

Forms of Precarity and the Orchestral Musician

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Abstract

Orchestral musicians are a very heterogeneous professional group. Some enjoy among the highest levels of job security of any performing artists while others struggle to sustain patchwork lives as players. Their experience of precarity comes in many forms. Even players who appear to have secure employment conditions may find their career made precarious by physical or mental health risks, stress caused by performance pressure, the requirement to sacrifice much of their artistic autonomy or structural features of the sector such as low remuneration rates. This article provides an overview of these myriad forms of precarious work among orchestral musicians while also considering various responses that attempt to address the problem.

Keywords

Orchestral musicians, precarious work, co-operative governance, social security

Biography

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Introduction

Orchestral musicians make up a diverse group of performers that face various professional challenges including different forms of precarity. Some players are in types of precarious employment familiar to many workers in the arts, while others experience precarity that is specific to the world of orchestral music-making. This article analyses a range of these challenges before considering employment and orchestral governance models that may go some way to addressing the particular forms of precarity experienced by large numbers of orchestral musicians.

Around the world, long-established publicly and philanthropically-funded concert and pit orchestras offer employment contracts that span multiple years or are even unrestricted, together with salary payments stretching across most if not all months of the year and social security entitlements such as health insurance and pension plans. Such job security is the envy of many performing artists. In numerous cities, though, financial pressures in tandem with and often caused by neo-liberal funding and management policies are eroding the security orchestral musicians once enjoyed. Orchestras across the USA and Europe are filing for bankruptcy, being wound up or merged (Flanagan, 2012). Even internationally-respected orchestras have cancelled entire concert seasons in the wake of protracted and acrimonious remuneration negotiations between managements and musicians (Cooper, 2014a). Other ensembles have made redundancies, and cut wages (Cooper, 2014b), imposed recruitment freezes, and reduced the number of tenured positions as new hires are made on a freelance or short-term basis. In Germany, a country renowned for its rich orchestral landscape, the number of non-freelance positions (Planstellen) in publicly-funded orchestras fell by just over 19 percent between 1992 and 2014 and the number of such orchestras dropped by 22 percent over the same period (Mertens, 2014).

As a result, precarious work is now widespread among orchestral musicians but it takes myriad forms (Coulson 2012; Cuny, 2014; DHA Communications, 2012; Frei, 2011a; Sinsch, 2011). A 2012 research report on working musicians in the UK noted that, "there is no such thing as a typical musician" (DHA Communications, 2012). There is perhaps no other feature of life among orchestral musicians that is as variegated as its precarity.

Precarity and employment conditions among orchestral musicians

There are no widely accepted definitions of terms such as "precarity" (Lewchuk, W., Lafleche, M., Dyson, D., Goldring, L., & Meisner, 2013, p. 17), "contingent", "insecure", or "precarious" work among orchestral musicians. Some of the commentary on the subject uses other terms such as "portfolio" or "patchwork" careers to describe employment that elsewhere is labelled as "precarious". The terms are, however, not always synonymous and confusion may result from this terminological imprecision. Nor are there any widely accepted measures, indicators, or "symptoms" that might help us to conclusively identify precarious work among orchestral musicians. A binary division between "secure" and "insecure" work among orchestral musicians oversimplifies and weakens any discussion. Instead of a binary scheme, it is more accurate to envisage degrees of precarity. Lewchuk et al. proposed perhaps the most useful tool in their Employment Precarity Index (2013). To rate the level of precarity experienced by

individuals using the Index, respondents are asked ten questions covering factors including the right to take paid leave, whether respondents have one employer who they “expect to be working for a year from now, who provides at least 30 hours of work a week, and who pays benefits” (p. 106). The extent of income variation, the exposure to potential loss of working time and the prevalence of on-call work are also factors, as is a respondent’s level of information about upcoming work schedules, the portion of income received in cash and the type of employment. The final two factors included in the Employment Precarity Index cover social security benefits and protection of the right to raise concerns with the employer. Such an index with its gradations of precarity is more useful than a simple “secure” vs “precarious” definition.

