Becoming a Composer: How postgraduate conservatorium students develop their musical identities

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Declaration

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Ethical approval has been granted for the study presented in this thesis from The University Human Ethics Committee project number 2013/799. Participants were required to read an information statement and sign a consent form.

Signed: ____________________________ Date: __________

Name: ________________________________
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Abstract

Musical identities research demonstrates the many roles that music plays in our everyday lives. For musicians, music is more than just a tool for self-discovery; it is a way of life, built over years of support, participation and love. The musical identities of performers have been explored in detail while composers’ identities have been explored predominantly through their compositions. The aim of this study is to investigate how composers establish and develop compositional identity. Five postgraduate composition students at The Sydney Conservatorium of Music participated in semi-structured interviews about their musical backgrounds, experiences and interests. Five main themes emerged as central to composer identity formation: ‘The Power of Music’, ‘Motivation to Compose’, ‘Influential Relationships’, ‘Environmental Factors’ and ‘Compositional Community’. Music was essential to the composers’ self-concepts. They were compelled to compose. They were determined to prove their worth through their music. And, they recognised the influence of their communities on their musical choices. These composers shared an understanding of the creation and continual development of their compositional identities through an alignment of these elements.
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1 Introduction

Musical identities are a representation of the influence that music has on our everyday lives. People use music to connect with themselves, others and their environments (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002) and music plays an important role in the development, understanding and expression of identity (Cook, 1998). Social constructionist theory establishes that all self-identities, including musical identities, are explored through a capacity to observe ourselves and others within our environments (Durkin, 1995). In this way, music serves as a communicative tool in various socio-cultural roles.

Musical identities function in two ways: ‘music in identities’ and ‘identities in music’ (Hargreaves et al., 2002). ‘Music in identities’ is how music affects different aspects of our identities, such as gender, age or ethnicity. ‘Identities in music’ are the identities within the musical activities in which we participate. Both are important in understanding the pervasive influence of music and how we use it to help place ourselves within different communities.

Music as a communicator is central to understanding how musical identities form and grow. Emotions can be conveyed or altered using music. Young children use music as a form of self-expression, acting out their thoughts and feelings in song form (Barrett, 2011). For adults, listening to music is an active behaviour, using it to communicate and modify emotional states (Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2015). Talking about music is vital in developing musical identities. Observing and discussing our own and others
musicality and musical environments is stimulating for both musicians’ and non-musicians’ identities and is the main influence on musical identity development (Munro, 2005).

For musicians, music encompasses their whole being. Composers are creators of music – it is both their vocation and their life expression. However, although the musical identities of performers have been explored in detail, investigation into composers has focussed predominantly on compositional output. In order to better understand composers, this thesis will direct attention towards the creation and development of compositional identity.


2 Literature Review

2.1 Self-identity

Social constructionism is the theory that self-identity is formed through continuous social and cultural interactions (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). One’s self-reflective consciousness is developed through one’s relationships with others and the ability to perceive oneself from others’ points of view (Cooley, 1902). The central component to understanding identity development from a social constructionist standpoint is to look at the ways in which we communicate through both spoken and gestural language (Mead, 1934). Further, social constructionism regards the self as composed of multiple fluid identities that perpetually modify and grow through societal interactions (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). This occurs through examining oneself within abstract social and cultural contexts while maintaining a broad perspective (Durkin, 1995).

The ways in which we communicate both socially and environmentally are essential to identity construction. The use of ‘I’ and ‘me’ are especially prevalent in Western languages, and these are particularly useful in the autobiographical narratives that we use to help construct our identities (Bruner, 1990). In the social constructionist tradition, talking is not only a means for conveying information, but also an agent that drives societal, cultural, and personal change (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). We talk with others with intention to position ourselves in relation to them (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996), as well as actively refrain from being portrayed in certain ways (Billig, 1997).
The autobiographical narratives we use to communicate are therefore not only a representation of self, but an enactment of self (Wortham, 2001). Through active storytelling we can perform as both the narrator and the central character in our stories. The narrator is able to actively evolve their character during the process of story telling (Billig, 1997). This type of active narrative not only occurs when interacting with other people, but also in conversation with ourselves – physically, emotionally and environmentally (Barrett, 2011).

2.2 Establishing Musical Identities

Music is a demonstrative art form that allows us to show the world both our true and desired selves. It is used for behavioural and emotional regulation (Bailey & Davidson, 2003; Juslin & Sloboda, 2001), and to communicate values and opinions (Barrett, 2011). From as young as one month old, infants show high responsiveness to music, using it as a communicative tool with their parents and caregivers. This is called Communicative Musicality (Malloch, 1999/2000; Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000). It is proposed that Communicative Musicality is fundamental to all human communication, implying that music is central to our experience as humans and understanding of identity (Malloch, 1999/2000; Trevarthen, 2002).

The concept of intrinsic musicality extends into young childhood, and is evident in the musical narratives enacted by children as young as 18 months old (Barrett, 2011). Infant Directed Song is an expressive art-form that is made up of child-invented songs (Trainor, 1996). The topics of these songs can include anything that is present in their day-to-day life, such as, people, activities, objects and emotions (Barrett, 2003, 2006).
Children who practise inventive song-making use it to help assimilate with the world around them and express their own social and cultural views, aiding in the evolution of both their musical and non-musical identities (Barrett, 2009).

For adults, music is an expressive vehicle with the capability to stimulate and change both felt and perceived emotions (Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2015). People actively consume music to help relax (Getz, Marks, & Roy, 2014), motivate (Laukka & Quick, 2013) and improve mood (Chen, Zhou, & Bryant, 2007). In these ways, music acts as a form of psychological self-therapy – to help cope with stress, anxiety or emotional events (Bailey & Davidson, 2003; DeNora, 2000; John A Sloboda, O'Neill, & Ivaldi, 2001). When listening to music, blood flow in the brain increases significantly to the areas known for inducing and regulating emotions (Baumgartner, Lutz, Schmidt, & Jäncke, 2006; Blood & Zatorre, 2001). Elevated emotional responses are also associated with the level of engagement people experience when listening to music (Sandstrom & Russo, 2013).

The majority of study into music and expressiveness has focused on how and why we listen to music. However, it is possible, and likely, that musical performers and composers relate to their musical practices in similar ways (Davidson & Burland, 2006). Both pop musicians (Gullberg & Brändström, 2004) and Western Classical musicians (Davidson & Burland, 2006) are known to use music as a form of emotional self-expression and as a vehicle for identity construction (Hargreaves et al., 2002). In studying brain activity responses to Beethoven’s 5th Symphony, professional musicians showed higher receptivity when compared to amateurs. This suggests that musicians
have more acute emotional experiences when listening to music (Mikutta, Maissen, Altorfer, Strik, & Koenig, 2014).

2.3 Communicating Musical Identities

Music, like verbal and gestural language, can be essential in helping to establish, develop and convey a sense of self-identity (Cook, 1998). Talking about music has shown to be an important way in which musical identities are understood and evolved. It has been established that verbal communication is involved in active identity work through the enactment of self (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and this is especially meaningful when talking about music. Corresponding to the social constructionist model, recognition and perceptions of our own and others’ musicality, as well as our musical environments, are evidently formed primarily through our discourse about music (Munro, 2005).

