In this economy, it’s easy to find gloom and doom perspectives about careers in music. There’s plenty of concern about the US overproducing talented and well-trained musicians in relation to the number of available jobs.

Let’s do the numbers: according to the Higher Education Arts Data Service there are more than 110,000 students enrolled in US music degree programs, and each year over 20,000 graduate into the “real world.” In looking at statistics of available jobs, let’s look first at orchestras. The ones that pay a full-time wage (the ICSOM member orchestras) represent in total about 4,200 musician positions. In an available sample year, 2003, there were just 159 openings in ICSOM orchestras.

Looking at another area—college teaching jobs—the number of doctoral music students is at an all-time high while many full-time college-level teaching positions, once vacated, are being divvied up to be filled piecemeal by poorly paid adjuncts. Openings for these jobs are routinely attracting 100-200 applicants.

The concerns are well-founded.

While all this may seem dire, the situation allows for divergent thinking. There may be something positive to be had from the situation.

Yes, it means that musicians—those creative, imaginative folk—need to think beyond the traditional jobs. And many schools are now offering excellent career development and entrepreneurial training.

But more than this, society as a whole may be the winner in the after-effects of an over-abundance of trained musicians. What happens to a culture that has an over-supply of musicians? If we stick to the positive fallout, the fact that there’s an over-abundance of highly trained musicians is actually good because . . .

1. It requires musicians to be more creative, to actively build their own audiences, and to consider their role in a community.

2. It brings more awareness of the arts to the general population, simply because musicians create multi-track careers and so are active in their communities in many different capacities.

3. Trained musicians contribute a wide range of abilities developed through their music training, and the majority of these skills are transferable and highly desirable in the larger workforce and in society.

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What Can I do with a degree in Music?

Portion of an article from www.majoringinmusic.com

- Accompanist (public and private schools, music schools and performing arts camps; other venues; religious centers and schools)
- Arranger
- Arts administrator/arts management
- Community music school director
- Composer
- Conductor
- Copyist, transcriber
- Copyright consultant
- Cruise ship entertainer
- Digital aggregator
- Educator – K-12, college, university, conservatory, religious organizations, private studio
- Electronic production and design (including audio engineering; mastering; mixing; music directing; producing; program directing; programming; recording engineer; studio manager; MIDI technician)
- Entertainment lawyer; music business lawyer
- Event production, management, planning, technology
- Film scoring (Composing, editing, supervising, arranging/adapting, conducting, orchestrating, synthesis specialist, theme specialist)
- Historian
- Librarian
- Lyricist
- Marketing
- Master classes
- Media development
- Merchant
- Music agent
- Music business
- Music critic or reviewer
- Music for game development
- Music industry
- Music licensing
- Music management
- Music online and print magazine writing, editing, publishing
- Music production
- Music publishing
- Music supervisor
- Music therapist
- Music web producer
- Musical instrument repairs and tuning
- Performer (Vocal and instrumental soloist, session musician, orchestra/band/group member, background vocalist or instrumentalist, performing artist, show band. Venues may include business meetings, conferences, cruise ships, weddings, hotels, restaurants, clubs, religious events)
- Production
- Promoter
- Recording (including research, publicity, marketing, public relations, sales)
- Royalty analyst, royalty accountant
- Songwriter (including composer, lyricist, producer; jingle writing for television, radio and internet; freelance work; librettist)
- Sound technician (sound design, sound operator)
- Summer camp music director
- Talent representation (booking, management)
- Tours/road work (road manager, sound technician, tour coordinator, tour publicist)

and anything else you can imagine!