Robbed or Released by the Pandemic? The Dynamics of Integrating and Situating Musician Identity Learning

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of musician identity learning. Identity is a significant driving-force behind many artistic vocations. However, identity may also pose challenges such as vulnerability, burnout and conflict of commitment. The paper focuses on musician identity, based on interviews with classical and rock musicians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyses reveal that the musicians are either in integrating or situating musician identity learning, two different processes discussed as dynamically interrelated and depending on life situation. The paper argues that breaks of normality accentuate challenges stemming from musician identity and that the proposed learning processes are responses to those challenges, which is previously under-explored. The paper concludes that many musicians or other artistic practitioners likely struggle to de-centralize their identity in order to foster a sustainable vocational career and personal growth, and that temporary career breaks may provide necessary relief and learning space.

Keywords Musician Identity · Learning · Integrated · Situated · Artistic Vocation · COVID-19

Introduction

Identity is a significant driving-force behind many artistic vocations. Whether forging professional careers or aiming to combine one's pursuit with other occupations, culture producers and performers invest a lot of themselves in their art (Stebbins, 1992, 2014). This investment demands personal identification of the practitioner to

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get devoted enough. In turn, being personally associated with what is produced also forms and reinforces the practitioner's identity (Hoedemaekers & Ybema, 2015). Somewhat curious, however, identity may also become hindering, put pressure, create fear of failing, disappointments and anxiety. Although responding to such challenges seems crucial to keep up motivation and proceed, these learning aspects of identity still seem under-explored. In this paper we seek to further our understanding of musician identity learning processes based on emotions expressed in interviews with musicians during the COVID-19 pandemic, when venues, theatres and festivals were shut down or heavily restricted. The paper contributes insights useful to scholars and practitioners within fields of artistic vocational learning and music education.

Musician identity strongly connects to a musician's motivation to keep making music (Bennett, 1980; Davidson & Burland, 2006; Karlsen, 2010; Kenny, 2016; Goodrich, 2019). Davidson and Burland (2006, p. 488) state that musician identity serves both as a protection against demotivating critique on a musician's life priorities, as well as links with "the drive and coping strategies of self-management around practice and performance style needed in order to succeed." Besides being a crucial prerequisite for participation in music-making, however, musician identity also constitutes a major outcome and reward from it. Studies show that musician identity becomes "realized" through involvement in music practices (Kingsbury, 1988; Smith, 2013; Hoedemaekers, 2018).

Previous research has approached musician identity in mainly two ways. Firstly, researchers have regarded musician identity as a self-categorization or self-understanding which makes music-making a legitimate past, present and/or future course of action (Davidson & Burland, 2006). The second approach treats musician identity more as various ways of identifying as musician in relation to other musicians (Randles, 2009). In other words, research has approached musician identity both as *to what extent am I a person who is into music-making?* and *how do I understand the kind of musician I am?* Often these approaches overlap since being and becoming a musician involves certain roles of musicianship including performer, teacher and scholar (Teko-Ahatefou, 2012). In this paper, we concentrate on identity as a live performing musician and how musicians' respond to the challenges it may pose.

Research has found three main challenges of musician identity – vulnerability, burnout and conflict of commitment. Wiggins (2011) describes how becoming one with performance makes musicians' vulnerable to self-critique and other's judgments. Behr (2015) points out that musicians even perceive lack of success as humiliating and degrading (see also Cohen, 1991). Frustration and disappointment from receiving too little in return from one's large emotional and material investments may also cause musicians to burnout and eventually give up music (Groce, 1991; Behr, 2015; Miller, 2018). Recent research on musicians during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that the widely shut down cultural life tends to amplify vulnerability (Cameron et al., 2022; Sefton & Sirek, 2023). Cameron et al. (2022), for instance, are not surprised to find that musicians' lack of affirming communities of music practices and appreciating audiences during the pandemic break increases their stress and impacts their well-being negatively.

A Conflict of commitment is an anxious and ambivalent state that may rise when the musician identity is too much or too little affirmed in relation to other compet-

ing identities (Berkaak, 1999; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 2004). Research has identified conflict of commitment between, for example, musician and music teacher (Russell, 2012), musician and student (Juuti & Littleton, 2012) musician and entrepreneur (Albinsson, 2018), musician and adulthood (Ramirez, 2013) and musician and parent (Teague & Smith, 2015). Teko-Ahatefou (2012) notes that music priorities, which often demand much time, resources and specific relationships, can cause guilt and be anxious to a musician who have significant relationships outside music and, thus, hold competing identities, such as partner or parent. During the pandemic many kinds of culture producers, and people in general, seem to have experienced increased conflicts of commitment. For example, Cosgrave (2021) shows how the break of business-as-usual has made freelance dancers start to question their identities with regard to their challenging working conditions and what they really love with their art. Moreover, Rudrum et al. (2022) point to that more time spent at home with loved ones sparked people's uncertainty and anxiety in relation to pre-pandemic orders, boundaries and priorities which, in consequence, became up in the air for renegotiation.

