orchestral performance, all in the (male) canonic Western Classical tradition. The motivation to explore these practices stems from my experiences as a professional

performer, post-conservatoire studies, whereby it very quickly became apparent that my skill set would need to be much broader if I was to survive and build a long-lasting performing career. Whilst at both my undergraduate and postgraduate conservatoires, I was never explicitly told what a 'portfolio' career was, nor that this was highly likely to be the nature of my future progression and that I would likely be maintaining a full-time, self-employed, freelance career. My joint principal study pathway was on one, traditional, orchestral instrument (clarinet) and one non-traditional (saxophone), which proved an insight into some varying curriculum approaches, regarding this cultural capital. For example, in an approach which is atypical across conservatoires, my undergraduate saxophone studies involved a compulsory focus for two thirds of the second year on jazz stylistic elements, whereby the technical exam was changed to involve jazz scales, transcriptions and improvisation (the end of year recital remained in the usual Western Classical tradition). Through this, saxophonists were able to begin formally exploring a style which is inevitably demanded of them in the profession. Through my alumni discourse and years in the profession as a performer, I can say with certainty that this course construct, i.e. this formal acknowledgement in the curriculum, is not applied in a widespread manner, across the conservatoire network. I received no such training in my postgraduate institution and in neither establishment on my other, 'traditional' principal study instrument.

Despite the fact that I was studying two instruments that are heavily featured in musical theatre, I was not once spoken to by my principal study teachers or heads of department about whether this was a career path to which I might aspire. There were no performance workshops or masterclasses offered by specialist guest visitors, neither (with the exception of one member of staff across two institutions) were there any staff teaching members on my instruments who were involved in this area of the profession. Assumptions were subsequently made amongst the student demographic regarding the cultural capital value associated with this style, as a result of its omission. My own experience, therefore, fully aligns with the alumni discourse.

Although there was limited deviation from the traditional Western canon in my performance studies, there were some broader curriculum options in supporting modules during my time as an undergraduate. These included jazz harmony, music therapy, world music, and workshops on Alexander Technique. There were very few workshops (aside from solo performance masterclasses) that were led by visiting guest specialists. However, one particular enlightening and memorable guest visitor seminar was given by Angela Beeching, whose book *Beyond Talent* (2005) was the only publication I was motivated to

purchase, and actively read, in my undergraduate studies. Coincidentally, although the conservatoire largely failed to underline the relevance, likelihood and realities of a freelance, portfolio career, Beeching's manual was essentially a handbook for running your own business as a musician, post-career, and was the only such discussion on the matter that we were offered.

Further aligning with my alumni discourse, my undergraduate education included compulsory, long-held, traditional modules (e.g. 'keyboard skills', which heavily featured figured bass), with which I failed to draw relevance, to both my general music training and my instrument specialism, and which have proved of no use or benefit in my career thus far, ten years after graduating. That is not to say that there were no academic modules which inspired, simply that as a professional, now in retrospect, there have been instances whereby my portfolio career could have been more successfully supported - particularly in that transitional period between conservatoire and the field thereafter - if some of the more antiquated, traditional elements of conservatoire training had been modernised. This is despite conservatoires claiming to be addressing ongoing academic calls for reflections on contemporary practices in relation to professional employability.

6.9 Autoethnographic testimony: Health and wellbeing

My desire to focus on health and wellbeing in relation to conservatoire practices directly stems from my own experiences, both in the short-term whilst in the conservatoire, and the longer-term, to the present day as a professional in the field, who now also teaches in one of these institutions. The motivation to reflect critically on this issue was originally in response to the query: 'what is the effect on musicians' identity and self-confidence when the vital, pivotal one-to-one relationship with the principal study teacher and/or head of department does or does not work effectively?' I experienced both overwhelmingly positive and negative relationships with these figures of power across my six years of study and this was indisputably connected to my overall impression of my respective conservatoire experiences. Therefore, my experience falls in line with the collective alumni discourse. When these relationships were positive, they proved to be hugely inspiring, motivating, and boosted my self-esteem, yet when they spiralled, this proved clearly detrimental to both my mental and physical health. In both extremes, these relationships were pivotal to my self-identity, not only within the conservatoire, but in its continuing formation into the profession thereafter. These experiences were some of the key motivators at the outset of this study, as I first began to consider conservatoire practices, cultures and links to identity. In applying my conversational model to the theme of health

and wellbeing there is clearly, therefore, a strong link between power dynamics (articulation and hegemony) and identity.

As outlined in section 6.6, my principal study teacher at the conservatoire taught with a method which was not effective for me, and in so doing, I questioned my ability and identity. This led to specific experiences of health and wellbeing issues in relation to conservatoire education as a student, which have sensitised me to this issue. I attempted once to raise these learning concerns with my head of department (who also happened to be my principal study teacher on my other instrument) and was explicitly told that "I'm sure it's nothing." I was offered no guidance from this figure of power on how I might reconcile my working relationship with this principal study teacher, nor advised by them at this point on the possibility of changing teachers, nor offered any health and wellbeing support (either formally or informally). Crucially, this experience has continued to form my identity in the profession, for this particular teacher maintains a high symbolic capital in the performing world also, and so this experience remains a taboo for me in the profession, too.

All of that said, I must acknowledge that as with my fellow alumni, I never considered seeking support through the conservatoire's student services department. Firstly, this was due to not really understanding what their role was, in large part due to the lack of integration on their part with mainstream conservatoire practices and cultures, i.e. aside from once in fresher's week. No-one from that department was involved in any kind of seminars/workshops/classes, so I did now know who the personnel were on more informal level so subsequently, there was no feeling of approachability. From informal discussions with alumni colleagues in the profession, I know that this experience is not limited to my own and is absolutely reflective of the wider conservatoire experience of those who studied in the years before and leading up to 2011 (i.e. the year I graduated from postgraduate studies). Secondly, I did not approach student services because I was terrified of admitting to what I thought would be perceived as failure, especially following the dismissive, belittling and unsupportively brief discussion with my head of department on the matter.

However, I acknowledge with the benefit of time and distance, and a greater understanding and appreciation of conservatoire institutions, that the student services department *could* have been an avenue for seeking support at that time and that the conservatoire did offer such pastoral care; I accept this was not a failure - on a formal level - on their part. That said, I do believe that the stigma attached to being seen visiting this centre (that I felt at the time) meant that I would never have made that leap. Therefore,

my testimony is fully in line with those of my alumni and my subsequent recommendations, in that my experience suggests that obligatory one-to-one sessions with a specialist for all students would help to break the destructive pattern of suffering in silence with health and wellbeing concerns related to conservatoire practices and/or cultures.