The working lives of recently graduated freelance orchestral players who may be employed for as little as a few calls per year (DHA Communications, 2012; Harper, 2002) are characterised by high scores on the Employment Precarity Index. They have no right to paid leave, do not normally have a single employer who provides “at least 30 hours of work a week”, their income varies considerably (DHA Communications, 2012) and they normally have limited entitlements to social security benefits, if any at all. (The social security entitlements of all workers vary between countries and those of freelance musicians in Germany and France are discussed below.) At the other end of the spectrum, long-established orchestral players in certain European orchestras have the employment conditions and security of public servants (Scherz-Schade, 2015).

We should, however, be cautious about applying to orchestras and their musicians, definitions and measures of precarity that are derived from and are most applicable to other sectors of the labour market. In Australia, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, in a submission to the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia, found that “contingent work in our industries are (sic) more likely to reflect genuine contingent arrangements” (Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2012). Such arrangements include short-term contracts for limited-run theatrical seasons, project-based contracts for recording musicians and casual contracts for orchestral musicians who play instruments that are only occasionally required or who are required to augment ensembles for specific performances. At the same time, some aspects of precarious work are more common among orchestral musicians than other sectors of the workforce. Orchestral players are, for example, at considerable risk of developing physical and mental health issues that threaten their professional lives. The health risks posed by work is not a factor in the Employment Precarity Index developed by Lewchuk et al. but is discussed further below.

The bases of employment on which orchestral musicians are engaged take on various forms (Mertens, 2010). At one end of the spectrum are freelance arrangements that offer remuneration and conditions set by employers alone. At the next point on the spectrum are freelance arrangements that are subject to industry-level collective agreements or standards that set pay rates and conditions without offering a route out of freelance precarity. At the other extreme of the spectrum are sector-wide or company-based collective agreements that provide long-term tenure, defined maximum workloads and social security entitlements such as sick and annual leave, employer superannuation contributions and unemployment entitlements that employees in other labour sectors expect.

It is a notable feature of employment patterns among orchestral musicians that many span several points on the Employment Precarity Index developed by Lewchuk et al. Some combine freelance music performance with more secure work in other areas such as teaching or work in non-music fields. Many have diverse freelance engagements with multiple employers (DHA Communications, 2012). Even players with tenured positions subject to collective agreements may also take on freelance work with other ongoing ensembles, chamber music groups or project-based orchestras (Cottrell, 2004). Sometimes this is in response to perceptions that individual artistic development and satisfaction is stymied by the collective nature of orchestral playing and the attendant subservience to the artistic decisions of conductors and senior players. This perceived trade-off between employment security and artistic self fulfilment is discussed further below. Most orchestras that operate under a collective agreement also use

freelance players so that even among the players on stage for a particular performance there may be a range of employment arrangements with corresponding levels of precarity. Research commissioned by the Musicians Union in the UK found that only ten percent of musicians were “full-time salaried employees” and 94 percent of the 2000 musicians surveyed work freelance, “for all or part of their income” (DHA Communications, 2012, p. 14). It should be noted that this research involved working musicians in general and included players from outside the orchestral sector.

Employment arrangements for orchestral musicians also vary widely depending on the countries in which they work. In Australia, the state-based symphony orchestras and the two pit orchestras (the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, and Orchestra Victoria) employ musicians subject to collective agreements. The situation in the United Kingdom is quite different. London’s four major independent symphony orchestras (the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia and Royal Philharmonic) are all player-governed and offer players employment on a hybrid basis that offers limited security on what might otherwise be considered freelance engagement (Lehman, 2002; McDowell, 2013). The BBC operates a stable of five orchestras throughout Britain that offer employment based on collective agreements.

