

EPILOGUE

By Peter Renshaw, project moderator

The main architects of this *Sound Links* Report, Huib Schippers (Project Supervisor) and Ninja Kors (Researcher and Project Manager), are to be congratulated on presenting a clear analysis of the central issues connected with cultural diversity in institutions for higher music education across Europe. Drawing on the work of the *Sound Links* partners, the Report provides a clear framework that invites institutions to reappraise the ways in which they are responding to the challenges of cultural diversity. The accompanying guide 'From Policy to Practice' especially offers a practical guide for translating principles of policy into action. The issues raised in the Report are complex, but they demonstrate that there is an urgency for institutions to address cultural diversity with an informed understanding and a clear resolve.

Several key questions arise from the main conclusions at the end of Part II of the Report. For example, it cannot be assumed that the inclusion of world music in the curriculum necessarily implies a commitment to cultural diversity. The two are not synonymous. Any such commitment will be realized only through the openness and sensibility of the culture of the whole institution. A fundamental shift in mindset can lead to new structures, different forms of artistic practice and innovative approaches to learning and teaching. By widening opportunities and opening up access to musicians from many varied backgrounds, an institution can find a creative energy and vitality through its growing diversity.

The Report highlights the closed nature of some institutions for higher music education. It emphasizes that in a world characterized by the homogeneity of globalisation, it is essential for institutions to be open and receptive to the many different ways in which musicians can be encouraged to develop their creativity and find their own individual voice. By fostering a climate that respects cultural diversity, staff and students can be given opportunities to strengthen their sense of musical identity.

One perceptive observation arises from a discussion of the danger of creating a new monoculture masquerading as cultural diversity. Evidence is shown where some cases of tradition-specific teaching in different music genres have become trapped in a single-minded tunnel vision which totally negates the open principles underpinning cultural diversity. This is a lost opportunity for both the institution and individual musicians.

Perhaps one of the most fundamental points in the Report is the recognition that in a world which respects cultural diversity, excellence and quality are defined in relation to fitness for purpose and relevance to context. Increasingly, it seems that there is an urgent need to produce a common framework for evaluating and assessing quality in accordance with diversity of need and purpose across all music genres. To achieve this, institutions for higher music education need to engage in a collaborative mapping exercise which brings together appropriate criteria for making judgments within the diverse range of music activities.

Finally, the Report draws attention to the widening employment possibilities arising from the growing diversity of the music industry. Musical practice is now embedded in much wider social and cultural contexts than what is restricted to traditional music venues and recording studios. Being a musician today involves having the opportunity to take on a series of roles – those of composer, performer, leader and teacher – in different genres, cultures and traditions. These changing roles have enormous implications for the future of institutions for higher music education.

In conclusion, it is pertinent to draw on a recent research project in England, which investigated the work, education and training of professional musicians in the 21st century. Emphasising the importance of cultural diversity and of widening participation in music provision, the Report asserts that:

The development within the higher education sector of a wider range of musical genres and cultural traditions in music depends, in part, on increasing the proportion of trained musicians and teachers coming from (...) those genres and traditions. (...) Such genres cover western as well as minority ethnic and world music traditions. In addition, the culture and ethos of many higher education institutions will have to change in order to absorb and do justice to this development. There is, too, a priority to retain quality and excellence at the highest international level

if the music industry is to operate effectively on this global stage. No single institution can offer the diversity of genres that we have today. This suggests that a collaborative strategy between the conservatoires and other higher education institutions would enable the sector to diversify more and to extend the range of opportunities for excellence in different genres. (Youth Music, Creating a Land with Music. Commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. 2002, pp.19-20)

Sound Links not only illuminates these views, but it also presents coherent insights into the complexity of cultural diversity and provides practical guidelines for future action. It is to be hoped that the observations and principles outlined in the Sound Links Report will inform the thinking and strategic planning of institutions for higher music education across Europe.

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