Regarding health and wellbeing training in the curriculum, I was exposed to this in a formalised learning approach during my undergraduate studies, led by a key figure in this field, Aaron Williamon. Coincidentally, Williamon and Thompson (2006) discussed this particular curriculum initiative that was first introduced during my time at the conservatoire, in their article 'Awareness and Incidence of Health Problems among Conservatoire Students', on which I can therefore offer first-hand, experiential reflections. The six-part, compulsory series for first year undergraduates covered issues including medical and psychological resources for the musician, the physicality of performance, the psychology of performance, sound and hearing, and physical fitness and nutrition for the musician. At the outset of this series, we were also given a corresponding booklet for reference, which listed further reading and contact details for relevant health organisations. On paper, this is clearly a very relevant and vital inclusion to the curriculum and as is shown in chapter 5, responds to ongoing calls to prioritise and formalise this training. I certainly recall that these seminars served to underline to me, as a seventeen/eighteen-year-old, that the profession I was aspiring to enter would be physically demanding, and this seminar series was one of the key academic components with which I engaged during my studies.

However, as has been a common thread across the alumni data, there was an issue amongst the general first year population with module delivery and engagement. As such, the seminars were, on average, poorly attended, despite their obligatory status. Acknowledging that teenagers who arrive at the conservatoire have an air of indestructibility, given their age and lack of experience and knowledge about the realities of a long-term career as a professional musician, this apparent lack of engagement could be strongly linked to the naivety of youth. As was reflected in the alumni discourse, however, the key issue amongst my peer group remained 'how is this relevant to *me'* and that young conservatoire students struggled to engage with overly formal sessions led by academic staff who they (incorrectly) failed to see as practicing musicians. This too was interconnected with the lack of emphasis placed on a portfolio career, so that students remained predominantly fixed on their solo repertoire and practice, to the loss of focus on other, supporting skills and learning modules. Therein lies a clear gap between institutional intent and experienced reality.

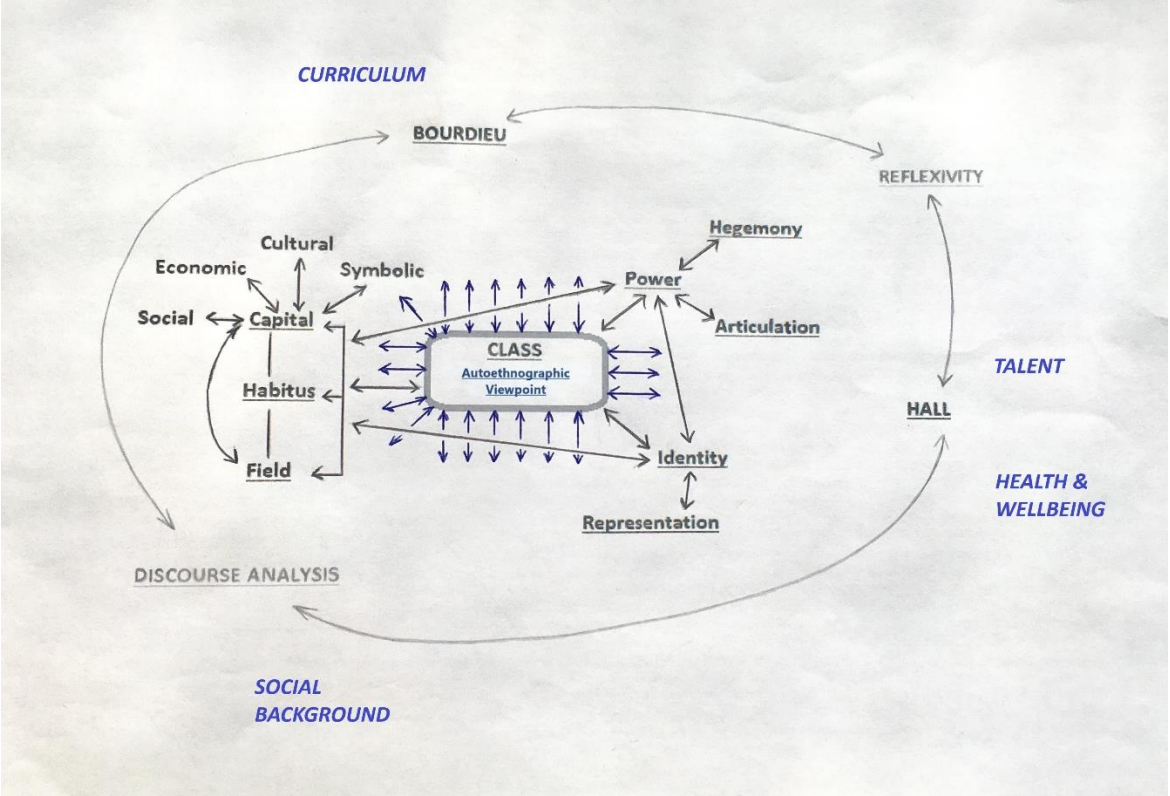
6.10 Conclusion

In concluding this analytical autoethnography, I acknowledge that my personal experiences of conservatoire cultures and practices were the starting motivations at the outset of this research. However, though my original queries were as a result of this, I have consciously placed the alumni discourse on the centre stage of this study and allowed their narratives to engage with the issues with which I was and have remained concerned. In so doing, I have attempted to remain as unobtrusive and objective as was possible during the fieldwork interview process. However, that said, when asked a reciprocal question by the alumni, I did always answer truthfully, albeit carefully, out of respect for their own candour and willingness to share their personal histories. In so doing, I was also mindful that I wanted to retain their respect as a continuing fellow professional colleague in the performing field.

As I reflect critically on my own testimony, the research process and my own motivations at the outset, I acknowledge that the alumni discourse does, to a degree, confirm my initial perceptions. As outlined in my methods (Introduction chapter, 0.2.1), the alumni who volunteered to take part in this study were, in the end, located via a word-of-mouth process. I must stress that seventeen of the twenty subjects were either not known to me prior to this research experience or were professional acquaintances of which I had no or very limited prior knowledge of their social background and conservatoire experiences. However, as this research was propelled by my own individual concerns and perceptions, I acknowledge the potential for an element of in-built bias, given that a large portion of the alumni happened to share the same background as myself (i.e. working class, state school habitus, first generation HE). Moving forward, if I was to expand my empirical data in the future, I would aim to more mindfully secure a wider-ranging representation of social backgrounds in order to limit the potential for any such researcher bias (see the following chapter, section 7.4, for further reflections on limitations of study and further research).

In this autoethnographic chapter, I have applied my conversational model to a cultural and class-based analysis of my own testimony. In concluding this chapter, I hereby develop my conversational model one final step further and critically reflect on where the four key themes of this thesis (i.e. social background, notions of 'talent', curriculum, health and wellbeing) are most appropriately positioned on this model, in relation to my own personal experiences. That is, where these themes most strongly resonate in my autoethnography with the concepts of Hall and Bourdieu:

Diagram 4: 'A conversational model: With autoethnographic thematic placement'



My conversational model, conceived for use specifically in this study, is one that was generated originally from my own ethnography as educator, professional performer and conservatoire alumna, and how these positions resonated with the theoretical thinking of both Hall and Bourdieu, respectively. In building on my original conversational model here in this chapter, I have further emphasised my clear position at the centre of this structure, along with the issue of class (and around which all of the concepts pivot). Placing myself thus is a clear reflection of the point at which this entire research project sprung from. That is, I turned my introspective gaze and initial concerns with class and social positioning in relation to my own conservatoire training, outwards, to reflect on other, related, cultural and social conceptual considerations. The developed, autoethnographic conversational model presented here demonstrates appropriate thematic positioning in relation to my own testimony. Having collated and analysed the discourse of my alumni respondents, I suggest that the precise placement of the main thesis themes atop of this conversational model varies, however, depending on the individual and their personal experiences of conservatoire structures. I also offer my own conceptual road map here with an additional purpose: that is, to conclude my analytic autoethnography with a nod to

Anderson's (2006: 378) aforementioned calls, that the researcher's self should be completely visible to the reader and the autoethnographer is committed to theoretical analysis.