Germany represents another situation again. In recognition of its deeply-rooted tradition, the German “theatre and orchestra landscape” was added to the UNESCO German Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014 (German Commission for UNESCO). The orchestral sector in Germany is one of the world’s largest and there are an estimated 10,000 musicians employed in some 130 publicly funded professional orchestras across the country (Scherz-Schade, 2015; Mertens, 2014 p. 6), representing probably the highest concentration of orchestras per head of population in any large nation (Scherz-Schade, 2015). The orchestras vary from theatre orchestras in provincial cities through symphony orchestras funded and run by broadcasters to major internationally prominent orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic. Players in some German provincial theatre or concert orchestras have the employment status and security of civil servants while many other musicians work on a more precarious, freelance basis (Scherz-Schade, 2015). In 2011 the German Orchestra Association (Deutsche Orchestervereinigung) undertook a study into the remuneration and employment conditions among freelance orchestral musicians and conservatorium teachers. This recently led to the publication of minimum standards for the engagement of freelance orchestral musicians that provides for basic conditions including limits on the duration of rehearsals, the number of rehearsals per day and travel costs (Deutsche Orchestervereinigung, 2015).

The situation of orchestral musicians in Germany is unique by virtue of the existence of a national artist social insurance scheme that provides full social security entitlements for freelance artists (Sinsch, 2011). The scheme provides cover to freelance musicians whose annual income exceeds €3,900. The necessary financial contributions are covered by payments made by the insured artists as well as by the German federal government and via a levy on arts companies including orchestras. The contribution rate for freelance artists is the same as it is for employees in other sectors and insured freelancers enjoy the same range of entitlements as other employees. In 2014, 50,715 freelance musicians were insured under the scheme, up from 14,649 in 1992, the first year in which freelance musicians from former East Germany were covered. The average performance income of freelance musicians insured under the German scheme varies by age. As at 1 January 2015, players under the age of thirty earned an annual average of €10,658 while those over sixty earned an average annual income from performance of €13,627, the highest for any age bracket (Künstlersozialkasse, 2015).

The German freelance artist social insurance scheme represents a significant attempt to address one of the factors included by Lewchuk et al. in their Employment Precarity Index (2013). Information on the scheme’s official website indicates that the motivation for the introduction of the scheme in 1983 had two main elements: “because this professional group is usually considerably less well insured than other freelancers” and “in recognition of the creative contribution of artists and writers as important for society”ⁱ

(Künstlersozialkasse, 2015 p. 1). France has an unemployment benefits scheme for freelance artists known as the intermittents du spectacle (Chrisafis, 2012), but in its breadth of entitlements, the German social insurance model for freelance artists has few equivalents elsewhere.

In many other countries freelance orchestral musicians do not have access to social security benefits (DHA Communications, 2012; Frei, 2011b). They may not qualify for state schemes if they have not made the required contributions. Similarly, in some countries they may even be excluded from public health insurance schemes. As a result, many are effectively forced into expensive private health and pension insurance schemes while others simply forego insurance cover altogether, a decision that clearly aggravates the precarious nature of their working lives. In the words of a 2013 report to the European Parliament, "It is doubtful that most dependent self-employed workers sufficiently improve their income over time and save enough to compensate for insufficient public pension entitlements" (Eichhorst, Braga & Famira-Mühlberger, 2013 p. 9).

It is, however, important to guard against overgeneralising about the employment precarity of orchestral musicians. There is considerable diversity among players of the different instruments of an orchestra. Violinists are by far the most numerous members of a traditional western orchestra. The opportunities for graduate violinists to get casual employment in professional orchestras are correspondingly frequent but the number of competitors is also high. At the other extreme are players of instruments that are not numerous in traditional orchestras. These include harpists, tuba players and timpanists. For players of these instruments, the opportunities for permanent or freelance engagements in orchestras are few and far between but the competition is also much less intense than that among most string players.

The various phases in a musician's professional development also manifest professional precarity in different ways. Many recent music graduates find getting work with a professional orchestra very difficult. There is a chronic oversupply of talented and well-trained orchestral musicians. The result is very high degrees of precarity, as measured by Lewchuk et al's index, among early-career orchestral musicians who may spend years in freelance work with irregular income, no guarantee of future work and no entitlements to social security protections unless they are provided by employment arrangements in other sectors.