In order to keep up motivation for their pursuit musicians seem to respond to these challenges in different ways – making their musician identity more occupational or more personal. Ramirez (2013) argue that musicians strive to make her/his musician identity more congruent with other, perhaps contradictory identities. This, the author states, often means reframing the meaning of musicianship in a direction of a "serious" occupation, i.e. a legit work. Other researchers have described these processes as constructing music-making activities into something that legitimately can be set apart from and equally valued as – and, thus, protected from – other competing life areas such as family and leisure (White, 1983; Berkaak, 1999). White (1983), for instance, describes this process as a "compartmentalization". Similarly, Berkaak (1999, p. 41) observes that musicians tend to make an "ontological distinction between the aesthetic concerns and their ordinary, social lives." Further, Nørholm Lundin (2022a) notes that musicians strive to take control over their vulnerable working situation by practicing even harder, becoming more skilled and professional. Miller (2018) also observes that live performing musicians often need to frame music into an occupation in order to handle the ever-present risks of disappointment and burnout. Recently, Sefton and Sirek (2023) describe how musicians perceive the pandemic as a temporary loss of "the good life", which may be an indication of a loss of something they do, not a loss of themselves as persons.

Musicians also seem to respond to identity challenges by making musician identity even more central to one's person, self-defining and life-fulfilling (Reid et al., 1994; Smith, 2013, 2017; Stebbins, 2014). Smith (2017) argues that this means feeling deeply as a musician even while engaging in other life areas such as family, friends and work (see also Lópes-Íñiguez et al., 2022). Further, Teague and Smith (2015) indicate that a centralized musician identity have a potential to manage a work-life balance since music is framed as both work and life. Compared to the compartmentalization response above, this personalization may serve as another way of protecting identity against threats from contrasting views and expectations on one's art, for example, held by an employer. The freelance dancers during the pandemic may exemplify this response as they realize how the culture industry commercial-

ism clashes with their creative ideals and feel a new appraisal of their art, as well as stronger solidarity to their artistic community (Cosgrave, 2021).

It is still unclear, though, how these different responses relate to the ongoing challenges of musician identity. Once having an occupationalized or personalized musician identity, how do musicians then experience identity challenges? The responses to the challenges seem most likely as something ongoing. From our adult learning perspective, previous musician identity research somewhat seems to lack theoretical framing of these processes as a continuous formation, struggle and mastery, in other words, as learning. Moreover, the identity learning processes implied by previous research seem to go in different directions – making musicianship into an occupation to some extent seems to contrast making musicianship a central part of one's person. In addition, there seems to be little knowledge about what music life circumstances underpin what learning process and under what circumstances a musician may switch between various processes.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of musician identity learning. We explore and discuss these issues based on an assumption that identity is something constantly learned (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Moreover, we depart from that uncertain times of interruption and disjuncture triggers and intensifies people's learning processes which makes their deep-seated views and habits particularly visible to them (Bjursell, 2020). Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic seems as a suitable time for a study on live performing musicians' identity learning. This research is based on our analyses of the research question: *How are musicians involved in musician identity learning processes when live performances are involuntarily prevented?*

Based on the results, the paper discusses how we better may understand musicians and, followingly, other similar culture producing vocations and their conditions to keep up motivation and proceed with their pursuit. Among others, educators could benefit from insights into the identity learning processes articulated by the paper, not least how they may affect musicians during career pauses and involuntary breaks such as a pandemic. By investigating these processes during an actual pandemic, the study may contribute, not only to musician identity and vocational learning studies, but to pandemic research showing how interruption not only comes with new challenges – as focused in many previous studies – but accentuate challenges that artistic practitioners face continuously during their lifetime.

Identity Learning Processes

In this paper, we define the concept of identity as a meaning pattern located within a person's experiences which guides action and thought. Although expressed by an individual and as something relatively static at a given point, we regard identity as a social and dynamic phenomenon which people learn through ongoing participation and negotiation in the practices of social life (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Thunborg, 2016). A person's mastery and practicing of skills and knowledges, as well as reflections over her/himself as a practitioner, involve changed self-understanding in terms of who s/he becomes and what social categories s/he becomes part of. Wenger (1998) points out that identity always involves both identification with social

categories and a negotiability of what those categories mean in relation to a person's unique experiences – a middle way between the social and a person. Moreover, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that identity is inseparable from the meaning people ascribe their practices and, hence, becomes an important condition for further learning. In other words, people become motivated to participate and learn in practices, since their participation realize identity (see also Smith, 2013).