Thus, during the course of this research, I have taken into account existing findings and built on these with my alumni ethnographies, applying the critical concepts of Hall and Bourdieu through my conversational model to both theirs and my own discourse. As I now work within the conservatoire system as a principal study teacher (among other roles), I acknowledge that my initial feelings of caution and negativity regarding certain aspects of conservatoire practices and cultures have somewhat been counteracted. For, through the research process, I have reconciled myself with the issues raised in this thesis, particularly those related to inclusion/exclusion (in connection with social background) and identity. As such, as I move towards the end of this research process, I am able to remove my gaze from the introspective narrowness of my own experiences, to critically reflect on the broader issues at play. In particular, I have examined my initial hypotheses regarding institutional obligations and readdressed my perceptions of student self-responsibility during the conservatoire experience, whilst simultaneously, my experiential perceptions regarding power dynamics and hierarchies within these institutions have been confirmed. In undertaking this ethnographic study, I have been reminded that not every student will experience the same feelings that I did. However, I have also discovered that I was absolutely not alone in my concerns and confusion regarding institutional structures, and the impact this had on my holistic pedagogic experience. The feeling of difference that I experienced in my conservatoire studies and the resultant questioning of my belonging within the institution, in my undergraduate conservatoire specifically, was the catalyst that led me directly to Hall, with his focus on difference and individual identity within shared cultural experiences.

Bourdieu (1977, 1979, 1989) discovered that alumni were guilty of using their power for self-preservation and to perpetuate class distinctions. However, in my privileged position in my current role within the conservatoire system as an educator, I am conscious as a result of this research to apply my critical findings to my own teaching. In so doing, I shall remain consciously self-reflexive regarding my own teaching practices in a concerted attempt to not simply, unconsciously, reproduce traditional practices and hierarchies, particularly in relation to class. Additionally, reflecting on issues relating to identity, representation and power, I seek to always remember to connect conservatoire practices and cultures to the realities of individual musical experiences. In so doing, therefore, I aim

to maintain awareness that these institutional experiences have the potential to impact musicians in the longer term, as well as during their formative training years.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined contemporary British conservatoires and their practices, as experienced from alumni perspectives. With attendance dates across a span of 28 years, from 1990 to as recently as last year, 2018, these twenty interview subjects cover the network of seven conservatoire institutions across England and Wales. That is, they represent attendance at the Royal College of Music, Royal Academy of Music, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Trinity Laban College of Music and Dance, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

The study adds to existing and ongoing debates surrounding these institutions by providing a unique insight, in three clear ways:

1) Longitudinal data.
2) Examination of patterns of similarity and difference that exist across the conservatoire network.
3) Professional demographic. Existing studies largely hone in on the current student demographic (at the time of research, respectively), which will, by the nature of age, experience and proximity to the research concerns, provide different ethnographic material than retrospective discourse from alumni who are presently placed in the professional field (for balance, please see also section 7.3 Limitations and further research).

Conservatoire alumni (apart from their place in Cottrell (2004) and the 2012 LSE report) provided a rich, hitherto overwhelmingly untapped source of data from which this study could prove most effective and insightful in contributing to existing academic discourse. Primarily, my study contributes to academic discourse within the field of conservatoire studies, and secondly, the broader field of music pedagogy in higher education. The key themes presented in this thesis: notions of 'talent', curriculum, and health and wellbeing, provided an appropriate context for discussion of conservatoire practices, cultures and impact of students' social background (which is my fourth key theme). Additionally, these themes, as discussed in the literature review of my Introduction, have been identified in ongoing academic discourse as being of importance and prominence within conservatoire settings.

I employed a qualitative methodology in this research to ensure that I could collate ethnographic, empirical data that focused on the in-depth, personal narratives of individuals, on which this study is built. A semi-structured interview approach allowed for flexibility within the interviews and for the subjects to have a level of autonomy in the direction and content of their discourse. In doing so, their narratives were honest and insightful, providing an abundance of rich material from which my analysis could develop. The nature of ethnographic enquiry necessitates that the researcher remains open to flexibility of both thought and research direction, depending on that which is reflected in the collected data over the duration of field work. The semi-structured in-depth interview methodology, therefore, provided a basic framework yet ensured that rigidity was minimised. Thus, this allowed my research direction to adapt to my findings as and when they began to arise, and in direct response to literature that was published during the course of undertaking this study.

7.1 Hall and Bourdieu: A conversational model

The social background of the alumni remains a consistent thread throughout my study as a means of looking at social dimensions of pedagogy and learning. I began this study from the premise that individual social status and class, and social positioning within wider society, determines how alumni experience conservatoire practices and relate to institutional culture. Therefore, in Chapter 1, I reflected on the theoretical foundations which would most effectively resonate with my research focus and allow for critical analysis of these social and cultural concerns.

I reflected on selected concepts of cultural theorist Hall and sociologist Bourdieu, and how these can be connected, primarily through their concerns surrounding issues of class. Additionally, I discussed three other, additional key issues on which their work can be drawn together in conversation; those of identity, representation through discourse and how power dynamics operate, and reflexivity. In so doing and inspired by Hall's 'Circuit of Culture' (1997b: 1), I was able to generate a new, conversational model, a practical framework reflecting how these concepts (and therefore these two thinkers) can be connected to each other. I further developed this model in chapter 6, whereby I placed an autoethnographic lens atop of the original conversational model to produce a second version. This second adaptation of the model demonstrated how my own testimony conversed with the concepts of Hall and Bourdieu within the context of the four themes of this thesis (social background, notions of 'talent', curriculum, and health and wellbeing). Thus, I entitled this second version 'a conversational model with autoethnographic

thematic placement.' In presenting this, I reflected how the model illuminates my autoethnographic testimony and conversely, how my own, experiential discourse in turn illuminates the concepts of Hall and Bourdieu. Thus, this hybrid conceptual model, adapted specifically for this study, has enabled me to generate both a cultural and class-based analysis of the ethnographic data of those empirical testimonies collected in the field, including my own.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated the primary importance of Hall's concept of identity (1990) to my study, because he highlights that although people might share a common history, specific experiences and cultural practices, identity is not a fixed concept, but is in a continual process of 'becoming'. As such, identity construct is as much a part of the present and future, as it is the past. Additionally, Hall's theory acknowledges that though there are many points of similarity within a culture, there is also 'deep and significant *difference'* and that no two people will self-identify in exactly the same way (Hall, 1990: 225). It is this thinking on which the analysis of my ethnographic data is predominantly constructed and presented. This viewpoint also resonates with the work of Pitts (2002: 76-77), who illustrated that 'musical identity is highly specific, and only by looking beyond generalisation to focus on the experience and beliefs of particular individuals can we come closer to understanding what being a musician – whatever that turns out to mean – involves.' Building on Pitts' suggestion, I have applied this approach to the conservatoire setting and thus have demonstrated that the identity of conservatoire students and alumni is indeed specific, complex and continually transforming and evolving.