In terms of musical conversations, both musicians and non-musicians characterise others and themselves based on different levels of musical involvement. Labels are used to signify association with certain groups and categories, with respect to others in those communities (Fischlin & Heble, 2004). There is a tendency to frame particular identities as either positive or negative, and claim the positive identities for ourselves, for example, jazz musician as positive and non-jazz musician as negative (MacDonald, Miell, & Wilson, 2005). Talking about music has also been shown to shape the ways in which we experience music. By claiming particular identities within music, we are more likely to participate in musical activities (listening, performing and talking about) within those identities and assign ourselves to distinct cultural subgroups (MacDonald et al.,
Even if we do not perceive ourselves to be a ‘musician’ per se, this talk functions as active identity work and is a crucial component in the creation and recognition of musical identities (MacDonald & Miell, 2002; Monson, 1996).

2.4 Music in Identities

Different facets of our identities are influenced by the type, amount and ways in which we experience music (Hargreaves et al., 2002). Studies into the significance of music in youth culture in Britain reported a link between an engagement with positively-defined musical preferences and an ability to navigate and resolve identity issues (Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2002). Research in America (Clay, 2003) and Tanzania (Perullo, 2005) showed that hip-hop music is central to both individual and group identity development in ‘black youth cultures’.

The latter two studies not only characterize the role music plays in youth identity, but also in national identity. Black culture in America and Tanzania is perpetuated through hip-hop music, fostering their rich cultural and ethnic identities (Clay, 2003; Perullo, 2005). There are countless other examples of national, cultural and ethnic identities portrayed through music. These can be found in traditional music (Washabaugh, 2012), religious music (Salhi, 2013), as well as newer genres such as the New York City rap subculture Zulu Nation (Folkestad, 2002) and the “soundscapes of Australia” (Richards, 2007).

Music in identities also considers how music can be a construct of gender identity. This includes looking at the masculinity and femininity of the roles that men and women take.
up in musical practices, how we consider particular musical instruments to be gendered, and the differentiation of musical tastes based on stereotypical ideas of gender (Dibben, 2002; Whiteley, 2013). For example, observations found that Heavy Metal exhibits a kind of hyper-masculinity (Walser, 1993). All the elements of the genre, including power chords, volume and technical mastery of instruments manifest to appear as power and control, which are typically masculine traits. Hence, Heavy Metal provides a benchmark for masculinity to aid its predominantly male fan-base in developing masculine gender identity.

Music in identities has also looked at the effects of music and music therapy on those with special needs or disabilities. Musical interaction has been shown to provide emotional support, and give back a sense of control to adults who have withdrawn from society due to disability caused by chronic illness (Magee, 2002). After a loss of identity, music presents a means to increase one’s sense of self. Research into people with special needs showed similar findings. Due to the social nature of music, participating in musical activities allows for otherwise-lacking meaningful engagement with others. This boosts morale and stimulates positive identity development (MacDonald & Miell, 2002).

2.5 Identities in Music

Identities in music are defined by roles assumed in musical settings. These include general terms, such as performer, composer or listener, as well as specific identifying concepts, such as musical genres or instruments. Musician identities can be established in early childhood through regular engagement in musical activities. Adolescent
musicians rely on peer and mentor encouragement for confirming and extending their positive musician identities into adulthood. Professional adult musicians tend to display more complex and specific aspects of their identities according to their chosen vocations and genres.

### 2.5.1 The Young Musician

During primary school, children begin to show an ability to recognise themselves as musicians or non-musicians. Both the school and home environment play a large contributing factor in establishing positive musician identities in children. Primary-aged children who only participate in school classroom music are far less likely to identify as musicians than those who are involved in extra-curricular musical activities (Lamont, 2002). This affirms the causative role of the parents and immediate family in the probability of a child identifying as a musician. Children whose parents advocate for extra-curricular musical activities are not only more likely to identify as musicians, but to view that identity as a positive one (Davidson & Borthwick, 2002). In the home environment, children with a high level of positive support in their music practice also have a greater chance of success in identifying as musicians (McPherson, 2009). This includes factors of regular exposure to music, encouragement to join music outside the classroom, having music lessons and practising regularly.

As children with positive musician-identities come into adolescence, they tend to adopt an intrinsic motivation to practice (Davidson, Howe, & Sloboda, 1997). Furthermore, the supporting role of the parents and family diminishes in necessity, passing to the teachers, mentors and peers (Davidson & Burland, 2006; O’Neill, 2002). Young people
are more likely to attribute positive feelings towards being musicians when surrounded by ‘like-minded’ peers (O’Neill, 2002) and when significant-other-musicians affirm their emerging musical identities (Davidson & Burland, 2006). Another crucial factor in the development of musical identities in young people is the role that music plays in regulating mood and its capacity for emotional expression (Bailey & Davidson, 2003; Juslin & Sloboda, 2001). Young musicians attribute music as a form of self-expression. A profound love for music and feeling of necessity for self-expression through music are major contributing factors in the development of a musical self-identity through adolescence and into adulthood (Davidson & Burland, 2006).

2.5.2 The Performer

The identities of musical performers have been examined in a variety of ways. These include solo performers’ identity (Davidson, 2002), the personality traits of different instrumentalists (Bell & Cresswell, 1984; Cutietta & McAllister, 1997; Kemp, 1996; Payne, 2009) and the transition to and attainability of becoming a successful performer (Davidson & Burland, 2006; Juuti & Littleton, 2010).

One aspect considered to be imperative for positive performer identity is the occurrence of an emotionally transformative musical experience during childhood (John A. Sloboda, 1991). Following the understanding of musician identities of young people, solo performers acknowledge this, as well as an intrinsic motivation to perform, supportive role of key others and regular musical performance exposure as the most significant elements in the construction of their performer identities (Davidson, 2002). Regarding the difference between a performer and a successful performer is also
important in understanding musical performer identities. An ability to cope with stressful situations, positive musical experiences with other musicians and music as a determinant for self-concept are considered the agents for performer success (Davidson & Burland, 2006). This aligns with tertiary music students who are navigating the transition from student to professional. Those with a strong sense of musician identity exhibit distinct characteristics, including, positive motivation behaviours, an emotional connection to music and self-assurance (Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

Another important factor in creating a positive musician identity is identifying as part of a larger musical community (Burland & Davidson, 2004). An overarching sense of group musician identity is of particular significance for professional jazz musicians, as they rely on a supportive group dynamic in order to explore different facets of their identities as musicians, jazz musicians and instrumentalists (MacDonald & Wilson, 2005; Wilson & MacDonald, 2005).

2.5.3 The Composer

Historically, composers’ identities have been directly interpreted through the characteristics of their compositions (Stauffer, 2002; Tsisserev, 1997). However, this approach does not give insight into the complexity of compositional identity from the composers’ experiential, behavioural or emotional perspectives. With regard to this, one study has offered an initial approach for understanding compositional identity (Carter, 2008). Through a multiple-interview case study of four undergraduate composition
students at a small academy in the USA, the study investigated what comprises undergraduate compositional identity.

For undergraduate composers, identity is a complex matter. The majority are at a particularly vulnerable age, where identity is constantly being reconsidered. Universities foster a sense of community and encourage social interaction between students. This kind of atmosphere is imperative to young composers, as is their family's support and general environment. Young composers have a need for validation of their efforts, as well as a sense of competition, finding that these positively reinforce their composer identities. One aspect of distinct significance for undergraduate compositional identity is their ability to self-represent their identities. They want to have creative purpose, artistic vision and most importantly, a unique compositional voice.