Further, in this paper we depart from an assumption that, for a person, identity emerges either on an integrated or a situated level (Bron & Thunborg, 2017). Integrated identity is related to a person's life and biography at large (Alheit, 2018). Bron and Thunborg (2017) connect the integrated level of identity to a person's ongoing strife to construct a tangible and coherent whole out of his/her personal biography and experiences (see also Mead, 1934). In addition, integrated identity not only integrates actual lived experiences but also involves imagination and visions of the future (Wenger, 1998). Thus, we understand identity on an integrated level as a centralized and dominant identity (Reid et al., 1994) which, in part, reconciles different life areas and experiences, but also reflects who a person wishes to be, thus, his/her self-project (Giddens, 1991). Identity on an integrated level follows a person though the various situations of everyday life and serves as an overarching sense of self.

In contrast, identity on a situated level is tied to specific situations and practices, in which the situated identity forms and actualizes. Further, we regard situated identities as multiple, volatile and relatively superficial (Bron & Thunborg, 2017; Malm, 2020). Although Wenger (1998) dislikes the term multiple identities our conceptualization here sits well with his idea about multi-membership. Bron and Thunborg (2017) argue that identities on a situated level mainly is about what a person does, not about who s/he is. On one hand, learning a situated identity comes with a potential for further participation and skill development within a specific and bounded context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). On the other hand, and in line with Akkerman and Bakker (2011), we in this paper regard situated identity learning as a person's development of a sensibility of contexts' boundaries, that is, in what practices and situations her/his skills and knowledges are valid and where they are not. Learning identity on a situated level, thus, involves a person's development of an ability to move between and adapt to different contexts – an ability tightly associated with personal growth (Wenger, 2000).

Method

The methodology used for this study is reminiscent of what Coupland (2015) terms storytelling – the musicians make sense of their experiences of events and themselves in qualitative semi-structured interviews. The interviewer's prompts guide the interviewees' reflections and free talk which generates data useful for interpreting the interviewees' conceptions, and for reconstructing the social settings in which the interviewees are embedded (see also Bron & Thunborg, 2015). Moreover, we depart from that storytelling involve biographical work in which ongoing learning processes are revealed through the teller's emotional expressions in his/her reflections over intriguing life issues, which, in turn, the interviewer may encourage by patient listen-

ing and continuous follow-up prompts that revolve around experiences and feelings (Bron & Thunborg, 2017).

We selected the musicians for the study among two different, assumed, live performance-oriented groups of Swedish musicians – classical musicians (CM) and rock musicians (RM). The CM we found through adverts at an interest organization's social media and the RM we found through personal social networks. In total, 22 musicians participated including 13 freelance CM, most self-employed, and nine RM, all in bands ranging from unknown to internationally touring.

All the interviewees were relatively experienced musicians aged between 30 and 60 where working years among the CM ranged between 5 and 35 years, and band experience among the RM ranged between 10 and 35 years. Of the 22 participants, 14 were women and eight were men. Among the CM there were most women, while there were six men and three women among the RM. This, to some extent mirrors the gender divide in that RM is mostly male (Clawson, 1999; Miller, 2018) while the CM, at least according to traditional stereotypes and expectations, are foremost female (Green, 1997). There are some indications, that CM without steady positions (freelancers) are predominantly female but there is no statistics (Nørholm Lundin, 2022a). All of the musicians were located in large cities, apart from one of the CM who had moved to a small-town. Based on the situation before the pandemic a smaller share of the CM was based in their own small-scale ensembles and projects, while larger share of the CM had long-term gigs and positions in institutional settings such as symphony orchestras or large ensembles and only one of them held a permanent position. The majority of the CM were combining long-term gigs with short-term gigs of various kinds including symphony orchestras, private theatres, military bands and church gigs. Only four of the 13 CM had other jobs or studies beside the music, while it was eight of nine for the RM. The one of the RM that did not have any other occupation was on long-term leave from a regular job because of her current career aspiration with her band.

The main instruments among the CM were strings, wind and voice, playing music from the subgenres of contemporary, classical, opera, musical and "utility music"'. The RM play rock band instruments such as electric guitars, drum kit and vocals, performing music from subgenres including pop, metal and punk. We conducted 21 interviews of which 20 were individual and one in a group of two musicians at a time (RM 1 and RM 2).

Table 1 provides basic information on each interview and interviewee including some general facts about the interviewees' pre-pandemic musical activities. The basic information varies between CM and RM depending on how their music activities are built. Among the CM what "matters" is the quantity and quality of gigs and contracts, working at the institutions (symphony orchestras, opera choirs and large ensembles) or in the free cultural life (private theatres, officially funded projects, churches, small ensembles/projects). What matters among the RM are similarly the quantity and quality of activities, but in other settings such as festivals, recordings and so on.

