

# LEADING MUSIC INSTITUTIONS THROUGH CHANGE

**Helen Lancaster**

*Contemporary music institutions are challenged by change in many ways, including shifting musical genres, altering social and industry relevance, political influence, and developments in delivery of instruction and product. Over the past 15 years, through forced amalgamations with universities, music institutions in Australia have also faced shifts in governance, and challenges to the traditional 'conservatorium' philosophy.*

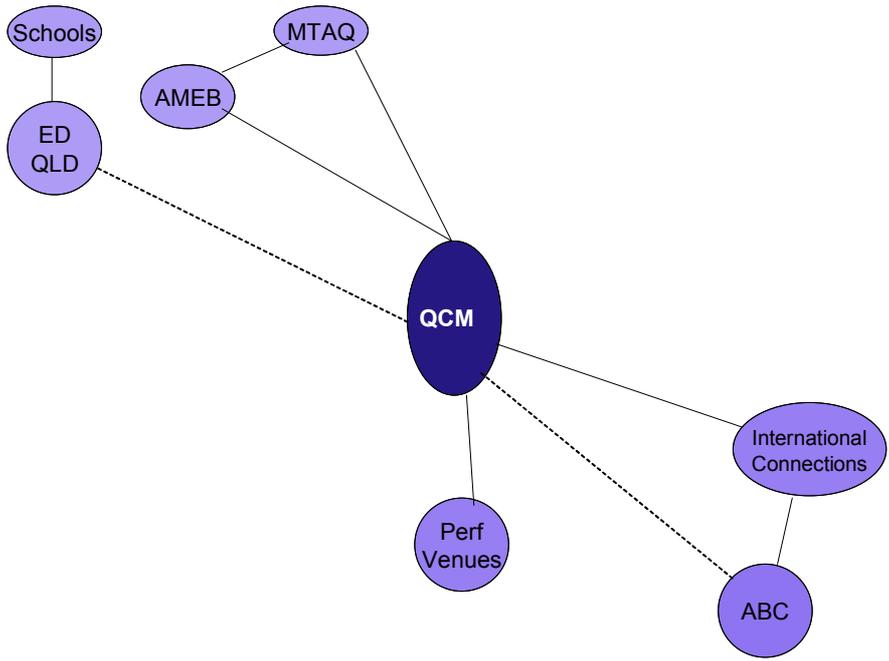
*This research found that these changes have made a significant impact on the institutions and their leaders. It analyses the responses of leaders from music institutions around the world as they reflect on the challenges confronting their organisations, and themselves as leaders, and gives examples of how some have responded to such challenges.*

## **Different contexts, different mindsets**

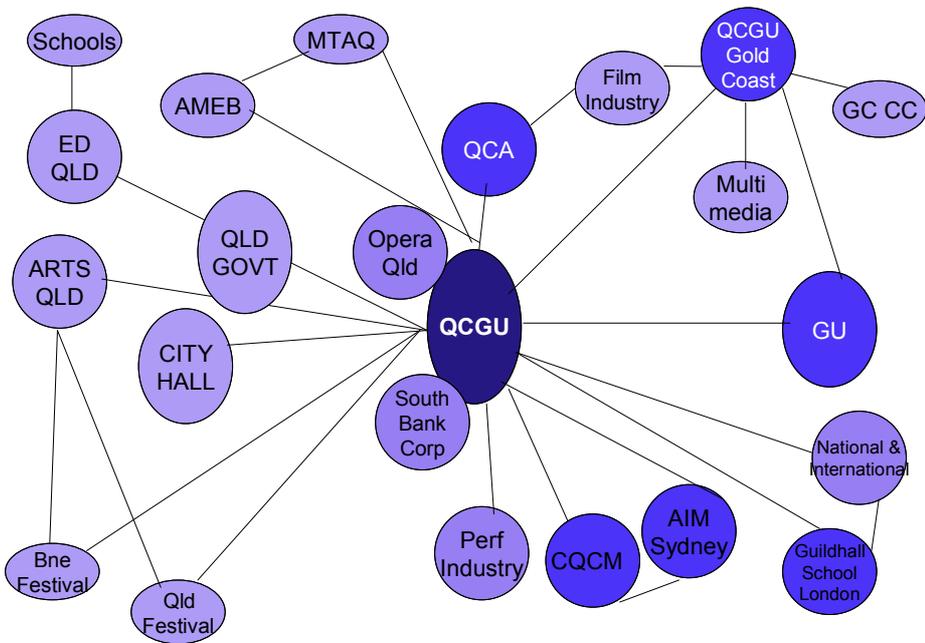
This research determined that context plays a significant part in the way an organisation perceives itself. Regardless of a number of family resemblances among some music institutions, the reality is that context is individual, and the philosophical character of the institution – its mindset – influences and is influenced by its particular context. And – in many cases - its particular leader.

The fact that *context*, and hence the *mindset*, may shift over time adds complexity to the conservatorium environment and the challenges it presents to its leaders.

For example, the context of Queensland Conservatorium in 1962:



differs in many ways from the more complex context of the QCGU in 2002:



The context of personal perspective is also significant. Leaders see some issues differently from subordinates, former leaders and other people closely aligned with the sector but outside the institution.

For those reasons, the data are displayed highlighting those differences in context when they appear.

Very early, I found the term “conservatorium” difficult to confine in its **contemporary** context. I eventually settled on those *tertiary music institutions with a primary focus on professional performance training, irrespective of their formal titles or the specific musical genres pursued.*

Within the post-secondary training sector, such institutions come in three main forms:

- Autonomous conservatoriums, with the traditional focus on training in performance
- Conservatoriums within a university setting
- University music departments

Although the ground is shifting somewhat, traditionally there has been a different mindset in the conservatorium from that in the university. When Sydney University and Sydney Conservatorium were arguing over amalgamation, composer Martin Wesley Smith summed up this difference very well. He explained that students of Sydney University objected to being absorbed

into an old-fashioned music academy where vigorous debate is almost unheard of. They want an education, not narrow, conservative, specialist training.