While undergraduate composers provide a preliminary understanding of what comprises compositional identity, there has been no further research in this field. Excluding composer biographies, to my knowledge study into the identities of postgraduate or professional composers, removed from their compositional style or output, ceases to exist.
2.7 Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate how composers establish and develop compositional identity. This study will focus on the lives of postgraduate composition students, as they can offer a unique view of what it means to be a composer. They are accomplished musicians and have shown commitment to pursue a career in composition, through being accepted and enrolling in postgraduate study. This study is focused on the experiences that help create and build their compositional identity. It is beyond the scope and interests of this study to examine or analyse the artistic compositional output of the participants. The study is focussed on gaining insight of the influential events, people, and experiences, that composers believe were and are imperative to the conception and continual growth of their compositional identities. This study will add to knowledge and expand awareness in the field of compositional identity.
3 Method

3.1 Ethics

The University of Sydney Ethics Committee approved this study, including permission for the participants to be named in the study (Appendix A).

3.2 Participants

Participants were five post-graduate students, studying at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of Sydney. They were all undertaking either Master of Music Research in composition or PhD in composition degrees. Participants were known to the researcher through associations within the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and were personally invited to take part in the study. The only selection criterion for the study was that the participants were currently enrolled in a post-graduate music research degree, and majoring in composition.

Prospective participants were given a Participant Information Statement (Appendix B) detailing the project’s objectives and data collection procedures. They were invited to take part in a recorded, one-on-one, semi-structured interview about compositional identity. Immediately preceding each interview, the participants signed a Participant Consent Form (Appendix C).
### Table 1: Participant information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Background/studies</th>
<th>Current research/interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beaugeais, Katia</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Saxophonist/Music Education</td>
<td>Herself as a performer-composer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biederman, Daniel</td>
<td>M.Mus.</td>
<td>B.Mus. Composition</td>
<td>Turntablism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coyle, Jim</td>
<td>M.Mus.</td>
<td>B.Mus. Composition/High school music teacher</td>
<td>The contrabass as a solo instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan, Craig</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS)</td>
<td>The use of software in film composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spargo, Sophie</td>
<td>M.Mus.</td>
<td>B.Mus. Composition</td>
<td>Narratives in music</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3 Interviews

The data in this study was collected through narrative style, semi-structured interviewing (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995), as it ‘facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage, enables the interview to enter novel areas, and tends to produce richer data’ (Smith et al., 1995). It has also proved an effective way of eliciting information about individuals’ musical identity (Carter, 2008; Davidson & Burland, 2006; Oakland, MacDonald, & Flowers, 2012). Participants in this study were encouraged to talk about key moments in their musical and compositional careers and reflect on how these influenced their sense of musical identity. The semi-structured interview allowed for natural discourse into ideas and opinions on the retrospective, present and future self of each participant (Taylor &
Littleton, 2008). It enabled these composers to explore the experiences that have contributed to their developing compositional identity.

The interviews began by asking participants basic biographical information, such as, name, age, degree/position, previous and/or related studies, and compositional area of interest for their current studies. The interviewer then asked the question ‘How did your compositional experience begin?’ Participants were encouraged to speak freely throughout the interviews.

The interview schedule (Appendix D) served as a guide to stimulate discussion. The interviewer used semi-structured interview questioning techniques to allow for the key questions to be asked, as well as to encourage dialogue into unexpected areas (Ballantyne, Kerchner, & Aróstegui, 2012). The interviewer did not necessarily follow the interview schedule sequentially, or ask every question of each participant. The interviewer used agreement prompts to motivate the participants to elaborate on their personal experiences, opinions and reflections (Mitchell, Kenny, Ryan, & Davis, 2003). The progression of each interview therefore assumed a natural, and distinct, discourse into each topic area.

The interviews were all conducted in person, at a time, and place, that was convenient to each participant. Permission to record interviews, as well as name the participants, was sought prior to commencing each interview. The first researcher then transcribed each interview for analysis.
3.4 Analysis

The interviews were analysed using in-depth qualitative analysis tools (after Smith et al., 1995). These included transcribing the audio-recordings of the interviews and reviewing each recording while close reading the transcript several times, in order to eliminate any errors and to ensure clarity and detail in the transcripts. The data was then coded using content analysis which involved critical reading of the transcripts, while highlighting and taking notes in accordance with the interview schedule (Krippendorff, 2004; Smith et al., 1995). The participants’ accounts were examined to identify both cohesion, and diversity, in their reflections. These notes were then used to code for common themes that began to appear. The analysis focussed on the composers’ discussions of their experiences, opinions and ideas relating to music and composition, and how this leads to the construction of musical, and, particularly, compositional identity. Significant statements from each of the participants were then collated into five key themes that emerged. The selected quotations in the results section are used to illustrate both patterns detected, and contrasting responses, among the participants.
4 Results

The composers talked about various concepts within the four topic areas outlined in the interview schedule, due to the fluid, narrative nature of the interviews. Discussions tended towards motivations to compose, the innate expressivity of music and the personal compositional voice. Composers talked about their musical backgrounds, as well as defining moments in their personal, musical and compositional lives. They also acknowledged the significance of both personal and professional relationships on their compositional identities.

Five key themes emerged in the analysis of the interview transcripts:

1. The Power of Music
2. Motivation to Compose
3. Influential Relationships
4. Environmental Factors
5. Compositional Community

4.1 The Power of Music

A profound love of, and emotional attachment to music was central to the composers’ identities. They found music to be a profoundly demonstrative medium, allowing them to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences through their compositions. For the composers, music was an organic and instinctive vehicle for communication.
Daniel talked about how as a child he “failed” as a music student. Yet, countless hours listening to and enjoying music inspired a lifelong affection for music. His affinity with music started from a young age and still has a profound affect on him as a musician and composer.

*I was a music lover from a pretty young age, around ten [years-old]. Maybe even younger I suppose. Just listening to my parents’ music and their old record collection and I had taken guitar lessons and piano lessons but I was not a particularly good student. So failed private lessons and a love of music.* (Daniel)

Craig referred to music and composition as emotionally fulfilling. He discussed his dissatisfaction with a career in finance, and his decision to change direction and do something that inspired him. Having spent the past 20 years composing in the privacy of his home, it was obvious that music and composition were paramount to his fulfilling his emotional needs.

*I had an opportunity to get out, and I did. I had this huge opportunity, and the financial means to support myself. I thought, “What do I love doing? And what have I always done?”* (Craig)

The composers talked about their compositional practice as an affective act and aiding in self-expression. Katia and Sophie identified with their music on a deep, personal level. Katia is a professional saxophonist and was focusing on the role of the composer-
performer for her PhD research. At the time of the interview, she was in the midst of composing the major work for her PhD portfolio. Even before it was finished, Katia felt an intimate connection with the piece. Her understanding of self was epitomised by this work of art.

*I’m currently writing a saxophone concerto, which I’ll be performing with the Modern Music Ensemble here. [It] is a big work in that I suppose it’s representing exactly who I am.* (Katia)

In a similar vein, Sophie, having completed her Masters portfolio, felt that the works she wrote were true forms of self-expression. By emotionally investing in her composing, Sophie felt an affinity with and unity of identity through her music.