All interviews took place online via Zoom in early 2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic had been around for approximately one year. At the time, although Sweden did not apply a full-scale lockdown as was the case in many other parts of the world,

Table 1 Basic information on the interviewees and their pre-pandemic situation

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Musical orientation
CM 1	Male	45+	Own groups and projects within the free cultural life, freelancer at the institutions.
CM 2	Female	50+	Freelancer at the institutions.
CM 3	Female	35+	Freelancer at the institutions + other occupation.
CM 4	Female	40+	Freelancer at the institutions + other occupation.
CM 5	Female	30+	Freelancer at the institutions + other occupation.
CM 6	Female	40+	Freelancer at the institutions, re-orientation towards small projects/groups + other occupation.
CM 7	Female	30+	Freelancer at the institutions.
CM 8	Male	45+	Freelancer at the institutions.
CM 9	Female	30+	Permanent position + freelancer at the institutions.
CM 10	Female	40+	Own groups and projects, and broad collaborations within the free cultural life.
CM 11	Female	55+	Freelancer at the institutions.
CM 12	Female	35+	Freelancer at the institutions.
CM 13	Female	40+	Freelancer at the institutions.
RM 1	Female	50+	Both of them: In a band that has played the biggest festivals in its genre, done mostly international tours, and released a few albums + other occupation.
RM 2 (group interview)	Male	40+	
RM 3	Male	40+	In a band that has released records and toured internationally at small venues on three continents + other occupation.
RM 4	Male	50+	In a cover band that partly makes a living from its music and occasionally tours internationally + other occupation.
RM 5	Female	35+	In an internationally touring band that has released a number of records and normally makes a living from its music.
RM 6	Male	30+	In an unknown and local band that mostly rehearses and has not played live + other occupation.
RM 7	Male	50+	In a band that has played the biggest festival in its genre, done national tours, one international tour, and released a few albums + other occupation.
RM 8	Female	30+	In the same band and has the same conditions as RM 1 och 2 (see above).
RM 9	Male	30+	In a local and mostly unknown band that has played live a few times + other occupation.

sharp restrictions prevented most physical meetings with a paying audience (Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis, 2021). This has presented musicians with financial and social challenges, just to mention some. The author TM approached and interviewed the RM and the author ANL approached and interviewed the CM. The interviews aimed at bringing fourth the interviewees' ways of dealing with life as a musician, before, during and after the pandemic. Typical questions were: What does your normal music life look like, and what has changed during the pandemic? What in your current music activities, if any, is most stimulating and motivating to you? What is the most important thing you take with you after the pandemic, any new insights or thoughts about your previous, current and future musical life? In order to reveal the learning processes the interviewees currently are involved in, follow-up prompts were added in the manner of: How does this feel? What do you feel is most challenging with that? With permission from the interviewees, the audio was digitally

recorded. The interviews lasted for in average 1,7 h and were transcribed and lightly edited to improve readability.

A thematic template analysis informed our repeated read-throughs and categorizations of the data (King & Brooks, 2018). First, taking emotional states as a sensitizing concept for revealing ongoing learning processes (Bron & Thunborg, 2015, 2017) we scanned data for descriptions of how the interviewees feel about their music life and themselves as musicians in it, especially with regard to the current pandemic situation. As variations within the theme of emotional states emerged, we then created and named subthemes for various emotional states. The subthemes formed a template against which we coded the entire material further, which, in turn, also fine-tuned the subthemes in terms of their meaning, naming and distinction from each other. Most interviewees, to some extent and at some point, gave both negative and positive emotional expressions with regard to the pandemic break. We interpreted this as their efforts to find ways around strong negative feelings by exploring even positive aspects of the situation. Conversely, some interviewees could be ashamed over having positive feelings, and thus stated that the break was bad and boring. This latter kind of statements may seem particularly socially legitimate among CM, where there is a prevailing discourse about "real musicians" who sees music as "meaning of life" and "a calling" (Nørholm Lundin, 2022a). Acknowledging a certain degree of ambivalence to these issues, however, our careful interpretation suggests that each of the interviewees tend to lean stronger towards one of the identified emotional states – which is the one we have regarded as the significant one. Once stabilized, some subthemes fell into two main categories (robbed/released) with three emotional states in each (robbed: emptiness, apathy, anxiety; released: gratitude, calm, relief). Lastly, we interpreted these two categories theoretically as expressions of two different, and somewhat contradictory identity learning processes (integrating/situating) among the interviewees.

We observed ethical considerations throughout the research processes in order to avoid harming the participants. The interviews took place under informed consent and to preserve anonymity we have obscured the interviewees' exact ages, real names and other information which might disclose them. Further, we have translated the selected interview excerpts below into English and made every effort to present the interviewees as fair as possible according to their views and experiences.

Two Identity Learning Processes During the Pandemic

Our analyses of the empirical material indicate that the studied musicians mostly feel either robbed or released by the pandemic break. Making use of Bron and Thunborg's (2017) distinction between integrated and situated levels of identity, we have interpreted our identified emotional states as expressions of two different identity learning processes.