Additionally, like Hall and Bourdieu, I have used the method of discourse analysis to critically analyse the alumni data, which thus allowed for discussion of power dynamics within conservatoire settings (the findings of which are discussed in section 7.3). At the end of this study, as I reflect on the process of conceiving and using this new conceptual framework, I acknowledge that applying the conversational model to my own experiential account has been crucial in critically reflecting on my current, pedagogic position as an educator within a conservatoire. This critical reflection directly affects the way in which I understand the likely and/or potential embodied learning experiences of the students that I teach and support. Thus, at the end of this research process, in this role as educator, I position myself within the centre of the conversational model in the box with 'class', shown in the autoethnographic conversational model (diagram 4) in chapter 6. I am thus able to consciously acknowledge that the background of my students does affect – to a greater or lesser degree and in different ways depending on background – the way that they adapt to the pedagogic and cultural field that is the conservatoire. In gazing outwardly from this

central position of the model, at the interconnected concepts that off-shoot from here, I reflexively appreciate that from the students' perspectives, my staff position within and as a part of this institutional structure is one of power and great influence. Also, I appreciate that their conservatoire experience is multi-layered and hugely informative in their ongoing identity formation as individuals and their self-conception of their musicianship. From this central viewpoint on the model, I can acknowledge that conservatoire practices and cultures are, to students, hugely complex and confusing (and have remained so, in retrospect, for many of the alumni) and navigating through them is challenging, particularly if these practices and cultures are implicit, not explicit.

7.2 Personal motivations

My study centres around the empirical data of my alumni subjects, yet I have been clear that my original motivations to undertake this research stemmed from my own experiences, which led me to ask questions regarding the practices and cultures of conservatoire institutions.

Through acknowledging Hall and Bourdieu's calls for researcher reflexivity, I have candidly and critically discussed these original motivations through the application of analytical autoethnography (framework by Anderson (2006)). I have shown that such an approach requires and ensures complete transparency regarding the researcher's (that is, my) position prior, during and post- the research process and that it allows for reflection on how original views or hypotheses have been challenged. It was vitally important to me both personally, and in my formal role as researcher, to respect and return the candour of my alumni volunteer subjects. I believe that sharing the same status as that of my interviewees, i.e. fellow conservatoire alumni and professional performing musician, created a bond of mutual respect and trust in the researcher and subject relationship. As a result, the narratives were engaged, reflective and critical and I believe this study elicited richer data because of my complete member researcher status.

7.3 Implications and recommendations

This study primarily contributes to the field of conservatoire studies and my findings have implications for the ongoing debate and critical reflection regarding the practices employed by these institutions. This section outlines the implications of my research findings and offers recommendations based on my empirical analysis.

In my literature review of the Introduction, I outlined my primary literary sources as Davies (2002), Ford (2010) and Perkins (2011). In this section, I bring their conclusions

into conversation with my own to discuss how I have built on and critically engaged with their final thoughts, respectively. Alongside this, I discuss the implications of my own chapter findings and how these connect to form overarching conclusions that speak to my original research questions and the broader issues of the conservatoire research field. Drawing these threads together, I end each thematic section with an outline of my subsequent recommendations.

7.3.1 Implications and recommendations: Social background

In chapter 2, I built on the empirical findings of Scharff (2018) regarding the representation of students from state and private school backgrounds, to look at how students from those backgrounds respond differently to conservatoire practices and cultures. In so doing, I built on the work of Davies (2002), whose analysis demonstrated that the training provided at the conservatoire she researched (in the 1990s) enabled some students to benefit more than others. She found that '[the] Conservatoire's notion of meritocracy ignores how differences in students' musical capabilities may be culturally shaped by their different degrees of social advantage or disadvantage that they might bring to the conservatoire.' (2002: 234-235). My alumni discourse elevates Davies's "may be" here to the confirmation that students' musical capabilities *are* culturally shaped by their backgrounds whatever class background they associate with. Not only this, but these social background elements are key factors in conservatoire students' identity formation. My data showed that during their studies, alumni identified more strongly with either their familial habitus (i.e. whether they are musical/non-musical) or their educational habitus (i.e. type of schooling pre-HE) and that this in turn led to perceived, unspoken, 'them and us' divides between those who experienced one type of background, and those who didn't, respectively.

Alumni did not however, articulate a perceived divide between those who were first generation HE and those who were not, but crucially, in the discussion of identity, there was a clear pattern reflected in the data that relates to this factor. That is, two-thirds of first generation HE students articulated that they felt they were not treated as an individual, but were made to 'fit in' to the system in place, compared to fifty percent of those who were not first generation HE. Currently, there exists limited ethnographic study surrounding (1) the musical/non-musical family habitus, and (2) first generation HE experience, within the field of conservatoires. Therefore, my findings, that show these two social background elements *are* connected to individuals' experiences as factors in notions of belonging and identity processes, is a new addition to knowledge of the field. However, it is clearly an area which requires further research for a deeper, more generalised and

emphatic research conclusion. Interestingly, this was only perceived in one direction, with a conscious divide articulated by those who went to state school, regarding those who went to private specialist music schools. Crucially, the discourse reflected that female alumnae were more consciously aware of their social background than their male counterparts and were also more concerned by financial pressures in relation to conservatoire study. Additionally, only male alumni proactively used their social background as a catalyst for motivation during their conservatoire studies.

In further building on Davies's study, my thesis focused on the financial concerns that effect the conservatoire experience. Specifically, I concluded that according to alumni, principal study teachers and heads of department overwhelmingly fail to guide students in matters of financial assistance for the purpose of instrument purchase (e.g. finance schemes, specialist loans). Related to this, in her thesis, Davies (2002: 235) recommended that 'music educators at the Conservatoire might thus examine how students' so-called innate musical qualities could be shaped by social factors such as their different social class backgrounds and musical training histories. In doing so, these educators can consider how they can improve the practices that discourage students from developing their capabilities as fully as possible, practices that also prevent the Conservatoire from fulfilling its official story of musical 'excellence' as fully as it possibly can.'

However, my alumni discourse clearly shows that conservatoires across the network have failed to heed her call for more introspective examination to reflect on how students' social backgrounds impact pedagogical experience, and how their practices could/should be adapted in response. Of the twenty alumni interviewed in my study, 90% of them attended conservatoires (or had at least two years of study left) in the seventeen years since Davies's work was published. Yet, every single interviewee considered that if conservatoires were more aware of the nature of their social background, their experience would have been improved, thus confirming three things: (1) Davies's position, (2) the continued absence of tailored student support that acknowledges students' social background and how this can shape their embodied learning experiences (3) this is an issue across the conservatoire network, not limited to one institution (as Davies's study was).