*The two works that I wrote for Masters, I would have been really, really happy to write them for personal enjoyment. They are the most me. Those were the first times at uni when I’d been really, really true to myself.* (Sophie)

Craig’s self-expressive composing voice appeared as a young adult, after the devastating loss of a friend and band member. Craig had spent his early twenties playing bass guitar and composing in a rock band, but the drummer was killed in a sudden car accident. The loss of an extremely close friend changed Craig’s purpose for composing. He felt emotionally bound to his friend and the grief he felt with his friend’s death could only be expressed through music.
Those formative years we were so close in the band, we were so close. And we had so many songs, original songs that we had composed. And with the loss of our drummer [it] was just so devastating. It was like losing a brother. I felt as though like I had lost a brother. I was in shock in a way. You know when I heard about it I just didn’t believe it. It didn’t really make sense to me until I went to the funeral and sort of caught up with the other band members and we all sort of, we all cried, and then there was this funny sort of still silence for years and years, until I decided to reconnect with the lead singer. But during those years of silence, I think my music that I wrote on piano, is some type of tribute to the lost band member. It’s some sort of personal expression to his memory. (Craig)

Although the participants could recognise their love of music and the self-expressive nature of composing, why they began composing was a mystery. They described feeling compelled to compose or that it seemed “normal” or natural.

I thought that I could hear music in my head and I wanted to get it out.

(Daniel)

Jim felt that composing “seemed logical”. He didn’t have control over his decision to compose, as if it were a subconscious act. This esoteric urgency to compose further confirmed the effect that music has on the composers.
I couldn't help composing. This creative compulsion to make music, to write music. (Jim)

4.2 Motivation to Compose

The composers felt strong, internalised motivations towards composing. They found that through composing came stylistic self-discovery. They were driven to compose by the act of composing itself and the satisfaction of finished works. Motivation also came by way of the stylistic boundaries set by other composers and the participants’ audiences, as well as their audiences’ reactions to their own and others’ music.

Katia’s penchant for composition came to her through her saxophone practice. She would spend hours practising modern saxophone repertoire and at moments found herself challenging the ideas and techniques of composers and their music. In this way, her compositional voice stemmed directly from her performer identity. Her compositional identity and motivations to compose emerged through the intuitive movements and behaviours she shared with her instrument.

I found that a lot of composers hadn’t used these percussive effects and techniques in a variety of ways. They were quite restrictive in their repertoire. And subconsciously I started thinking a composer should be doing it this way and that way and that started in the practice room when I was practising my modern repertoire. I was sort of just mucking around and was having to spend hours practising these extended techniques. I started just composing little passages on the spot. (Katia)
Craig also used other composers’ music to help him discover his niche. By identifying similarities between his music and that of film composers Danny Elfman, Howard Shore, John Williams and particularly, Angelo Badalamenti, Craig felt justified in exploring his voice as a film composer.

*I saw connections between their music and my music... And I thought to myself, I can do that... I would have a piece that had the same tones, the same sentiments, the same feeling to it that suited a picture on screen.*

*(Craig)*

Sophie found that the more she composed, the more confidence she felt in her compositional choices. Having spent her undergraduate degree composing music for the purpose of grades, she no longer felt the need to write music for anyone but herself. By taking the judging process out of her writing, she relaxed into her work and felt free to compose in the way she preferred. Her motivation came from the practice of composing itself.

*I guess once you just write something playable, singable, enjoyable, it’s a better sound than if you’re trying to please all these hypothetical judges. There’s always going to be someone who doesn’t like what you’ve written so you may as well write something that you really like.* *(Sophie)*
In contrast, Daniel was constantly striving for originality in his compositional voice. He dissected every idea he had, motivated by the notion of innovation. By continually recomposing his work, Daniel felt validated that his compositional choices were unique.

*It was very important to me to find who has used the turntables and to make sure that if I was doing something unoriginal...I didn’t want to put blood, sweat and tears into what I thought was an original idea.* (Daniel)

A significant incentive to compose was the value of the finished product. For Sophie, having a large work performed as a teenager was a decisive affirmation of her compositional identity. Experiencing the work in its’ finished form was motivation for Sophie to continue composing with the goal to become professional.

*The point where I knew that I was actually really, really serious was in about my mid-teens. I ended up writing my first opera when I was about 14. Since I got that performed, I was like, “this is probably the career path that I want to go down”.* (Sophie)

Craig felt a similar affirmation after finishing his first attempt of an orchestral work for an esteemed competition. He had put an immense amount of work into the piece and completing it was of great worth to his self-esteem and motivation as a composer. He felt a pronounced satisfaction in submitting the work to the competition – having spent months of solid work on it – before it had even been performed.
I allowed myself to get close to this piece of music. I loved it. I loved it. Once it was coming together, the building blocks just built onto each other and it made more and more sense as it went along. And I was so, so proud to hand it in and say, “Yes that’s mine, can I have a receipt for that please”? And the guy said, “You want a receipt for handing in your submission”? I said, “Yes I do, I’ve put three months work into this”. So I made him, you know, write a receipt for submission, like, as if it were a thesis. (Craig)

Jim’s motivation to compose arose through an evaluation process. He felt that the qualities of a single idea could predict the worth of the finished product and by judging each new musical germ, he decided whether or not to give those ideas time and attention. This came from an acknowledgement of the highly time-consuming and technical process that is composing. Through an awareness of his own abilities and desires as a composer, he found incentive to write music.

When an idea arrives in my imagination for a piece of music, very often I make the decision to dedicate that time and effort and skill into making a finished composition out of that idea because I feel that the idea is worth pursuing and completing. (Jim)

The participants felt that, through their compositions, they would prove their self-worth as composers. In particular, they discussed the importance of writing music that would appeal to and gain them an audience, which, in turn, would allow and impel them to
continue composing. Katia said she would feel acceptance as a composer if she could appeal to those who aren’t familiar with modern music and techniques. This outsider approval was a confirmation of her compositional motives.

*And getting people who don’t know the more modern things, for them to be really surprised and be like, “oh wow what’s that technique” and, “that’s really interesting”, and not be too shocked by [the music]. (Katia)*

Sophie and Daniel were both motivated to compose by what they thought audiences wanted to hear. They used their own experiences and preferences as audience members and listeners of music to evaluate their own compositions. Sophie felt strongly that she knew what types of music audiences enjoyed. This allowed her to continue writing in the way she liked, as well as actively appealing to a wider audience.

*I [choose] to write nice tonal music because I like to listen to tonal music if I’m just like relaxing. I like appealing to a wider range of audience. People now have a terrible view of modern music as atonal and maybe discordant. [My music is] still tonal enough to get the admiration of like [a] normal man in the street as well as composers, teachers that kind of thing. (Sophie)*

Daniel gave three reasons why he liked to compose in the way he does, citing audiences as two of those causes. Like Katia, he wanted his audience to be excited by innovation in his compositions. He acknowledged that his compositional process and voice are
motivated by his listening style, and wanted his audience to be continually interested and engaged with his music.

*First is I just like I can’t quite put my finger on, like the way you like mustard or not. Two, there’s something accessible about it, people can hear it and will understand what’s going on. The third thing is, my preference of music to write and my preference of music to listen to is music that takes me on some level of a journey. Not only do I want to engage the listener, I want to surprise the listener. I have a hard time sitting still, so in order for me to be interested for 5 to 40 minutes, I need, [and] I prefer stuff. (Daniel)*

4.3 Influential Relationships

Relationships with other people were imperative for the composers’ confidence in their musical choices and validity of compositional identity. These included immediate family, close personal relationships and working with mentors.

Parents had an especially strong influence on the participants, particularly during childhood. Jim recognised the significance of his father being a musician on his own musical voice. He considered “Celtic and English music” to be a large part of his compositional voice and identity – something that was subliminally introduced to him by his father.

*My father was a folk musician and accordionist, so from a quite early age I was exposed to that sort of traditional music. (Jim)*
Daniel, as cited earlier, mentioned, “listening to [his] parents’ music and their old [vinyl] record collection” as instilling a life-long love of music, as well as inspiring a compositional interest in turntablism.