Robbed by the Pandemic: Integrating Musician Identity Learning

The majority of the studied musicians seem to feel robbed of the life that comes with gigs, rehearsals and so on. These musicians all appear to wish that music could be

a bigger part of their lives. In present times, they seem rather discontent with their music life which they seem to regard as threatened – they have become afraid to lose it, and, hence, perhaps, to lose themselves. For instance, RM 3 says that "instead of seeing the pandemic as an opportunity to do something new, I've rather felt deprived of what you're doing." The "robbed" musicians express various emotional states including emptiness, apathy and anxiety which may be seen as different indications of one and the same integrating musician identity learning process. In order to preserve and protect the music, these integrating musicians respond by a process of reconciling themselves as someone for whom music constitutes a dominant and defining part. In this learning process, they form and reinforce a musician identity that serves to "take back" and protect what they experience as robbed from them.

In integrating musician identity learning, a loss one's music life becomes a loss of oneself – an emptiness. Musicians involved in this process state that music is not just something you do, it is something "one is so close to" (CM 11) and "a calling, you don't quit just like that" (CM 1). When music is lost, they sense clearer what they really are – e.g. a singer: "am I still a singer, if I don't sing?" (CM 12). Moreover, there is a sense that nothing else is as fun as music, and it's difficult to see oneself with another occupation (CM 13). Thus, these CM feel robbed of a great deal of themselves – a feeling of emptiness which is also represented among the RM. RM 3 has barely no music activities at all going on during the pandemic, which has made him realize how big and important part of himself that has been lost because of the lock-downs:

> When this rather important component is involuntarily taken away from you for an entire year, you realize that it's a big part of who I am. This means a lot to me, it's not just a fun hobby on the side but something that affects my life a lot and maybe to some extent defines who I am. (RM 3)

Discovery of what is lost makes musicians learn that what is lost actually is something essential to oneself, which, paradoxically enough, makes some of them respond with apathy. In this case, integrating musician identity serves to save one's music life intellectually and emotionally for the future. Heavily delimited music practices, then, only reminds of a declining music life which, in response, calls out apathy and lost motivation. This is expressed by CM 12 as "everything loses in importance, it doesn't matter what I do". For some musicians, it's hard to stay motivated and creative when there are no concrete goals. For example, RM 9 describes how his band have become stagnant and passive, and he, himself have become unwilling to practice his instrument:

> If there is a gig, you have that to aim for and it becomes easier to decide on a repertoire and practice it. Then it also becomes more fun to pick up the instrument and practice by yourself. But when I don't have anything in front of me, it's hard to find motivation. (RM 9)

For some of the CM apathy and lost motivation has grown gradually throughout the pandemic as a result of repeated cycles of hopes for opened up cultural life,

and disappointments from new restrictions. Initially, the pandemic was thought of as something that would last for just a shorter period of time. Now, after one year, the back-and-forth situation with better time periods of bookings followed by recurring cancellations, contributes to the musicians' decreasing motivation. CM 11 states that it is "almost no point as gigs will probably get cancelled anyways". For CM 2 times of hopes for gig possibilities gave her "energy to practice the instrument" and thoughts like "now I need to get myself together, being goal-oriented", and then, when it all got cancelled she "took a 'holiday'". This back-and-forth situation is, thus, was experienced as increasingly tiresome – "when one had built a sense of hope, the set-back was almost worse than when there was a total stop" (CM 8).

For some musicians, and mainly CM, integrating musician identity learning is expressed by starting to be anxious over not being able to stay in shape technically and losing control over careers that have been built for a long time. Normally, the CM embody the practice of staying in shape, individually and at the gigs. During the pandemic, however, they are cut off from rehearsal rooms since they neither have access to localities at live venues, nor are able to rehearse easily at home where their families often work. Staying in shape is a stress factor for the CM since it seems to be a golden rule to always be ready if someone calls about a gig – you may only get one chance. Some musicians perceive it as impossible to pause their careers, as one need to stay in shape if someone calls about a gig "which they are not likely to do, but…" (CM 11). As CM 7 says: "I have no idea how I will be doing, if I will be considered to be relevant for gigs or if I will be remembered at all".

The integrating CM deal with increased doubts about the possibilities for sustainable and dignified careers. They ponder about things such as how much they have to invest again – in time and efforts re-building careers and networks – to be able to be out there, visible and flawless. Will they be thrown back in time and place, to when they were at music college, laying the foundations for their careers? It is like "corona somehow 'pulled the plug'" (CM 5).

Also, for the RM, an integrating identity learning process is expressed by a new felt anxiety of not being "out there". For example, RM 7 reports that "a financial source of income in gigs and selling merch and records, as well as the opportunity to build on the fan base, disappeared". And, similar to the CM, some RM express worries about the technical shape they will be in after the pandemic. RM 1 has "realized that you've become very rusty on the old songs when you don't keep them going as much, playing live and so on" and RM 9 feels that during the pandemic "it's about having some kind of activity and keeping the songs reasonably fresh, so that it won't be too heavy to get started later". However, in comparison to the CM, potentially lost commercial status and technical shape do not seem to generate as much anxiety. Instead, their integrating identity learning process makes them anxious about losing the band itself – their prime vehicle for music-making and career:

> At times you have wondered if we still have a band or not, you don't know that. Then you've written some tentative messages in Messenger just to stay on the radar, try to chat and joke a little in general. (RM 3)

For RM 7, integrating identity learning is expressed in his increased worries about what would happen if there was a new pandemic following the current one, in the midst of record releases and touring: "I'm not sure that all members would be able to carry on then and 'uh, now I'm done, now I'll do something else', that's my worry."