At a later stage of working life, in many countries orchestral musicians approaching age-dependent retirement face having to continue working to supplement very low pension payments. DHA Communications (2012) found that in the UK, "(p)rofessionals outside of music are ... three times more likely to have a workplace pension that includes an employer contribution" (p. 19) than are musicians. The same study found that only 35 percent of British musicians surveyed "regularly pay into a pension scheme." The levels of precarity facing late-career musicians or their recently retired former colleagues is a problem that has to date attracted little research attention in the English speaking world (see Gembris & Heye, 2012, for research in German). The health risks associated with ageing are also a problem for many orchestral musicians and are discussed in more detail below.

Structural conditions of orchestral performance, player creativity and wellbeing

Considering only the levels of precarity inherent in the employment types found among orchestral players overlooks other aspects of a working musician's life that may also contribute to precarity in the orchestral sector. Such cases, that in other respects might score quite highly on Lewchuk et al's Employment Precarity Index, may involve more subtle forms of precarity that are also more specific to the working lives of orchestral musicians. In the next section I focus on three such forms of precarity: physical and mental health risks posed by orchestral playing, risks associated with the suppression of artistic autonomy demanded of musicians, in particular those in large orchestras, and the perceived unsuitability of much musical training and the high cost involved in such training.

The health risks posed by orchestral music-making vary depending on the instrument a musician plays. Each instrument is associated with different health problems that may endanger a player's ability to work. Orchestral instruments present players with challenges that are ameliorated but not removed by the acquisition of high-level proficiency typical among professional musicians (Piperek, 1981). These challenges differ between instruments and it is unfortunate that most research into the working lives of orchestral musicians does not break data down into instrumental groupings. The challenges can be ergonomic as well as artistic. Physical overuse and posture problems afflict many players, often because playing techniques and instruments were developed centuries ago when ergonomics was hardly a consideration (Harper 2002). The result can be chronic musculoskeletal pain or performance stress (Rickert, Barrett & Ackermann, 2013). A pioneering 1981 study of stress among players in the Vienna Symphony found that 38 percent of wind players experienced high or very high stress as a result of "technical problems with one's own instrument" (Piperek, 1981, p. 37). For string players the level was 26 percent.

More importantly, the study found that the share of musicians reporting stress induced by the nature of their instrument increased with age. It would thus appear that the heightened instrumental mastery that might be assumed to accrue to players with careers of twenty years or more is offset by the physical and cognitive decline often associated with ageing. As the study's author notes, "(I)t is the tragic lot of the musician or the performing artist in general that increased perfection is thwarted by old age as such" (p. 38). It is also worth noting that a German study into the experience of ageing among orchestral players found that, "every second orchestral musician over 50 finds it increasingly difficult to meet their own musical expectations"ⁱⁱⁱ (Gembris & Heye, 2012, p. 5). Indeed, survey respondents in the same study indicated that the highest level of performance could be expected from musicians in the age bracket between 30 and their mid-40s (p. 6).

Health risks are thus a further important factor in the precarity many orchestral musicians experience (Rickert et al., 2013) and it is significant that these risks increase with age and professional experience. Considerable research supports these observations. A 1986 US study found that, "76% of the participating musicians reporting at least one medical problem that was severe in terms of its effect on performance" (cited in Harper, 2002, p. 83). The Gembris and Heye research among all of Germany's 131 orchestras found that 55 percent of respondents reported, "suffering physical ailments that impaired their ability to perform" (2012, p. 7). Amongst string players the rate was even higher (62 percent) and among players over 55 years of age the rate was 70 percent. The study also found that 34.3 percent of respondents complained of hearing problems. Prolonged exposure to high sound levels can lead to hearing impairment among orchestral players and this is a problem that warrants further research.