### The Australian context

In Australia in particular, the traditional conservatorium has been changed to such an extent as to bear only passing resemblance to the original European model. The Australian context has been shaped by forced amalgamations with universities, the result of the 1988 Higher Education Policy. Here, the conservatorium culture came face to face with that of the university. This wasn't entirely new – the first conservatoriums in Australia were established under the jurisdiction of universities. However, those were then left largely to their own devices.

Not so, post-amalgamation. Very few retained their independence within the university organization, many which did at first have since slowly fused with the university system. A few retain some individuality – for example, Sydney Conservatorium, Queensland Conservatorium, VCA – but their “conservatorium” identities have been blurred by university issues. For example, they offer academic as well as performance programs, and they are developing research alongside performance.

There is an important element of perspective present here. Whereas the early examples were positive, the forced marriages of 1991 were approached without any shift in mindset. Conservatoriums were cornered, making any adjustment more difficult. The alternative was to lose their government funding.

Conversely, where institutions in Europe and the UK have chosen to establish partnerships with universities, the perception is more positive.

Scholz believes that the conservatorium culture parallels that of the medieval model of a university, "a guild, where you have the masters, the apprentices, the workers, all together". Whilst the parallel does work, the **conservatorium focus on vocational activity is the root of the apprehension** behind most mergers. It is interesting that it is now academic pursuits – research – which are emerging as an essential focus in the pursuit of funds.

And that's not so easy:

The longer term effect of amalgamation has been to place the Conservatorium in a schizophrenic situation. The Conservatorium must compete against prestigious, powerful and entrenched university faculties for funding dollars that are traditionally tied to research, an activity outside the ambit of most staff within the music school. (Collins 219)

It may well be entirely appropriate that the traditional conservatorium model has been blurred by amalgamation. After all, the greater percentage of future musicians will not be employed in industries which look for traditional conservatorium graduates.

There's another side to amalgamation which is often lost in the discussion. We tend to overlook how the amalgamation process impacted on the universities as a whole. Across the university sector, there were generic changes to governance which affected all disciplines, not just music. Most of the complaints from leaders in music institutions echoed around the faculty offices of their parent universities. It seemed that what senior university management could not avoid, they "plainly chose to imitate" - devolving pressure for financial savings and targets for improved performance (Coaldrake and Stedman 10). But the devolution was in name only. The targets

became constraints which restrain the devolved manager's capacity to innovate or resist.

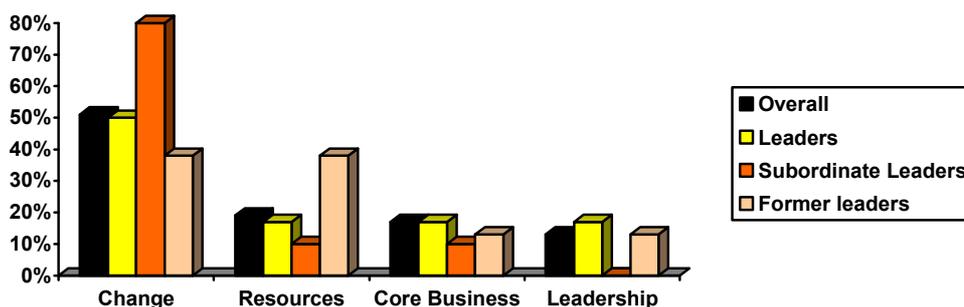
Leaders in Australian conservatoriums understand this - they rely on their individual universities to decide the worth of their conservatorium. Some music leaders have lost their senior management roles through amalgamation. A member of senior management has influence, participating in university policy decisions, including those related to budget. However, the loss of status didn't necessarily mean loss of responsibility.

For most, what has been lost is the power to effectively manage their responsibilities.

## The Challenges for Music Institutions

### Initial responses

Four highest initial responses in comparative rank order:



For all categories of informant, coping with change was the highest initial response. Leaders rank change at more than twice the impact of the other themes. Subordinate leaders rank change *extremely* high, confirming a greater impact on them. Their comments reflect a sense

of having no control over change, and they had no sympathy for their leaders. This might be because they want the job – some certainly indicated that they could do it better.

Former leaders consider change equal highest with locating and managing resources. It is tempting to assume that this suggests there was a different set of challenges in earlier times, but equally it might reflect the pragmatism which results from understanding the bigger picture.

## **1. The Issue of Change**

I have to be a person who is working for change, because it's clear that there are changes all the time. (Informant 25.1 1)

In a music institution, change manifests itself in many ways, not the least of which is through music itself. The immediate responses of informants in this study were focused on "the very concept of change itself" as the greatest challenge, *before* they elaborated on specific kinds of change – revealing a sense of being inundated by change in more than one of its aspects.

One informant put it very clearly:

I don't think I'm making any special claim about change being disruptive. I think change is coming, and will that be disruptive for this faculty? *Unbelievably* so! (Informant 51)

Maintaining a delicate balance between changing context, process, and content is a real test for music institutions in an environment which is constantly evolving to differing degrees in each setting. There are few ready-made prescriptions. Instead, there is a family of issues needing different resolutions. Facing a complex balancing act with little or not

training in change management, leaders find the challenge of change intense. For example, change

has become too upsetting: all the cuts, and also I'm just *tired!* ... I don't want to be here, I don't *like* what's happened, I don't like the direction it's going in. (Informant 29)

Without strategic planning, the direction may well be haphazard. In response to a survey, 80% of European leaders answered that they had a strategic plan, but only just over half of them reported that it was actually being applied. Pressured to meet change in a limited time, leaders are finding that changing things is

more and more difficult because there seems to be more and more things to do. There is an impression which is almost a delusion that because we can do some things more quickly, that we can do *more* things. (Hope)

At the same time, leaders are forced to cope with change without adequate preparation.