There is clearly here, then, space for recommendation regarding the principal study teacher and head of department as the conservatoire staff personnel who have the most one-to-one contact with students in relation to their learning and development. For, if these staff members were more aware of their students' social backgrounds, i.e. the social factors that have shaped their musical and creative learning thus far; then as the alumni in this study demonstrate, these staff may be able to better engage with and help nurture the

young musicians in their midst, towards a career in the profession. In so saying, I acknowledge that principal study teachers are commonly responsible for a number of students and this does raise the question of how much this particular staff member can attend to the individual requirements of several students (whereas I would argue that this is more of an expectation of the head of department's managerial role to assist with the specific needs of students within their cohort). However, in my recommendation here, I do not suggest that a reflection on the support offered to students in the context of their social background needs to demand additional time or commitment from principal study teachers. More that it is the approach to and method of support and nurture provided to students within the existing one-to-one teaching space that needs to be critically considered, given that no two students will learn in the same way and social background does contribute to their embodied learning experiences.

7.3.2 Implications and recommendations: Notions of 'talent'

Chapter 3 brought together the voices of Kingsbury (1988), Davies (2002) and Perkins (2011) to consider notions of 'talent'. Specifically, I combined discussion of this issue with my conversational model, to reflect on hegemonic and articulation power processes that work within the hierarchical value systems of conservatoires. I did so whilst also focusing particularly on Hall's concept of identity (1990) for a discussion of how these practices can affect students as individuals, and can continue to impact their identity when alumni in the profession thereafter.

In building on Kingsbury's conclusion that talent is the central concern verbalised by (American) conservatoire students, I have developed this idea to show that whilst this was a concern for most alumni, it was rarely articulated using this terminology. It became apparent from the discourse that the sub-issues of favouritism (primarily) and pigeon-holing (secondarily, as a direct consequence of favouritism) were in fact their explicit concerns. I discussed how practices that blatantly separate students in regards to attribution of talent, such as the aforementioned publicly advertised 'Stars of Tomorrow' recital, which carry high levels of symbolic capital, serve to further inflame claims of favouritism. This is particularly so when selection processes are opaque, thus perpetuating concerns of pigeon-holing, as students remain unsure of how to prove their talent and therein raise their symbolic and cultural capital. This resonates on some level with Pitts (2003: 291), who concluded that transparency and explicitness regarding student attainment should be prioritised in music higher education learning. As such, Pitts is also

reflecting the responsibility and power that pedagogic staff positions hold in higher education establishments.

My study demonstrated that in the conservatoire, there are two key figures of power in alumni's experiences; that is, the principal study teacher and head of department, the latter of whose role needs more research. In chapter 3, I showed that heads of department especially, and principal study teachers secondarily, show instances of inflicting hegemonic power, whereby they are in the dominant position to manipulate the (cultural) value system, so that their views become the accepted departmental view. This is also hegemonic because despite alumni objecting to these issues in retrospect, they did not publicly do so at the time. I demonstrated that such hegemonic practices effected alumni's notions of identity and wellbeing.

For some alumni, concerns regarding pigeon-holing and feelings of being unable to alter the views of this figure of power (i.e. the head of department) related to their consistent presence on all individual exam panels, across the entire course of study. Therefore, it was deemed that if this relationship was positive/negative, this could have a correlating impact on 'success', or not, within the department, regarding the hierarchical pecking order and selection for performance projects. Importantly, it was perceived that perceptions of ability were hard to change when the relationship was not 'good'. This also worked vice versa, with a positive relationship with the head of department seen as the key to avoiding the trap of being unfairly pigeon-holed.

On a broader level, my study demonstrated practices relating to talent across the wider conservatoire sector with the alumni discourse clearly demonstrating a perceived 'them and us' divide across the broader conservatoire network that has hitherto not been reflected in existing research. That is, alumni articulated clear assumptions regarding the 'standard' of the different institutions, i.e. the level of talent within the respective student cohorts. This reveals therefore, that not only is there a hierarchical system within a singular conservatoire institution (Perkins, 2011), but there is also a larger, general hierarchical system across the network. This hierarchy runs in two cycles concurrently, firstly, this relates to inside and outside of London, whereby those in the capital are most highly placed. Secondly, there is an additional hierarchy across the city of London itself, with instances in my alumni discourse of both students and staff articulating assumptions and comparisons regarding talent, across these four institutions, with one establishment in particular seen as the least valued.

Recommendations in light of these chapter insights regarding notions of talent are two-fold and relate firstly to the head of department and secondly, to students. These

recommendations are centred around the issues of perceived favouritism and pigeon-holing. Firstly, greater transparency in performance selection processes more generally, but specifically those events with high symbolic capital, is vital. Whether this be more frequent auditions for prestigious public performing events, or simply just being told *how* these selection processes work, that is, what the decisions are based on (e.g. are these decided by previous recital mark(s) or perhaps through examples of instances of perceived improvement across the term or the year?) would go some way to alleviate concerns of favouritism. Additionally, though heads of department are of course aware of the duties their position requires, the alumni discourse clearly calls for renewed reflection from these figures (particularly given their persistent role in examinations) of how their role and power is perceived by students. The alumni clearly stated that heads of department should be mindful to foster an approachable, nurturing and fair manner. This was particularly important for those alumni who were concerned that they were 'stuck' in their perceived place in the departmental hierarchy and subsequently reported feeling demoralised when they felt they could not approach the head of department on the matter.

That said, my second recommendation relates to students themselves, who as the alumni show, can be quick to lay blame on the staff and practices of the institution. In taking more ownership of perceived ill-doings, and using these experiences as opportunities for learning about both themselves, and the nature of the music profession, students can spin these experiences into positive action. For, favouritism and pigeon-holing remain prevalent and accepted practices in the professional field whereby many work engagements are as a result of word-of-mouth recommendations. Therefore, if this parallel with favouritism and pigeon-holing in the professional field is made clear to conservatoire students, they may subsequently be provided with an opportunity for reflection on longitudinal and persisting equality issues that are prevalent in the profession. Thus, students may subsequently use conservatoire experiences of perceived unfairness as a catalyst for development and accept that this is an assumed part, however frustrating, of their music career from this point onwards, one that they must quickly learn to adapt and get used to.

7.3.3 Implications and recommendations: Curriculum

In chapter 4, I contributed to renewed debates about what a conservatoire education 'should' look like. Given that my alumni data spans 28 years of conservatoire experience, I have applied a longitudinal reflection on curriculum change, from an ethnographic perspective, that has previously been lacking within academic discourse. Additionally,

these alumni were ideally positioned to offer specialist, first hand views on the most appropriate training for employability in the profession thereafter, thus speaking to my research aim of bridging the gap between the ideals of conservatoire training and the realistic demands of the profession.

