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Bravo Maestros: the experiences of state-school students' journeys to a UK music conservatoire

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A Thesis presented to King's College London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Culture, Media and the Creative Industries



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Abstract

Since their formations in the early nineteenth century, UK music conservatoires have served as the elite training grounds for many of the world's most successful classical musicians. However, whilst these institutions play an important role in preparing musicians for a future performance career, the way in which conservatoires admit students can be seen to reflect and perpetuate classical music's status quo – this being, overwhelmingly white and middle-class. This cultural hegemony is highlighted in the reports by UCAS which show how the majority of conservatoires are made up of privately educated students from the most advantaged backgrounds. The data also show how the most advantaged fifth of young people remain around six-times more likely to enter a programme at a UK music conservatoire than those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, with both the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music accepting fewer state-school students than Oxbridge. It is from the data sets provided by UCAS and HESA along with the wider research which demonstrates how state-school students remain at a disadvantage when accessing these institutions which form the rationale of this thesis. In order to gain a deeper insight into this issue, the PhD has collected qualitative data through interviewing participants on their lived experiences of their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. To do so, the research employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis to uncover key themes that illuminate the journeys of young musicians aspiring to UK conservatoires, which include: *Parent Empowerment*; *the 'Meritocratic Musician'*; *Becoming 'Serious'* and *being a 'Fish out of Water'*. To further understand these experiences, this research draws on the conceptual frameworks of French social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu. As a result, this research has generated a wealth of new knowledge of music education research and expands on the sociological knowledge of class, culture and inequalities in relation to classical music in the UK. In doing so, the research also highlights the equity, diversity and inclusion challenges both state school students and conservatoires face.

Key words: music conservatoires, classical music, state-schooled, Bourdieu, inequalities

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For everyone who feels as if they don't belong.

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List of Abbreviations:

ABRSM – Associated Boards of the Royal Schools of Music

CUKAS – Conservatoire United Kingdom Admissions Service

DfE – Department for Education

HE – Higher Education

HME – Higher Music Education

EHME – Elite Higher Music Education

HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency

OfS – Office for Students

POLAR – Participation of Local Areas

RAM - Royal Academy of Music

RCM – Royal College of Music

RNCM - Royal northern College of Music

RCS – Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

RWCMD – Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

RBC – Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

SES – Socio-economic status

UCAS – University and College Admissions Service

WP – Widening Participation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Background and Rationale: for the few, not the many

The UK is currently home to nine major music conservatoires. Playing “a unique and pivotal role in the higher education (HE) landscape as providers of specialist performing arts education”, these institutions have long been drivers of renowned musical training (see Perkins, 2013; Bull, 2019) and play an important role “for our next generation of performers and composers” (Presland, 2005, p. 237). Considered as the “lifeblood of culture in the UK and leaders in the global arts industry” (ibid, 2013, p. 4), it may come as no surprise that “most players in UK orchestras” have “graduated from a UK conservatoire”, with many others “found in theatres, opera houses and on screen all over the world, from Munich to Melbourne, and from Beijing to Berlin” (see Conservatoires UK, 2020). Attracting some 1300 international students annually and home to over 8,400 students (see HESA, 2022), UK music conservatoires often present themselves as “beacons of artistic and educational excellence” which form the “backbone of artistic life” in the UK. (Conservatoires UK, 2023). In general, studying music at a conservatoire differs enormously to studying music at a university (see for example, Ford, 2010; Comunian, Faggian and Jewell, 2014). Not only must students possess high levels of practical ability on their instrument but also, the length of the programme (usually four years opposed to three) along with the intense vocational nature of the conservatoire curriculum is what sets these institutions apart. “This ethos is reflected in the high level of contact hours between students and staff” and is considerably higher than that offered at a university (see Conservatoires UK, 2023). As noted by UCAS (2023):

“Instead of a limited number of contact hours per week at a university, conservatoire students often work a 09:00 to 17:00, Monday to Friday routine. Performances and workshops are mostly held in the evenings and at weekends. On top of this, students are expected to practise extensively in their own time” (UCAS, 2020)

In their 2020 report on conservatoire education, UCAS Conservatoires summarised conservatoire study as: focusing on the individual; facilitating personal development;

measuring against the student's own criteria; fostering creativity; unique learning experiences; training for a career in the profession (UCAS Conservatoires, 2020, p.4). For musicians, training is often centered around weekly one-to-one lessons with distinguished professors (Gaunt, 2010; Carey et al., 2013), many of whom have active international performance careers (UCAS, 2023b). This unique and intensive pedagogical practise, more commonly referred to as the "master and apprentice"¹ model (see Long et al., 2014) aims to prepare students for a future performance career and is "vital" in building "the thick skin so essential for musicians dealing with the inevitable crushing criticisms of their student and professional lives" (Lehrer, 1987 in Presland, 2015, p. 245). This, along with the conservatoires "strong connections" in many "areas of the arts world" and further training "with international figures" is what makes these institutions the first choice for many aspiring performers (see Conservatoires UK, 2023).

Access into these institutions tends to be "highly competitive" (Caizley in HEPI, 2019) with most conservatoires remaining heavily oversubscribed (Perkins and Mills, 2009) and only accepting the most able of performers. Students are usually admitted into the conservatoire based on their performance at audition with applicants "also expected to demonstrate sufficient scholarly achievement to pass the academic components of the degree" (Perkins and Mills, 2009, p. 818). Such procedures are highlighted in the work by Davies (2006) who state how conservatoires:

"Offer training that reflects the neo-liberal ideal of a meritocracy whereby the degree of 'talent' and 'effort' that students bring to and invest in the learning process determines their subsequent musical progress and success" (Davies, 2006, p. 804-805)

Thus, only those with the highest levels of attainment are then able to access these spaces (see RCM, 2019, p.1). This is pointed out by the conservatoire-based researchers Burt-Perkins and Mills (2009) who assert how these recruitment

¹ The master and apprentice model of teaching is a "type of intense learning, based on an individualised, educationally interactive exchange between master musician and student" and remains instrumental in developing "the highly sophisticated blend of musical, interpretative, artistic, and highly technical skills an instrumentalist or vocalist requires to become a professional musician. (Wills, 1997 in Lebler, Burt-Perkins and Carey, 2009, p.233)

practices tend to favour those whom have had access to expensive instrumental tuition (Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009, p.817). Ultimately, this then leaves UK music conservatoires predominantly occupied by those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. This was reported in the UCAS Conservatoires end of year report in 2015 which showed how, “the most advantaged fifth of young people in the UK remain around six times more likely to enter courses at conservatoires than the least advantaged group “(UCAS Conservatoire Report, 2015, p.28). In the Royal College of Music’s ‘Access and Participation Plan’ for 2019-2020, the conservatoire states how:

“Children who are likely to become credible applicants for the RCM’s single undergraduate programme, the Bachelor of Music degree, will have access to and be engaged with music making throughout their school lives and will usually have reached a high level of attainment by the time they are in their mid-teens. One or more distinctions at ABRSM Grade 8 level is usual” (RCM, 2019, P.1)

However, given the systematic removal of quality music education in UK state schools (Roberts and O’Donnell, 2019; Bath et al., 2020) along with the increase of music provision in private schools (BPI Report, 2019), it can come as no surprise that conservatoires such as the Royal College of Music (RCM) and the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) accept fewer state school students into their institutions out of any HE institution in the UK, including Oxbridge (see data in HESA, 2022).

At the time of the research report by UCAS Conservatoires (2014), I had just enrolled with a scholarship at a conservatoire in London. Deriving from a state-school and Free School Meal background, I found the conservatoire to be a rather exclusive institution, both in terms of my educational and social experiences. Such experiences are conceptualised by French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu through his “theory of practice” – a framework which includes his concepts of: habitus, capital and field (see Bourdieu, 1972). Bourdieu viewed “the education systems of industrialised societies” as catalysts to reproduce “class inequalities” (Sullivan, 2002, p.144) with social class thus determining how well you do within the system (see Bourdieu, 1972, 1979, 1984, 1990). It can therefore be inferred that the lower your class, the lower your chances are of “fitting in”, especially in middle-class environments such as universities (see for example, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009, 2010) or in this case, the conservatoire.

Whilst Bourdieu has remained significant in helping to understand the social and cultural inequalities in education (see for example, Grenfell and James, 1998; Mills, 2008; Reay et al., 2009, 2010; Web et al., 2016; Reay, 2017; Hart 2018; Jin and Ball, 2019 etc.), research has yet to employ his concepts to understand such inequalities in UK music conservatoires.

Given the unique position of conservatoires in the cultural and creative industries (more specifically, the classical music industry) along with their highly-selective recruitment procedures which tend to favour those from privately educated backgrounds, this PhD explores the lived experiences of state schooled students and their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. In doing so, the PhD makes a significant contribution to understanding the challenges and opportunities state school students face when accessing the talent pipeline in their pursuit of studying at a UK music conservatoire. At the same time, this thesis contributes to the ongoing sociological debates on the practices of classical music and the middle-class culture it perpetuates.

1.2: Facts and figures: access and participation

Participation rates for state-schooled, low-socio economic and black² students in UK music conservatoires have remained very low (see data in CUKAS Annual reports 2006-2013; UCAS Conservatoire reports, 2015-2022; HESA, 2022) despite conservatoires' efforts to increase access to these spaces (see Davies, 2004; Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009; McPhail, 2010; Perkins, 2013). Whilst plentiful research exists which explores conservatoire culture in regards to teaching and learning for staff and students (see for example, Renshaw, 1986; Mills, 2004; Mills, 2005; Presland, 2005; Miller and Baker, 2007; Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009; Gaunt et al., 2012; Perkins, 2013; Rumiantsev et al., 2020), none of the research focuses on those whom are heavily underrepresented within these spaces.

² Data from HESA show how during the academic years of 2014/15 to 2017/18, the Royal College of Music had no UK-domiciled black student enrolments. [Likewise, the Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland had no UK-domiciled black student enrolments for the year of 2015/16.](#) This data shall be further explored in the PhD (see HESA, 2020).

The elitist nature of conservatoire admissions was captured in the media in the early 2000s (see for example, Smithers, 2005; Morris, 2006) when Conservatoires UK (CUK) teamed up with 'University and Colleges Admissions Service' (UCAS) to form what was then known as 'Conservatoires UK Admissions Service' (CUKAS) (see CUKAS annual report, 2006, p.4). This media attention was brought about through CUK institutions³ pledging to dispel their "middle-class and elitist public image" (Smithers, 2005). It is evident from these sources that conservatoire leaders had blamed the lack of diversity within their spaces as a consequence of disadvantaged students not being able to meet "the tough entry requirements" due to them not having "access to expensive music lessons from a young age" (see Price in Morris, 2006; Smithers, 2005). This was later reiterated in the report by CUKAS (2006) which states how "a major factor in the creation of CUKAS was the desire of Conservatoires UK institutions to attract a broader base of applicants by increasing accessibility to advanced musical training" (CUKAS, 2006, p.4).

The merger between CUK and UCAS also meant that UK conservatoires student data was to be made publicly available for the very first time⁴ with hopes of creating a more transparent system of admissions (see Smithers, 2005). However, just over eighteen years later, UK music conservatoires are still struggling to recruit students from diverse backgrounds, with the majority of students who attend these institutions deriving from the most advantaged backgrounds in the UK (see POLAR data in UCAS conservatoire report 2015-2020).

To gain a more comprehensive insight into the highly selective nature of conservatoire admissions, this research has extracted the latest data available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)⁵ which show how all four ABRSM⁶

³ At the time of the media reports CUK represented seven conservatoires in England, Scotland and Wales. Today, CUK represents eleven conservatoires in total.

⁴ As noted in the Guardian article by Smithers (2005), the merger between CUK and UCAS meant that data on conservatoires widening participation records was made publicly available. This was made possible through the link between UCAS and funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

⁵ The latest data by HESA is that from the academic year of 2018/19, which was published in early 2020.

⁶ The Associated Boards of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) is the exam board of the Royal Schools of Music, delivering over 650,000 music exams and assessments every year in 93 countries. It formally represents the RCM; RAM, RNCM and the RCS. More can be found at: <https://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-us/our-history/>

conservatoires are significantly under the current benchmark set out by HESA for the recruitment of state school students (table 1.2):

**Table 1.2: % of state-school students in ABRSM conservatoires in 2018/19
(HESA, 2023)**

Conservatoire	Total full-time entrants	Percentage with known school data	Percentage from state schools	Benchmark (%)
RCM	65	96.7	39.7	89.6
RAM	70	94.4	41.8	89.7
RNCM	135	99.2	73.6	90.9
RCS	185	97.9	84.4	91.7

What the data set above shows is how all four ABRSM conservatoires for the academic year of 2018/19 failed to meet the benchmark⁷ on the recruitment of students from UK state schools. Upon further analysis, this research also found all four of these institutions continuously failed to meet the benchmark on the recruitment of state school students from the academic year of 2015/16 to 2020/21 (see Perkins and Mills, 2009; HESA, 2023). For some further context, the very latest data is highlighted in the table below which gives an overview into the percentages of underrepresented groups in all four of the conservatoires associated with the ABRSM in the UK:

⁷ For more information on how benchmarks are used by HESA, please see: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/benchmarks>

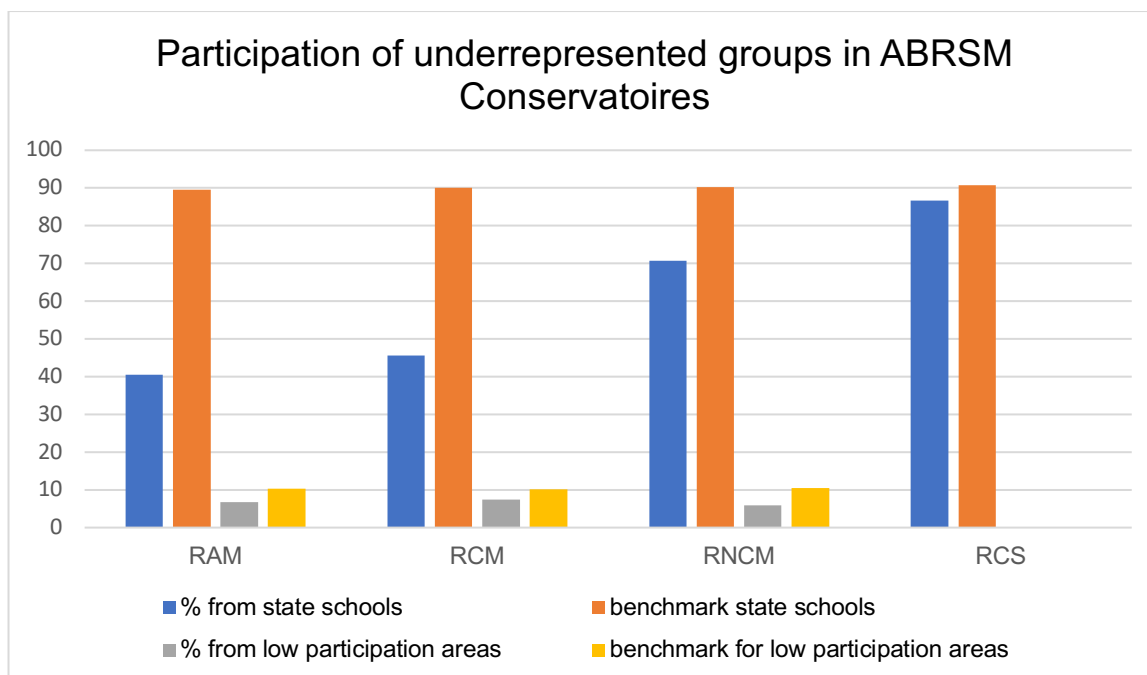


Figure 1.2: Participation of underrepresented groups in ABRSM Conservatoires

There is currently no data on the benchmark for low participation areas for the RCS as low participation data is not produced for HE providers in Scotland (HESA, 2022). It is also worth noting that overall number for those at the RNCM from low participation areas stands at a total of five undergraduate students (5.9%). This signifies that the remaining recruited students come from areas with higher participation rates. Unfortunately, HESA does not provide data for each quintile (group of five) within participation areas. This limitation necessitates further investigation to fully understand the demographic makeup of the RNCM and RCS student body.