### **Change or you don't survive!**

All organisations eventually undergo conditions that threaten their very existence. Eventually most of them succumb. (Mintzberg and Westley)

Some music institutions have experienced threats to their survival, and in most cases, the threat has triggered a process of change.

Change or you don't survive ... sharpens the mind wonderfully, it ... washes away all the bits of irrelevance. (Ritterman)

"Turn it around or close it down" was the challenge issued to the School of Arts at Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education in 1984. The response of the school was to take a brave leap away from

the conventional, to become the first specialist pop music conservatorium. Now under the auspices of Southern Cross University, and regardless of a few tweaks around the edges, it remains strongly committed to the genre which saved it from closure.

The regional campus of Queensland Conservatorium was faced with closure in 1994 when the Brisbane campus was feeling the first financial impact of amalgamation with Griffith University. There was no 'turn it around' option, but an angry response from the local community kept it alive, reinvented as CQCM. In order to survive as a new conservatorium in the hunting grounds of its old parent, the CQCM radically changed its programs to focus on music theatre and jazz, with immediate success. In a subsequent reinvention, the CQCM initiated virtual programs to attract students who could not attend on campus full-time.

Strong leadership during testing times may be the reason an institution survives. A study in the USA found that the seven remaining conservatories have survived as a result of periodic great leadership:

The biggest single factor that allowed these conservatories to survive was chief leadership. Such leadership, often autocratic, strong, visionary, pulled each of the schools out of various critical debacles, often associated with serious financial circumstances. (Gandre)

The threat to survival can add a positive advantage to the challenge of change:

If you don't have that sort of knife-edge arrangement, then I think [change is] a more challenging task really ... helping people who are inherently fearful of change to see the connections between what they're doing and what is being suggested as a route forward takes time, takes belief, can be done too fast, and

if done too fast is likely to unravel. I don't believe in waiting forever. (Ritterman)

Gavin Henderson at Trinity College of Music took advantage of this knife-edge, when the College found itself without an inner-London home. In response to what he called "the threat of the gallows", he moved the College to Greenwich, a locality offering access to a wider community. It is also near to the Laban School of Dance, and built new programs in partnership with the dance school.

The relocation precipitated a "wipe the slate clean" mentality, where people "could recognize that we were not simply going to transpose old practice onto a new environment" (Henderson Interview). Henderson acknowledged that it wasn't quite so simple: "You can change the display in the shop window, but what goes on in the stock room out the back is much more difficult to change." In this case part of the problem related to the number of part-time staff, whose "loyalty to the vision will be peripheral", making it problematic for the leader to "pull the rest of the staff along". Such interplay between context, process and content is directly related to an organisation's capacity for change.

But, as Ritterman said, you can't wait around forever. There are examples of the university parent delaying a leadership change in their resident conservatorium in order to weaken its position, or that of its leader. Without leadership, an institution is at its most vulnerable, and there are glaring examples of such manipulation in some institutions. In the words of one informant,

For a while there we thought that we might be shut down – [with] no professor, [it's] a dangerous position to have, you don't have that advocate of that [level of] seniority. (Informant 33)

A number of restructures in and around the Elder Conservatorium of Music occurred during a 7-year period without an Elder Professor of Music. When Charles Bodman Rae was appointed to rebuild the reputation of the institution, he said that this period without leadership had reduced Elder's credibility:

Clearly there was a lot of damage done to the public perception [...] there was a lot of damage done interstate and internationally to the reputation of the school. (Interview)

He acknowledged that whilst Conservatorium staff understood the damage, they were powerless to fight a University which "had lost the plot." Bodman Rae therefore claimed his first challenge was "to regain ground that has been lost."

The threat to survival is a sub-theme which emerges from the interviews with startling frequency. Leaders were most sensitive to the issue, 42% of them expressing concern about a threat (former or future) to the continuing existence of their institution. The constant threat of merging with a larger organisation is ever present for some, as one leader describes in this list of challenges:

Having to keep my eye on the health of the affiliation [...]; having to work very hard lobbying that on a day-to-day basis whenever I'm in the University; [...] there's an increasing push from amongst my colleagues in the University to take us over. (Informant 37)

The leaders weren't alone: 40% of the external informants were worried about a potential threat. The level of concern among former leaders (25%) and subordinate leaders (20%) was much lower. One external informant described the consequences of closing a conservatorium thus:

Most music schools would react [to closure] [...] and you see that [after closure] there were many fewer musical projects [...] there are less people getting excited about music, less people to get lessons from the institute or private teachers, it's drying up. [sic] (R.Bakke, Interview)

A comparison by institutional type is interesting. Informants from autonomous conservatoria were less concerned about threats to survival than those from university conservatoria. And both groups were less concerned than informants from university music departments.

The figures are revealing. The only remaining autonomous conservatoria are the more established institutions in Europe and the USA, predominantly well-funded. It is hardly surprising that informants from this background would be less frequent in their indication of concern about threats.

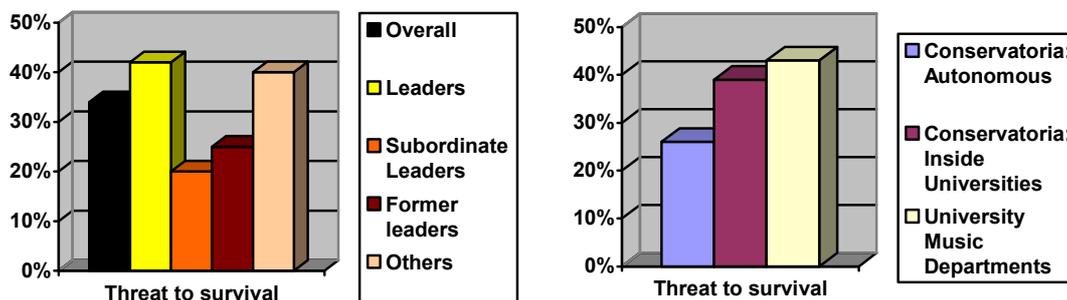
However, across the world most conservatoria within universities and university music departments are feeling the impact of changing governance and funding. Even the older more renowned ones among them have not escaped the implications. The comparison of data by institution is even more startling than that by individuals. It is worth noting here that the threat to survival is more acute among university music departments, perhaps reflecting concern about their university's merger with an external conservatorium.