The collective nature of performing in large orchestras can be an additional source of psychological stress among players (Bond & Bunce, 2003; Johansson & Theorell, 2003). Membership in a large collective inevitably demands the sacrifice of some artistic autonomy on the part of members. There is substantial research that highlights problems with a lack of "artistic integrity" among orchestral musicians. The term "artistic integrity" refers to the involvement of performers in artistic decision-making. Parasuraman and Purohit found that "many musicians feel that their skills are undervalued and underutilized, and that they are "anonymous cogs" in the orchestra" (2000, p. 74). Johansson and Theorell argue that musicians are, "unique in the sense that there is such conformity with regard to working goals" (2003, p. 141) in orchestras. Parasuraman and Purohit (2000) highlight a "lack of congruence between the education and training of musicians and their actual jobs" (p. 74). They note that traditional training models prepare student musicians for careers as soloists while the vast majority, if they become professional musicians, will do so in orchestras in which "teamwork and the submergence of one's identity and creativity in the collective sound" (p. 74) are essential. It is important to note that such perceptions vary considerably within orchestras. Unfortunately, much research in the sector does not sufficiently differentiate between the different instrumental groups within orchestras and

between the different hierarchical positions among the players. Such differentiations are particularly relevant to questions surrounding artistic integrity. The 1981 Vienna Symphony research makes this clear. It differentiates between string and wind players and between section leaders and rank and file members. Forty-two percent of string players surveyed, for example, agreed that “only in chamber music ensembles am I able to prove what I can really do” while among wind players, only 11 percent reported the same feelings (Piperek, 1981, p. 41).

Much of the research undertaken into health and mental wellbeing among orchestral musicians has highlighted the desire of players to have greater influence in decisions about musical and managerial concerns. As far back as 1981, 83 percent of interviewees from the Vienna Symphony indicated that they wanted greater opportunities to participate in “decision-making when it comes to musical problems” (Piperek, 1981, p. 54). Parasuraman and Purohit also found that “increased participation in decision making related to musical problems” was among their “more salient recommendations” (2000, p. 82). Johansson and Theorell (2003) even found that “(t)he more the employees” of the twelve Swedish orchestras they surveyed “reported they could influence important conditions, the fewer symptoms they reported” (p. 145). These are important considerations to bear in mind when the discussion turns to player-governed orchestras in the next section.

The working lives of orchestral musicians can thus place considerable burdens on their physical and mental wellbeing with implications for the precarity of their careers. In response, the Association of British Orchestras (ABO) and the Musicians Benevolent Fund introduced a Healthy Orchestra Charter in 2006 with the aim of “motivat(ing) occupational health and safety performance improvement in orchestras” (ABO 2006, p. 2). It featured a series of awards to recognise the efforts of orchestras to deal with health problem among players and management members. By the ABO’s own admission, however, the Charter “needed work to sustain interest from orchestras” (ABO 2012) and health risks remain serious causes of professional precarity among orchestral musicians.

Orchestral musicians are normally very highly trained with the vast majority completing higher education before moving into paid work (DHA Communications, 2012). This means that in countries including Australia, the UK and the USA, many orchestral players enter the workforce with substantial student debts that result in reduced disposable income over a period of many years as debts are repaid. In economies in which orchestral musicians already earn average salaries well below other professions, the precarious personal finances of players are further endangered by such debt repayments. This problem looks likely to worsen in coming years as many countries increase tuition fees in real terms.

A range of other factors also contribute to precarity among professional orchestral musicians. The atypical working hours of orchestral musicians involved in performances and touring make finding child-care practically impossible and make it difficult to maintain family relationships (DHA Communications, 2012). Orchestral work is thus extremely difficult and costly for single parents or for couples who are both orchestral musicians. Income tax regimes that struggle to accommodate extended periods of little or no income interspersed with periods of much higher income also contribute to the precarity experienced by many freelance orchestral players.