Taken together, most of the CM and some half of the RM seem to be involved in an integrating identity learning process, which, in part, may be understood in the light of the two genres' different conditions during the pandemic. In general, RM seem to have more opportunities to somewhat keep up music-making and their contacts with bandmates and fans, while many of the CM and particularly those working in traditional and large settings as symphony orchestras, are on their own without possibilities to stay active, in touch or in the loop. For many integrating CM, thus, the worth of being active in creative communities, such as small-scale ensembles and projects have become more apparent. In all, we have identified an integrating identity learning processes mainly through musicians' expressions of emptiness, apathy and anxiety. Regarding anxiety, the two genres of musicians differ in that the CM mostly feel anxious about losing their technical shape, career and status, while the RM mainly feel anxious about losing their bands. However, a band may in many cases be seen as a rock musician's vehicle and context for technical shape, career and status (Bennett, 1980).

Released by the Pandemic: Situating Musician Identity Learning

Other musicians in the study seem to feel mostly released from their music life. Over all, these musicians are rather satisfied with their music lives at the moment. In a way, the pandemic break appears to have made them come to a deepened insight that music is just one part of them – a part which have been relatively dominating and consuming for many years – and that there are other valuable life areas that they might have neglected so far. Such areas may include family, friends and other interests, but also the situation of undemanding and pure music enjoyment. The "released" musicians express gratitude, calm and relief, states we have interpreted as indicative of a situating identity learning process. In this learning process, these musicians learn to become like "everyone else", demystifying and rationalizing music-making as one special area of work, interest or even hobby.

Some of the situating musicians experience a new-felt gratitude towards things that they previously have taken-for-granted. The social settings for music activities are among such things. CM 6 experiences that the pandemic initially moved her away from both playing and her music friends and colleagues. Then, when eventually returning to her old music settings, she felt a new awareness of what she loves with the music part of her life:

> It was for a year or something, that, unnoticed, both my confidence and identity as a musician disappeared. But then, when I met with some of my old colleagues again, it was, oh right, it can feel like this too. All response, mutual understanding, respect and feelings of being competent at something highly appreciated. I, then, discovered in an aha experience that I had moved away from seeing myself as a musician. (CM 6)

The situating identity learning process is also expressed by the RM in their feelings of a somewhat needed distance from the music life which have given them a unique chance to reflect upon all the positive meaning music have for them. RM 5 discovers how everyday band life somewhat has made the very existence of the band taken-for-granted. The pandemic break made her realize that the band itself is nothing given:

> The band is dependent on us meeting and seeing each other and making music together and when we don't, we don't really have much… raison d'être [chuckles]. But above all, what I have learned about us as a band, which I didn't think before, is that the band actually is quite fragile. (RM 5)

Another expression of this de-centralizing identity learning process is reflections on the meaning of friendship and the persons behind the mere music collegialities. For RM 5, these reflections have generated a gratitude for the bandmates as persons and for having them in her life. In a way, the relationships get released from the strict musical context: "Peculiarities that you can get annoyed with in each other when you meet a lot are just kind of cute and fun now [chuckles]". To intensely touring and working musicians the joy about music life is easily lost in everyday aspiration and pressure. To them, the pandemic break has come as a needed time for stepping back to remember and re-conquer the positive feelings that drove them into music life in the first place. RM 8 expresses a process of being released from everyday mindless grind work, formulating a seemingly newfound appreciation for having the possibility to take part of a joyful life of music and community:

> I think this break also had made me appreciate getting out and play more, that whole thing, the whole music sphere and meeting others, yeah, the whole music community. I long to feel that joy of being on stage again and hanging out with the whole band and having fun together. (RM 8)

For some CM, their involvement in a situating identity learning process is expressed by gratitude towards being able to work in professional settings, and, hence, being able to distinguish music as an occupational, bounded and, therefore, secured part of their life. CM with some kind of steady employment in orchestras and likewise, express newly won insights into how lucky they are in relation to others with no income during these challenging times. The pandemic break has made these CM start to realize how much they love their job and how privileged they are to be able to immerse themselves into what they are already very good at. Other expressions of a situating and distancing learning process among both genres of musicians, are to feel lucky to be able to practice at all during these circumstances. Distancing from the taken-for-grated of music-making have made them, in a new way, appreciate the limited time they actually are able to make music:

> I have had the time to start missing it and understand how boring it is without, well… you feel the love a little. I just enjoy, I get to live for the moment and appreciate being there and then and how incredibly good it sounds. (RM 6)

Moreover, situating musician identity learning is expressed by a calm over not having to keep up with the normally high pace of everyday music career activities. Some of the situating CM describe the pandemic situation as a golden chance of taking a pause, as no one is working and there is no need to be stressed. The distancing from the music career is also evident through development of a new view of music as something you do besides other things, for example, bread-and-butter jobs, studies, hobbies and family life.