#### **Threat to the survival of the conservatorium**

Source: Interview process

##### **a. Comparative response by individuals**

##### **b. Comparison by institution**



## 2. Money changes everything!

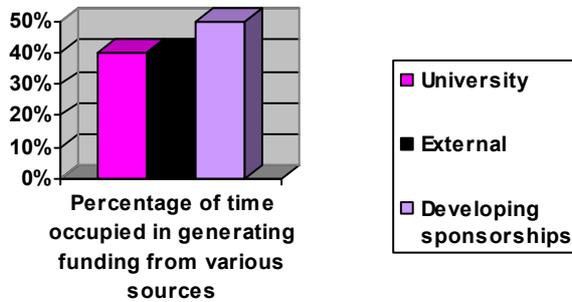
The need to locate and manage resources is common to music institutions around the world. Music institutions are by nature expensive because of their focus on individual and small group instruction, and the high cost of essential equipment and facilities. To be viable, they need financial stability, because it influences their capacity to attract quality student intakes and produce quality graduate outcomes.

Few music institutions accept that their income is sufficient to meet their goals. Fred Blanks once wrote that at Sydney Con the "busiest percussion instrument [was] its rattling begging bowl."

The interviews unlocked a high level of concern about funding. Leaders absorb the impact of financial pressure: leaders and former leaders ranked resourcing the institution second highest among their challenges. It ranked third among subordinates and others. In surveys conducted in 2002 and 2003, 100% of leaders reported that financial concerns were the greatest challenge to their institutions. The second of these surveys uncovered the detail of funding sources for Australian institutions as they were in 2003:

### Occupation with generating funding from various sources

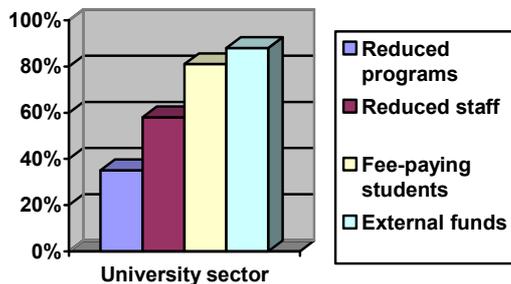
Source: Survey C, 2003



The result for leaders is considerable: heavy workloads make enlisting and maintaining support an unachievable goal. Consequently, leaders may face impractical decisions which will impact on the future of the institution, on the next generation of musicians, and hence on society. The decisions may require abandoning some programs in favour of others, despite the inevitable repercussions. By 2004 37% of Australian institutions had been forced to reduce programs as a result of financial constraints, and 58% had reduced staff:

### Effects of reduced funding on the Australian university music sector:

Source: Post-Secondary Music in Australia



Managing to survive inside the university sector has placed Australian music institutions in a situation which allows them less control over their funding:

The university's a much more regulated environment now than it was then [10 years ago]. You basically had a one-line budget. [...] There was no question of us not having enough funds. [...] But now it's all very, very regulated" (Informant 29).

University administrators now place more pressure on departmental leaders to manage within a business framework.

We are accountable to public funding, or individual funding more and more; [...] we've been caught up with this business model that's come more and more into universities. (Informant 34)

Despite references to a business model, and perhaps because they lack the power or experience, few Australian leaders take an entrepreneurial approach. As one said, "I'm not an entrepreneurial person. I just cannot go out and ask for money. I can't do it!" One of the exceptions is Greg Whateley who introduced the Virtual Conservatorium as his answer to difficult financial times at the CQCM.

Missing among the comments from European leaders is any mention of resources by those conservatoria which are making the most significant changes. Money is "very important but I'm not so thrilled by it," said Rineke Smilde when her attention was drawn to the fact that she had not mentioned finances among the challenges she faced (Interview 1).

Smilde was describing the process of change she brought about at NNC, and the obvious financial implications required comment. Her can-do attitude took a positive two-pronged approach to the way in which finances were applied to the needs of the NNC. First, she ensured that she had control of the budget, and then she found a way of maximising its potential to improve the level of teaching available by using flexible methods of employing the best teachers.

In one example, Smilde employed Joris Teepe, a successful Dutch jazz musician who had been working in New York for more than ten years. She supported his idea to spend part of each year in New York, and whilst in Groningen invite his American jazz colleagues to teach and perform at the NNC. Because there were positions available, the funding was adapted to this two-way practice rather than to a more formal appointment (Teepe, Interview). In this proactive approach, the small conservatorium quickly developed a reputation for their jazz program. :

That jazz program is now famous across Europe and the USA. At the AEC Congress in 2003, one of Teepe's students spoke in glowing terms about the program at NNC, saying it provides "constant inspiration". Boris Petrov is Bulgarian and has relocated to Groningen because of the jazz program's reputation. Smilde understands that quality is threatened by diminishing resources and has been flexible in her response.

