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Schools of Rock

As live music comes of age, is it time to look again at the value of formal training? Johanna McWeeney reports on how education is turning to an employer-led model to meet the demands of an increasingly complex industry.

Behind the sexy images, trendy hairstyles and tattoos on stage, the live music sector is developing into a major economic and cultural player. However, with power comes responsibility and as the industry expands in size, so it grows in complexity.

Universities and colleges have picked up on the trend and are increasingly catering to the live entertainment market and the once shunned idea of professional training is more appealing than ever as industry leaders attempt to stay on top of the red tape and ahead of the competition. Innovative training courses are bringing new levels of skill to the workforce and awareness is filtering through that education has much to offer. Gone are the days of boozy lunches: It's time to get back to school.

Just as the current recession is tipped to produce a period of new creativity in the arts, so this period of rapid change within the industry is also a time of huge potential, and educational institutions and governments throughout Europe are rising to the challenge. In 2007, a committee chaired by CEO of UK Music Feargal Sharkey on behalf of the UK Government, reported that training was not adequate to support the growth of

the industry; a failure that would reduce further opportunity for expansion. At the time the research was carried out, there wasn't a single course in the UK that provided specialist skills in the promotion of live music.

Now, an industry that is traditionally too cool for school is being overwhelmed with training choices as demand for professional development soars and colleges rush to hoover in students to fashionable 'pop music' degrees. However, the quality and relevance of courses varies hugely from generic event management degrees with little or no industry recognition to the employer-led postgraduate courses at Bucks New University in the UK, and Germany's mandatory industry apprenticeships. And it's not just colleges and universities filling the void.

LEARNING BY ASSOCIATION

Training has been intrinsic to the mandate of industry associations such as the European Arenas Association and the Musicians' Union for years, and in the case of the Norwegian Rock Foundation (NRF), for three decades. NRF's Gry Bråtøy still believes learning





Gry Bratomyr

from like-minded colleagues is the most useful way: "I'm very sceptical about college courses," she says. "We are an organisation for promoters and most of us have gone the old-school way of learning by doing. We're trying to build up a network between all our members so they can share experience and knowledge; there's a big difference between that and colleges that do this to earn money."

"Higher education has not been serving the industry properly for a number of years," says Tim Sayer, programme leader of a new BA Honours degree in Live Music at University College, Plymouth in the UK. "The process now is to break down the scepticism around education by engaging people from the industry, listening to what they're saying and producing students with skills that will service the industry."

One factor spurring the rethink towards education is the relative mountain of new legislation. For example, British companies are coping with the recent introduction of a new licensing act, door supervisors' regulations, disability discrimination legislation and a rigorous health and safety culture. Chris Hannam of Stagesafe, a leading provider of training for Safety Passport (a national qualification for stage technicians and crew) says, "Employers have a legal duty to control risk and to train staff so they are competent in their health and safety responsibilities. Nobody got into rock & roll to be 'health & safety-ed' but as the industry grows and becomes more professional, people are more aware of their liabilities."

A trend towards compulsory qualifications in the UK is evident in the introduction of the

door supervisors' licence which is administered on behalf of the government by the Security Industry Authority (SIA). The training body behind the SIA is also currently consulting with the industry on plans to produce a new national qualification for concert promoters.

Despite any remaining scepticism, industry leaders across Europe are beginning to acknowledge the fact that a deeper understanding of issues such as contracts, business models and even lessons on getting the most from music conferences, will help them to match international standards. Business might be no less cut-throat than before, but it's much more bureaucratic, and that requires new skills.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Fontys Rock Academy in the Netherlands has run short courses in Musical Entrepreneurship since 2002 and European Artist Management since 2007. The courses each run over eight Saturdays and are aimed at working professionals. Topics include international taxation, insurance, law, publishing, and international tour organisation. According to course coordinator Alexander Beets, the curriculum was dictated by the industry.

"People already active in the business were interested in learning about things like management skills, contract analysis, 360-degree deals and full rights contracts," he says. "They were having problems staying successful – what they'd been doing for the last 20 years wasn't working anymore. When that happens you can either look for another job or look at new ways of doing things."