For even further clarity, the table below gives an overview into these statistics on a year-by-year basis, from the academic years of 2017/18 to 2020/21, as analysed and extracted from HESA (2023):

**Table 1.2.1: % of state school students in ABRSM Conservatoires 2017/18 -
2020/21:**

Conservatoire	% of state school students entering in 2017/18	% of state school students entering in 2018/19	% of state school students entering in 2019/20	% of state school students entering in 2020/21
RAM	38.2	41.8	37.5	40.5
RCM	31.1	39.7	44.8	45.6
RNCM	72.5	73.6	81.6	70.7
RCS	89.5	84.4	81.2	86.6

In general, the data in the table above shows that the percentage of state school students entering conservatoires increased for some conservatoires over the four academic years. Rather interestingly, the RCM and RAM have managed to increase their state school students in 2020/21 in comparison to their numbers in 2017/18. More so, the RNCM and RCS experienced a decline in the recruitment of state school students, with the RCS, despite having the highest overall percentage of state school students, showcasing a gradual decrease over the years. The RNCM witnessed the largest increase in the percentage of state school students entering the conservatoire, but also saw the most significant drop in 2020/21. In 2017/18, 72.5% of RNCM entrants were from state schools. This figure increased to 73.6% in 2018/19 and then to 81.6% in 2019/20. However, it subsequently plummeted by 10.9% in 2020/21.

It is noteworthy that the 2020/21 academic year also coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as highlighted by HESA (2022), “the first thing to note about the 2020/21 student data is that overall student numbers are up by more than 8% over 2019/20” (HESA, 2022). And while prospective students would have auditioned in the autumn before the pandemic, the data from HESA documents UK domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants who did not leave within 50 days of commencement at HE providers. Data for 2021/22 and 2022/23 would be necessary to complement the statistics in order to be able to provide a more comprehensive overview of the trends in this area.

Through comparing and contrasting these statistics with other UK elite⁸ Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), it appears that during the years from 2015/16 to 2020/21, both the RCM and the RAM recruited fewer state school students than both the University of Oxford and Cambridge – two institutions which are notorious for their disproportionate recruitment of privately educated students⁹ (see Nahai, 2013). Furthermore, whilst arguments can be made here on the contrasting features between conservatoires and UK HEIs in general, this data unquestionably demonstrates that there may be systemic barriers in place that are preventing state school students from applying to and attending the conservatoires – potential barriers which this thesis will soon discuss and explore.

1.3: Widening Participation to UK Music Conservatoires: acknowledging the gap

Widening access and participation (WP) in Higher Education (HE) has become a pressing issue for governments around the world (Burke, 2020). The UK has a long history of scholarly interest in WP in HE with research in this field beginning in the mid-twentieth century (Kettley, 2007) and continuing to expand ever since (see for example, Crawford et al., 2016; Martin, 2024). The term itself refers to the “discrepancies in the take-up of higher education opportunities between different under-represented groups of students” (Hubble and Connell-Smith, 2018, p.4). As mentioned above, UK music conservatoires are specialist arts institutions which belong to the UKs wider HE sector. However, despite their role in the sector, their unique contribution to WP remains largely unexplored in current research. As pointed out by Burt-Perkins and Mills (2009), HEIs “that receive more applicants than they have places have no choice but to devise ways of selecting some candidates and rejecting others” (Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009, p. 817). The case of UK music conservatoires exemplifies the challenges inherent in WP policies. Their specialised

⁸ Elite universities are characterised within the PhD as consisting of those who belong to the UK Russell Group. See <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/our-universities/> for a list of the 24 members.

⁹ The data from HESA for the academic year of 2018/19 show that the University of Oxford recruited 60.6% of students from state-schools along with the University of Cambridge who recruited 65.3% in comparison to the Royal College of Music who recruited 31.1% from state schools and the Royal Academy of Music who recruited 41.8% (see HESA, 2020)

nature creates difficulties for these institutions as they strive to implement targets and achieve strategic inclusion goals.

1.3.1: Access and Participation Plans

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the WP agendas of UK music conservatoires, it is useful to analyse the policies set forth by the UK government. In 2019, the Office for Students (OfS) published their Access and Participation Plan Guidance (see OfS, 2019) which sets out a national strategy for the UK HEIs future WP targets¹⁰. The OfS set out their ambition to “eliminate the gap in participation at higher-tariff providers between the most and least represented groups by 2038-39” (OfS, 2019, p. 19). Using POLAR as a methodology to measure outcomes, the OfS want to see a ratio decline from approximately 5:1 at what it currently stands at, to 1:1 by 2038-39 (OfS, 2019). Achieving this will require all HEIs to have an Access and Participation Plan (APP) which should set out how HEIs “will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from HE” (OfS, 2019, p. 3). As the OfS (2019) state:

“English higher education providers are required to have an approved access and participation plan if they are registered in the Approved (fee cap) category of the Register and wish to charge above the basic tuition fee cap for ‘qualifying persons’ on ‘qualifying courses’” (OfS, 2019, p. 4).

It must be noted here that the guidance put forward by the OfS (2019) does not mention or refer to specialist HEIs, with no reference made to the UK Conservatoire sector. While UK law mandates that UK music conservatoires adhere to WP guidelines, their specialist nature presents unique challenges compared to universities. Take acceptance ratios: for popular instruments like piano, voice, and strings, the vast number of applicants far outweighs places across most UK music conservatoires (UCAS Conservatoires data, 2018-2024). Unlike universities that can

¹⁰ The guidance was issued by the Director for Fair Access and Participation, on behalf of the OfS under section 29 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA).

leverage outreach programmes to attract diverse applicants, conservatoires are limited by their admissions criteria – typically requiring a high standard like ABRSM Grade 8 Distinction as a minimum entry standard to fulfil the technical demands of their degree programmes. Achieving the targets set out by the OfS (2019) for UK music conservatoires will thus be more challenging than other HEIs. However, this does not mean WP efforts in conservatoires are impossible.

The OfS, which is an independent regulator for HE created APPs to centralise WP efforts (see Thomas, 2022) and to “detail the intervention strategies and activities that providers will make to address risks to equality of opportunity” (OfS, 2023). In doing so, HE providers measure and evaluate their impact “over a four-year period” and are required to have an APP if: (1) they are registered with the OfS in the 'Approved (fee cap)' categories and (2) they want to charge above the basic tuition fee cap (see OfS, 2023). The plans centre on a students' “whole journey”, ranging from “access, success, and next steps - and demand institutions assess progress for diverse groups, including those of lower socio-economic backgrounds, different ages, or with disabilities” (Thomas, 2022 p. 97). Inside APPs are HE providers “programme interventions” which are programmes that aim to “widen access to HE” and “are typically delivered longitudinally, over at “least one academic year” and in many cases, starting “at primary school age” (Moore et al., 2023, p.1).

The RCM and the RAM are the two oldest surviving conservatoires in the UK. Established in the nineteenth century, these institutions are steeped in history and consistently ranked within the world's top 10 universities for music (see QS Rankings 2023). Both located in central London in two affluent areas (Marylebone and South Kensington), their alumni range from Sir Elton John all the way to Benjamin Britten. Just like their HE counterparts, UK music conservatoires are legally functioning HE providers that must also adhere to the regulations set out by the OfS for providing APPs. This section will now explore these APPs of two of the UKs oldest music conservatoires in more detail, exploring their challenges and opportunities. The selection of the RCM and the RAM for this analysis is twofold. Firstly, both conservatoires have consistently fallen short of the recruitment benchmark for state-schooled students established (see HESA, 2023). Secondly, their overall ranking and recruitment data suggest they face the most significant challenges in achieving the

OfS (2019) WP ambitions. By examining how these two conservatoires address WP, we can start to gain valuable insights that may be applicable to other similar institutions. If the RCM and RAM can successfully implement effective strategies, they could also potentially serve as models for other UK music conservatoires striving to improve WP.

Both the RCM and RAM published their APPs between the years of 2020 and 2022 and both plans last for four years in total. It was interesting to see that in the introductions of both APPs, the difficulties they have in recruiting diverse and underrepresented students are outlined as part of their rationale and backgrounds. For example, in their APP, the RCM state that:

“With a 10 to 15 year lead time required to develop the skills needed for conservatoire entry and the socio-economic diversity of school leavers with access to music education decreasing rather than increasing, the RCM faces a significant challenge in increasing the diversity of its student body, and long-term change is needed on a national scale to reverse this trend (RCM, 2020, p.2)

Likewise, the RAM acknowledge this issue and write:

“In common with other leading international conservatoires, the Academy mainly recruits students who have already achieved a very high standard in their instrumental discipline or show clear promise of doing so. This means that most applicants who have not had the advantage of high-quality individual tuition over a period of many years prior to application are at a disadvantage” (RAM, 2022, p. 4)

To get a more detailed overview of what programmes the APPs at both conservatoires offer, table 1.3 below gives an overview of the outreach programmes in the APPs of the two conservatoires against the target group ages:

Table 1.3: Outreach programmes from two UK music conservatoires

Target group	Royal College of Music	Royal Academy of Music
Early Years and KS1 & 2	RCM Sparks RCM Junior Department	Open Academy Pre-Junior Academy: beginners Junior Academy Your Academy
Secondary School (KS3 &4)	RCM Junior Department	Transitions programme Open Academy Junior Academy Your Academy Springboard sessions Clubs
Audition preparation (KS4 & 5)	RCM Junior Department Mentoring of prospective applicants	Junior Academy Your Academy: Summer School

Both the RCM and RAM recognise in their APPs the pivotal role of early musical engagement in nurturing talent and facilitating the pipeline to HME. Their programmes provide structured pathways for children and young people to develop their skills and to potentially progress to advanced musical training at a conservatoire level. The programmes on offer at both the RCM and RAM seem to recognise these challenges with their programmes aiming to target those who are at risk of missing out. It is clear from their programmes that their aims are to ensure fairer access in early musical development whilst catering to specific age groups' needs. For example, as one of their aims in their APPs, the RCM write how they hope to “contribute to reducing the national inequality of access to high quality music tuition by offering a pathway of learning, allowing those from under-represented groups to access and develop the

skills required to progress to higher music education” (RCM, 2020, p. 31). To do this, they plan “to increase the number of RCM Sparks Juniors participants on track to achieve the required standard to audition for any junior conservatoire by the end of the 4-year programme” and to increase in their target groups by 40% over a four-year cycle (RCM, 2020, p. 31). This could potentially mean that those who become involved in this programme are able to continue in the talent pipeline, eventually leading to study at undergraduate level at a UK music conservatoire.

While both conservatoires offer programmes at the early stages level, attracting talent from diverse geographical backgrounds across the UK presents a challenge for both of these institutions. In the RAM's three-stage access strategy, the "Community First" programme is run in partnership with disadvantaged schools in London and Leeds and aims to address their geographical limitations in regards to their outreach policies (see RAM, 2022, p. 16).

“Interventions are designed to lower these barriers for the young people on our Access schemes, though of course our reach is limited by geography and resource. We cannot hope to address all of the entrenched inequalities in the wider UK social and educational context. We have been able to offer a series of audition fee waivers to those who have attended our Clubs (see Your Academy below) to facilitate this” (RAM, 2022, p. 16)

In contrast, the RCM does not appear to offer any outreach activities outside of London, suggesting that this could be an area for improvement in addressing geographical diversity.

Addressing the financial affordability to music education remains a focus throughout both the RCMs and RAMs APPs. Initiatives like the RCM's subsidised music lessons at all stages of learning and likewise, with programmes such as the RAM's "Chance to Play" scholarships for early years, can be seen to help address financial barriers for those from more socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, in both APPs, there is no clear plan on how prospective students will be recruited. More so, there appears to be very little emphasis on the role of parents and carers in both APPs. In the RCMs APP, there is some reference made to the role of parents and their

role in early musical development. This is outlined in their programme 'Get, Set, Play' aimed at 6-8 year olds which "is a year-long free programme offered to families and young people from the least affluent neighbourhoods of the Tri-borough area" (RCM, 2020, p. 18). The programme "offers an accessible way for parents, grandparents and carers to learn music alongside their children and provides a pathway for a continuing musical journey" (RCM, 2020, p.18). In contrast, the RAM make only one reference to the role parents play in their APP as shown below:

"Individual departments are supported by the Access and Participation Manager to carry out projects to identify talented musicians aged 4-17 from under-represented groups with the aim of familiarising them with the Academy and its undergraduate programmes, and – where appropriate – working with them and their families" (RAM, 2022, p. 15)

In her qualitative research, Baker (2019) explores the vocational and academic divide in WP in the HE sector and at times, makes reference to the conservatoire sector here in the UK. As such, issues such as the costs associated with applying to a conservatoire, such as "audition fees", "additional application fees" and "the travel and accommodation expenses incurred when attending auditions" are amongst some of the constraints students from working class backgrounds face when accessing these institutions (Baker, 2019, p. 73). However, this is merely the tip of the iceberg. To even reach the application stage, a prospective student likely possesses significant instrumental proficiency, often requiring substantial financial investment over many years. More importantly, they must be aware that conservatoires exist as a viable educational option. Both the RCM and RAM in their APPs outline their audition fee-waiver schemes, with both stating how this is designed for those from low-income households with the RAM also offering audition fee waivers for their junior programmes. Furthermore, the RAM write how:

"In the light of the successful online audition process introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, we will keep digital auditions to mitigate against travel and other access costs, for both the Junior and Senior programmes, as well as continuing to offer audition fee waivers" (RAM, 2022, p. 20)

Further complicating the recruitment challenges for UK music conservatoires, McQueen and Cavett's (2024) research show a decline in music literacy among university music applicants. McQueen and Cavett's (2024) research revealed a lack of consensus on the cause and solution behind declining music literacy. Some participants in their study attributed this trend to lowered music education standards in schools, while others advocated for curriculum updates that balance western traditional approaches with contemporary needs (McQueen and Cavett, 2024). One noteworthy finding in this study is the data highlighting instrumental teachers as the single most influential factor in developing musical literacy (ibid). The role of the instrumental teacher is also referenced in the majority of UK music conservatoires APPs. An extract from the RCMs APP (2021) is included as an example below:

“Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have had access to the high-quality tuition or the conditions needed for the hours of daily practice needed to succeed as a musician, making them more likely to have technical shortcomings that need addressing, especially at the start of their HE studies, or pastoral challenges requiring additional support. Students from such backgrounds who have been admitted to the RCM previously have often needed significantly more individual support throughout their studies to enable them to succeed” (RCM APP, 2021, p. 21)

This aligns with the reality that the most common pathway to UK music conservatoires is facilitated by instrumental tuition, often beginning at a young age. Not only does this highlight the economic disparities in music education but it also poses significant challenges for UK music conservatoires seeking to diversify their recruitment pool. Given their limited size within the broader HE sector, UK music conservatoires may struggle to single-handedly address the chronic WP challenges and also, achieve the ambitious targets set by the OfS (2019). With limited spaces available and admissions based on high musical proficiency, attracting talented students from underrepresented backgrounds thus becomes increasingly difficult.