It is not uncommon to have conservatoriums build their profiles on the reputations of past graduates. Current pressures on resourcing and delivery of programs have changed the environment to the extent that results of past kinds may now be difficult to achieve. An informant from one leading European conservatorium sounded a note of warning:

You can explain the very good results from the good old days, from those very big names who are going around the world, and we are so happy for. They studied in the 80s, the early 90s, when everything was much more easy and flexible, and **they could study as long as they wanted**, and they didn't finish their degrees and they started a career, [...]. And **nowadays we have limits**, the new system has changed totally. [...] there are enormous cuts and enormous rules and if you don't do

something in a given time then you lose your position. It's a different world [...] compared with those old days when everything was possible. [sic] (Informant 25)

Finding a balance between the traditional conservatorium expectations regarding quality of intake and changing artistic preferences is an inherent challenge. The shift away from traditional training means that music institutions like this one, which have based themselves on new models of training, do not have the same set of historical successes. They have to generate them in the present.

I think we still get just as talented students. I don't think that the experiences they come in with are quite as deep in the tradition that we have always looked for. I think their experiences are broader [...] [and] we may [have to] look at that talent in a different way so that we don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. (Chandler, Interview)

Clearly this position reflects a fundamental dilemma for the evolving conservatorium, that of finding a way to continue the elite level of training which has always been the core of the conservatorium culture, whilst at the same time meeting societal expectations of access and musical breadth.

Higher rates of participation in music making at pre-tertiary level exacerbates the problem, leaving a gulf between the experience of the potential student and the programs of many conservatoria. One informant referred to a degree of arrogance at the tertiary level which continues to dictate the intake criteria. His suggestion was to reposition the approach:

Repertoire will take care of itself. Banish repertoire, make them musicians first, work on their ears, make music. My own feeling is that we're afraid of that level of excellence and we want to

find a way that will touch that knowledge, to reduce that fear.  
(Informant 44)

### **Challenge 3: The shrinking core**

All leaders face the question of what constitutes appropriate training for future musicians facing a diversity of music futures. Most informants addressed the tension between traditional training and the contemporary reality.

The argument that Western classical music remains relevant but no longer central to music training presents contemporary music institutions with a real challenge. Speaking of this artistic dilemma, Finnish conductor Esa-Pekka Solonen says

Music academies the world over are nowadays producing top-rate players. But at the same time classical music has come to assume a somewhat more peripheral role than it used to have in society. (quoted in Kotilainen)

Sean Gregory from Guildhall School of Music puts it even more plainly:

The classical conservatorium culture is, of course, valuable and vibrant. It just won't do for the majority of people. Worse still, it alienates a huge number of potential music-making participants of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. ("Collaborative approaches...")

Johannes Johansson sees the dilemma in musical terms:

The challenge as I see it is that we have to find a way to keep the art of interpretation alive, but to liberate it from the structures that we learned in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries." (Johansson 2002)

Alongside classical music are many other options for musicians: pop music, world music, community music, sound art, collaborative practice, music technology, to name a few. Institutions need also to

consider industry relevance – the gulf between conservatorium and career – and the manner of delivery of their programs is no longer simply face-to-face. Predicting what graduates will need in forty years' time is impossible.

We do not *know* what they will need. We only may open [sic] them so that they are aware of the changes which are taking place. (Scholz)

Among the older conservatoria in Europe there has been a polarization of responses. For a few, "the weight of history ... [is] just always there." (Informant 14.1 1). Others, particularly amongst the former Eastern European states, have used European Union subsidies to update their programs in recent years. For some this has meant offering jazz and popular music programs. For others, merging with universities has made liberal arts units available to music students. A few are now questioning the outcome. Some want to develop 'Performance Gyms', aka conservatoria.

Many conservatoria continue to juggle the needs of the focused performer with those of a more eclectic profession. "The real problem is ... to have the students with ... 'many hats' (suited) to ... a lot of professions and a lot of experiences." (Informant 14.1 1) Trying to keep all the options viable at once absorbs time, energy, and precious resources. The Dean of Eastman School of Music (USA) is not alone in declaring "Keeping it relevant is something I think about every day, all day long." (Undercofler 2003)

Taking a non-traditional approach to music training immediately disassociates the institution from the traditional intake, with consequent advantages and disadvantages. There's an element of risk but also potential in being first in the market, a concept well

acknowledged in business, and even now in some universities (Lancaster 2004). Former Director of the Central Queensland Conservatorium of Music (CQCM), Greg Whateley, a believer in 'first-mover' advantage, which led CQCM along its e-Conservatorium path.

It's not always the larger music institutions which have the most forward-thinking leaders "because the big institutions are always the most difficult to move" (Informant 16.1 7). The same informant also stressed the need for conservatoria to specialise, for "certain institutions [to] have a strong emphasis on one thing," at the same time noting the importance for a crossover between genres because of current employment trends.

When it comes to specialization, most institutions augment traditional programs with new ones, only a few abandoning the old altogether. Very few institutions now exist for training in the Western classical tradition alone, even in the more traditional countries of Eastern Europe. Of the tertiary institutions in Australia, only one continues to ignore contemporary alternatives, but the principal rationale for doing so is related to physical limitations (Informant 51.1 1).

For some conservatoria, repositioning core business is a proven method of avoiding the threat of closure. Faced with the "shrinking core the traditional conservatory constitutes" (Informant 51), some institutions address a wider constituency or employ specialisation as a shield against reducing numbers. In some cities where a number of institutions compete for students of similar backgrounds, the issue of quality is ever present.

Among all the participants in this research, only one stood firmly in support of Western art music to the exclusion of all other genres, claiming that the challenge for him is

to ensure that the powers-that-be understand the difference between art music and pop music and that the former needs to be maintained and the latter not allowed in a tertiary sector which purports to train musicians of excellence. (Survey A, Response 1)

This questions the notion of excellence, implying that it is relevant only to traditional training in Western art forms. From the evidence generated through this research, this view represents a minority position. The comment is the more curious because the respondent's background is not in classical music.