Beets says the industry-focussed approach attracts top names as guest speakers. "We have Ed Bicknell [former manager of Dire Straits], Stuart Worthington [professional management consultant] and Miles Copeland [former manager of Sting]," he says. "The reason someone like Ed Bicknell comes over is because what we're doing hits the bullseye. He's able to have a fundamental discussion about business models and markets, and that's a discussion he cannot have with someone doing an event management course."

Berne University of the Arts, Switzerland, has similar objectives in its postgraduate programmes, but is unique in having bilingual

provision (French/German). Training covers management and planning skills, financial issues including sponsorship and fundraising, marketing and public relations and development of cultural policies, and students have the opportunity to take work experience and individual coaching. According to professor for contemporary music Peter Kraut, courses are designed for festival organisers and music school professionals in full-time work with a flexible choice of training ranging from full masters studies to one-day courses.



Alexander Beets

In the UK, Bucks New University (BNU) runs part-time residential postgraduate courses around peak times of the year such as the summer festival season. Courses cater for people who want to continue to work while they study and students are sponsored by their employers. BNU's training is designed to bring value to the workplace as well as the individual.

Head of music, Teresa Moore, says, "One of the things we've always tried to do is work with employers. We have a very strong



Teresa Moore

network across the industry and try and listen to what people want."

BNU's MA in Music and Entertainment Management covers issues current to the live sector such as secondary ticketing, the impact of the recession, health and safety, corporate manslaughter legislation and the move to crowd management as opposed to crowd control. "The whole industry is in a state of flux," Moore says. "People need to understand what's changing and know how to tap into different forms of marketing, generate new ideas and develop a much more strategic and professional approach in how they operate."

"The industry has finally started to recognise that education has a place," she adds. "Postgraduate education is a place to step outside; to get a whole new range of perspectives. At masters level you're not teaching the basics, you're trying to provoke students to come up with ideas and drive the process themselves. I think there's huge value in that."

BNU is also ahead of the market in pioneering a course in sustainable events management in association with European festival association Yourope. "One of the big drivers at the moment across Europe is climate change and sustainability," Moore says. "But when I was putting the course together I couldn't find anyone who was doing the same thing for the live industry. Now I'm working on a two-day conference for festival organisers in Finland that will look at environmental policies, legal questions, long-term planning and on-site issues."

LEARNING POLICY

While specific institutions may lead the festival field in some areas, nowhere in Europe is nationwide formal education as developed as in Germany, where students must complete an industry apprenticeship. "You can train to become a concert salesman, an event producer, a master stage technician, a rigger – there's all kind of courses, and they're run through the Chamber of Commerce or associations," says veteran production manager Chrissy Uerlings. "Germany is very far ahead with this."

In 2001, Germany introduced the new designated occupation of event and performance manager. Training consists of a three-year, dual-track apprenticeship developed in consultation with German promoters' association IDKV. Trainees work in a company within the industry for three days a week, for which they receive a basic salary, and spend two days a week in college.



Brighton Institute of Modern Music

"There's a very different way of teaching people in this country," says IDKV president Jens Michow. "If you want to enter a profession, the absolute minimum qualification is the apprenticeship. Without that you have no chance of getting a job. With regard to being a promoter, university courses are strange: You've studied for three or four years, but what do you know about the business? A six-week work experience

create between 5,000 and 10,000 new jobs in the creative industries. It followed the announcement that live music revenues in the UK are reportedly greater than those of the recorded industry for the first time. UK Music's Adam Webb believes that since the failure of the financial sector, the government is seeing the live music industry as a building block to recovery. "It's a sort of evolution towards thinking about music more as an export product," he says.

In a separate initiative and a departure from the government's typical championing of formal schooling, the National Skills Academy (NSA) has been established to oversee the delivery of creative apprenticeships; employer-led training for a wide range of jobs including the live music sector. Live Nation's CEO of international music, Paul Latham, chairs the NSA's creative and cultural skills section.

"Obviously there are lots of industries such as the building trade where there are more focussed apprenticeships," he says. "But our industry has a lot of small to medium employers with a low staff turnover. That's where a lack of information as to how to get jobs in the industry becomes prevalent. Part of the problem is that courses already exist but not all of them are suitable for purpose. They don't necessarily make an individual more employable and that's the fundamental wrong."