What is clear from both the RCM and the RAMs APPs is that both institutions are aware of the challenges children and young people face when accessing quality music education. Their APPs draw on in-house and external data which explore these

challenges, providing their programmes with a rationale for their strategic interventions and target groups. However, what is also clear is that their APPs lack a focus on qualitative data with very few (if any) references made to the lived experiences of underrepresented musicians who are not in receipt of their services. It is evident in both APPs that for those from state schooled backgrounds, support available through a plethora of programmes and strategic interventions/ activities. However, how this support is distributed and channelled to the right groups is an area to be fully evaluated through the conservatoires impact evaluation – a key requirement put forward by the OfS (2019). Programmes like RCM Sparks and RAM's Pre-Junior Academy provide a diverse curriculum for children, catering to specific developmental stages and showing intersectional approaches to their target groups. However, attracting talent from diverse backgrounds remains a challenge. While the RAM's "Community First" programme in disadvantaged schools has started attempts at tackling geographical limitations, the RCM's current lack of similar outreach beyond London requires expansion and further attention. Addressing financial barriers to music education is another key focus of both APPs across all stages of a young persons' early musical journey. Initiatives like the RCM's subsidised lessons and RAM's "Chance to Play" scholarships exemplify this commitment. However, the recruitment strategies for these programmes remain unclear, requiring further transparency.

The importance of high-quality one-to-one tuition, often facilitated through junior departments, remains a core element to the pedagogical practices behind their WP programmes and activities. The RAM's "Your Academy Summer School" demonstrates a model for addressing this need for underrepresented groups but again, more data is needed to fully understand the effectiveness of this programme – especially looking at how this feeds directly into improving WP for the groups which remain underrepresented within their environments.

1.3.2: Exploring WP further

As stated by Benson-Egglenton (2022), “delivering WP in the context of certain academic disciplines can reprioritise less common WP target groups, such as girls (in STEM), or state schooled students (in music conservatoires)” (Benson-Egglenton, 2022, p. 1417). It is thus down to the specific institution to set out their ambitions and to put forward their strategy and their plans on how they wish to further diversify their admissions processes. The “concept of ‘widening participation’ itself is highly contested within and across different national contexts, and there is no one agreed definition” (Burke, 2020, p. 58). There is also no exemplar of what works and what works best in regards to WP in UK music conservatoires, especially when recruiting those from state school backgrounds. More so, there is no empirical research which solely focuses on this area in the context of the UK HE landscape. As highlighted by Comunian et al. (2023), the “scholarly literature on WP” draws challenges for certain HEIs, especially those who offer more vocational courses, such as conservatoires:

“This is a particular issue for conservatoires, where entry requirements are often dependent on students having access to expensive lessons and instruments very early in life, long before they reach the point of auditions for entry. HEIs are thus placed in the difficult position of balancing entry requirements with openness and inclusivity, against a backdrop of structural inequalities within secondary education” (Comunian et al., 2023, p. 95)

Limited research exists on WP in UK music conservatoires. Although there is no direct data on WP issues in UK music conservatoires, we can bridge this gap by drawing on other relevant research. As mentioned by Baker (2019), whilst plentiful research exists in the WP sector in general, such studies have largely focused on A-Level students in sixth forms going to university (see Baker, 2019). Studies like Whittaker et al. (2019) offer insights that can help us understand the recruitment challenges conservatoires face. In their research, Whittaker et al. (2019) investigated music education participation in England. Their findings revealed a significant disparity, with over 60% of A-level music entries between the academic years 2013/14 and 2017/18 originating from schools classified within the highest socioeconomic brackets (POLAR ratings of 4 or 5) (see Whittaker et al., 2019). This trend indicates that young people from more

advantaged backgrounds are more likely to reach higher levels of musical engagement and academic attainment and in turn, more likely to study music during Key Stage 5 – the age at which a prospective applicant would likely apply to study at a UK music conservatoire. This aligns with the broader data presented throughout this thesis thus far, which demonstrates a clear correlation between a person's social background and how this impacts their access to music education.

It could be argued that WP strategies in UK music conservatoires must extend beyond interventions aimed at older students (such as those in Key Stages 4 & 5) and prioritise initiatives in the early years. Like the previous section highlighted, UK music conservatoires have many programmes for all ages. However, there is little evidence at an institutional level which show how these programmes show how they are contributing to the WP efforts. Summer schools or short-term programmes, while valuable, may not be sufficient to address these long-term needs in facilitating the talent pipeline for underrepresented groups to these institutions. As Gaunt et al. (2021) point out:

“Opening access and widening participation within student cohorts contributes a multi-layered and complex set of issues in itself. A range of initiatives and recruitment strategies engaged in diverse communities across specialist provision pathways under 18, short courses and summer schools are almost inevitably needed to support long-term change; and for music, unlike some other arts disciplines, particular emphasis has to be given to early years work where the long journey to professional expertise must so often begin” (Gaunt et al., 2021, p. 15)

One way in which UK HEIs have been seen to achieve their WP targets is through making “greater use of ‘contextualised’ admissions” (Boliver et al., 2017, p.7). This is a system whereby HEIs “take account of the background of potential candidates when considering their applications, in recognition of the fact that the school achievements of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds often do not do justice to their academic potential” (ibid, p.7). For example, this might involve lowering typical academic requirements for disadvantaged applicants, potentially by a grade or two. However, for UK music conservatoires, achieving WP goals through contextualised admissions

can bring with it many challenges. For example, whilst considering an applicants background in the admissions process is crucial, the demanding technical proficiency required for success in a conservatoires undergraduate music programme may limit the flexibility of such approaches in practice. Not only this, but once inside, this could harness a greater feeling of a student feeling as if they do not belong (see for example, Reay et al., 2012). Another way in which UK HEIs along with some UK music conservatoires achieve their WP targets is through a 'Foundation Years' (FY) programme. A FY is referred to "an additional year of study at the beginning of a higher education course that is designed to prepare students for undergraduate degree-level study" (DfE, 2023).

"Students tend to study a foundation year if they did not meet the entry requirements and/or have the necessary skills or subject knowledge to gain direct access to the undergraduate course that the foundation year is integrated with" (DfE, 2023)

Research by O'Sullivan et al. (2019) used both contextual admissions and FYs as a way to explore both confidence and belonging in HE. Their results found that students entering HE through a FY reported a significant increase in their sense of belonging throughout their studies. This improvement stemmed from the relationships they built during the FY, leading to greater confidence and a stronger sense of community. Conversely, students entering through contextual admissions reported no change in their sense of belonging, often feeling different and isolated (see O'Sullivan, 2019). These findings suggest that while FY students may possess lower academic qualifications upon entry, their experiences within the programme fostered a sense of belonging, highlighting the need for diverse WP routes that cater to a wide range of needs. Furthermore, the results underscore the importance of providing opportunities for all non-traditional students to develop social capital and bridge any social gaps they may face. The role of the FY could potentially be an avenue for UK music conservatoires to further explore in the pursuit of their WP targets. FYs not only serve as a bridge for students to prepare for the demands of the conservatoires intensive undergraduate degree but also, offer a valuable pathway for achieving WP both in regards to the OfS targets and as O'Sullivan et al. (2019) demonstrate, the achievement of fostering a sense of belonging once inside. However, a significant

financial barrier remains. Currently, many UK music conservatoires charge tuition fees for FYs, with very little funding available to cover full costs. Even when bursaries and scholarships are applied, these tend to exclude students from working class backgrounds, as access to student loans in the UK is limited to four years – the same duration as a typical undergraduate music degree at a UK music conservatoire. In other words, a student relying on student loans to fund their tuition and living expenses would not be able to access a FY at a conservatoire unless they were to pay themselves or received full tuition fee waivers and additional stipends for living expenses (if relocating).

As shown so far, what we can see from the data provided by both HESA and CUKAS/UCAS Conservatoires is how privately educated students from middle class backgrounds are more likely to be admitted to a UK music conservatoire than those from state-schooled and working class backgrounds. This, along with the gap of knowledge on WP in these institutions is what formed the rationale to this research. As a result, the research questions below will build on the available quantitative data with hope of generating a wealth of new knowledge on equity, diversity and inclusion in these spaces. To do this, the PhD will thus answer the following questions¹¹:

- 1. What are the lived experiences of state schooled students' journeys to a UK music conservatoire?**
 - I. To what extent do economic, social, and cultural capital influence the experiences of students embarking on their journeys to UK music conservatoires?**
 - II. In what ways do the conceptual frameworks proposed by Bourdieu contribute to understanding and interpreting the experiences of state school students navigating their pathways to UK music conservatoires?**
 - III. Beyond the impact of economic, social, and cultural capital, are there any additional factors that play a crucial role in facilitating the successful journeys of state school students to UK music conservatoires?**

¹¹ Question 1 serves as the overarching research question for this PhD. The subsequent three questions research into specific aspects of this overarching question, providing insights that will contribute to addressing the broader research query.

1.4: Measuring Background

So far, this thesis has given a snapshot into the public data on student demographics in UK music conservatoires whilst setting out a set of research questions which aims to develop a deeper understanding of the quantitative data. Within the data, the role of social background and previous schooling has thus far played a significant part in understanding the largest group within UK music conservatoires: this being, the most advantaged young people within society. This type of demographical data has been captured through exploring public data and reports which have been made available from UCAS and HESA. Within each data set, the usage of 'Participation of Local Areas' otherwise known as POLAR is a tool which is used to gather information on student's demographics and has been considered the "best measure on equity of participation" in UK universities (see Martin, 2018, p.2). However, whilst the data sets from POLAR and HESA help to tell us what is happening in UK music conservatoires, they fail to tell us why and more importantly, the contextualised background to these statistics. The following section will explore the methodological tools used to collect data in UK music conservatoires before bringing in Bourdieu whose frameworks will help to make more sense of the data.

1.4.1: Measuring students backgrounds in UK music conservatoires: tools and methods

The first report to highlight the demographics of student intake in UK conservatoires was published by Conservatoires UK Admissions Service (CUKAS) in 2006. The report which explored the age, race, disability, gender and SES of applicants allowed for the first time to see such demographics in one singular document. Inside the report, the methodology used to assess an applicant's SES was a system called 'MOSAIC'¹². This novel measure of SES (see Sharma, Lewis and Szatkowski, 2010) is based on "census, housing and financial data" (Tonks and Farr, 2003, p.29) which is then used to classify "postcode areas into distinct social types" (CUKAS report, 2006, p.11). The

¹² "MOSAIC is one of a number of geodemographic systems available in the UK and it classifies all households and neighbourhoods into 52 distinct "lifestyle" types based on a clustering of census, housing and financial data" (Tonks and Farr, 2003, p.29)

most affluent group within the MOSAIC system are categorised as “symbols of success”, who at the time of this report, accounted for just under 10% of the UK population (MOSAIC Report, 2004). The most disadvantaged group in the report are categorised as those deriving from “welfare borderline” and “municipal dependency” (CUKAS, 2006, p.11), which can be seen in the table below:

Table 1.4.1: UK domiciled applicants by MOSAIC classification (CUKAS, 2006)

MOSAIC group	Applicants	%
A Symbols of Success	514	21.8
B Happy Families	210	8.9
C Suburban Comfort	402	17.0
D Ties of Community	207	8.8
E Urban Intelligence	247	10.5
F Welfare Borderline	51	2.2
G Municipal Dependency	23	1.0
H Blue Collar Enterprise	107	4.5
I Twilight Subsistence	24	1.0
J Grey Perspectives	139	5.9
K Rural Isolation	182	7.7
Not known	253	10.7
Total	2,359	100.0

As shown above, the most dominant group to apply to the conservatoires during this year was those from the ‘symbols of success’ who accounted for 21.8% of applicants. Those from this group are considered to derive from households of “successful professionals of high net worth, living in fashionable areas” (see Sharma, Lewis and Szatkowski, 2010). The smallest group of applications came from those in the municipal dependency group who are “low-income families, living in social housing” (ibid, 2010). In 2010, CUKAS subsequently began exploring SES of applicants through a system called Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) which was originally set up to help facilitate the WP agendas in the UK HE sector (HEFCE, 2014). Like MOSAIC, POLAR categorises students into (five) quintiles based on an applicant’s postal code. Quintile group five is considered the highest (the students from the most affluent backgrounds and most likely to enter HE) with quintile group one considered the lowest (students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and least likely to enter

HE). Since the CUKAS merger with UCAS (UCAS Conservatoires) in 2014, POLAR has since been used to map applicants' SES with the trend in applicants remaining the same since the first report in 2006. This being, the most dominant group of applicants consisting of the most advantaged groups and the lowest being the most disadvantaged. These figures have been analysed by UCAS to show how those applying to conservatoires from the "most advantaged areas" were at one point in the admissions cycle, "more than 6.2 times as likely to be accepted through UCAS Conservatoires than those from the most disadvantaged areas" (UCAS Conservatoires Report, 2014, p. 28).

However, whilst both the MOSAIC and POLAR methodologies are sophisticated in nature, they do come with discrepancies, some of which can make it hard to gain a comprehensive insight into students' SES. For example, the POLAR system "may not be fully representative of all young people living in that area as there may be young people living in different parts of an area who have substantially different, HE participation rates" (HEFCE, 2014, p. 5-6). There also remains further critique on POLAR and its effectiveness for measuring the underrepresentation of students, particularly for those living in London¹³ and for the lack of wider frameworks they draw on when understanding a student's background. This is highlighted in the work by Boliver, Gorard and Siddiqui (2019) who note that "POLAR may yield some, and possibly many, false negatives" due to disadvantaged individuals not being identified due to them not living in "disadvantaged areas" (Boliver, Gorard and Siddiqui, 2019, p.5). For example, you could in essence get two participants who share the same postcode. On one side of the street, one prospective applicant may live in social housing and have other economic factor which impact their likelihood of applying and entering HE (i.e. entitlement to Free School Meals, from a looked-after background, being a young carer etc.). Meanwhile, the applicant residing on the other side of the street may come from a high-income household with minimal socioeconomic challenges. Despite their contrasting circumstances, both applicants would be classified identically by this postcode-based tool, implying an equal likelihood of pursuing access and entry into HE. However, this classification fails to capture the

¹³ In particular, BAME students tend to be overlooked within the London POLAR frameworks. For more information please visit: <https://www.londonhigher.ac.uk/ceo-blog/the-polar-problem-hiding-londons-disadvantaged-students-from-view/>

nuances of their individual circumstances and the socioeconomic barriers they may face. Thus, POLAR can give us somewhat of an accurate overview into the landscape of student backgrounds in UK HEIs. However, this heavily quantified system can at times, be unreliable and lacks attention to the social factors of the wider student demographics. Thus, in order to understand the data from both HESA and POLAR, a more contextualised definition of class and SES will now be discussed. In developing a framework of better understanding a participant's social, economic and cultural background within this PhD, the research will offer a better insight into the participant's experiences whilst building knowledge on the many inequalities prospective state school students might face on their journeys to both a UK music conservatoire and the classical music industry in general. Furthermore, this PhD will build on the data in UCAS to form a more contextualised insight into an applicant's SES and how their backgrounds are far more nuanced than being attached to one postcode.

1.4.2: Tools for measuring demographical data: Building with Bourdieu

This section will now discuss Bourdieu's key concept of capital and explore how this will be used to measure and understand a person's circumstances and background within this PhD. In doing so, this research hopes to gain a more contextualised understanding into the participants' social, cultural and economic backgrounds and to move further beyond the model of POLAR – a system which quantifies students into groups based on the rates of young people in HE by local areas, showing only a geographical measure of disadvantage.