Sophie and Katia both acknowledge their mothers as providing them with and encouraging music lessons as young children. After Katia had been learning piano for a few years, she begged, “aw Mum, I want to play the saxophone”. She was encouraged to learn a second instrument and it soon became her main focus.

When Sophie was five years old, her mother unexpectedly recognised musical talent in her. Having earlier bought Sophie’s older brother a keyboard, they came home from a musical performance and Sophie immediately showed interest in working out the music she had just heard, on the piano. Her mother heard and chose to nurture this skill.

_I went to see Beauty and the Beast, and I got home and I started figuring out the theme song from it and my mum was like, “aw, you must have really good aural skills, let’s get you some lessons”. So, basically that’s how it started, when I was five. (Sophie)_

Both Katia and Sophie’s mothers played instrumental roles in their daughters’ musical careers. They not only encouraged formal music practice, but also recognised their daughters’ intuitive passion and enthusiasm for music. By supporting this interest in music, Katia and Sophie gained the necessary skills and assurance to help develop their identities into composers.
Other personal relationships affected the composers’ compositional identities. Sophie mentioned how romantic relationships can modify compositional process, inspiration or outcomes.

*I think you end up writing things that are more true if you’ve had that kind of experience... Love songs if you’ve just got a new boyfriend and you’re in those first three months. There’s a purpose and a reason and a place to be using personal experience, which I use all the time. (Sophie)*

Craig’s earlier described loss of a relationship through the death of a close friend was extremely influential for him as a composer. He paid tribute to his lost friend through the music he wrote, signifying the weight of that friendship, and its implications for Craig as a composer.

*There’s nothing physically, financially, or in any other corporeal way that I can honour him, except in music. (Craig)*

The participants also recognised the influence of other musicians on their compositional identities. These included teachers and musical idols. Katia saw her two saxophone teachers during her Postgraduate Diploma as being important instigators of her compositional career. When Katia showed her sketches and pieces to them, they immediately encouraged and offered opportunities for Katia to gain exposure and guidance as a composer.
I showed Margery Smith who’s very focussed in contemporary repertoire and also a composer, she said, you know you should really keep going in all this compositional stuff, because she found I what I was doing was interesting...And then Mark Walton said, “you know you should take advantage of being at the conservatorium and start performing your own pieces in [your] recitals”...The department was just encouraging me to do it. (Katia)

Sophie also acknowledged that considerable impression that her Master of Music supervisor had on her.

_He’s been a big part of giving me back my right to compose in the way that I’d like to be composing._ (Sophie)

She had been struggling with a certain aspects of her compositional style that had previously been seen as “kind of a bad thing”. However, her supervisor’s honesty and support allowed Sophie to feel confident in her intuitive compositional choices.

_My supervisor said, “Sophie what would you like to write in a completely free world? And if you fail at least you’ve written something you really, truly believe in”. And I was like I’ll just go for it._ (Sophie)
4.4 Environmental Factors

The composers identified experiences in their lives, both musical and non-musical, that helped to shape their compositional identities. These experiences were singular defining moments, as well as prolonged events, and were considered turning points, or watershed moments, in their compositional careers.

There were musical encounters during childhood and adolescence that the participants acknowledged as central to their development as musicians and composers. Daniel, who specialises in turntablism in composition, remembered his introduction to the turntables as metamorphic. Discovering the turntables through hip hop music sparked a life-long curiosity and respect.

*At elevenish I saw what hip-hop artists could do with the turntable as an instrument. Everything that they did you could so clearly associate those same mechanical movements and manifestations as a piano. It was just very clear that the turntable was an instrument and should be used as one.*

*(Daniel)*

Craig experienced a defining moment at a similar age to Daniel. As a ten-year-old in 1977, he went to see Star Wars at the cinema and was captivated by it.

*The combined audio and visual experience... This is what a film should be like, you know, this is the ultimate type of film, where there’s an excellent*
connection, synchronisation between the narrative, the visuals, and the music. (Craig)

He felt a sense of awe watching Star Wars, crediting it as much to John Williams’ score as to George Lucas’ story and visuals. He believed he could sense a complexity in the score that others might not perceive.

Fantastic film scores. Thematic, large, you know, John Williams, it has it all. Complicated. Many people may not say so, but I know the intricacies. (Craig)

Star Wars was the beginning of a deep love for both film and orchestral music, which Craig considers central to his identity as a composer.

I love Star Wars. I love listening to Star Wars. I love watching Star Wars... I watch Star Wars maybe three times a year... You know, that movie that I saw as a ten-year-old boy has influenced my life. (Craig)

Craig also recounted the first time he heard Mozart’s Requiem as a 13-year-old. After hearing it, he rushed out to buy a copy of the score – an item he still cherishes today. The emotional connection Craig felt to this piece of music was so strong that he joined a choir during his undergraduate studies “just so [he] could sing in Mozart’s Requiem”. Craig felt very close to this piece of music and it guided his love of large emotional works and pursuit of composition.
It had a deep and profound affect on me. [I] Loved it, loved it to bits. [II]
Knew all the words, still do… That led on to other musical interest like
Mahler Symphony no. 8, the Symphony of a Thousand, which is my favourite
orchestral piece of all time. (Craig)

For Katia, being introduced to the saxophone at the beginning of high school was a
major turning point. She had already been learning piano for about five years and was
already quite a serious musician.

Saxophone was supposed to be more of a hobby instrument, not too stressful
because piano was my main focus. (Katia)

However, she found that, as well as picking up the saxophone effortlessly, it allowed
her to explore aspects of music that the piano didn’t.

I found it very easy, I just went much better in saxophone… I was really
interested in the different way of playing, I loved the physicality, the energy
you know. (Katia)

Katia found her potential as both a performer and a composer in the saxophone. She
recognised the opportunities with new music that the saxophone offered, which
encouraged flexibility and inventiveness, allowing Katia to discover her compositional
voice.
The composers recounted influential moments from their time as undergraduate composition students. Jim felt he was treated unfairly, due to his interest in tonal music. A low grade at the end of his degree meant he “couldn’t” enter post-graduate studies straight away. Retrospectively, however, Jim saw this as a positive growth experience. It meant he could work on his compositional voice without being judged. He also recognised that waiting to be able to study at a postgraduate level was a blessing.

*I’m much better at being a postgraduate student now then I would have been at the age of 21.* (Jim)

Sophie observed her time as an undergraduate as being directly influential on her later confidence and abilities as a composer. The degree required her to explore compositional possibilities she may otherwise not have attempted. Although she felt that during this time she was mostly composing to please the teachers, Sophie was challenged to think differently about her compositional style and process.

*Everyone was made to write for an instrument you’d never composed for, in a different style. It was fantastic because it made us all get out of our comfort zones... I think it’s really good experience cause it does change your music.* (Sophie)

She felt that, even though there were certain tasks that she didn’t necessarily identify with, overall this style of learning improved her technique as a composer. She felt
confident that she could tackle a variety of compositional tasks – “when it comes to writing that again, I’ve got that skill”.

Daniel experienced a watershed moment during his time as undergraduate student in Arizona. Daniel attended a concert, which included a concerto for turntables. Although he was a fan of the instrument, the concept of it being used in a classical concert setting was new to Daniel. He had been excited about the concert but the result was disappointing.

At the time I hated the concerto for the turntable. I thought it was kitschy.

(Daniel)

This experience was a big turning point for Daniel. It encouraged a more elastic view on the capabilities of the turntables as an instrument. It was the catalyst he needed to feel validated to explore composing as a serious career option – “spite’s a funny motivator”.