Orchestral musicians need to practise almost every day to maintain professional skills, even when they do not have paid engagements. This practice is not directly remunerated and represents a substantial commitment to self-funded professional development that is neither required in most other professions nor recognised in relevant social security legislation. Similarly, players in orchestras usually own their instruments and this represents a substantial investment. Instruments routinely cost over \$10,000, and in many cases much more than that. It is not unusual for orchestral musicians to own several instruments in that price range. Tenured orchestral musicians may receive an instrument allowance, but this is far from universal and certainly does not apply to freelance players. High-quality instruments may retain reasonable resale value, but such a divestment can only occur once a player has decided to stop playing

and leave the industry. The professional precarity many orchestral players experience is thus exacerbated by having to make what is effectively a self-funded capital investment that in extreme cases may be on a level comparable to investors in a small business at the same time as having to repay substantial student loans and committing to unremunerated practice on a daily basis.

Responses: player-governed orchestras and multitrack careers

Faced with this panoply of challenges to career sustainability among orchestral musicians, it is worth noting some of the responses that players have developed. Here I consider two: the pursuance of multitrack careers, and the development of orchestral governance models and management structures that feature high levels of player involvement in decision-making.

Around the world, various orchestras use player-governed corporate structures that in some cases were created in response to problems of precarity among musicians or risks of unemployment. The London Symphony Orchestra, for example, uses a well-researched and documented employment model that combines elements of freelance work with some basic securities. Musicians who successfully audition for a position with the orchestra become shareholders in the company although the orchestra's legal status as a not-for-profit company means that they do not receive financial dividends. Every player does, however, have voting rights and the orchestra is run by a Board of Directors, the members of which are democratically appointed by the musicians (McDowell, 2013). Members of the orchestra are considered freelance in that they have the right to take on engagements from other sources but to maintain their position within the orchestra and the attendant entitlements they must accept a set percentage of engagements it offers each year. Similar arrangements are used by the three other major independent symphony orchestras in London as well as in player-governed models in use in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Israel, Japan and the USA (Lehman, 2002).

Some orchestras have adopted player-governance models in the immediate aftermath of bankruptcies that threatened the livelihoods of musicians and thus represent a concrete response to acute employment precarity. The Colorado Symphony Orchestra was created from the ashes of the Denver Symphony Orchestra that filed for bankruptcy in 1989. In response to the organisation's collapse, fifty musicians decided to establish a new orchestra consisting mainly of players from the disbanded Denver Symphony Orchestra. When they did so, they chose to give the new orchestra a cooperative governance structure (Lehman, 2002). A similar transformation occurred at the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. It was launched in 1990 after the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra was declared bankrupt and today claims to be "the longest-standing musician-governed and collaboratively-operated orchestra in the United States" (Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, 2015).

Whether the experience of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra and the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra reduced precarity among the musicians is an interesting question that exceeds the bounds of this article. Even if player governance is no cure-all solution to employment precarity among orchestral players, various studies have found that it can at least go some way toward addressing the lack of job satisfaction and sense of disengagement and even stress felt by many musicians. Erin Lehmann in her 2002 doctoral dissertation on models of self-governance in four orchestra in the US, UK and Germany found that such models produced:

a profound and pervasive sense of player "ownership" and "say" particularly through the board (in which the players exercise their principal authority) and this, in turn, leads to increased job motivation, satisfaction, and reduced stress (p.186).

She also found that there was "less mental stress because the orchestra is not battling management all the time nor being completely subordinated to a music director" (p. 194).

Similar outcomes were achieved when in 2004 the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) introduced an artistic leadership model that transferred "significant (though not

all) artistic decision-making authority to musicians, vesting them with control over their artistic future and responsibility for continued improvements in the SPCO's artistic quality" (Tepavac, 2010, p. 62). Under this model artistic decisions are made by two committees, each of which is made up of three musicians and two members of the management staff and a group of artistic partners consisting of major soloists who work with the orchestra. Tepavac found that "(t)he model has had a profound effect on the musicians' self-image, improving their motivation and job satisfaction" (p. 68). In the words of one player interviewed by Tepavac, "(t)he model is huge for me. After being a section player for 15 years with no voice whatsoever, having a place where my voice is heard is huge. It's really changed, immensely, my job satisfaction" (p. 68).