Is social class a “scientific construct” or does it “exist in reality?” (Bourdieu, 1987, p.1). This is the question which Bourdieu (1978) puts forward when discussing the theoretical and practical existence of groups within society. What Bourdieu (1987) is seeking to explore here is whether social classes actually exist and if they do, is class a product of a “realist” or “constructivist” philosophy? (Bourdieu, 1987, p.2). Throughout his works, Bourdieu (1987; 1990; 1997) argues that individuals exist and operate in society through various fields. In the context of this research, both classical music and the conservatoire can be identified as distinct fields given their capital endowed properties. The stratification of class is argued by Bourdieu (1986) to be an outcome of an individual's possession of capital and he outlines how “capital can

present itself in three fundamental guises”, these being: economic; cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1986, p.184).

Firstly, we have economic capital “which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the forms of property rights” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.184). The second capital outlined by Bourdieu (1986) is cultural capital. This “is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the forms of educational qualifications” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.184). Lastly, we have social capital or in other words, an individual’s “connections”. Like cultural capital, this can also be “converted into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Social capital is understood by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) as the dispositions which “accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119). However, despite all three forms of capital remaining essential to understanding Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of class, it is perhaps the notion of cultural capital which continues to be one of his most discussed concepts in academia today (see for example, Lareau and Weininger, 2003; Karadag, 2009; Heikkilä and Rahkonen, 2011; Prieur and Savage, 2013; Pennell, 2015; Wildhagen, 2016; Mikus, Tieben and Schober, 2019) and also the most significant in understanding the experiences documented within this PhD.

Cultural capital is highlighted by Bourdieu (1986) as existing in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital is the “form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17). In other words, this is our cultural identity and the embedded forms of knowledge which are engrained within us. Through embodied cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) more commonly refers to our skills, knowledge and tastes. It can help explain the discourses of cultural aesthetics and further help understand such dispositions in regards to class. For example, Bourdieu (1986) found highbrow cultural art forms to be more commonly consumed amongst the middle classes.

The next form of cultural capital set out by Bourdieu (1986) is the objectified state, which can be understood “in the form of cultural goods” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17). Objectified cultural capital can be seen as the physical product of our embodied

cultural capital and can help researchers better understand the nuances and contours of an individual's tastes. An example of cultural goods could be the clothes we wear, how we wear them and where we wear them. This is also illustrated by Bull and Scharff (2017) who highlight dress as a key notion in the (re)productive practise of classical music and how dress can be seen as a crucial notion of the practice of classical music (see Bull and Scharff, 2017). Objectified cultural capital can further signify a person's class type and is heavily driven through economic capital. For example, the more money a person has, this in turn, gives them more autonomy and choice when shopping for clothes which can ultimately dictate a person's agency.

Lastly, we have the institutionalised state which is "a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17). An example of institutionalised capital could refer to the recognition an employer places on a person's educational credentials, subsequently giving the individual greater autonomy within their field (see Bourdieu, 1986). More specifically, it could be the recognition an orchestra places upon the conservatoire when recruiting new musicians. Given that most players in UK orchestras have previously studied at a UK music conservatoire (CUK, 2020), it could be argued that these institutions provide individuals with the capital which is needed to enter the orchestra. In short, this form of cultural capital can be seen to be symbolic and is (re)produced and validated through institutions (such as universities or conservatoires). While cultural capital continues to remain one of his most widely discussed forms of capital, Bourdieu (1986) acknowledges the importance of the interconnections between his notions of capital and how heavily dependent they are on one another (Bourdieu, 1986). He states how "it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms" (Bourdieu, 1996). Referring to his notions of cultural, economic and social capital, Bourdieu (1986) writes how larger amounts of each capital will not only locate a person in a higher-class group but give them greater agency within the fields they operate (Bourdieu, 1986).

It is also through the accumulation of economic, social and cultural capital an individual's agency within classical music education can be better understood. For

example, musical tuition and instruments can be seen as economic resources which are then utilised to confer cultural capital. This cultural capital can then be converted into social capital through institutions (such as conservatoires). Recent data from the Musicians Union in 2018 showed how families with an annual household income of £28,000 are half as likely to have a child learning an instrument in comparison to families with an annual income of £48,000 or more (Musicians Union Report, 2018). Within the report, families on a low-income stated that the main barriers to learning an instrument were both the cost of lessons and the cost of the instrument (Musicians Union Report, 2018, p.4). If then that is the case, this would mean that those with fewer economic resources ultimately have fewer chances of learning an instrument, making economic capital a key component of a prospective classical musician's learning journey (if they are to even start at all). This type of claim made by the Musicians Union (2018) will be further investigated throughout the participants' lived experiences during the data collection and their early journeys.

Likewise, social capital plays an important role in the understanding of cultural capital, especially in the institutionalised state. Bourdieu (1986) views social capital as a 'network-based resource' which can help in adjoining "institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu. 1986, p.247). Through viewing education as an arena in facilitating the activity of social capital, it is through 'mutual' relationships whereby privilege and power can be extended, allowing for this to be preserved and (re)produced (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1989) understands the social movement of individuals/ groups through his theory of social space and writes how the 'closer the agents, groups or institutions which are situated' within a given space, 'the more common properties they have; and the more distant, the fewer' (Bourdieu, 1989, p.16). This is understood in the work by Crossley (2012) who explores Bourdieu's mapping of class in relation to social space. Through understanding how "location in social space shapes an individual's experiences, life chances and habitus", we are then introduced to the notion of "sense of one's place", otherwise known as "class consciousness" (Crossley in Grenfell, 2012, p. 85). This is what Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) also found to be the case in their work on working class students in elite universities.

The sense of “one’s place” can also be understood as one’s ‘feel for the game’ (see Bourdieu, 1984; 1990) and how through “knowing the rules of the game”, one is able to achieve greater agency (Bourdieu, 1984). In their work on access to elite universities for those from state-schools, Oliver and Kettle (2010) highlight the role of teacher habitus and the impact this can have for students attempting to access elite institutions. They found “the agency of individual teachers” to act as “an important factor in creating the right conditions for students” when making applications (ibid, p. 750). Through reinforcing these conditions through “their possession of social capital”, teachers “were able and willing to exploit past experiences and current networks for their students’ benefit” (ibid, p.751). Rather similarly, this research is keen to understand the participants’ educational experience and to further explore the impact their state-education had on their admission to the conservatoire. One of the underlying reasons to why conservatoires struggle to recruit state school students is highlighted by the RCM through “the diminishing specialist music provision in state schools, which makes it difficult for the College through its own efforts to significantly change its student mix” (RCM, 2019, p. 3).

Furthermore, given that “many students” arrive “for audition” at a UK music conservatoire “having already established a rapport with their potential professor¹⁴”, the experiences documented in this PhD show the many ways in which those from state-schooled backgrounds experience the manifestations of social capital, especially for those with no preformed relationships with conservatoire staff (Presland, 2005, p. 245-246). Through exploring the participants’ backgrounds and their early life and journeys through a Bourdieusian lens, this research will further contextualise the quantitative data highlighted earlier – something which will further help understand the equity, diversity and inclusion challenges conservatoires face when recruiting students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds.

¹⁴ This “rapport” is identified by Presland (2015) through students being acquainted with professors “at summer music schools or by seeking private lessons when they are considering their future” (see Presland, 2015, p.245).

Chapter 2: Harmonising Disparity: A Literature Review of Class, Inequality, and Exclusion in the practice of Classical Music

2.1: Introduction

Using Bourdieu and wider research to better understand the experiences of state school students and their journeys to a UK music conservatoire, this chapter develops the exploration of the theoretical frameworks in which this research sits. In doing so, it will contextualise the relationship between class and classical music education through the concepts of capital, habitus, and field which resonate deeply with the experiences of the research participants. Through a Bourdieusian lens, we can explore the inequalities and internalised dispositions which influence trajectories. Engaging with his ideas also allows this PhD to dissect the reproductive practices of classical music education, exposing its hierarchies, codes, and power dynamics. Ultimately, it is through understanding Bourdieu which will further help understand the intricacies of the participants journeys, and not just on an individual level but also, for the broader landscape of classical music. By deconstructing the many invisible barriers and dispositions at force, this chapter starts to uncover the unwritten rules of the game.

2.2: Bravo for Bourdieu

In his work *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1979) writes how “nothing more clearly affirms one’s ‘class’, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music” (Bourdieu 1979, p. 18). For Bourdieu (1979), classical music is a signifier of “legitimate” taste and closely associated with the middle-classes. It is something which he asserts as representing “the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, especially the social worlds, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art” (ibid, p. 11). To capture the tastes of the dominant classes, Bourdieu (1979) references Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*¹⁵ as a musical composition which best resembles “legitimate taste” and preferred by those with higher amounts of cultural capital (ibid, p. 69). And as Johnson (2002) argues, for those from higher social backgrounds, classical music can be regularly used “as a gesture of class distinction” or “in short, snobbery”

(Johnson, 2002, p. 21-22). Classical music as a symbol of status is better understood by Bennett et al. (2009) who highlight how classical music for elite groups “provides repertoires and an arena for socialising, while continuing to enjoy public legitimacy” (Bennett et al. 2009, p.75). They go on to state how the art form “evokes hierarchy and power” whilst perpetuating “the ghostly memories of legitimate cultural capital” (ibid, 2009, p.75). As Bull (2019) states, it is the preserve of the white middle classes (Bull, 2019) and to an extent, carries with it an extremely ‘stuffy’ reputation (Getz, 2015). In this sense, classical music can be seen as a facilitator to help legitimise social positions (see Coulangeon, 2005) and can be viewed as an art form which assists the (re)productive processes of social positions (see Savage, 2013).

In recent years there has been a growing interest in research on the structural prejudices and inequalities at force in the classical music sector (see Wright, 2015; Burnard, Trulsson and Söderman, 2016; Bull, 2016; Bull and Scharff, 2017; Scharff, 2018; Bull, 2019). For example, through the research by Scharff (2018) and Bull (2019), we can see how certain forms of capital is (re)produced in unfair ways which benefit those from more advantaged backgrounds. More specifically, in the work by Bull (2019), “the social side of music” is discussed as “important” and is illustrated by Bull (2019) as a tool for setting the middle-classes up “with networks of other middle-class professionals” which they are “able to draw on in the future” (Bull, 2019, p. 65). In parallel, Wright's (2015) research highlights the efficacy of classical music as a mechanism for accumulating cultural capital, thereby reinforcing its significance as a key agent in perpetuating cultural reproduction. Through recognising the complexities involved in understanding the inequalities within classical music, it is Bull (2019) who asserts that “there is no simple formula for understanding the relationship between music and inequality” (Bull, 2019, p. xviii). Thus, it is through the work by Bourdieu (1977, 1980, 1984, 1993, 2001) where this research shall begin “to illuminate how music tastes and music criticism are influenced by, but also help to reproduce, social inequalities” (de Boise, 2016, p.178-179). Bourdieu's theoretical understanding is crucial for framing the context of this research. Not only does the sociology of classical music shed light on the individuals who find resonance or struggle ‘to fit’ within the canonical repertoire, but it also enables us to construct a broader understanding of the factors that perpetuate exclusivity, particularly within the context for those from underrepresented backgrounds. It is in this chapter, I shall begin to build on Bourdieu's

theories with hope of developing a greater awareness of how capital is (re)produced amongst individuals, groups and institutions.

2.3: The Practice of Classical Music: a Bourdieusian insight

Although Bourdieu refers to classical music only a small number of times, in his work *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu uses classical music as an instrument to help understand the concept of social and cultural (re)production. This understanding of consumption is addressed by Prior (2013) in the paper 'Bourdieu and the Sociology of Music Consumption'. Prior (2013) explains how "personal tastes and cultural distinctions, in other words, are significant to the maintenance of social divisions in a stratified society" (Prior, 2013, p.182). Echoing the earlier statements made on the legitimacy of classical music (see Johnson, 2002; Bull 2019), Prior (2013) also acknowledges how the preservation of classical music is aided through dominant groups and is enforced through the concept of "legitimate culture" which he describes as the "highest values of aesthetic formalism" (Prior, 2013, p. 183). This has been more recently reaffirmed in the work by Bull (2019) who suggests that:

"Classical music is an ideal site for the middle classes to construct symbolic, cultural and economic boundaries to safeguard their privilege, as the discourse around the 'autonomy' of the aesthetic - the idea that this music exists in a separate realm from any social concerns - allows issues of inequality to be side lined in favour of prioritising 'the music itself'" (Bull, 2019, p. 7).

In his work '*The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups*', Bourdieu (1985) seeks to expose and understand the (re)productive practices of groups in society, exploring their social and cultural formations and how these then feed into hierarchal structures. Acknowledging classical music as a site (or field) where groups can extend, construct and (re)produce social, cultural and economic capital, it is through a Bourdieusian lens where we can start to investigate the concepts which pin together the social and cultural practices of classical music. These concepts are calculated by Bourdieu (1984) as the following equation:

$$(\text{Habitus} \times \text{Capitals}) + \text{Fields} = \text{Practices}$$

2.3.1: The Holy Trinity: Habitus, Capital and Field

The concept of habitus, capital and field are central to Bourdieu's theories and are often referred to as the 'Holy Trinity' in the field of sociology (see McKinnon, Trzebiatowska and Brittain, 2011). Forming the core of Bourdieu's frameworks is his concept of habitus. In fact, throughout all areas of Bourdieu's work, once recognised and located, habitus can be seen within all spheres of the social world (Bourdieu, 1980; 1984). In both the sociological critique and appraisal of Bourdieu, King (2000) explains habitus to be a facilitator to better understand both objectivism and subjectivism. A concept he considers to be of "corporal dispositions and cognitive templates" which can overcome "subject-object dualism by inscribing subjective, bodily actions with objective social force so that the most apparently subjective individual acts" can generate "social meaning" (King, 2000, p. 417). It can help understand the "structured structures" along with the "generative principles of distinct and distinctive practises" (Bourdieu, 1996, p.17). It could be as simple as understanding our food choices or even the way we eat our food, our hobbies and cultural interests, our political opinions and even the way we express our beliefs and views (see Bourdieu, 1993, p. 17). Driving the habitus are what Bourdieu defines as his system of "capitals" and likewise, play a major role in the development and renewal of an individual's structured structures (see Bourdieu, 1980; 1986; 1990). For Bourdieu, capital is "accumulated labour" and is understood as "a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures" (Bourdieu, 1986). It is as he states, "what makes the games of society" and depending on who performs the accumulated labour thus gives rise to the forms of (in)equality. These forms of inequality in this sense, are what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as "*lex insita*" which is "the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 46).