Daniel also shared an important event that had occurred within six months of the interview, during his postgraduate study. He had an interest in podcasts about music, and in particular, listening to “people who [he] respected give definitions for what they thought is and isn’t music”. He found through this interest that his ideas about music were challenged to the point of internal destruction.
I had a preconceived notion as to what music is and to what an instrument is and to what composition is, and those have just been redefined to the point where I had a little mini identity crisis. (Daniel)

However, this began a new process for Daniel, allowing a ‘clean slate’ from which he could rediscover and grow as a composer, philosopher and musician.

But truly having to thumb through records and embrace this and work with this and figure it all, and really take nothing for granted, just sort of broke me down and then allowed [me] to rebuild myself as a composer... So it’s like having this total openness to what I think music is and an instrument is but I can define myself within that space. (Daniel)

There were significant events outside of the participants’ musical lives that helped to propel them toward composition. Katia and Jim acknowledged external influences on particular compositions, and their compositional identities. Speaking about a piece she had recently finished at the time of the interview, Katia credited the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris as her inspiration. The composition was originally meant to be a singular entity. However, after visiting the Orangerie for a second time while writing the piece, she “got so inspired that it turned into a 20 minute song cycle”.

Jim spoke about his connection to religion, and in particular, Catholicism, as being a prominent feature of his musical writing. Jim felt that his life-long relationship with religion had a profound affect on the music he chooses to compose.
Well, my religious beliefs run to the deepest part of who I am... So the obvious thing about that is that my music quite often contains chorales or references to chorales, which clearly come from the tradition of Christian hymns. (Jim)

Sophie and Craig both experienced catastrophic, life-changing circumstances, which deeply affected their compositional careers. Sophie was a keen ballet dancer from a young age and expected that she would grow up to be a ballerina. However, when she was nine, she had to have an ankle reconstruction, eliminating the possibility of that career path. Following this, Sophie found herself composing more and more, and found that “if you don’t stop you eventually end up becoming a composer anyway”. The incident, that crushed her dream as a young child, both allowed and compelled her, to express herself through music and composition.

Having an ankle reconstruction and having my ballerina dreams crushed at nine [years old]. I think you end up writing things that are more true if you’ve had that kind of experience. (Sophie)

Craig’s life-altering experience occurred prior to his decision to leave his career and become a composer. As described previously, Craig experienced the sudden death of the drummer and close friend, in his band. This propelled Craig’s state of mind into a different sphere. He felt the decisions he made from that point on about his life, career, and expression through composition, were dramatically altered through this experience.
There was no other way to describe it... It was a watershed moment.
Because it puts your own mortality into sharp focus. When you see one of
your friends, one of your brother’s [die], it brings your own mortality into
sharp focus. And it’s at that moment you go, you ask yourself, either
consciously or subconsciously, “What am I doing with my life”? Life is so
short, make the most of it now, because no one lives forever. (Craig)

Craig expressed a deep gratification through telling this particular story. He felt that this
experience had dramatically transformed his concept of self.

I’m so glad that you’re asking me these questions because this is really at
the core of who I am. (Craig)

4.5 Compositional Community

A crucial factor in the composers’ identities was their ability to appropriate themselves
within their wider musical community. They were adept at discussing the stylistic and
cultural influences on their work. They especially regarded how musical genres, styles
or composers had influenced their compositional practices. Another consideration was
the value that other people placed on their music. These were notable, respected and
musician-judges in competition settings, and audiences. The participants also
recognised the changeable nature of music and composition. Therefore, compositional
voice and identity are flexible concepts and evolution is unavoidable. All of these
elements helped the composers to gain a sense of ingenuity, credibility and ownership
in their creative voice.
When asked about their compositional style, the participants tended to describe their compositional voice within a historical or cultural frame of reference. Having an interest in, and understanding of music of the past, aided the participants in describing their own music. Craig talked about his love of the symphonic works of Brahms, Mozart, Wagner and Mahler. He also admired film music composers, feeling an affinity between his and their music. These associations guided Craig towards understanding and classifying his own compositional style.

*Dramatic, Wagnerian...If I’m to start a composition, I usually start big. I like themes. I like associating themes with characters. You know so that’s what my music is like. Its big, its bold, it has something to grab onto.*

*(Craig)*

Daniel also compared his compositional voice to that of another composer.

*The best example of me would be like Steve Reich...his city life pieces.*

*(Daniel)*

Moreover, he characterized his work through an understanding of musical styles and gestures. Daniel referenced historical genres of music that influenced his writing, as well as specific harmonic idioms.

*The land of the impressionists...that’s definitely where I like to live.*

*(Daniel)*
Jim also used specific musical traditions to describe his music. He referred to his religious background, as well as folk music as being influential on his compositional voice. Further, Jim discussed his interest in writing for other non-professional and casual settings. He found a niche that encompassed many of his musical, social and cultural interests, all the while maintaining his conservative perspective of Western classical music.

*My music I suppose would be reasonable to describe it as more towards the conservative end of contemporary art music. I write melodies because I can. I tend to use instruments mainly in conventional ways rather than really extending their techniques. I tend to avoid extreme virtuosity and very very hard music. A lot of my work is with children and with amateurs so quite often my music is really very easy to play. I write a fair bit for the voice, which is tied in with the fact that I write melodies. There are elements of the traditions on which I grew up. You know the Christian tradition and the traditional music, the Celtic and English music, which is my family background as well. (Jim)*

At the other end of the spectrum, Daniel was particularly interested in how far he could push his compositions beyond the traditional constraints of western classical music. He discussed the importance of confluence of conventional instruments and the turntables in his music, as well as the inclusion of non-musical elements.
I have a preference for...easily accessible [sounds] pushed up against things that are uncomfortable or not necessarily recognisable as music.

(Daniel)

After identifying the central aspects of their music, the composers were able to interpret and define how their own music fit into, around, and possibly even outside of, some musical traditions.

The composers used commendation they received from the wider community to help validate their compositional choices. They enthusiastically received the support of their general audiences, and felt that it provided legitimacy to their work. Sophie talked about the importance of her compositions’ ability to relate to anyone. She felt that there were misconceptions about what modern classical music sounds like and desperately wanted to show people that it didn’t have to be an unenjoyable experience. By recognising this, Sophie could write music that she felt more people could relate to, therefore attracting a wider community of support, not only for herself, but also for modern classical music in general.

I like appealing to a wider range of audience. People now have a terrible view of modern music as atonal and maybe discordant... [My music is] still tonal enough to get the admiration of like normal man in the street as well as composers, teachers that kind of thing. (Sophie)
Craig and Katia both expressed the significance of respected musicians’ admiration on their level of confidence as composers. Katia was the 2010 recipient of the ISCM/IAMIC International Society for Contemporary Music Young Composer Award. This was an important moment for Katia. Her self-belief in her ability as a composer was solidified through this experience, crediting it to the recognition of her piece by international judges. It also strengthened her self-confidence in the uniqueness of her compositional voice.

*Some people have never heard a sax piece like that and I think that’s what made the judges very interested in what I was doing. It’s good to get these moments – to get the confidence.* (Katia)

Craig had a similar encouraging experience, after composing his first work outside of film music. The piece, an orchestral work called Icons, gained a runner-up placing in the Sydney Symphony 80th birthday composition competition. The same piece also allowed him to attend the prestigious Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Composer’s School two years in a row. Previous to writing Icons, Craig had identified solely as a film composer.