The basic condition of music life is often about working during evenings and weekends. During ordinary circumstances, this constitutes some challenges for many musicians with regard to having family and friends outside of music life. For RM 4 the pandemic break came with a situating identity learning process resulting in a letting go of a life that used to be routinized around constantly being away. He expresses a sense of calm from being involved in an identity learning processes in which he discovers life values other than music:

> It's also nice to be at home with the family, it's nice to see the kids on the weekends, like having a Friday family night, eating tacos. I've never really lived that life, so I think it's great [laughs]. (RM 4)

For RM 8, the break also came with a calm from the everyday career aspiration pressure and accentuated insights about other things than music, equally important in life. To some musicians, paradoxically enough, music per se may be a downplayed area while being an aspiring musician. RM 2, who is in the same band as RM 8 above, likewise expresses a calm from cancelled career obligations of touring, practicing and keeping up the physical abilities. In contrast to his bandmate, however, this calm sparks in him new lust and energy for music-making:

> We got an opportunity to completely focus on new material, to sit in the studio and make songs. When you're out playing all the time, a lot of focus is taken away from being creative and you have to go into match mode, you know [chuckles]. (RM 2)

This quote illustrates how RM 2's situating identity learning process involves new appreciation of not having to be away touring all the time. Now when music does not consume all of his awake hours, he discovers what parts he loves the most about music: sitting in a studio, by himself or with a few bandmates, producing new music, undemanding and playful – as a hobby alongside other parts of life.

When being involved in situating musician identity learning the personal musical relationships and social contexts are up in the air. Some musicians express this process by feeling rather relieved not having to focus on, and committing to, old and worn band relationships or other disturbing elements of music life. The break of business-as-usual may come as a welcomed relief from much of the energy consuming everyday social relations.

In summary, we have found a situating identity learning process among both genres of musicians but mainly among the RM. We have identified this learning process through the musicians' expressions of gratitude, calm, and relief. However, there

are some differences between the genres regarding gratitude and relief. The situating CM mainly express gratitude for being able to work professionally with music, while the situating RM mainly are grateful for having their bands and fans. Moreover, relief is mostly expressed among the RM, namely relief from worn and tearing internal band relationships.

The Dynamics of Integrating and Situating Musician Identity Learning

The pandemic has indeed triggered and made visible learning processes among performing musicians (cf. Bjursell, 2020). In our analyses above we have identified that musicians appear to be involved in two different musician identity learning processes when live performances are involuntarily prevented. However, our identified processes do not seem unique to the pandemic situation, but rather reflect two different general musician identity learning processes. Discussed next are these two processes' various conditions and implications. Moreover, based on our general impression from literature and the interviewees' music life stories, we suggest that there is likely a certain measure of dynamics between the two processes. Hence, these two identity learning processes, what triggers them and their relation to each other – underexplored issues in previous research – may serve as this paper's main contribution.

Integrating musician identity learning may be seen in full analogy with forming a musician identity which Reid et al. (1994), Smith (2013) and others previously have regarded as centralized, self-defining and life-fulfilling. In short, this means that being a musician becomes a central part of a musician's person and general self-experience. However, there is still relatively little known about under what circumstances such learning process triggers. In the light of present study, and with some support in Teague and Smith (2015), Cosgrave (2021) and Rudrum et al. (2022), we suggest that an integrating identity learning process foremost triggers as a response to conflicts of commitment from too little music priority (cf. Golden-Biddle & Rao, 2004). The integrating musicians in present study experience amplified conflicts of commitment from the new imbalance between various life areas during the pandemic. For many of these musicians it is likely that family and day job concerns becomes increasing parts of their existence (cf. Rudrum et al., 2022). Hence, these musicians' response becomes a learning process in which music life – and not family life, as in Rudrum et al. (2022) – gets protected from vanishing away by making music an integrating whole of the person. This process is reminiscent of Teague and Smith's (2015) depicting of musicians' handling of their work-life balance challenges, such as being both musician and parent, by letting life become music – music is who one is and, therefore, no other commitments or significant relationships can threat it.

The general implications for integrating musician identity include that it may increase and further cultivate a musician's dedication and motivation to participate in music practices and to develop further musically. In the pandemic situation, this learning process may to some degree motivate the musicians to outwait the crisis and intellectually and emotionally centralize a conception of music as a calling and something sustainable. However, integrating one's musician identity eventually may pose new challenges, and most reasonably increased vulnerability and risk of burnout, as Wiggins (2011), Miller (2018) and others have indicated.