Whilst the structures and elements of capital differ according to the field in which they are located, in the case of classical music, Burnard et al. (2015) argues how "middle classes around the world may have common traits, including the perception of classical music" (Burnard, Trulsson and Söderman, 2015, p. 35). Burnard et al. (2015) signify these traits as a "clear language" which is built up of "social, cultural symbolic

capital and assets” (ibid, 2015, p. 36). More so, the geographical mobility of classical music as a distinct class signifier outside of Western cultures is captured in the work by Huang (2011) who explores the ‘cultural fever’ of Western classical music in the context of China¹⁶. In the study, Huang (2011) notes how:

“Western classical music finds transcultural affinities in Confucian traditional values of artful self-cultivation and virtue, while simultaneously acting as a signifier of modernity and individual creativity” (Huang, 2011, p. 161)

The practice of Western classical music in China is also reported by Montefiore (2014) in an article by the BBC which documents the “bourgeois” culture of classical music in mainland China and states how:

“China is experiencing piano frenzy with an estimated 40 million children now learning to play. The instrument is increasingly in vogue among China’s burgeoning middle classes, who have the money to splurge on steep lessons and expensive fixtures” (Montefiore, 2014, para.3)

This notion of classical music as a marker of bourgeois culture is further explored by Burnard et al. (2015), who observe that exposing children to classical music serves as a signal of the family’s elevated educational attainment and cultural capital (ibid, p. 36). Consequently, from this perspective, classical music functions as a mechanism for individuals to position themselves favourably within their respective social spheres, drawing upon its distinction as ‘serious music’ to enhance their social standing. It is alongside these conceptions which forms the central arguments in the work of Bull and Scharff (2017), who explore how production and consumption practices help in (re)producing class inequalities in the classical music industry. Through examining empirical data from two separate research projects¹⁷, the research found three key

¹⁶ UK music conservatoires as pointed out by Ford (2020) “have been increasingly reliant on international students from Asia, particularly China, to fulfil recruitment targets” (see Ford, 2020). Upon further investigation, it appears that Chinese students make up the largest intake of international students across all ABRSM conservatoires (see HESA, 2020) – something I shall highlight within the PhD when illustrating demographics to capture the conservatoire student body.

¹⁷ The empirical data presented in their work is based on two separate studies: (1) “namely Bull’s (2015) research on classical music education and Scharff’s (2015, 2015a, 2017) study of the classical music profession” (Bull and Scharff, 2017, p.287). They argue how the two have been “usefully brought into

stages to understanding the (re)productive nature of classical music: (1) the role of the “family” which is central in the (re)productive practices of classical music for the middle-classes. The research found the middle-class participants to view classical music as “natural”¹⁸ opposed to the working-class participants who experienced the music as “unfamiliar” (ibid, 2017, p. 295); (2) the “practices of performing and listening to classical music” (ibid, 2017, p. 295). Examples of such elements include “feeling comfortable and confident in grand spaces, as well as wearing appropriate dress” – something which the research found not to “be equally available to musicians from different class backgrounds” (ibid, p.296). This objectified form of classical music is also observed by Roy and Dowd (2010) in their paper on the sociological understanding of music and how music relates to broader dimensions such as race, class and gender. In their work, they illustrate how the “meanings created by classical music” are aided through “the architecture of the concert hall, the physical relations of participants, the conventions for behaviour, and microsocial interaction, all of which frame the music itself and the discourse around it” (Roy and Dowd, 2010, p. 189); (3) the final stage outlined by Bull and Scharff (2017) is facilitated through the “research participants’ value-judgements” which show how participants place classical “at the top” with other genres (such as rap music) deemed inferior (ibid, 2017, p. 296). Roy and Dowd (2010) also explore the hierarchy of classical music in their work and write on the superiority of the art form and its practices over popular music (Roy and Dowd, 2010, p. 193). They suggest how these ‘value judgements’ could be down to classical music requiring “much training and cultivation to appreciate” (ibid, p. 196). It could thus be argued that classical music is a genre which “resonates a clear ‘language’ when it comes to social, cultural and symbolic capital and assets” and is considered “especially important for parents in their positioning” (Burnard, Trulsson and Söderman, 2015, p. 35-36).

dialogue to explore common themes around class inequalities in practices of producing and consuming classical music” (ibid, p.287).

¹⁸ Crucial to their argument, classical music was perceived by their participants as ‘naturally’ practiced and listened to in middle-class homes therefore uncontested and unquestioned (Bull and Scharff, 2017).

The positioning of agents is analysed by Bourdieu (1990) through his field theory which he understands as “symbolic structures and formations” which “combine to form one whole, one single articulate reality” (Bourdieu, 1990). This in theory governs both the “structures” and “notions” in the cycle of (re)production and social stratification (Lima and Campos, 2015, p. 65). Further understood by Swartz (2015) as “structured spaces” which are organised through “specific types of capitals or combinations of capital” (Swartz, 2015), fields are socially constructed arenas which can serve as the “battle grounds” for habitus and capital-to play out (see Grenfell, 2015). Examples of fields within Bourdieu’s oeuvre are religion, art, education, science and law (see Bourdieu, 1983; 1984; 1990). However, as outlined by Thompson (2012), Bourdieu’s concept of field was not “pretty and benign” (known in French as *‘les pré’*) but instead, “was used to describe, *inter alia*, an area of land, a battlefield, and a field of knowledge” (Thompson, in Grenfell, 2012, p. 66) hence the term “battle grounds”.

Understanding classical music practice as a field, in this sense, could be where a person’s habitus and capitals are battled out, and perhaps their position could be impacted by their previous training (see, for example, Perkins, 2012). This is something this research investigates throughout the data collection, focusing on the interrelationship between social background and hierarchy within the field.

The conjunction of both cultural capital and habitus when played out in a specific field help to create what Bourdieu (1990) refers to as practice – a concept which describes the “structure of social phenomena” which “determines and is itself perpetuated by action” (see Schatzki, 2008). Practice is understood by Swartz (1997) as the “outcome of a relationship between habitus, capital and field” (ibid, p.141) and to “grow out of the interrelationship” between these concepts (ibid, p.142). Bourdieu’s concept of practice, provides a valuable framework for understanding the relationship between an individual’s habitus, cultural capital, and their positioning within the field of classical music. The relationship between these elements is thus what can help shape and craft the experiences and trajectories of aspiring classical musicians. Habitus, as defined by Bourdieu, which refers to the internalised set of dispositions, preferences, and attitudes that individuals acquire through their backgrounds and upbringing is the lens through which individuals interpret and navigate the world around them. In the context of classical music, habitus could be the likelihood of an individual being exposed to classical music in general. Likewise, it is cultural capital which manifests in the form of

early musical training, knowledge of the classical repertoire/ canon, and familiarity a person develops of the classical music world as a whole. It could be argued that individuals from backgrounds with access to higher amounts of capital are thus more likely to possess these forms of cultural capital, providing them with an advantage in pursuing a classical music career. For example, individuals whose parents possess substantial economic capital, have social connections to music teachers, and who hold cultural capital in the form of classical music knowledge may be more likely to transmit and perpetuate their familiarity for classical music to their children. It is however the intersection of habitus and cultural capital within the field of classical music practice which gives a further understanding to 'practice' (Bourdieu, 1984). Practice might therefore help explain the patterns, behaviours, routines, and activities that an individual engages in as they navigate the field of classical music and how these are then used to position an individual within the field. It is shaped by the habitus (a direct outcome from the practices of the field which are perpetuated through individuals and institutions) and influenced by the distribution of cultural capital. For aspiring classical musicians seeking admission to UK music conservatoires, 'practice' as outlined by Bourdieu could play a pivotal role in shaping a person's chance of success when auditioning at these institutions. Their habitus, shaped by their upbringing and exposure to classical music, influences their aspirations and ability to engage with the training and standards required by conservatoires. Additionally, their cultural capital, which could encompass their musical ability, knowledge of the field, and capacity to navigate the conservatoire's expectations could also help further determine their likelihood of admission.

2.3.2: Symbolic Violence

Not only do habitus, capital and field help understand the logic of practice but they also set out the rationale for the concept of symbolic violence (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990). In short, symbolic violence helps understand the way in which individuals (or social agents) "play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them" (Connolly and Healy, 2004, p.15). This system of internalisation and acceptance along with the various structures which control such processes are generated through habitus and again, depending on the field in which the agent is located will depend on how comfortable an individual feels

in their surroundings (see for example, Lehmann, 2013). The term itself, whilst sounding drastic in nature explains how “it is an act of violence” due to the way in which dispositions can lead “to the constraint and subordination of individuals” (Connolly and Healy, 2004, p.15). It does this through its symbolic nature “in the sense that this is achieved indirectly and without overt and explicit acts of force or coercion” (ibid, p.15). The triangulation between capital, habitus and field (that being the way in which our social structures are (re)produced) are systems which both Bourdieu and other researchers put to work to help understand the (re)production of stratification, class grouping and inequalities (see Bourdieu, 1980; 1984; 1987; 1991; 1993; Conway, 1997; Connolly and Healy, 2004; Wacquant, 2013; Wiegmann, 2017). Power (1999) explains this system of practice as “the result of the relationship between an individual's habitus, different forms of capital, and the field of action” (Power, 1999, p.48). The interconnected nature of each concept work in tandem and never operate on a singular basis. It is what Bourdieu (1970) understands as the concept to “impose meanings” and to do this through a “legitimate” way “by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force” (Bourdieu, 1970, p.4). It is what Bourdieu (1970) understands as the concept to play out power in a field in a somewhat natural and legitimate way. For example, through an individual successfully imposing their own values, beliefs, and worldviews, it is thus the dominant groups who then gain the upper hand in shaping social hierarchies and maintaining their position of power (see Bourdieu, 1970).

In the context of this research, symbolic violence could be the acquisition of ability and knowledge of highbrow repertoire needed to gain access to the conservatoire. For those from backgrounds with access to higher amounts of economic, social and cultural capital, having the right training and breadth of knowledge to the classical canon could thus put individuals from more advantage groups in society at a greater advantage during the auditions than an individual who derives from a background with access to lesser amounts of capital.

2.4: (Re)producing through the Code

One way of understanding the relationship between social class and classical music could be through the agency of education and the institutions in which it is taught and (re)produced. This could be educational institutions (such as conservatoires),

organisations (such as the ABRSM) and also within the family home (see Bull and Scharff, 2017). As Prior (2013) states:

“A child who grows up in a household in which they are encouraged to play a “noble” instrument like the piano or violin is already accumulating nascent mastery over legitimate musical culture. Their upbringing is preparing them for membership of a polite world, a world which, according to Bourdieu: “is justified in existing by its perfection, its harmony and beauty, a world which has produced Beethoven and Mozart and continues to produce people capable of playing and appreciating them” (Bourdieu 1984, p.77 in Prior, 2013, p.183)

Through having opportunity and exposure from an early age, people within this world are the ones Bourdieu (1984) reports of being capable of practise, consumption and appreciation. This type of “code” is understood through the work by Lamont and Maton (2010) who discuss how having access to music education can in turn give access to an “elite code” – something “which requires special knowledge, skills, and special talents” (Lamont and Maton, 2010 in Wright, 2015, p. 4). They argue how having access to this elite code can later “play a central role in student decisions concerning whether or not to study music” (Lamont and Maton, 2010 in Wright, 2015, p. 4). The type of “code” is further understood by Bourdieu (1998) as “a structured body” which “has incorporated” the early “structures” of a “particular world” to which the structures become the engrained “perception of that world” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.81). In other words, it is an individual’s structures which form the locus to their agency. The code in this sense can be seen as a tool of reproduction – a concept which allows us to further understand the early formations of habitus (see Nash, 1990) and how symbolic violence is then used in the field.

Habitus “captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others” (Grenfell, 2014, p. 51). Habitus is understood by Bourdieu (2002) to be formed within the home and starts to play out in a person’s early life (Bourdieu, 2002). It can be seen as a direct outcome of one’s resources. (Bourdieu, 1984) and can help understand a person’s likes and dislikes (Bourdieu, 1990). Huang (2019) describes this direct outcome through social class and writes how “a working-class person will

have a particular, class-based understandings of the world; this will be different to the world view of people from the middle class” (Huang, 2019, p. 48). In the example of music education, this can be understood as “musical habitus” (Prior, 2013, p.183) and is fruitfully understood through the “code” (Wright, 2015). Access to the code is observed by Bourdieu (1973) as “set of resources developed during early life, largely within the family, and acquired differentially according to class” (Bourdieu, 1973 in Wright, 2015, p.2). In other words, the more capital and resources you have, the better your chance of gaining access to and developing the ‘code’.

In this sense, it is through being taught classical music that a child will then become familiar within that world or as Prior (2013) puts it, gain “membership” (Prior, 2013). Through becoming familiar (or gaining membership), the child thus accesses the code and indirectly develops an understanding for the rules of the game (see Bourdieu, 1986) ultimately giving them a greater chance of pursuing training at a conservatoire. Once an individual’s habitus has been formed, it can then be (re)produced through capital, a concept understood by Bourdieu (1979; 1984) as having systematic control located, gathered and then objectified into both material and symbolic properties. In this sense, classical music education can be understood as both material and symbolic due to its capital given properties. These properties which can be objectified into material properties such as the norms and values the music reinforces (i.e. concert etiquette, pedagogical practices, language and cultural history etc.) also bring with it symbolic properties such as status and credentials given through institutions (such as the ABRSM and degrees from conservatoires). However, cultural capital is not just institutionalised in terms of educational credentials and educational environments but it is also embodied (see Bourdieu 1986). Habitus is not a just a fixed construct but instead, can change, transform and transcend depending on its location (see Grenfell, 2015). This also means that those who did not acquire the cultural code (see Wright, 2015) can likewise still become familiar to the practice(s) of classical music. In fact, Bourdieu himself defied his own social gravity with his own set of personal trajectories forming his contemporary understanding of a divided habitus – otherwise known as habitus clivé (Bourdieu, 2007). In his work, *A Sketch For A Self- Analysis* (2007), Bourdieu puts to theory his personal upwards social mobility. As Friedman (2016) notes:

“While this notion of habitus clivé is forcefully invoked in Bourdieu’s own self-analysis, it remains a concept only fleetingly explored in his empirical work. This was perhaps because he saw its occurrence as fundamentally rare, the ‘exception that proved the rule’ in terms of the general ontological” (Friedman, 2016, p.7-8)

In a later article, Friedman (2018) writes how “habitus clivé, or cleft habitus” is a notion which helps to understand how a person’s “conditions of existence change so dramatically over the course of their life that they feel their dispositions losing coherency and experience a sense of self torn by dislocation and internal division” (Friedman, 2018). The socially mobile nature of habitus is also highlighted in the study by Reay et al. (2009) who examines the educational and social experiences of nine working class students enrolled at an elite UK university. As Reay (2005) revealed in an earlier study, when a student enters an unfamiliar field, their ‘habitus’ can either change and transform or send the student into a state of unease. In a later study by Reay et al. (2009), the development of habitus is further documented by working-class students lived experiences who “acquire the self-confidence and self-regulation that accompanies academic success against the odds” allowing for individuals to move between unfamiliar fields (Reay, 2009, p. 1115). In this case, the majority of students felt as if their habitus was “transformed” (Reay et al. 2009, p. 1110). The state schooled participants in this PhD research entering the practice of classical music may also experience a sense of habitus clivé. On the one hand, they may carry the habitus of a working-class background. On the other hand, they are expected to adopt the habitus of the classical music world, characterised by middle-class values and norms. This type of dual habitus could lead to feelings of unease and uncertainty. They may feel out of place in the conservatoire environment, where their working-class background may not be fully understood or valued as symbolic capital. They may also face challenges in navigating the social dynamics of their journeys to a conservatoire which are often shaped by the cultural capital of their more privileged counterparts. As a result, this could leave them with a divided habitus. For example, in the work of Reay et al.’s (2009), they observed that when high achieving students from working-class backgrounds enter unfamiliar fields, such as elite HE, “the powerful influences of prior learning experiences and dispositions” provide working-class students with “almost

superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination” (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1115) and they note:

“These working-class students had faced the paradoxical situation of being more like a ‘fish out of water’ in their largely working-class state secondary schools where their highly developed academic dispositions fitted uneasily into the field of predominantly working-class schooling. The irony is that they have a greater sense of fitting in as learners in elite HE than they had at school surrounded by ‘people like them’” (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1115)

Students from state schools entering conservatoires, like those entering elite universities, may face similar challenges due to social hierarchies and cultural capital differences. This could suggest that working-class state school students who aspire to become classical musicians may also be capable of overcoming the challenges of habitus clivé in their journeys to a UK music conservatoire.