*I wrote it to show, not only because I wanted to win that competition, but I wanted to show the world that I had range. I had the ability to not only write for the cinema, but I had the ability to write for the concert hall.* (Craig)
However, the recognition of talent and technique from these large, respected institutions showed Craig his potential position as a composer. He felt justified in occupying two very different spaces within the compositional community.

So that was a stylistic step up for me, and something that probably would identify me now... I’ve got this score, that I’m incredibly proud of and it’s, you know, it’s my first stab at an orchestral piece. So I’m looking forward to doing my next one... I believe I do have two musical identities – one for film and one for the concert hall. (Craig)

The composers also acknowledged that their ‘place’ within the compositional or musical community is not necessarily static. Sophie described her compositional voice as constantly expanding. As she discovers more about herself, her music, in turn, will evolve.

I can hear my voice changing but it still sounds like the same composer...
I’ve always had [a compositional identity], but it’s kind of been a changeable identity. I think probably my compositional voice is going to be something that is always developing. (Sophie)

Jim felt that change and growth within his compositional practice was inescapable, if not necessary. Through composing he is able to explore and reveal new elements of his identity.
As far as I’m concerned, every exercise in composition is an exercise in self-discovery, an exercise in trying to find an authentic and unique style, and communicate that to people in a way in which they will appreciate it. (Jim)
5 Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the construction of compositional identities. The results provide an understanding of how compositional identities are developed, particularly from a postgraduate and, semi- or pre-professional perspective. Although each participant experienced different compositional paths, and composed in different styles and genres, similarities were recognised in and through the experiences they discussed.

The composers understood the fluidity of their identities. They talked about past, current and future events and possibilities that have and could affect their compositional choices. A love of and active appreciation for music pervaded the interviews, and it was clear that music was fundamental for the participants’ self-expression and emotional communication. They felt driven to compose, by both the act of composing itself, as well as in an effort to prove their worth to themselves and others. They acknowledged relationships with family, friends, mentors, audiences and their wider musical communities as influential to their compositional choices. By constantly exposing themselves to new environments, particularly within the global music community, the composers were able to continually grow and reshape their compositional identities.

These results relate to and expand on the existing musical identities research (Carter, 2008; Davidson, 2002; Davidson & Burland, 2006). The five themes gave a comprehensive account of the way the composers conceptualised their compositional identity. These composers shared a vision in what it meant to be or become a composer.
Music was essential to their self-concepts, they felt compelled to write music, they were determined to prove their self-worth through their compositions and they recognised the influence of their close and global communities on their compositional practice and choices.

The composers felt a visceral urge to write music, feeling connected to it on an esoteric level. As musicians, music was at the core of their self-concepts (Davidson & Burland, 2006) and an essential expressive medium for them (Bailey & Davidson, 2003; Juslin & Sloboda, 2001). They talked about music in a demonstrative capacity. Music in general, as well as specific works, had the ability to incite and modify their emotions (Mikutta et al., 2014).

Through their stories, the composers explored different facets of themselves and acknowledged the dynamic nature of their identities (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). Composing, performing, talking about and showing others their music, modified and expanded their self-concepts’. Through their experiences with music, they developed both aspects of musical identities – ‘music in identities’ (MII) and ‘identities in music’ (IIM) (MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002). Simply by labelling themselves as composers they defined their underlying IIMs (Fischlin & Heble, 2004). They especially characterised their ‘composer’ identities in their discussions of influential genres, styles, instruments, and other composers, on their compositional practice. They particularly mentioned environmental experiences that influenced their self-concepts as composers. Emotional experiences with music were especially significant (Mikutta et al., 2014; John A. Sloboda, 1991), as were non-musical events. The composers also
talked about how music influenced components of their non-musician identities (MII). Music gave them a sense of belonging and validation by offering a view of themselves within historical and cultural contexts (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). The encouraging nature of their interactions with music boosted general morale and stimulated affirmative identity development (MacDonald & Miell, 2002).

Writing music didn’t only feel natural for the composers; they were determined to prove their self-worth through their music. The composers attributed much of their compositional identity development to positive support they received in relation to their composing. Gaining praise for their efforts in music, and specifically, composing, built confidence and facilitated their determination to succeed. The composers especially recognised their parents’ encouragement and support. Their parents were perceptive and able to identify the composers’ talents and enthusiasm for music from a young age. This allowed the composers to build confidence in their abilities and pursue their musical interests (Davidson & Borthwick, 2002; McPherson, 2009). Along with affirmations from significant-other-musicians, (Davidson & Burland, 2006) this confirmed the composers’ efforts and compelled them to continue composing. They also identified as being part of larger musical communities (Burland & Davidson, 2004). They used descriptive language to compare themselves and their compositions to those of famous composers and claimed those identities further by rejecting musical genres, styles or artists they thought were unfavourable (MacDonald et al., 2005). By doing this, they showed a desire to be identified among composers whom they admired (Fischlin & Heble, 2004) and surrounded themselves with concurring minds (O’Neill, 2002).
The composers also considered their compositions to be self-expressive (Gullberg & Brändström, 2004; Hargreaves et al., 2002). Composing acted as a channel for active identity development (Hargreaves et al., 2002), as well as emotional communication (Davidson & Burland, 2006). The participants used composing to help negotiate their spiritual and career identities, as well as a form of psychological therapy and stress relief (Bailey & Davidson, 2003; DeNora, 2000; John A Sloboda et al., 2001). Considering the affective capacities of music (Baumgartner et al., 2006; Blood & Zatorre, 2001; Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2015), the composers wrote music not only as a display of skill, but to present themselves and their identities to the world (Gullberg & Brändström, 2004; Hargreaves et al., 2002).

The participants showed that their musical and compositional behaviour, choices and identities were cultivated and explored through different socio-cultural contexts and relationships. Through talking, the composers engaged in active construction and negotiation of their identities. They presented their stories in the form of autobiographical narrative, describing experiential influences, and observing, during the story-telling process, how these experiences helped in the evolution of their compositional selves. This aligns with social constructionist theory, where identity is defined as a socially formulated concept (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003) and talking is an active agent for identity exploration (Bruner, 1990; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wortham, 2001).

The participants talked about the many social aspects of their musical lives. There were meaningful relationships that influenced their journeys as composers. They specifically
identified their parents’ affection for and encouragement of musical pursuits, as well as their parents’ own involvement in musical activities. The role of their parents and immediate family were of particular significance in childhood, as they helped the composers to establish positive and life-long appreciation for, and engagement with music (Davidson & Borthwick, 2002; McPherson, 2009). Further, the participants recognised the effect that other personal relationships had on their identities. Particularly during adolescence and into young adulthood, the supportive others transformed from those in parental roles, to mentors and peers (Davidson & Burland, 2006; O’Neill, 2002). The composers directly credited their self-worth and affirmation of identity to their mentors and other significant relationships, especially during their young adult lives.

Another important social consideration for the composers was their perception of ‘place’ within a wider, global musical community (Burland & Davidson, 2004). They positioned themselves and both their existing and desired compositional output within specific musical environments. This showed an ability to examine themselves within abstract contexts (Durkin, 1995), position themselves in relation to others in their communities (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996) and perceive their own and others’ musicality and musical environments (Munro, 2005).