The situating identity learning process means that musician identity becomes decentralized, also described as a compartmentalization, which to some extent expands on White (1983), Berkaak (1999), Russell (2012) and others. Put briefly, the situating process involves actualizing musician identity more temporary and situation-wise when engaging in music life and its associated activities. In this process, music is framed even more as a form of occupation alongside other occupations and commitments in life (cf. Ramirez, 2013). The situating musicians in the study seem to us as responding to pre-pandemic experiences of consuming pressure in relation to music performance and career aspiration, which the pandemic break has made them more aware of (cf. Cameron et al., 2022; Sefton & Sirek, 2023). These musicians seem in a process of taking a step back and realizing that it is more to life than just music and that it may be most healthy and sustainable for them to frame music as an occupation with varying degree of career aspiration that one may step in and out of. Previous research to some extent implies that situating identity learning processes may be triggered by vulnerability (Nørholm Lundin, 2022b; Sefton & Sirek, 2023), burnout (Miller, 2018), as well as by conflicts of commitment (e.g. White, 1983; Berkaak, 1999; Ramirez, 2013). With regard to the latter, present study gives us at hand that situating identity learning mostly seems to be triggered by conflicts of commitment from too much music in life, which contrasts the conflicts of commitment from too little music, as described above.

The learning process of situating musician identity associates with development of a sensibility of the boundaries of the music life context (cf. Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). In turn, this means being able to combine and move between a variety of different contexts and responsibilities, such as day jobs, family, friends and other interests. Therefore, learning musician identity alongside other more or less equally important identities in a musician's life have a potential of becoming a kind of personal growth (cf. Wenger, 2000). Although a musician identity on a situated level may be very precious and important to a musician, it is also relatively superficial (Bron & Thunborg, 2017). Without a deeper personal identification, music-making run the risk of eventually becoming reduced into extra-musical features such as business, technique or social relations, which, in turn, might lead to lost creativity, motivation and appreciation of music in all. In addition, situating musician identity learning is all-dependent on continuous participation in music life practices, which makes it volatile. If situating musicians do not maintain their music practices to a certain degree, music-making easily vanishes from the array of things in their lives, and so do all reasons and motives for doing it. This disturbance of the balance of the array of identities may cause conflicts of commitment from too little music, as we have identified among some of the musicians in present study.

Finally, we propose that the presence of two different identity learning processes among different musicians in various music life situations, may be indicative of that the identified processes to some extent may be related to each other over time. Although beyond the scope of present study, we may expect that musicians, as well as practitioners of other similar artistic vocations are involved in integrating identity learning during a certain time period, after which they might transition into a new era of more situating identity learning, or vice versa, back and forth slowly in one or perhaps several cycles throughout their lives. Based on our reasoning in this paper, it

is possible to understand transitions between the two different processes as a response to a situation in which the challenges which inevitably comes with identity becoming too unbearable and acute – which may be the case in changing personal life situation, intensified career aspiration, lack of success or breaks of business-as-usual.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed that musician identity learning processes are ongoing and dynamic. Musicians may learn to feel as a "musician" on either an integrated or a situated level of identity during different times and depending on current life situations and identities. Integrating musician identity learning comes with certain challenges that must be kept to a minimum in order to keep motivated and to proceed. If these challenges get accentuated enough, as they are likely to do during breaks of normal practices, such as prevented live performance during the COVID-19 pandemic, musicians respond to them by a situating musician identity learning process. Similarly, situating musician identity learning has its challenges which, if too prominent, have the potential of triggering an integrating learning process. Further, this study, with some caution, provides indications of that integrating musician identity learning is most common among musicians who are in a situation in which they need to combine their music activities excessively with other occupations and struggle for the legitimacy of their pursuit, like many musicians do. Conversely, situating musician identity learning seems more common when a musician regardless of genre is professionally established and have music as a highly legit work in his/her life.

Finally, we believe that many artistic performers or other specialized adult practitioners strive to delimit their practitioner identity to the situated form since it may seem to promise sustainability, distancing and a healthy view on one's vocation – insights valuable to, not least, music and other artistic vocation educators. However, there is seldom time for such learning processes in these practitioners' continuous strife for hanging in there, maintaining their careers. Other obstacles for such learning include widespread norms among musicians that music ought to be a "calling" and, followingly, the musician identity should be integrated. However, as musicians and other cultural producers and performers grow experienced, and sometimes professional, many begin striving to combine their artistic pursuit with responsibilities such as family, friends or other interests in life. In this respect, temporary breaks of careers, such as the pandemic, may function as a necessary relief and learning space. Our proposed association between de-centralized identity, sustainable career and personal growth, though, calls for further exploration among other kinds of musicians and creative people, and with help of other methods, such as observations.

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Declarations

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