2.5: Institutional Habitus

In Bull and Scharff’s (2017) research, in their three stages of understanding the (re)productive nature of classical music, a key factor of the second stage is “the role of cultural institutions as spaces where inequalities of production and consumption may influence each other and be reinforced” (ibid, 2017, p. 295). In this section, the literature review will explore the social and cultural practices of conservatoires through the notion of institutional habitus (Reay, 1998). This will provide the reader with further insights into what Mills (2007) describes as the ‘secret garden’ (Burt and Mills, 2007, p.1).

2.5.1: Exploring the secret garden

The work of Rosie Perkins and Janet Mills – researchers at the RCM - has explored the learning and teaching experiences in UK music conservatoires (Mills, 2004; 2005; Burt and Mills, 2006; Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2008; Burt-Perkins, 2008; 2009; 2010 Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009; Perkins, 2010; 2013; 2013b; 2015): along with the pedagogy and practises of the music conservatoire in general (Perkins, 2012; Perkins

and Triantafyllaki, 2013; Perkins and Williamon, 2019). Through exploring the institutional cultures of these institutions, Mills opened what she considered to be “the secret garden”— a concept which describes “some of the myths that surround conservatoire education” (Burt and Mills, 2007, p.1). It is from this description set out by Mills where this research offers further insight into this ‘secret garden’ through Bourdieu’s conceptual frameworks. Through the use of analogy of the secret garden to further understand the institutional cultures of UK music conservatoires, this will allow an understanding of the complexities individuals face on their journeys to these institutions and further contribute to the experiences captured by Porton (2023) in the work by Bull, Scharff and Nooshin (2023) – work which was developed from Portons PhD data in 2021 which explore the social inclusion practices of UK music conservatoires through alumni perspectives (Porton in Bull, Scharff and Nooshin, 2023).

It remains uncertain whether or not “Bourdieu himself believed that a habitus could be an attribute of an institution” (Morrison, 2007). However, other research has shown how habitus can exist beyond the individual, as ‘institutional habitus’ (see Reay, 1998). First brought to light in the field of educational research through the work of Reay (1998), institutional habitus was used to help understand how the cultures of educational institutions are negotiated through external social, cultural and economic values of the groups which occupy their spaces. Reay (1998) argues that educational institutions have distinct institutional habituses and explores how these “are linked to wider socio-economic cultures through processes in which schools and their catchments mutually shape and reshape each other” (see Reay, 1998 in Reay, David and Ball, 2001, p. 2). As explored earlier, habitus is not a fixed construct and can change depending on its location (see Grenfell, 2015):

“Similarly, institutional habituses are capable of change but through dint of their collective nature are less fluid than individual habitus. They can be understood as the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual’s behaviour as it is mediated through an organization” (Reay, 1998, p. 521)

The movement into and through HE is often perceived as a “fraught process for many students, but particularly for those from diverse backgrounds” (O’Shea, 2018, p. 95). In her work on WP in HE, Thomas (2002) provides a conceptual understanding on the

practices of HEIs and the impact they have on student retention. In doing so, Thomas (2002) states how “institutional habitus should be understood as more than the culture of the educational institution; it refers to relational issues and priorities, which are deeply embedded, and sub-consciously informing practice” (Thomas, 2002, p. 431). However, whilst adaptable in nature, institutional habituses “are less fluid than individual habitus” (Reay, David and Ball, 2001, p.15). Thus, the dominant social groups (in the case of the conservatoire this would be the white, privately educated and most advantaged young people) “mark the institutional habitus which is reflected in the organisational structures which regulate the individual’s behaviour” (Weissmann, 2013, p. 263). This could suggest that if a conservatoire’s institutional habitus is perpetuated through the dominant group then those from other groups may find it hard to “fit in” and not only this but also, be admitted into these institutions. Thomas (2002) suggests “if a student feels that they do not fit in, that their social and cultural practices” become “inappropriate” leading to their “knowledge” being “undervalued” (ibid, p. 431). Thomas (2002) contrasts this experience to students from the dominant group and explains their encounters like a “fish in water” (Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) in Thomas, 2002, p. 431). Thus, for those not part of the dominant group, experiences could relate to the sensation of a “fish out of water” – a notion used in the work by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) in understanding the experiences of working-class students at elite universities.

In her work, Bull (2019) defines conservatoires as “behemoths” (something large and powerful) due to “their Victorian origins; their architecture (heavy, stone, imposing) calls to mind the captains of industry of that period” and also their “huge influence they have on the rest of the ecology” of classical music (Bull, 2019, p. 29). Reiterating the statements made by Conservatoires UK (2020) and Perkins (2013), Bull (2019) also acknowledges the gatekeeping culture of conservatoires and states how those in power within the field of classical music “tend to have studied at one of them, and therefore the practices that are taught at these conservatoires shape musical cultures for generations to come” (Bull, 2019, p. 29). Thus, if the institutional habitus of the conservatoire (i.e. the cultures inside the institution) is conferred through the cultures of the dominant group (in this case, white and advantaged) and given the conservatoires’ position as gatekeepers to the classical music industry, it could be argued that diversifying the conservatoire could also ultimately help diversify the

sector. This is also recognised by Weissmann (2013) who states how structures of institutional habitus (i.e. the dominant groups) are reinforced through their impact on the non-dominant groups or in other words, “how non-dominant groups are treated at university” (Weissmann 2013, p. 263). To understand this further, Tarabini et al. (2017) write how “institutional habitus allows us to explore how objective structural conditions produce particular schemes of perception, appreciation and action (Tarabini et al., 2017, p. 1178). Through their research on school-level variables and the impact of these on student’s educational opportunities, Tarabini et al. (2017) understand institutional habitus through three stages: (1) the incorporation of social composition within institutions to help understand practice, regulations and organisation; (2) moving beyond perceptions and actions on an individual level through analysing institutional cultures through collective perspectives; (3) moving beyond organisational practice of institutions through bringing in “cultural and expressive elements” of “daily life” within the institution being studied (ibid, p. 1178).

Firstly, the incorporation of social composition, which Tarabini et al. (2017) highlights as being “linked to the socio-economic and cultural status of students” (ibid, 2017, p. 1178). In other words, this refers to the factors related to a student's social background. In this context, the term allows us to understand a student's social composition, meaning a student's socio-economic and cultural background and how this is directly linked to their experiences. This is something which Reay (1998) and Reay, David and Ball (2001) highlight as the principal element of institutional habitus. Secondly, to move beyond individual perceptions, institutional habitus will be understood through the conservatoire organisational practices (see Bull, 2019). As Tarabini et al. (2017) recognises how experiences are “influenced, mediated and even constrained by the particular institution” in which they are located (ibid, 2017, p. 1179) - collective or “shared elements” will, in theory, could help understand the practices conservatoires reproduce and how these trickle into the industry – impacting the way in which aspiring classical musicians position themselves within the field. Facilitating the third stage in their work, Tarabini et al. (2017) reference the work by Reay, David and Ball (2001). Through bringing in “cultural and expressive elements”, Tarabini et al. (2017) explore the nature of moving beyond what institutions do and apply this through “exploring the logic and rationale behind the application thereof, the micro-dynamics by which these are configured and specified” within institutions (Tarabini et al., 2017,

p. 1179). To better understand the elitist nature of conservatoires, we need to examine the "micro-dynamics" of these institutions. This means looking at the practices which shape the culture inside these spaces. By understanding how these micro-dynamics operate, we can identify the ways in which conservatoires perpetuate elitism and conversely, how their gatekeeping status could be used as a way to help diversify the talent pipeline to the industry.

2.6: Understanding institutional habitus through the model of elite education: elite or elitist?

In the 2013-2015 strategic plan set out by Conservatoires UK, the report states that "conservatoire education is elite but not elitist" (Conservatoires UK, 2013, p. 12). However, in 2015, this anti-elitist claim was contested in an article in *Arts Professional* which claims conservatoires to be "among the most elitist" institutions in the UK based on their large intake of privately educated students (see *Arts Professional*, 2018). The aim of this section is to investigate these claims through placing the model of conservatoire education in a working definition of elite education. This will be achieved through drawing on the work by Börjesson and Broady (2016) who offer a twofold definition on how to define the elite characteristics of an educational institution. Furthermore, in bringing the conservatoire into this model of elite education, this research formulates a new conversation which will allow academic research to demystify conservatoires and explore more of the 'secret garden'.

Firstly, Börjesson and Broady (2016) discuss their "meritocratic definition" of elite education and state how this "takes place in institutions or programmes characterised by highly selective recruitment of students based on scholastic merit" (ibid, 2016, p. 16). Not only do UK music conservatoires have highly selective admissions process (see Davies, 2006; Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009) but the students who gain entry into these institutions tend to be those from more advantaged backgrounds (see UCAS Conservatoires 2015-2020; HESA, 2020). Furthermore, Börjesson and Broady (2016) identify how "merits other than scholarly achievements" are likewise valid when applying to specialist institutions (ibid, p. 17). Such merits, in this case, can be seen to form part of a person's accumulation of cultural capital. This is something which Perkins (2013) also finds through her research on student learning within a

conservatoire. Perkins (2013) discovers how “the perceived amounts of cultural capital that a student brings with them to the conservatoire appear to be an important factor in the construction of hierarchies” (Perkins, 2013, p. 205). Perkins (2013) discusses her findings through highlighting concerns on “the potentially negative impact of hierarchies on those not positioned at the top” within these institutions. She explores the conservatoire as a social space and feeds this into Bourdieu’s field theory. Acknowledging “field” as a “space”, Perkins navigates through this model by acknowledging that capital – a driving force in the development of a field – “is not equally available to everyone” and with some people acquiring “more (and different) capital to other people” (ibid, p.198). For Bourdieu, this social space (the conservatoire) is an inherently competitive field and a “network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p. 39). Crucially, then, a field is a space in which agents “struggle to maximise their position” (Maton, 2005, p. 689), and which is characterised by hierarchies of values (Moore, 2008). Position in a field is determined, at least in part, by capital; the resources and rewards available in any social space (Vryonides, 2007). But, as Perkins (2013) has shown, when capitals are unevenly distributed, position is then affected, allowing for hierarchies to be structured and for the institutional habitus to play out. The distribution and accessibility of capital is shown to favour those with more resources (Grenfell, James, Hodkinson, Reay, & Robbins, 1998). In other words, capital goes to capital. And, how much capital one attains can further impact how one is positioned when playing the “games of society” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 46). This is highly apparent in the conservatoire sector, whereby previous training and access to resources plays a key role in facilitating access and excelling once inside. As Börjesson and Broady (2016) notes:

“In meritocratic elite institutions, high ambitions, excellent performance and sustained effort are considered highly desirable and frequently become the norm due to the combined influences of staff and pressure from peers”
(Börjesson and Broady, 2016, p. 17)

This now leads us on to the second definition of elite education set out by Börjesson and Broady (2016) who define this stage as “a social one”, with emphasis being placed on the “intra-generational reproduction of the current dominant groups by educating

and training their offspring” (Börjesson and Broady, 2016). As highlighted earlier, Bourdieu (1984) explains how a child who has grown up in a household where music education is considered “noble” has already accumulated what he refers to as “legitimate culture” (Bourdieu 1984, p.71). This is what Lamont and Maton (2010) describe as an “elite code” - something “which requires special knowledge, skills, and special talents” (Lamont and Maton, 2010 in Wright, 2015, p. 4) and is how a person can then as Prior puts it, gain “membership” (Prior, 2013).

Access to the code is usually dominated by those from more advantaged backgrounds and is often reproduced through an intergenerational system (see Wright, 2015). The code in this context also plays a key role in developing a more informed understanding on the institutional habitus of conservatoires. This can be better understood through drawing on Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of “the game” and showcasing how “knowing the rules of the game” can give greater agency in fields such as education and classical music (see Bourdieu, 1984). Research by Lareau et al., (2016) explore the “rules of the game” through an “institutional” lens and explain the process as knowing and understanding “the formation of cultural and social capital” (Lareau et al., 2016, p. 295). Social capital is understood by Bourdieu (1986) as the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21). In other words, it is the “networks, norms and the trust” which exists within a social field enabling “coordination” within collective groups “toward shared objectives” (Putnam et al., 2003 in Julien, 2015, p.3 59). It is the people we know and the social circles we belong to. These social circles may differ according to the field we are positioned in at a given time. For the elite, this is something Börjesson and Broady (2016) understand as:

“Groups that occupy dominant (formal and informal) positions within the overall field of power or within different fields such as the economic, the political, the academic or the artistic field. An individual belongs to the elite based on his or her individual position and merit” (Börjesson and Broady, 2016, p. 18)

The reproduction of dominant groups is also understood through cultural capital and is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as a “theoretical hypothesis” which explains “the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes

by relating academic success” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 17). This is our degree of self-confidence and objectified experiences formed through early life which have been institutionalised through family, social and educational institutions. It plays a main role in the understanding of social class and societal power relations and is achieved through middle class parents “by educating and training their offspring” (Börjesson and Broady, 2016).

As shown above, the second definition by Börjesson et al., (2016) grips together the idea of how a conservatoire can be viewed as not just elite, but also, elitist. This elitist nature is highlighted through what appears to be a “hidden curriculum” – a system which “refers to the unspoken or implicit values, behaviours, and norms that exist in the educational setting” (Alsubaie, 2015, p. 125). In other words, it is knowing the unwritten rules of the game (see, for example, Bathmaker, 2015). As illustrated throughout this chapter, not only must conservatoire applicants possess high levels of musical ability of to pass the entrance audition but also, once inside, and through the conservatoires’ institutional habitus, students are placed into a hierarchy based on their “perceived amounts of cultural capital” (Perkins, 2012, p. 5). This is an important area to understand alongside the experiences of state school students and their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. It is the institutional cultures which are reinforced through the people who attend and teach within these institutions – as noted so far, the more advantaged groups within society. Furthermore, it is important to understand the institutional habitus as part of the widening participation agenda of UK music conservatoires, which should not only be focused on getting diverse students through the doors but also, retaining the talent and making these spaces inclusive once a student has been admitted. The arguments presented above suggest that conservatoires are both elite and elitist in their cultural and institutional practices. It is also crucial to recognise these institutions and the cultures they perpetuate when exploring the journeys of aspiring classical musicians from state schools. As gatekeepers to the classical music industry, conservatoires often play a pivotal role in facilitating the talent pipeline. However, they also bear the responsibility of ensuring that these spaces are committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion for both prospective and current students. Understanding these ‘secret gardens’ can provide insights into why certain individuals’ journeys to a UK music conservatoire might be more aligned with the institution’s habitus, ultimately increasing their chances of being recruited and

feeling a sense of familiarity within the environment. Likewise, it can also help us understand why certain individuals' journeys might prove to be more challenging when attempting to gain admission into these spaces. Understand the journey destination in this sense is just as important in understanding the very beginnings of an individuals' journey.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1: Introduction

The chapter begins by reintroducing the research questions – looking more closely at how these have been constructed before venturing into the approaches taken to answer them. The ontological and epistemological positioning of the research is then addressed before exploring the methods and tools used to collect the data. Finally, the chapter explores how the data was analysed in preparation for the discussion and findings.