As noted earlier, many orchestral musicians have multiple employers. In the case of early-career players this is often a necessity as they supplement freelance orchestral engagements with potentially more secure work in other areas such as teaching or work in fields outside music (DHA Communications, 2012). Even players with tenured positions subject to collective agreements may take on freelance work with other ongoing ensembles, chamber music groups or project-based orchestras (Cottrell, 2004) in an attempt to ease the artistic strictures imposed by membership of a large collective undertaking such as a symphony orchestra. Indeed, many orchestral players regard a combination of both types of work – playing in a large symphony orchestra as well as in smaller chamber or jazz ensembles – as ideal. One player interviewed by Stephen Cottrell said that, "(i)n a sense the idea would be to do both. A chamber music group gives you the security of a small group almost like a family, and you can come out and be a soloist and retreat back into it. But you don't always get the huge expanse of an orchestra, so think the two together, that would be my ideal" (Cottrell, 2004, p. 104). In such cases freelance work can be an important complement to more secure work in established orchestras. Another interviewee quoted in Cottrell's book found that, "the great thing about being a freelance player is the variety. One day you can be doing the quartet, the next day you could be doing a film session, the next day you could be doing Mozart players" (p. 74). Such multitrack careers may lead to higher levels of precarity on the Lewchuk et al. index. Nevertheless, some players appear to value the opportunity for artistic development and exploration afforded by less financially secure and often short-term projects (Cottrell, 2004).

An interesting model thus begins to emerge, as part of which individual musicians experience different types and levels of precarity and respond in a number of ways. On the one hand, they may enjoy the relatively low levels of employment precarity associated with membership of a large, well-established civic institution such as a symphony orchestra. At the same time, the large-scale collective nature and heritage-focused repertoire of such music-making may contribute to a heightened sense of artistic precarity caused by the need for suppression of artistic individuality and freedom that can lead to stress and the loss of job satisfaction. On the other hand, work with smaller-scale, project-based ensembles promises music-making that is more artistically satisfying and thus, for many players, provides greater job satisfaction. Simultaneously such work may counteract some of the stress experienced in symphony orchestras even if the price is exposure to higher levels of employment and income precarity as understood by Lewchuk et al.

Conclusion

Precarity among orchestral musicians manifests itself in myriad ways, a number of which go beyond the type of employment conditions captured by the Employment Precarity Index developed by Lewchuk et al. (2013). It is thus difficult to generalise about precarity among professional orchestral musicians. Their employment conditions vary greatly depending on a range of factors. Some players enjoy job security that is the envy of many other performing artists such as actors and dancers. Yet even these musicians may suffer the professional precarity that results from health risks associated with performing on unergonomic instruments, from stress derived from the particular challenges of professional performance on orchestral instruments, and from the artistic limitations imposed by membership of large collective institutions such as symphony orchestras.

Precarious work of various forms remains a serious concern among orchestral musicians in many countries. While precarity in its various forms appears likely to remain a feature of the sector, there are several models and initiatives that address the problem. These include programs that attempt to address the health risks of orchestral playing, as well as player-governed organisational models that give players greater control over their working lives, greater involvement in the futures of their orchestras and greater artistic say in their musical work (Tepavac, 2010). Musicians themselves have also developed personal responses to the challenges thrown up by employment-specific and artistic precarity. These reactions include strategies that are not solely aimed at reducing employment precarity in the sense used by researchers such as Lewchuk et al. (2013) and that may even increase employment precarity. The apparently self-defeating or paradoxical nature of these forms of career management in fact reflects the complexity of motivations involved in work as a musician, and the attendant friction between the desire for employment security and artistic fulfilment that lies at the heart of many careers in orchestral music-making.

Notes

- i. Translation by the author
- ii. Translation by the author

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