#### **Challenge 4: Time: Becoming the institution**

The unrelenting pace of the role and constant preoccupation with work means that leaders never have the pleasure of knowing that their work is done (Gmelch and Miskin). The open-ended nature of parallel administrative, academic and artistic responsibilities impacts on the leader's personal time, causing consequent levels of stress. Where change is involved, the pressure is greater because "it costs so much energy to get rid of all the negative things, to get your school positive" (Smilde, Interview 1).

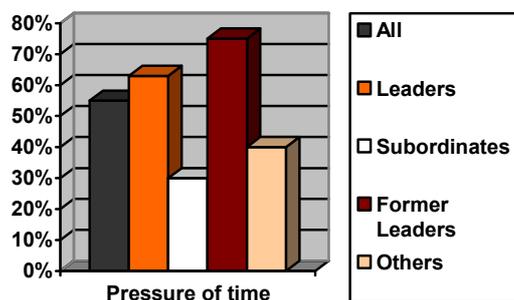
With so many different demands on them, leaders expressed despair about lack of time available to them to meet their responsibilities, and to maintain their own professional work. Many said they are forced to choose between their artistic or academic aspirations and leadership responsibilities for the duration of the appointment.

Overall, 55% of informants in the study were pressured for time: 63% of leaders and 75% of former leaders, 30% of subordinates and 40% of other informants. The distribution is worth noting: among autonomous conservatoria, 53% of respondents from autonomous conservatoria commented on issues related to time, and 44% of conservatoria situated within universities expressed similar concerns. Among the informants from university music departments, the response was markedly higher at 86%.

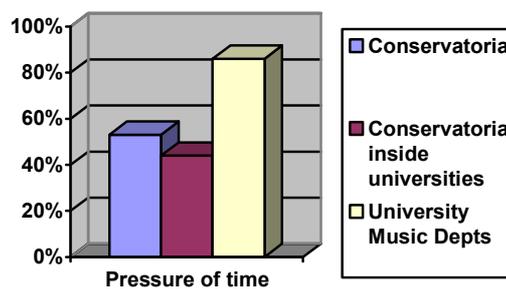
### Pressure of time

Source: Interview process

#### a. By individual informants



#### b. By institutional type



The preference for high-profile artists as leaders is part of the problem and the paradox is that once in the job, few can afford time to maintain their artistic work. Most contemporary leadership positions “lock the appointee into administration at a high level, basically disabling the person from keeping their skills at a cutting edge level” (Survey C, Response 1).

In the past, some have been absentee directors. At Sydney Conservatorium, John Hopkins made no adjustment to his outside

work, despite his claim that “you’ve got to be prepared to submerge a whole lot of your personal aims for the achievements of the whole” (Interview). “Widely remembered for his absences” (Collins), Hopkins justified his professional commitments as linking the institution to the professional world. “I thought it was very important to relate to the outside profession and therefore for myself to be active as a conductor,” he explained. Hopkins did admit that such an approach may not always be feasible, adding that while he considered it very important for the Director of the Conservatorium to be an active musician, “whether that’s possible these days to the same degree, I really don’t know” (Hopkins, Interview).

For most, it is not. Even leaders who sacrifice their professional work find themselves consumed by bureaucracy. For one, the challenge is “my inability to keep up with the ocean of administration. This [university] administration often purports to assist in quality control, but in reality acts like a brake left on in a moving car” (Survey A, Response 6). “To be a leader really must be the *main* activity,” said Laszlo Tihanyi, Director of the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest:

There are days when I am sitting in front of my computer at 12 o’clock at night [...] on the part of the Academy. And it was a day without any musical activities, without any composition work, without any solution for my conducting problems and so on, and it disturbs me some. (Interview)

Some even express a loss of professional identity. Principal of the Royal Academy of Music, Curtis Price declared that “your own ambitions, your own personality, disappear and you become the institution.” (Price, “Interview 1” 3).

On trying to maintain his own professional interests, one informant responded emphatically “it’s *impossible!* End of story.” (Informant 51.1), and another, on accepting leadership for a second term, said “Normally I never would have done it” (Scholtz 2002).

All argue that leaders need time for their own work. A rare few are unwavering in preferring to maintain their professional commitments instead of the leadership role. One leader insisted “If the job ever got me to the point where it caused me to stop playing, I’d quit!” (Informant 45).

Some note that, even having reduced their professional output, expectations remain so overwhelming that they resolve not to seek the role again: “I am not especially interested to become again a rector” (Buciu 2002). One of those who had temporarily assumed leadership in the absence of another said “I never wanted to be Head of Department. I always said nobody could pay me enough to do it.” (Gross 2003)

For some, it’s about time:

People expect fast responses, and ... it impedes on time for reflection. It has to do with time for planning, for strategic counsel. These things are more and more difficult because there seems to be more things to do. There is an impression which is almost a delusion that because we can do some things more quickly, then we can do more things. (Hope 1)

Others experience a sense of isolation resulting from responsibility:

Like any person who’s top of the tree, there are many times when you feel isolated. However much you discuss with your colleagues, there are always the points when it’s *your* decision, (Horsbrugh 1)

or resulting from the system of governance:

It's very isolating. The more so in an environment in which teamsmanship is discouraged in favour of top-down leadership styles. I've always been very consultative and believed that a good leader empowers their colleagues. That's hard to do in the modern university." (Informant 29.1 2)

Among the informants who expressed concern about pressures of time, there was no corresponding link to a concern for minutiae. Even leaders who indicate that they do not devote themselves to minute detail still insist that they have no time for their professional work, for example:

What I don't have time for is getting involved in the minutiae of individual departments [...] but what I do have time for, and I think it's essential I have time for, is the broad picture. [...] [But to do that] I had to put my own work, my own scholarship, my own writing of books aside [...]. That was a big sacrifice. (Price: Interview 1)

The undertone in these comments is the leaders' acceptance to varying degrees of their facilitative role, to the detriment of their own creative work, whether as performer, composer, conductor or scholar. From the NNC, Smilde believes that

you must feel the *urge* to facilitate for [your people]. [...] [Y]ou must *stand* for your school in an intelligent way, not with the elbows, you must be convincing not by what you say but by what you *show*. (Interview 1, vocal emphasis noted.