3.2: The Research Questions

The rationale for this research has been informed by public data which highlights the underrepresentation of state-school students entering UK music conservatoires (see UCAS, 2021; HESA, 2021). However, despite there being a growing interest in the field of conservatoire research, qualitative data which focuses on the journeys of state-school students within these spaces remains limited. What we currently know is the number of state-school students in UK music conservatoires and how these numbers have trended over the years. What we are yet to know is how their economic, social and cultural background, along with their school type impacted their journeys to these institutions. Why are conservatoires dominated by privately educated students? What can the culture of classical music education tell us about these experiences? Why are more advantaged young people more likely to be admitted to a conservatoire than their disadvantaged peers? What role does school type play in facilitating these journeys? Through exploring state-school students' journeys to the conservatoire, the PhD makes an original contribution the widening participation agenda of UK music conservatoires by giving further insight to the barriers and challenges state-school students face and to conservatoire and educational research.

To address the gaps in knowledge, the research questions are as follows:

What are the lived experiences of state schooled students' journeys to a UK music conservatoire?

- 1. To what extent do economic, social, and cultural capital influence the experiences of students embarking on their journeys to UK music conservatoires?**
- 2. In what ways do the conceptual frameworks proposed by Bourdieu contribute to understanding and interpreting the experiences of state school students navigating their pathways to UK music conservatoires?**
- 3. Beyond the impact of economic, social, and cultural capital, are there any additional factors that play a crucial role in facilitating the successful journeys of state school students to UK music conservatoires?**

The primary research question is what originally brought me to this research. After exploring the quantitative data on student demographics within conservatoires, I noticed there was an absence of qualitative data to accompany the statistics. What currently exists is a plethora of research which examines the impact of social and educational background in regards to Higher Education access and outcomes (see for example, Marcenaro-Gutierrez, Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles, 2007; Zidmars, Sullivan and Heath, 2009; Triventi, 2011; Jerrim and Vignoles, 2015; Crawford et al., 2017; Thompson, 2019; Reay, 2021 etc.). What is yet to exist is a body of literature which explores the access agendas to conservatoires for those from underrepresented backgrounds. And whilst similarities can be drawn between the two, there also remain stark differences, with conservatoires requiring specialist entry requirements – that being, a high-level of skill on a chosen instrument. As Burt-Perkins and Mills (2009) note, entry to a conservatoire “typically centres on an audition during which applicants play a musical instrument solo: this leaves conservatoires open to criticism that they favour students who have benefited from expensive instrumental lessons and tuition over several years” (Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009, p. 817).

The data and literature highlighted throughout this thesis so far show how those from privately educated and middle-class backgrounds are more likely to enter a UK music conservatoire in comparison to their low SES peers (see UCAS, 2023; HESA, 2023). This, along with the systematic removal of quality music provision in state-schools over the years potentially puts low SES state-schooled students at a disadvantage. This is particularly an issue for those from working class backgrounds who live in areas of high deprivation and poverty and who derive from diverse and challenging

backgrounds. For example, the report conducted by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) found only 12% of the most deprived schools in the UK have an orchestra, compared to 85% of independent schools (BPI, 2019). The findings also show that only 64% of schools in disadvantaged communities offer students musical provision (such as school musicals), in comparison to 91% of state schools in more affluent areas, and 96% of independent schools (BPI, 2019). This inequality was also recently debated by Members in the House of Lords who criticised the government for its lack of support in funding quality music education in state-schools:

“The number of pupils taking A Level Music is down by a third since 2014 – sadly, often because it is simply not available as a subject. GCSE applicants have come down by 17 per cent over the same period and 29 per cent of state schools have seen a reduction in the number of qualified music teachers, while the number of trainees is falling inexorably... Is my noble friend aware that while 50 per cent of pupils in private schools get sustained music education, just 15 per cent of state school pupils do so?” (Lord Black, House of Lords debate, 2022)

It is clear that there continues to remain an abundance of issues which impact both the quality and quantity of music provision across state-schools in the UK and have done for some time. Could it be that this lack of provision is one of the main reasons to why more disadvantaged state-school students are less likely to enter conservatoires? The multifaceted nature of the issue was captured by Gregson back in 2003 who writes how, orchestras say, “we can only take what the conservatoires give us”, to which the conservatoires say, “we can only take what the schools give us” with then schools stating how “we could do more, but we need more funding” (Gregson, 2003 in Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009, p. 832). Perhaps accountability should fall on all levels, from government all the way to conservatoires. However, if they are to take responsibility and form better partnerships to deliver wider outreach work, it is important that they understand the experiences of those they wish their policies to serve. Whilst the data in this PhD is not representative of the experiences of all state-school students across the UK, it is nevertheless a good starting point – one which has also been left unattended for some time. The state of music education in state schools in England has been under scrutiny for some time, both academically and

politically (see APPG for Music Education Report, 2019). It is therefore worth noting that whilst this PhD primarily focuses on how an individual's background influences their chances of gaining admission to a conservatoire and how certain factors, such as economic, social, and cultural ones, impact their journey, arguments can also be drawn from these debates which are crucial for understanding why state school students may lack opportunities compared to their privately educated peers.

Building upon the primary research question, the research investigates how influential participants' backgrounds were in shaping their journeys to a conservatoire and digs deeper into the structural inequalities that might impact their progress. Understanding the participants' economic, social, and cultural backgrounds was essential, as not all state school attendees are considered disadvantaged or underrepresented. It is evident that a persistent issue exists in the life cycle from a person's schooling to their 'eventual' entry into a conservatoire. As Burt-Perkins and Mills (2009) point out, this cycle heavily relies on expensive instrumental tuition and many other factors which require a person to have access to greater amounts of capital. This is also evident in the report by the ABRSM (2014) which find unequal participation rates in music provision for young people from working class backgrounds. Findings reveal how more advantaged young people are more likely to play an instrument and 74% more likely to have instrumental lessons in comparison to just 55% of their less advantaged peers (ABRSM, 2014). A factor facilitating this is shown to be economic capital. Put simply, those from working class backgrounds are less likely to be able to afford instrumental tuition. These financial challenges are acknowledged by Hallam and Burns (2017) as being "considerable" with "the cost of tuition and participating in extra-curricular ensembles" more likely to be more than low-income families "can afford" (Hallam and Burns, 2017, p. 4). Even for those who are given the opportunity to study music in school, there tends to be a trend of more advantaged young people accessing courses such as A-level music (see Whittaker et al., 2019). Whittaker et al. (2019) found that at least 60% of A-level music entries came from schools in postcodes with POLAR ratings of 4 or 5 – the same POLAR ratings as those who are also more likely to enter a UK music conservatoire (Whittaker et al., 2019; UCAS Conservatoire Report, 2015-2020). This, along with research which show how membership to junior conservatoires and organisations such as the National Children's Orchestra (NCO) and the National Youth Orchestra (NYO) "is significantly higher" for those "who attended

independent/fee-paying schools” (ACE Report, 2021, p. 16) show how becoming involved with music at an early age and sustaining musical provision from primary up until the conservatoire level is a practice which requires higher levels of economic capital.

As demonstrated in earlier chapters, the significance of Bourdieu’s conceptual frameworks in understanding outcomes for young people remains significant across the field of education. This is recognised by Sullivan (2002) who writes how “success in the education system is facilitated by the possession of cultural capital and of higher-class habitus. Lower-class pupils do not in general possess these traits, so the failure of the majority of these pupils is inevitable” (Sullivan, 2002, p. 2). This inevitability has since been examined across research in the education arena with data showing how higher amounts of cultural capital and habitus play a key role in accelerating outcomes for young people (Grenfell and James, 2003; Marginson, 2007; Edgerton and Roberts, 2014; Stahl et al., 2019). Whilst Bourdieu himself did not write explicitly about educational policy (see Rawolle and Lingard, 2008), his concepts (such as that of cultural capital) are present in national frameworks (see for example, Ofsted, 2019) and remain popular across the global education policy field(s) (Rawolle and Lingard, 2023).

Bourdieu also explored the role of music in understanding social positions and uses music as a signifier within his theory of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1979). For Bourdieu, “nothing more clearly affirms one’s ‘class’, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music” (Bourdieu 1979, p. 18). As highlighted earlier, Bourdieu writes how classical music is a form of “legitimate” taste and is closely associated with the middle-classes. It is something he asserts as representing “the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, especially the social worlds, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art” (ibid, p. 11). If classical music (as Bourdieu writes) is an art form (re)produced by the middle-classes, how does this then impact those from backgrounds with less access to the capitals he states are needed when engaging with and practising the art form? Do his remarks still hold over four decades later? Could it be that his concept of taste in the understanding of social reproduction perhaps needs renewing? How do his concepts relate and respond to the experiences of the participants within this PhD? It is through exploring these

questions where this research brings a wealth of new knowledge to Bourdieu's discussions. The above literature is important to note in this part of the PhD as the methodology should not be a 'stand-alone' chapter but instead, something which allows the reader to understand the critical perspectives behind the research questions.

3.3: The 'Ologies'

As Braun and Clarke (2022) write, "the terms ontology and epistemology (the 'ologies) refer to the philosophical/ meta- theories that underpin all research (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 166). They are what Scotland (2012) signifies as crucial components to the research paradigm: "ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods" (Scotland, 2012, p.9). Ontology is fundamentally concerned with "the nature of existence" or in other words, the study of being (see Crotty, 1998, p. 10). On the other hand, epistemology refers to the question of "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p.8) and focuses on "the relationship between the knower" and "what can be known" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). The relationship between the two are intrinsically linked with Grix (2004) writing how they are both "considered as the foundations upon which research is built (Grix, 2004, p.58). As Braun and Clarke (2022) write:

"This O&E stuff can seem separate from the actual process of doing research, head-melting theory that has little practical importance. Nothing could be further from the truth, as they are deeply connected to research practice" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 166).

They go one step further to simplify the relationship between the two and conclude how "ontology is about what it is that we think we can know, and epistemology is about how we think we can know it" (ibid, p. 166). From this point, the two should generally "fit together and be harmonious and coherent" (ibid. p. 167). As someone who brings to the table their own set of experiences, the way I have viewed the social world unavoidably also brings with it the way I perceive reality. However, this 'reality' by which I see and view the world may not necessarily be the reality of others, who might also have derived from similar backgrounds. Thus, the ontological positioning of my research "is not reducible" to my epistemology. Or in other words, my "nature of reality" is not generalised in my "knowledge of reality" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 182). This is what

Bhaskar (1975) calls 'Critical Realism' (CR). CR "can be understood as combining ontological realism (the truth is out there) with epistemological relativism (it's impossible to access truth directly) to provide a position that retains a concept of truth and reality" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 169). In other words, CR puts forward the argument of what actually exists (in the social world) is unable to be diminished to what we (i.e. the researcher) has come to know about it. As Braun and Clarke (2022) concede, CR "recognises that human practises always shape how we experience" the world which in turn can "give rise to perspectival and contextual truths" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.169). It is therefore "the qualitative researcher" who "is part of the world they want to understand; they cannot stand outside of the human and social reality they are observing through their research" (Pilgrim, 2014 in Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.170).

Fletcher (2017) goes one step further in explaining CR and explains how this philosophy is "theory-laden" but not "theory-determined" (Fletcher, 2017, p.182). He goes on to assert how "CR does not deny that there is a real social world we can attempt to understand or access through philosophy and social science" but acknowledges how "some knowledge can be closer to reality than other knowledge" (ibid, p.182). This stems from Bhaskar's (1998) critique of positivism (i.e. "naïve realism") and interpretivism (reality formed through people/ groups). Fletcher (2017) further conceptualises the work of Bhaskar (1975; 1998; 2008) through drawing on the three levels of reality (as outlined in CR ontology, see Bhaskar, 1975): (1) the empirical level; (2) the *actual* and (3) the *real*. Working together, these form the layers of reality. The first level (*empirical*) is how we experience events and how through "experience and interpretation" we explain things through "common sense" (ibid). It can be how a researcher comes to know about knowledge through particular theories or schools of thought. This is what Bhaskar (1998) denotes as "transitive" knowledge which are "artificial objects fashioned into items of knowledge by the science of the day" (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 11). This level of reality is what we experience. For example, this could be seen as the participant's experience of a classical music concert - experience here is open to interpretation depending on the mechanisms at force. At this level, participants empirical reality might include their experiences of the music (i.e., if they enjoyed it). The *actual* level describes how "events occur whether or not we experience or interpret them" (Fletcher, 2017, p.183). Bhaskar (1975) explains how

the actual domain exists whether a person experiences them or not (i.e. the unobserved). For example, just because a person is not present at the classical music concert does not mean the event has not occurred. The *real* level is the total reality and how “casual structures” act as “inherent properties in an object or structure that act as causal forces to produce events” (Fletcher, 2017, p.183). These structures might not be physically observable to the researcher (see Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014). It is the casual structures (or mechanisms) that are the forces behind the experience at the *empirical* level. In the example of the classical music concert, structures could be driven through a person’s habitus – something that exists (and has been built upon over many years) but something we cannot necessarily see (and can be everchanging). Described by Bourdieu as the “structured structures” along with the “generative principles of distinct and distinctive practises” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 17), the habitus thus acts as a structure which determines the empirical reality.

When all three layers of reality are combined, this “broadly postulates a reality that exists independent of a researcher’s ideas” but also allows the researcher’s “experiences and understandings of reality” to be “theorised” through “language and culture” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.169-170). In this research, this would be how experiences are understood through the conceptual frameworks of Bourdieu. To summarise, CR helps researchers attain knowledge through theories (Danermark, 2002) which in turn move the researcher closer to reality (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 1998). Coming to the research through a CR lens will allow me to place my participants’ lived experiences at the centre of my analysis whilst also factoring in the sociocultural elements at force (put forward by Bourdieu) to make more sense and position their experiences through social frameworks.

3.4: A Qualitative Approach

A qualitative methodology is best for exploring “phenomena” as opposed to a quantitative methodology which is suited for investigating the “hypothesis” of a given phenomena (Mack et al., 2005, p. 3). The two come with very different approaches which can differ depending on the nature and aims of the research. Outlined in the work by Haradhan (2018), “qualitative research is an umbrella term” which covers the following theoretical designs: “narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, action research, case study, ethnography, historical research, content analysis” and so on

(Haradhan, 2018, p. 7). Qualitative research “is not just about data and techniques – it’s about the application of qualitative techniques within a qualitative paradigm” (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 4). One of the major aspects across all qualitative research is the “interpretation” of “knowledge” set out by the researcher (Sherman and Reid, 1994, p.85). For example, in the context of this research, a qualitative approach would allow me to capture the lived experiences of participants’ journeys to the conservatoire whilst allowing me to remain present within the conversation through positioning my understanding of reality through CR. This along with the emphasis a qualitative approach places on the “wider social systems” remained the most appropriate methodology to answer the research questions (as set out above).

However, it must be stated that despite the major differences in both qualitative and quantitative designs, the two can often complement one another, with mixed-methods research being an increasingly popular approach within the social sciences (Flick, Kardorff and Steinke, 2004; Greene, 2008; Timans, Wouters and Heilbron, 2019). Whilst this research is qualitative in nature, it is from quantitative data where I have been able to form the rationale for the research. For example, it was through the quantitative data from HESA and UCAS which highlight the underrepresentation of state-schooled students in UK music conservatoires, to what formed the rationale for pursuing this research.

3.5: Data Collection

Empirical data was collected over a fourteen-month period between March 2021 – May 2022. Interviews were conducted through the online platform Zoom and upon the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, in-person interviews were also conducted when requested by the participant. At all times, the participant had full autonomy over their preference of interview location (i.e. online vs. in-person). In Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), “a very wide variety of data collection methods are amenable for analysis” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 26). In their most recent work, Braun and Clarke (2022) acknowledge that empirical research is “based on the idea that we don’t reach assessments or draw conclusions based on a random or haphazard engagement with the world (data), but through a deliberate and thought through strategy” (ibid, p.27) – something I aimed to exercise throughout the data collection stage(s).