In this approach, I have built on the work of Ford (2010), whose findings recommended a need to reflect on the overwhelming emphasis on traditional Western Classical music, within the conservatoire (NB her research took place in one institution, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama):

> What is new, is my argument that one cannot change the conservatoire by working around a curriculum which emphasises a discourse of classical music. Attempts at reform which emphasise contemporary discourses of employability or personal development as the raison d'etre of a conservatoire education, rather than questioning the music component of music education, risk being ineffectual or eroding the specificity of the conservatoire. The curriculum at the heart of training performers must reform to embrace new music and anti-specialism. Without this, the discourses of employability and personal development will end up as faulty apologists for the conservatoire if used to justify itself to the outside world and to secure continued funding, undermining the potential strengths of the institution whilst short changing its students. (Ford, 2010: 222-223)

Collectively, my alumni discourse reflected evidence that conservatoires are positively engaging with Ford's calls, in that they are attempting to address the need to: (1) redefine and broaden notions of excellence and 'talent', (2) consider the issue of employability in the changing professional field (an issue of increasing importance across Higher Education debates more generally), and (3) widen curriculum options to engage students in a broader range of stylistic performance skills, not limited to the Western Classical tradition. However, the alumni discourse also concluded that despite this, the extent to which these changes to practices, cultures and pedagogical frameworks are made, and the speed at which they are rolled out, varies largely, depending on the institution. Additionally, the notion and likelihood of a portfolio career was not made clear to all but one of the alumni interviewed. Interestingly, there was a gender divide reflected in the data regarding attitudes to training, which demonstrated that female alumnae were generally more negative in articulating their experiences relating to curriculum. They were also more likely, or able and/or willing, to provide clear opinions on the recommendations they felt should be made in implementing future improvements to formal and informal conservatoire training, and they clearly related this to their own experiences.

The data reflected that there was under-representation in two key areas which are connected to the inability to completely answer Ford's (2010) call for critical reflection on

the overwhelming prevalence of the traditional Western Classical canon within conservatoire curricula. Firstly, the under-representation of musical theatre as a genre of performance training offered to students and secondly, in the lack of specialists in this genre amongst the instrumental teaching staff. These practices serve to perpetuate symbolic and cultural capital hierarchies within the conservatoire, which place the highest value on the traditional Western Classical music canon. I acknowledge in this discussion of implications and recommendations that I single out the musical theatre genre specifically as a branch of professional life outside of the Western Classical tradition which is under-represented within conservatoires. I am aware that honing in on this one particular specialism has the potential to raise questions regarding the notion of research objectivity, given my own position and experience within this particular professional field. I must stress that my connection to musical theatre represents only a part of my performing career, i.e. it is not the sole musical genre in which I am employed and not my only specialism. However, in striving for a truly reflective research presentation, I acknowledge that my own insights regarding the musical theatre profession and my existing observation of its relative absence within conservatoire curricula, may have had some influence. In my proceeding recommendations regarding the place of musical theatre training specifically within conservatoires, I offer these points as representative of the findings from my alumni data, given that this musical genre was a strong theme across their collective experiences. However, I am clear that musical theatre is only one example of other fields of musical activity outside of the traditional Western Classical tradition that conservatoires may and should be encouraged to consider, within the context of the curricula they provide.

The lack of musical theatre specialist staff within conservatoires was not the only finding from the data which relates to staff representation. Alumni perceived that on traditional (i.e. orchestral) instruments, there was also under-representation of full-time freelancers on the staff, which further devalued this as an aspirational and valid career pathway. This is despite the fact that all alumni, to a greater or lesser extent, have since led full-time freelance careers.

Therefore, whilst acknowledging that conservatoires are being proactive (but in differing degrees), in attempts to modify their practices with regards to curriculum concerns as a response to contemporary pedagogical needs, my study concludes that there are four additional ways in which these issues can be further addressed. My recommendations are: (1) a greater inclusion, across all conservatoires and in all departments (i.e. not just woodwind, in which currently the greatest adaptations are being made) of the musical theatre genre, whether this be compulsory or optional, (2) a greater

representation of musical theatre professionals on the teaching staff, (3) a greater representation of freelance performers on the teaching staff also, across all departments (so, not simply limited to those instruments that are traditionally non-orchestral, i.e. guitar, saxophone, piano) and (4) Reflect further on the culture of traditional staff representation by considering whether a broader age-range of staff, from the older members who traditionally teach there (and whose decades of experience and knowledge is, of course, invaluable), to younger 'successful' professionals, who can provide a different kind of mentorship and professional career advice that would complement their older peers. I argue that this would also provide students with the confidence that 'success' in the music profession *is* within reach and is not necessarily associated with or defined by age.

A further recommendation in response to the alumni discourse is the need for more informal general skills classes, led by various musicians (both staff and guest visitors), to enlighten students on the unspoken codes of practice of the performing world, which are not covered in the formal curriculum. This could include things which may appear inconsequential (e.g. the newcomer in the section always buys the first round of coffees in the break and drinks after the concert/show, or who and when you should ask for practice parts for upcoming work, or what the process is regarding travel and hotel expenses and per diems when on work trips) but which are in fact vital to know if one is to effectively fit in to the various work settings in which they may find themselves. These small codes of conduct are crucial to 'get right' if one is to be invited back for future work engagements in the field of music performance.

My final recommendation regarding curriculum practices relates to the importance of outreach work and its need to be made an obligatory and larger focus of a conservatoire education. This is so that students are aware of music performance in a broader, holistic, social and cultural context. This would also help to remove them from the cushioned and arguably often self-centred 'bubble' of the conservatoire environment, as they are encouraged to reflect on *who* they perform for, why and what the function of music can be.

7.3.5 Implications and recommendations: Health and wellbeing

In chapter 5, I demonstrated that health and wellbeing is an issue on which none of the alumni had been directly asked about previously, in relation to their conservatoire studies. This was the first indicator of the taboo which surrounds this issue within conservatoire culture and which has long been prevalent, and one which has not yet been completely eradicated. With increased focus on health and wellbeing in both contemporary general society and debates surrounding higher education, my study has shown that conservatoires

are proactively seeking to formally address this matter in various ways; (1) through the Musical Impact project (2013-2017), (2) inclusion in some form in the curriculum and (3) for RNCM, the appointment of the country's first specialist Lecturer in Musician's Health and Wellbeing (Dr. Sara Ascenso).

Though the ramifications of the Musical Impact project and the success of Sara Ascenso's new role remain to be seen given their recency, my alumni data shows that between their attendance dates of 1990-2018, the health and wellbeing taboo in conservatoires was very much in existence and little had apparently worked (according to these ex-students) to break down barriers to enable honest discussion on the issue. So, though conservatoires are proactively addressing this issue formally (which this study strongly encourages), little has been done on an informal level to encourage positive change. I must stress here that not all alumni gave negative feedback in relation to the conservatoire experience and their personal health and wellbeing. However, the majority of alumni expressed common problems with self-confidence and/or anxiety, largely as a response to either the nature of the conservatoire environment (i.e. its cultures and practices) or as a side effect of the one-to-one relationship with the principal study teacher, or the head of department.