Jens Michow

where you have a little glimpse of what happens is not enough. Students on apprenticeships, however, are constantly involved in the projects and procedures of the business for two and a half or three years, so what we have, finally, in the 21st Century, are people who have been trained in how it really is."

Germany is not alone in recognising the need to support the music industry's economic, social and cultural role with able new recruits and in May, the UK Government revealed plans to



The NSA aims to create a "cradle-to-grave transferable skills passport" for industry workers. By providing employees with career development routes, the hope is for a more engaged workforce with less staff turnover and lower recruitment costs for employers.

"This transcends current trading or competition," Latham says. "If you look at all the colleges who offer something connected to creative and cultural skills, you have countless courses; none of them using the same language and very few using language that employers recognise. We're engaging with colleges, universities and industry trainers to cut through the morass of qualifications and create a central online repository. It's not about posting job vacancies; it's about posting job descriptions."

FIRST STEPS

As Latham is discovering, undergraduate provision for the live sector has been growing at an alarming rate, but not all institutions are up to speed with the industry. According to Allan Dumbreck, editor of the *Music Education Directory*, while courses in the UK alone have almost doubled in the last three years (from 135 to 250), the industry is aware of no more than 20. But if employers don't already recognise that universities might have something to offer, according to BNU's Teresa Moore, they should.

"When one of our graduates goes into a job in the music industry they already know how the industry's structured and how it works," she says. "They don't have to be trained from scratch and that's very appealing to employers."

The Brighton Institute of Modern Music (BIMM) in the UK runs a diploma in live sound and tour management and a new



△ Sarah Clayman

professional diploma in live sound and tour production will start in September. Director Sarah Clayman believes the fashion for music industry training is a positive step. "It's opening up the industry to more people," she says. "Back in the day there was no training. You just went on the road and started as a rigger or a runner. It was very male dominated and all about who you knew. Some young people don't know anyone in the industry but they're just as talented as those with connections. Now that you can be trained for a specific role in the industry, it's making people raise their game."

Martin Cloonan, who runs a Popular Music Studies masters degree at Glasgow University in Scotland, is of the opinion that undergraduate training should teach students to develop an objective understanding of the industry. "There's a place for people who've learned on the job sharing their experiences," he says, "But it needs to be put into the context of the whole industry. We might have a local promoter in to talk to the students, but afterwards we'll look at the live music industry on a global scale. We'll look at operators like Live Nation and AEG and how we can understand the role of the promoter within a changing industry."

COMBINED DEGREES

The general consensus is that what the industry requires from undergraduate training is a combination of practical experience and business acumen. If universities are to train people for the job market, they cannot operate in isolation. Also acknowledged is the fact that no amount of education or work experience will guarantee

a place in the industry. Tor Nielsen, MD of Live Nation Sweden, says, "There are many courses at university level [in Sweden] that deal with music management, promotion and so on. That doesn't mean it helps people one bit to become promoters. That still takes contacts, timing and years of training."

And Ben Challis, visiting professor of law at BNU, agrees: "A degree can give you an understanding of how the music industry works, but the only way people get jobs is by working hard. I always tell my students that a lot of how you get into the music industry is down to luck; but it's strange that the harder you work, the luckier you get."

But just as hard work is still a prerequisite for success, so the increasing number of degree courses reflects a more fragmented, multi-disciplined industry. Some institutions could be accused of jumping on the bandwagon, but the increased competition for student dollars is pushing them to build closer links with the industry. The result is better courses, a more knowledgeable workforce and an industry that appreciates the commercial advantage that this brings.

Considering that virtually no formalised training existed for live music ten years ago, the needs of the industry and the output of many education providers are now closely aligned and the live industry's training grounds are a far cry from early event management degrees and the sporadic on-the-job skill-swapping of old. At corporate, university, governmental and association levels, the need for proper training is now recognised, and a variety of undergraduate degrees and vocational or postgraduate courses are finally meeting the challenge.



△ Paul Latham