Referring to the importance of developing the institution and the artform, Scholz cautions that "the leader must have time thinking of it" [sic] (Interview).

## Challenge 5: Leadership

Thus, leaders consider the role of leadership to be one of the major challenges. Referring to the challenge of leading, Johansson said "Leaders are like ants on a log in a river, pretending that they are in command." (Interview). For many the problem is related to minimal preparation, and there were pleas for **appropriate** professional development and mentoring.

You're likely to damage the organisation unless you have some training in management. In the old days you became a director because you were a good player. But those aren't the qualities that you *need*. You need to be able to do all kinds of things – planning, trying to put up with all the crap, balance a budget, be able to do all the kind of things that you don't have to do as a musician. Just managing, managing a building. Very few people ... have the ability to do it. Most learn it on the job. (Informant 39)

Some leaders were quite critical of their capacity to cope with the administrative demands of the role. Perhaps the best summary was

I don't feel particularly a professional in any of the stuff I do here, but I've learned how to do it the best way I think I can ... but I haven't been trained to do it. (Informant 34.1 2)

Others were more specific:

I don't think I'm good at administration ... and I have a very low threshold for boredom. (Informant 29.1).

I had to learn patience... [and] what I still find difficult is that sometimes you have to let go ... you have to say to yourself 'this is enough for now'. (Smilde 2002)

I have a problem with giving people time to give their picture of things and wait. ... I can say [to myself] ... 'it's not a danger to be silent for 15 seconds - wait, wait'. (Johansson 6)

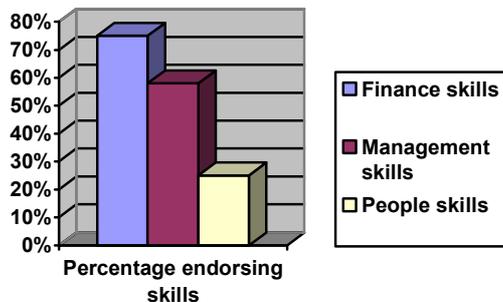
Few reported having experienced mentoring or training, but those who did confirmed its value. For example,

I have never undergone leadership training but I have been mentored very significantly. That's when I found out one of the aspects of leadership is being willing and able and desirous of mentoring future leadership. (Informant 40)

The 2002 Survey asked leaders what sort of professional development they considered necessary. The question was open-ended, and the responses revealed three trends: financial skills, management skills and people skills.

### **Professional Development needs of conservatorium leaders**

(Source: Survey of leaders in Australian music institutions, December 2002)



Subordinate leaders saw the priorities differently, completely reversing the emphasis and placing people skills first. Of one leader, a deputy said

he's a researcher and he's never run a big department, let alone a big institution. His instincts are not at all in terms of human relations. (Informant 14.1 4)

Another deputy spoke in similar terms of a different leader whom he said did not communicate well:

The consequences are that nobody knows what the priorities are ... this is extremely paralyzing." (Informant 15.1 10)

Comments on their colleagues' abilities:

I think there's certainly evidence that he isn't managing to keep the stress under control. (Informant 28.1 6)

He was an astonishing musician, ... [but] he was *terrible* in every other respect – he was *dictatorial*, he didn't *consult*, he did what he liked, he was *irrational*, he couldn't read a budget, and everything else was a total mess." (Informant 51.1 6)

### **Conclusions & Future research**

The challenges confronting conservatoriums and their leaders fall into the broad clusters of access, equity, community, and industry - labels which parallel major issues in the broader cultural policy. Indeed, some of the challenges are the direct outcome of government policy and/or community pressure. However the findings indicate that whilst there may be a few generalised circumstances and a shared vocabulary, such issues take individual forms in each conservatorium setting.

At the outset, I assumed that this project would confirm a direct link between cultural policy and conservatoria. Although it would appear that the link is there, it has been less discernible in this study than was expected.

For example, I had expected to find a clear intersection with changing conservatorium programs and the creative industry philosophy, but surprisingly, no reference was made to them in the interviews.

This wasn't because of sample excluded people from creative industries. Perhaps it is because conservatoriums are slow to respond to shifts in social preferences and changing cultural policy. The data implied that autonomous conservatoriums feel the impact of policy

related to arts funding. However, because most conservatoriums around the world now reside within the tertiary education sector, in most cases the impact of government policy comes primarily in the field of higher education funding and policy rather than cultural policy.

Other preliminary expectations were that there may be parallels between the various challenges and leader responses. This might have led to the development of predictive models to assist future leaders in their decision making. However, each situation is clearly quite idiosyncratic, and leadership is exercised in individualised contexts. Despite any similarities among the contexts, strategic choices are made according to individual circumstances.

The study showed a direct correlation between the background of a leader and the decisions made. This suggests it should be important to leader selection within conservatoriums. A leader's background informs the kinds of decisions and directions that are likely to be taken.

The big picture shows the contemporary conservatorium as a more equitable institution, allowing wider student access to a flattened hierarchy of musical genres. In this context, leaders have to justify, reimagine, and reimage the conservatorium. They have to position it in against the communities in which it resides and those industries it serves. There is no generalised form for this. Possible outcomes depend to a large extent on the capacity each institution has for shaping its profile, and the role allowed each leader in making such decisions. Governance might constrain or liberate institution and leader alike. In some situations, the corporate logic of rationalisation has affected the power of conservatorium leaders to respond to change.

The study found that there is no single set of instructions for how to lead a conservatorium. At best, there are situations with family resemblances, and for each of these situations the solution may be different depending on the nature and context of the institution. The situational resemblances between and among institutions are becoming less obvious and the solutions more diverse.