In such cases, particularly when health and wellbeing concerns related to members of staff, who as shown are dominant figures of power, those alumni affected all stated that they did not know to whom they should turn. This was in large part for fear of judgement and detrimental repercussions regarding how they would subsequently be affected in the (instrument) departmental hierarchy. Crucially, though all conservatoires formally provide health and wellbeing support through student services departments (or similarly titled), not a single alumnus had used this facility and only two of them voluntarily acknowledged the department's existence over the course of the entire interview process. As such, the alumni maintained their silence regarding these issues and these departments remain underused. For all, this affected their sense of belonging within the institution and left them to question their identity in the short term. Since leaving the conservatoire and in the years that have passed, there were varying outcomes related to this experience. For some, they were able to proactively use these negative health and wellbeing experiences from their conservatoire studies to strengthen their ability to deal with challenges the profession has dealt them. However, for others, particularly those whose health and wellbeing was challenged as a result of the one-to-one relationship with their principal study teachers, this has had a long-term detrimental effect, many years later, on their self-identity. Specifically, on the type of musician they perceive themselves to be and what

they believe they are and aren't able to achieve. Therefore, this thesis has shown that the taboo that students feel regarding the discussion of health and wellbeing can have long-reaching impact on musicians' self-perception, beyond the conservatoire's walls and can subsequently impact their career choices.

One final research implication on the issue of health and wellbeing that relates to identity is that of autonomy. In relating to my conversational model, the discourse showed that heads of departments (and sometimes principal study teachers) applied articulation practices, which put students into labelled groups for the benefit of the institutions' symbolic capital and fail to see and treat people within these groups as individuals. My findings showed that individuality and autonomy were of great importance to the working-class alumni in particular. Why does this matter? This is important because this effected the alumni's conceptions of identity and notions of creative freedom and aspirations. The music profession, especially in performing, is one which requires a clear sense of identity, self-confidence, drive and motivation, all of which require a certain level of autonomy.

In her study of conservatoire learning cultures, Perkins (2011) recommended that these institutions provide a reflective space for learning and a mentoring system, which would serve to:

> Facilitate and support students as they work to bring together the objective and subjective dimensions of their careers and, in so doing, create their own definitions of success. In bringing such reflection into student practices, the conservatoire begins redefining its success measures through allowing students to shape what is important to them, and supporting this through mentors who celebrate, embody and facilitate a wide range of 'successful' roles in music. (Perkins, 2011: 218)

My study, therefore, builds on Perkins to confirm that a level of autonomy is indeed important for conservatoire students, particularly those who do not subscribe to the conservatoire's most prized value in the hierarchy of culture, that is, solo performance in the Western Classical tradition. Furthermore, my research suggests that in the eight years since Perkins' recommendations, according to the 35% of my alumni cohort who have attended conservatoires since, no such spaces for reflective learning are in place. This is across the conservatoire sector. I argue that introducing such practices, or those of similar intent, would indeed go some way towards attempting to challenge the health and wellbeing taboo that pervades these institutions.

My extended recommendations, that would encourage more student and staff self-reflection, are given forthwith: (1) conservatoires should provide specialist training for principal study teachers and heads of department for vulnerable students and those with

learning support needs, such as dyslexia, (2) schedule regular informal general skills classes (as referred to in 7.3.4 above), with special guest visitors, which encourages a candid discussion on the realities of surviving in the profession (e.g. the health and wellbeing toolkit which students should begin to build for themselves). Student services staff members could also be involved in these classes, to raise awareness of their department and improve notions of approachability. (3) Conservatoires should employ a wellbeing specialist who is not a member of music staff, e.g. cognitive behavioural therapist, and with whom all students are required to attend an obligatory and confidential one-to-one meeting once a term (and thus removing the stigma of being seen asking for help, given everyone would be required to attend such sessions. Additionally, a specially trained staff member who is not a member of music staff may provide a perceived level of removal from conservatoire culture and concerns over judgement and ramifications for study, therefore encouraging students to converse more openly and candidly), (4) conservatoires should follow the lead of RNCM and consider additionally employing a health and wellbeing music member of staff, who is abreast of the latest academic research and ensures and oversees the position of this issue on the curriculum, (5) this topic should be a compulsory element of the curriculum, to formalise its relevance and importance for musicians in training.

7.4 Limitations and further study

Having discussed the implications and recommendations of my study, I reflect here on the limitations and potential for further research. This research aimed to provide critical reflection on the practices of contemporary conservatoires from the ethnographic perspectives of alumni, with social background as a focus throughout. Therefore, my research only contends with alumni's experiences of issues relating to class. However, aligning with Hall's understanding of culture, I acknowledge that class is but one element, intersecting with race and gender in the discussion of cultural practices and identity. Therefore, this thesis provides a focus on only one of these three elements. Further research within the alumni demographic which focused predominantly on gender and race, would further inform my own findings and provide a more three-dimensional view of pedagogic and cultural experiences of institutional practices.

Another limitation of study is the type of educational habitus of the alumni pre-conservatoire, that is, the alumni were vastly over-representative of state school backgrounds at 80%, with a remaining 10% from a general private school and 10% specialist private music school. Concluding my autoethnography (chapter 6, section 6.10) I offered critical reflection on my alumni demographic and particularly, on the nature of our shared

social backgrounds. Therefore, I have reflected upon the potential for in-built researcher bias and acknowledge that once again here, within the context of research limitations. For, though hugely informative regarding the embodied learning experiences of under-represented students, a more balanced reflection of types of educational habitus might have elicited even more fruitful insights from those who attended private specialist music schools, in particular, for further comparison.

Despite my conviction regarding the rich, insightful narratives of alumni, who are an under-represented demographic within the conservatoire research field, I must also temper this by acknowledging that retrospective empirical data must also be viewed with an air of caution. For, I am aware that such reflection carries the risk of inaccuracy in mis-remembering, given the passing of time. However, in this context, as a complete member researcher of the community under study, I was also in the advantageous position of realising if any of the discourse was wildly incongruous, and as such incorrectly recalled (though I encountered no such instances). Another research limitation relates to the type of data sample, for I acknowledge that had I spoken with different alumni constituents, my results might have been different. That is, for example, had I interviewed musicians who are career soloists and that is their one and only form of employment in the profession, then their cultural, social and embodied learning experiences of conservatoire structures in relation to my research themes (i.e. social background, notions of 'talent', curriculum, health and wellbeing) might well have contrasted with the discourse of the more 'typical' performing alumni that I spoke with (i.e. those who have portfolio careers/are freelance or contracted orchestral or show musicians).

In reflection, I acknowledge that the alumni interview quotes included throughout this thesis demonstrate some examples of leading questions. I have chosen to include such examples in the thesis for transparency of the research process. Looking to the future, in extending this study forward, this is something that requires more mindful attention during the data collection process to ensure that the potential for results bias is as limited as it can be. That is, given the semi-structured interview method employed (consciously chosen for the flexibility it allows in the direction of the interview discussion), I acknowledge that it is my responsibility as researcher to ensure a critically reflective, self-aware and consciously non-leading, and non-suggestive position.

As a further research limitation and an area for potential future research moving forward (and as outlined in my methods (section 0.2.1)), my study (regretfully) does not include the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, due to two main reasons. Firstly, by practical coincidence and not design, none of my alumni attended this conservatoire. Secondly,

neither do I (in my position as reflexive, complete member researcher) have any autoethnographic experience of the Scottish conservatoire system, however I do of the English and Welsh systems. Therefore, I did not feel it appropriate to make research claims and subsequent institutional recommendations about a conservatoire from which I have no ethnographic data. Hence, looking to the future, this is an obvious area for attention in presenting a more complete picture of contemporary British conservatoire practices.