5.1 Limitations and Future Directions

This study offers an initial view of the conception and growth of compositional identity. It is the first study of its type, gathering preliminary data on the compositional identities of postgraduate composition students. The results build on the work of previous studies,
offering an introductory explanation into the development of compositional identity
(Carter, 2008; Davidson, 2002). This study was focused on compositional identity
development solely from the perspective of the composers themselves. Other research
into compositional identity focuses on establishing objectives towards compositional
output and is primarily interested in how identity work affects or describes
compositional voice or vice versa. It was beyond the scope and interests of this project
to investigate the impacts of process, genre or style on the participants’ physical
compositional output. Therefore, this study chose to exclude the examination of the
participants’ compositions, considering it unnecessary to successfully resolve the
intentions of the project.

The participants of this study were a purposive sample at the Sydney Conservatorium of
Music. While they gave a fascinating insight into identity, there is opportunity for
growth in the field of compositional identity. Future research should continue to explore
compositional identity in young professionals at other conservatoriums and post-
secondary institutions. This model of research can also extend into the professional field
of composition. Future studies should follow the line of questioning established by
replicating this study, and focus on a varied cross-section of composer-musicians. These
could include songwriters, popular music producers, folk and non-Western composers,
and amateurs. This would enhance understanding of how compositional identities are
evolved for different musicians and genres.
5.2 Conclusion

This study aimed to discover how composers establish and develop compositional identities. Five postgraduate composition students at The Sydney Conservatorium of Music were interviewed regarding their compositional identities. Analysis of the interviews revealed five themes. The participants experienced music socially and explored their compositional identities through their relationships and in their communities.

Music was critically important to these composers. It was central to their self-concepts, and pervaded every aspect of their lives. The composers felt compelled to write music. There was a need to prove themselves, their abilities and their worth through their music. Their compositions were a representation of their self-concept and their skills. The composers categorised and placed themselves among their peers through their involvement in global music and composition communities. The participants’ close relationships were most important in providing high levels of positive support in their chosen vocation.

Compositional identity of postgraduate composers is formed through multiple and varied experiences and is continuously changing as they gain knowledge about themselves and their place in the world around them. This group of composers demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental elements of their compositional identities and especially acknowledge the unpredictable and flexible nature of their musical identity. This study provides a strong foundation for future research in the field of compositional identity. For the postgraduate composer,
compositional identity is a complex musical expression of their past, current and future selves.
6 References


APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL

Research Integrity
Human Research Ethics Committee

Thursday, 26 September 2013

Dr Helen Mitchell
Conservatorium Admin, Sydney Conservatorium of Music
Email: helen.mitchell@sydney.edu.au

Dear Dr Helen Mitchell

I am pleased to inform you that the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved your project entitled "Compositional Identity".

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.: 2013/799
Approval Date: 24 September 2013
First Annual Report Due: 25 September 2014
Authorised Personnel: Mitchell Helen; Barbeier Damian; Hoffman Sophie

Documents Approved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Uploaded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20/06/2013</td>
<td>Recruitment Letter/Email</td>
<td>Recruitment Email</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/08/2013</td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>18/09/2013</td>
<td>Participant Consent Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>21/09/2013</td>
<td>Participant Info Statement</td>
<td>Participant Information Statement</td>
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HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the approval date stated in this letter and is granted pending the following conditions being met:

**Condition/s of Approval**

- Continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans.
- Provision of an annual report on this research to the Human Research Ethics Committee from the approval date and at the completion of the study. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of ethics approval for the project.
- All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC within 72 hours.
- All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.
- Any changes to the project including changes to research personnel must be approved by the HREC before the research project can proceed.

**Chief Investigator / Supervisor’s responsibilities:**

1. You must retain copies of all signed Consent Forms (if applicable) and provide these to the HREC on request.

2. It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Integrity (Human Ethics) should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

{signed}

Dr Stephen Assinder  
Chair  
Human Research Ethics Committee

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This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), NHMRC and Universities Australia Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007) and the CPMP/ICH Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice.
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Dr Helen Mitchell
Senior Lecturer
Room 2123
C41 SCM
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 1250
Email: helen.mitchell@sydney.edu.au
Web: http://www.sydney.edu.au/

Compositional Identity

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is the study about?
You are invited to participate in a study of compositional identity. The study aims to gain insight into how compositional identity is formed. The research is focussing on established, living composers, their compositional background and how they perceive their own compositional identity.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?
The study is being conducted by Sophia Hoffman, Masters Student and will form the basis for the degree of Master of Music Research (Composition) at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Dr Helen Mitchell, Senior Lecturer and Dr Damian Barbeler, Research Supervisor.

(3) What does the study involve?
The study will involve an interview, at a location of convenience to both you and the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded, and possibly video recorded. Questions asked will relate to your general background and history as a composer, comments on a piece of your music chosen by the researcher and specific details relating to your compositional identity.

(4) How much time will the study take?
The interview length aim is one hour, however it could take longer than anticipated.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?
Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent and - if you do consent - you can withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with The University of Sydney.

You may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio and/or video recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?
This study aims to gather important information and knowledge based on your personal views and experiences as an established composer. Because of the personal aspect of the research, it is integral that you will be identified by name in all aspects of the study. A report of the study may also be submitted for publication.
Due to the important nature of the information gathered from the interview, we seek your permission to use the results for other purposes. These could include further post-graduate study at The University of Sydney or another university, or approved research within an accredited institution. In these cases, further ethics approval will be sought for the use of the information provided in this interview.

Due to the important nature of the information gathered from the interview, we also seek your consent to keep the results of the interview indefinitely.

(7) **Will the study benefit me?**

We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from the study. However, your involvement in this study will be important for the addition of knowledge on the subject of compositional identity.

(8) **Can I tell other people about the study?**

Yes.

(9) **What if I require further information about the study or my involvement in it?**

When you have read this information, Sophie Hoffman will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Sophie Hoffman, soph.hoffman@gmail.com, 0420540205.

(10) **What if I have a complaint or any concerns?**

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact The Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 9351 8900 (Telephone); +61 2 9351 8177 (Facsimile) or ho.humanetics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, [PRINT NAME], give consent to my participation in the research project:

TITLE: Compositional Identity

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

3. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary — I am not under any obligation to consent.

4. I understand that this is not an anonymous study. I understand that by being involved I am agreeing to be identifiable by name. I understand that any research data gathered from the results of the study may be published and will be kept indefinitely.

5. I understand that the results of this study may be used for another purpose. This includes further post-graduate study at The University of Sydney or another university, or research at an accredited institution.

6. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) or The University of Sydney now or in the future.
7. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, the audio and/or video recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

8. I consent to:

- Audio-recording
  YES ☐ NO ☐
- Video-recording
  YES ☐ NO ☐
- Receiving Feedback
  YES ☐ NO ☐
- Being identified
  YES ☐ NO ☐
- Results kept indefinitely
  YES ☐ NO ☐
- Results being used for other purposes
  YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered YES to the “Receiving Feedback” question, please provide your details i.e. mailing address, email address.

Feedback Option

Address: __________________________________________

________________________________________

Email: __________________________________________

........................................................................
Signature

........................................................................
Please PRINT name

........................................................................
Date
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROMPTS

**Interview Questions/Prompts**

The interviews will be open-ended, but will follow a general structure.

The interviews will begin with some questions about their musical background and history:

- How did your composition experience begin?
- How did you know that you wanted to make composition your profession?
- Before you became an established composer, how did you respond to the pressures to compose music of specific styles?

The questions will then turn to be more specific, about compositional identity:

- How would you describe your compositional identity?
- How did you come to the decision to write music of this style?
- What are some significant changes that you have noticed in your compositional style? Can you tell me the circumstances in which these changes occurred?
- Why do you think these particular moments caused you to rethink your identity?
- Would you describe this as a watershed moment?