Adding to the complexity, each conservatorium may need different responses at different times, a factor with direct repercussions for leadership. In making choices in how the institution is positioned, a leader makes a distinctive mark on a conservatorium, particularly in its relation to external organisations.

Conservatorium leaders need to be prepared to adjust to a range of conditions at various times during the period of their leadership. They may need to adjust leadership style, and that has implications for professional development. Leaders need to be equipped to meet these expectations, understanding when and how to modify their actions in response to changing circumstances.

**This study has clear implications for future research.**

There is no predictable connection between challenge and response in conservatoriums so further research might analyse the success of various outcomes relative to the institutional setting.

Detailed case studies would lend themselves to further examination of new curricula in conservatoria:

- Which institutions are pursuing which genres of music, and how?

- What are the forms of tuition and assessment appropriate to such programs, how are they developed, and evaluated?
- Further examination of the role of individual tuition in the contemporary conservatorium curriculum, and its relevance amid evolving musical preferences.

Most evident is the need for further examination of different forms of leadership appropriate to the conservatorium. Future research might explore the suggestion that different leadership is needed at different times in the life of each institution. By correlating various leadership styles with different phases of an institution's development, or with different challenges confronting institutions, research might develop a more lucid understanding of how conservatorium leaders might manage such transitions, and the professional development which may be required to assist them in doing so.

In respect of leadership style, transformational leadership with its focus on the consideration given to individuals is clearly appropriate to many conservatorium contexts, and the element of vision is deemed important to leaders and followers alike. There is scope to further explore the significance of vision to conservatorium leadership in its various guises: vision as the outcomes of individual and shared vision, the strength of vision whether created or inherited, and the articulation of a vision across the conservatorium and into the community.

From among the complexities of conservatorium leadership, the process of decision making in conservatoria offers further scope for future research. In order to better understand the relationship

between governance and institutional positioning, it would be useful to analyse the processes linked to decision making in different leadership settings. Such research might provide a more direct connect between conservatorium leadership and cultural policy.

Conservatorium leaders have different levels of responsibility in different institutional contexts, and an analysis of the relationship between their leadership status and the results of their decision making may provide valuable evidence of the impact leaders have on their institutional outcomes.

## **Methodology**

The study is multi-disciplinary, connecting to varying degrees the borders of music, cultural and higher education policy, organisational theory, leadership and strategic decision making, all of which shape the conservatorium environment. This diversity complicated the project in a number of ways, not the least of which being that the major fields – cultural policy and leadership – each research in different ways, and write in different academic styles.

Because of this diversity, I deliberately ignored the issue of theory hoping it would go away. After completing the study, I went seeking something which identified with what I'd done. I latched onto constructivism, because it allowed for interpretation and the intrusion of personal perspective – essential with reliance on data from interviews and my own involvement as investigator. To account for potential bias, I found very useful the hermeneutics approach which confirms that

inherited bias or prejudice is not regarded as a characteristic or attribute that an interpreter must strive to get rid of ... in order to come to a 'clear' understanding. (Schwandt)

In my case, experience brought immediate rapport to the interview, and so I was honest in acknowledging my background and its potential interaction with the data. In fact I argued that my experience had enhanced the intensity of the data, but backed it up via other means. In order to test the data as it emerged, I used some quantitative instruments - surveys and questionnaires – to triangulate the findings. To further build a comprehensive response to the research problem, I developed some case examples as illustrations of some of the findings. To enhance the credibility of the study, I also presented the emerging

results to colleagues, encouraging discussion and testing out the validity over the period of the research.

Thankfully, my research wasn't testing a specific hypothesis, because all my hypotheses were wrong! What I aimed to do instead was to clarify the experiences of music institutions and their leaders. Because it focused on understanding the experiences rather than finding the cause, qualitative techniques gave the best fit and formed the greater part of the data collection via interviews.

Interviews were open-ended, beginning with the question "what are the challenges for your conservatorium and for you as leader?" and allowing informants to choose the direction of the discussion as active participants. Pre-interview research and thorough planning assisted with instantaneous processing of each informant's responses in content, sequence, and social dynamics.

The participants comprised 55 informants in three categories – leaders, former leaders, subordinates and other people directly related to the field. They were chosen primarily from Europe and Australia, although there was some representation from the USA. Although they were included in the pilot study, Asian institutions were not included in the research sample because it was evident from the pilot study that institutions in Asia face challenges of a different nature to those in the Western world.

There were some challenges of an ethical nature. Many of the informants were candid in expressing their views. Because this is a relatively small sector, anonymity therefore involved more

consideration than just withholding a name. Although a high percentage of informants chose to be identified, a great deal of care was taken to avoid any identifying reference to others who wished to remain anonymous.

The structure of the dissertation was the final hurdle. Because of the diversity of research, and having equal proportions of material in two academically different fields, the design of the dissertation became different from the norm.

The need to do this first became apparent when writing the literature review. I had what amounted to an extensive review of cultural and conservatorium-based literature, and an even more wide-ranging review of literature in leadership and organisational theory. Mixing the two together produced constant need for cross-referencing so it was decided to do two separate reviews.

That decision created a domino effect on the rest of the structure – the text didn't flow reasonably from one chapter to another. It seemed almost that I had two dissertations, and so the idea of two literature reviews emerged, each followed by the relevant data. But where do you put the methodology when you divide the literature reviews and the data?

So my dissertation has three parts, separating the process from the two distinct fields:

1. Approaching the study: an introductory chapter, followed by the methodology

2. The changing conservatorium context: definitions, a literature review, data and case examples related to the conservatorium and cultural policy
3. Leadership for changing times: a review of the leadership literature relative to the conservatorium context, and the data which follows from that. This section finishes with the implications for conservatorium leaders, and the conclusion.