Though there was a complete cross-sector representation of all the conservatoires included in this research (in England and Wales), I was not able to make any further substantial conclusions (other than those given) regarding potential patterns and anomalies pertaining to individual conservatories within the sector, due to lack of even representation. For example, there were instances of direct impact on students' social experiences, in relation to notions of talent relating to one establishment in particular. Two alumni (i.e. alumni 7 and 17, in chapter 3, section 3.5) who attended this same conservatoire and were of the same instrument department, yet whose attendance dates were 15 years apart, clearly stated that social acceptance amongst peer groups was entirely dependent on how staff perceived their abilities. That is, if you were deemed talented by the principal study teacher and/or head of department, then you were accepted by your peers and included in social activities, however, were excluded if you were one of the least talented. Thus, in this particular instance, alumni's identity and sense of belonging was evidently challenged. However, it is not clear from the data whether this is a culture pertaining to this particular conservatoire, or whether this is coincidence (however, tentative indications are that this did not appear to be a pattern across the wider alumni data collected).

Therefore, this is an example of how the study could be further extended, to engage with a greater number of alumni interviewees, who equally represent all conservatoires across the network and with an even spread across all instrumental departments. This would also allow for further reflection on the insightful finding of this study regarding the existence of a broader hierarchical system across the conservatoire network as a whole, which is evidently an interesting area for research attention in moving forward.

7.5 Closing reflections

At the outset of this study, my aim was to address the gap between intent (in institutional delivery) and reality (in student experience). In so doing, I have shown that conservatoires are increasingly engaging in critical, reflective discourse regarding their pedagogical

practices and learning cultures, and gazing outwards to reflect on their purpose in relation to broader higher education concerns regarding employability. However, through applying my conversational model for a cultural and social analysis of my empirical data, my study also reflects that across the conservatoire sector generally, despite hearing and heeding calls for change, they have largely been exceptionally slow to action this change. Not only that, but in some instances, they have entirely struggled to modify their practices to the degree required. Vitally, my data suggests that over the past three decades, these institutions have failed to demonstrate to students exactly why practices are in place, and crucially, why they are important to them as individuals, in respect of their career aspirations. Therefore, conservatoires have also underestimated the long-term effects that the conservatoire experience' (particularly the relationships with figures of power, the one-to-one principal study teacher and head of department) can have on musicians' identity and health and wellbeing.

That said, I have also demonstrated that students are extremely quick and content to lay blame for any perceived ill-doings at the foot of the institution, and commonly do not take ownership of any negative experiences related to their time at the conservatoire. My own experience as an alumna mirrors the implications of my findings from my fellow contemporaries, whose discourse reflects that students require more transparency and explicit instruction in order to process conservatoire practices effectively. This would encourage them to take more responsibility for their learning and subsequent experiences (both good and bad); implied notions are not sufficient enough.

From a professional perspective, both the research process and the resultant findings have changed how I approach my role as a principal study tutor in a conservatoire. That is, I am now acutely aware that my involvement in my students' training, and by extension, their lives more generally, cannot be viewed as boxed into, or reduced to, a one hour a week involvement. My alumni have confirmed that the relationship between the conservatoire student and instrumental tutor is foundational to their conservatoire experiences, seeping into the social and cultural aspects of their higher education experiences. Thus, in response to my research, I am extremely mindful that my position is one of power from the student perspective. As such, my attitude towards and interactions with my students has the potential to affect both their career aspirations and the ongoing formation of their musical identity, as well as potentially their self-identity and wellbeing more generally.

Therefore, in my teaching practice moving forward, I aim to consciously encourage reciprocal candour in the student-tutor professional relationship. Thus, in doing so I also

hope that there is greater potential for my students to feel that our lessons are a 'safe space' in which they may bring forth any learning and health and wellbeing concerns. My research has clearly reflected that there is much work left to do to break the taboo of displaying and articulating signs of struggle within conservatoires. I am reminded, through this research process, that conservatoires have specially trained health and wellbeing support staff in their student services departments, and that the issue of their underuse can in part be addressed by principal study tutors being more active in encouraging their students to approach these teams. In the spirit of professional reflection, there is a point at which specific health and wellbeing issues, and pastoral support, should arguably not fall squarely on the shoulders of principal study tutors, and that we should be mindful – for the benefit of both parties (staff and students) – of asking for other, more appropriate assistance if and when that moment arises. Thus, this also encourages establishing a network of staff for students' support needs, and the sharing of expertise, for the benefit of the student.

A further change to my teaching approach, in light of writing this thesis, is to be more consciously aware of student's autonomy and their individual aspirations, and to be mindful of respecting these, guiding and mentoring them as appropriate (this includes directing them towards other staff with specific specialisms, if and when required). That is, making sure that they feel 'heard'. In tandem with this, a particular outcome of my study was the importance of explicit interaction, direction and instruction in student's training (this also resonates with the atmosphere of transparency and candour (above) which I now mindfully encourage in the lesson space). As such, I am now more careful to explicitly encourage student self-responsibility, and independent learning and musical exploration. I have shown in this study that students can be extremely quick and content to lay fault with the institution in response to unexpected or disappointing outcomes, and that in not taking self-responsibility, the alumni showed that in some instances this was detrimental to their development of appropriate emotional responses to future issues such as rejection. Thus, I believe that in explicitly encouraging this notion of student self-responsibility, my students may be more likely to build a greater sense of resilience, independence and organisational skills, which will be vital to them as they enter and navigate the profession.

To summarise, therefore, my professional teaching perspective and practice has been, and shall continue to be, inevitably informed and shaped by my research process and findings. In particular, I am struck by and thus am now extremely mindful of, the potential my role of power has to effect musicians' self-identity and aspirations. That is, not only in the handful of years that I may teach them, but long afterwards, potentially for decades. I

am reminded, therefore, that this responsibility is not one that I should take lightly or with flippancy and certainly should never take for granted. Additionally, I am presently extremely aware that every student will experience, and be affected by the conservatoire, differently. That is, no two people will assimilate their 'conservatoire experience' in the same way, and so a singular, inflexible approach to teaching and mentoring will not fit all.

As a final reflection, I asked all of my interviewees whether they were proud to say that they had attended their respective conservatoire(s). With an overwhelmingly positive response, 80% said that yes, they were. Additionally, every single alumnus, including those who were 'not proud', articulated that these institutions were wonderfully vibrant and passionate, artistically creative, enriching social, cultural and embodied learning environments. In the words of Kevin Price, Head of Music Performance at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, 'I like to say to students that conservatoires are an upmarket supermarket whereby you (as students) are handed the keys and an empty trolley upon entrance, and told to taste all of the ingredients and come up with and refine the most tasteful recipe book that you can. One that reflects the essence of your creative personality.'[148] As a conservatoire alumna and now as an educator within such an institution, having gone through this research process I am reminded that these establishments open the door to a wonderous world of immersive, creative opportunities, both for young and established musicians, staff and students, alike.

[148] In discussion with Kevin Price, Head of Music Performance at Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Details of this discussion are referred to in this thesis with his permission, given via personal email communication on 6th September 2019.

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