3.5.1: Participant recruitment: who and why?

Recruiting participants was done through the process of purposive sampling - a method whereby “the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience” (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). To address my research questions, participants were recruited via the following criteria:

- 1. Participants must have successfully gained entry into a UK music conservatoire.**
- 2. Before entering the conservatoire, the research participants must have previously studied at a UK non-selective state school.**

The next steps involved the process of recruiting a varied sample of participants based on the above criteria. To do this, I used the social media platform Twitter which attracted a diverse sample pool of participants with experiences spanning over three decades. Braun and Clarke (2021) confirm that “there is no failsafe way to justify participant group/data set size in reflexive TA” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 14). In fact, Braun and Clarke (2022) state how “the concept of data saturation” which is widely regarded as the “gold standard for determining sample size is also deeply problematic” (Braun and Clark, 2022, p.28). Opposed to using terms such as ‘data saturation’, they advise researchers to adopt terms such as “information power” as this invites the researcher to reflect better on the “richness of their dataset” (ibid, p.28). Information power is more concerned with “sample adequacy, data quality, and variability of relevant events” than the actual number of participants (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016, p.1759). In other words, I strived for quality over quantity. Information power is, therefore, a better way of measuring the richness of the sample size through reinforcing the idea that “the more information the sample holds, relevant for the actual study, the lower amount of participants is needed” (see Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016, p.1753). Through reflecting more on data quality, I was able to concentrate on elucidating the aims of the study to help generate more rich and in-depth accounts of experiences. An overview of participants is available in **Appendix B**.

3.5.2: The semi-structured interview

Unlike the standardised or structured interview, the semi-structured interview “allows for discovery, with space to follow topical trajectories as the conversation unfolds” (Magaldi and Berler, 2018). They allow for the participants to share and explore their lived experiences with only interview prompts being used where necessary (Smith et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews remain one of the most widely used methods of data collection in empirical research (Bradford and Cullen, 2012) and are often the “sole data source for a qualitative research project” (DiCicco- Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). This proved to be useful in this research given the multiple realities which participants brought to the table. A fixed set of interview questions could assume that a fixed reality exists which also goes against the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research. From this perspective, the semi-structured interview “provided access to situated, interpreted realities, not simple, decontextualised truths” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 171).

The semi-structured interviews in this research were designed to encourage participants to revisit their lived experiences, from early life influences all the way to their conservatoire auditions. The structure of the interview questions were thus designed around participants’ key educational stages: primary school; secondary school; post-16 and audition experiences. This process allowed participants to ‘re-live’ their journeys, exploring how their personal experiences intertwined with broader social structures of society. By delving into these narratives, the research aimed to make tacit understandings of musical practice more explicit. For example, *How did they first come to learning an instrument? What was this like? How did this fit (or not) with their lives? How did they feel? To what extent were their parents involved in their journeys? How was their musical experience played out in the state school environment?* Participants’ reflections offered insights into the internalised dispositions that shaped their musical journeys and ultimately manifested in their approaches to music education and performance. Due to the retrospective nature of the research, focusing on experiences that had already occurred, methods like observation were not feasible. Instead, the research relied on participants’ detailed narratives to document their journeys. These narratives then provided the foundation for applying Bourdieu’s conceptual frameworks to interpret and analyse the data. However, this reliance on

participant narratives does introduce a potential challenge, particularly in fully grasping some of Bourdieu's more nuanced concepts, such as habitus.

“Bourdieu’s social theory offers a way of understanding some of the most important features of the field of educational research, while also providing educational researchers with a rich conceptual apparatus for their practice” (Grenfell and James, 2004, p. 507)

As a Critical Realist (CR) approach underpins the research, the interview questions were designed to ‘dig deep’ into the participants lived experiences and realities with Bourdieu’s key concepts forming the wider frame by which the research questions were designed. In upholding the CR ontological and epistemological philosophies, I was able to (indirectly) encourage participants to make sense of their realities through incorporating theories into the research questions. For example, I was keen to find out how the role of capital, as influenced by a participant’s background, impacted the way in which participants both came to and sustained classical music training prior to attending the conservatoire. To do this, questions in the beginning of the interview asked participants to self-identify their class type whilst growing up (i.e. working or middle-class). Through them identifying their class type¹⁹, I was able to encourage participants to reflect on this when asking them about their early musical training. Examples of responses included *“as a working-class kid”* and/or *“coming from a working-class background”* which allowed me to attribute meaning to how they perceived their social background to both influence and impact their journeys to the conservatoire. What was it that made them working class? How did this play out throughout their journeys’ and more importantly, how did their social background impact their sense of belonging?

As earlier stated, the large majority of interviews took place virtually as opposed to in person. Noted by Sullivan (2012) who explores online interviews as a research tool, “the potential for video conferencing as a research tool is almost unlimited” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 60). Such advantages became apparent during the third UK lockdown during early 2021 where many (including myself) were restricted to working from home and often in isolated and remote parts of the UK. The benefits of conducting interviews

¹⁹ The opportunities and challenges of self-identification is later discussed in section 4.2.3 of this thesis.

online are also discussed by Archibald et al. (2019) who also echo the “convenience” of online data collection, “particularly in terms of access to geographically remote participants” (Archibald et al., 2019, p.4). Conducting online interviews allowed me to reach participants who might otherwise have been unable to participate, especially those considered vulnerable and/ or outside of London/ in geographically excluded areas. This was also useful for those with busy schedules (i.e. childcare/ caring commitments etc.).

It must also be noted that whilst the same semi-structured interview format was implemented for all participants, conversations surrounding issues on race and class were further explored when appropriate and were fully participant led. For example, conversations on structural racism were predominantly led by Black interviewees. This was also applicable to those who identified as working-class where I would only reflect their own words through probes, as opposed to making generalisations. For example, where a participant identified themselves as working-class and made reference to this, I would use probes such as: “*you mention how your social background put you at a disadvantage*”, as opposed to asking if they thought their social background put them at a disadvantage. This design and format allowed for me to plan accordingly and to help aid conversations whilst ensuring the interview addressed the research question(s) under investigation. In total, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted online using Zoom with 2 interviews being conducted face-to-face in the final stages of interviewing.

Interviews were designed to capture participants’ journeys with questions based around key chapters to participants lives: early life and primary school; secondary school and post-16. Early life and primary school questions were composed with the aim of capturing their earliest memories of music making whilst also exploring their musical provision throughout Key Stage 1 and 2. Questions asked included: ‘*can you tell me how you first got involved in music?*’ ‘*What was the music provision like in your primary school?*’. As the interviews were semi-structured, it allowed me flexibility to respond to participants experiences through asking more questions related to their answer. For example, where a participant mentioned their parent’s involvement in their musical journeys, I would ask further questions on this and use probes where necessary: ‘*you mention how your parents were your biggest fans, can you tell me*

more about this?'. Secondary school covered Key Stage 3 and 4 with post-16 (16-18) exploring Key Stage 5 and beyond. There were also occasions where participants had taken a 'gap year' prior to attending the conservatoire. Knowing in advance through the public data published by UCAS Conservatoires, I was already aware that the second largest applicant age group for undergraduate applications after 18 and 19 are those aged 21-24 (see UCAS Conservatoires, 2023). Given this, I was able to prepare questions for those who had taken a break in-between school and the conservatoire. Where this was the case, questions were again participant led and responded to the social, cultural and economic experiences (such as employment and further musical training) of participants prior to auditioning for an undergraduate programme. The final element of the interviews was designed around the audition. The audition in this research signifies the beginning of the end and was very much symbolic in nature. This is where all their hard work and practice played out – allowing me to further draw on Bourdieu's conceptual frameworks to understand their position within the field (or as he put it, battle ground). Questions were thus designed to be as reflective and descriptive as possible: *'What was it like when you first got there?'*, *'How did you feel before you went into the audition?'*, *'Despite the outcome you just mentioned, how did you feel the audition went?'*.

Crucial to answering these questions is the role of Habitus. Bourdieu (1989) conceptualises habitus as a form of embodied history, reflecting the lasting influence of specific social environments and relationships. These influences shape individuals' predispositions, tastes, understandings, assumptions, physical mannerisms, and emotional responses (Bourdieu, 1989, p, 18). Primarily shaped within the context of childhood and a persons early life, the habitus possesses a degree of permanence. However, as it also responds and reacts to ongoing social interactions and can adapt and evolve in response to new situations. For example, a persons habitus could be located through experiences from transitioning from primary school to secondary school. By employing semi-structured interviews, participants were able to provide comprehensive accounts of their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. This approach allowed the research to capture key moments and, more importantly, to trace the influence of habitus on these journeys. Bourdieu expressed reservations regarding social research that solely relies on interview data and participant narratives as the primary means of data collection. His concerns stemmed from the potential limitations

of self-reported accounts (see for example, Barrett, 2015). Bourdieu cautioned against solely relying on people's narratives (ibid). He argued these accounts could be misleading and that research participants might overestimate their self-awareness, focusing on abstract rules rather than the intuitive habits of everyday life. He argued how the act of narrating experiences could even create an artificial distance, leading people to overthink and misrepresent their natural actions. For Bourdieu, these limitations highlighted the potential for narratives to obscure the deeper, unspoken practices that truly shape our lives (Bourdieu, 1977 in Barrett 2015).

3.5.3: Limitations of the semi-structured interview

While semi-structured interviews are a widely used method for collecting data in social science research, their application for capturing Bourdieu's concepts, particularly habitus with its emphasis on embodied dispositions and unconscious structures, presents distinct challenges. Rather interestingly, Bourdieu's own work demonstrates a pragmatic approach and can be seen at times to employ interviews in certain contexts, presumably as a means to access participants' lived experiences:

*“...And, finally, accompanied by a sizable research team, Bourdieu's best-selling text *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu, 1999) consists substantially of interview-based narratives expressing histories of “suffering” within neoliberalising France” (Barrett, 2015, p.3)*

In this thesis, habitus plays a pivotal role in understanding participants' lived experiences. However, it is crucial here to reinforce the role habitus plays as a relational concept. For example, and as mentioned earlier in this thesis, Bourdieu's formula: $(\text{Habitus}) \times (\text{Capital}) + \text{Field} = \text{Practice}$, emphasises this interconnectedness and highlights how habitus is not isolated but shaped by, and interacts with, both the individual's social capital (resources) and the broader social field (cultural and social structures) in which they operate. This framework allows us to move beyond a simplistic understanding of habitus and instead see it as a dynamic product of these interacting forces.

Capturing habitus through interview transcripts thus presents a unique challenge. As highlighted by Barrett (2015), Bourdieu argues that agents may provide statements that contradict their embodied dispositions (habitus) for various reasons. These contradictions may stem from a conscious desire to deceive or, more likely, from the inherent 'invisibility' of habitus itself (Barrett, 2015). Individuals often operate unconsciously based on ingrained dispositions, making them formally unknown. This 'invisibility' is further amplified when researcher and participant share a cultural background, potentially masking certain dispositions (Barrett, 2015).

Acknowledging this, Barrett (2015) suggests using life history as a notion within interviews. Life history interviews delve deeper into personal experiences, encouraging participants to share stories and memories. This approach can provide richer data that captures the embodied and emotional aspects of habitus that may be difficult to articulate or remain unconscious in traditional interviews (see Barrett, 2015). One approach to address this challenge could be to structure the interviews around key stages in participants' lives. This life-course approach (as used in this thesis) could help uncover the embodied dispositions and unconscious structures that shape habitus, ultimately providing a more comprehensive picture of their experiences. Furthermore, to maximise the potential of gaining insights into habitus from interview transcripts, this research will utilise Bourdieu's full toolkit of 'practice'. Through "integrating habitus" for example "with cultural capital", this can offer "a means to work with a more tangible but arguably restricted conceptualisation" (Davey, 2009, p.288). As Reay (2004) points out, "habitus cannot be directly observed in empirical research and has to be apprehended interpretively" (Reay, 2004, p.439). It is also through a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) which will allow the research to explore habitus as a notion throughout the participants lived experiences. By adopting this approach, the research acknowledges the limitations of interviews as a data collections method and has set out to capture a richer understanding of Bourdieu's key concepts (such as habitus) as they manifest in the lived experiences.

3.6: Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for this research was granted through King's College London minimal ethical risk registration process which is designed for low-risk research (Appendix A). However, whilst this research did not pose any foreseeable risks to participants, the ethical and inclusive practices within participatory research go much further than just institutional guidance. As noted by Kings (2021), "the epistemological differences between the approaches taken by committees and the practices of doing research presents other dilemmas" (Kings, 2021, p.2). As my research was conducted online during a pandemic, further challenges arose which moved beyond the institutional guidance. To address this, I followed the guidance set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA)²⁰ (2018) and accompanied this guidance through wider guidance from peer-reviewed literature. It is important to note here that there were no conflicts of interest identified that could have compromised the objectivity of this research.

As part of the principles unpinning the ethical guidelines by BERA (2018), they state how social science research(ers) "should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities" and that "all social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose" (BERA, 2018).

"BERA believes that educational researchers should operate within an ethic of respect for all persons – including themselves – involved in or affected by the research they are undertaking. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice, in recognition of both their rights and their differences arising from age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant characteristic" (BERA, 2018, para.1)

To begin with, information sheets explaining the research, its focus and the aims were given to prospective participants. This was to ensure transparency and to give the

²⁰ This guidance was updated in April 2024 and can be found here: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-fifth-edition-2024-online>

prospective participants further insights into the research project. As stated by BERA (2018), all “researchers should do everything they can to ensure that all potential participants understand, as well as they can, what is involved in a study” (BERA, 2018, para. 9). In addition, participants were apprised of the data retention procedures, data sharing protocols, and any potential secondary uses of the research data that may arise in the future. For participants who expressed continued interest, informed consent forms were then provided. These forms comprehensively explained the data collection and storage processes, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any point²¹.

“Researchers should recognise the right of all participants to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time, and participants should be informed of this right” (BERA, 2018, para.31)

As part of the ethical preparation, care was also given to the distress management of the research focus. Whilst the research was identified as minimal risk, it was nevertheless important to prepare for any emotional distress the research might bring. As Draucker et al. (2009) point out, any research that carries with it the “risk of inducing or exacerbating emotional distress” may result in participants experiencing “anxiety, depression, embarrassment, or acute stress reactions as they recall, re-examine, and reveal their experiences” (Draucker et al., 2009, p. 343). While the research questions were designed to be participant-led, allowing them to delve into topics as deeply or briefly as they desired, the study anticipated potential themes related to feelings of not belonging, isolation, and imposter syndrome. This consideration arose from the acknowledgment that participants, coming from state-school backgrounds and diverse circumstances (as well as different genders and ethnicities), might face social stigmatisation.

“In advance of data collection, researchers have a responsibility to think through their duty of care in order to recognise potential risks, and to prepare for and be

²¹ All participants signed the informed consent form, and importantly, all participants retained their right to withdraw from the research at any point.

in a position to minimise and manage any distress or discomfort that may arise” (BERA, 2018, para.34).

As mentioned above, participants were provided with as much information on the research topic, aims and outcomes as possible to mitigate potential distress during the interview process. Nevertheless, protocols were established to address any unforeseen emotional responses that might arise. To ensure participants' well-being, the research drew upon publicly available resources, specifically the guidance offered by the Open University (2023) for researchers navigating situations where emotional distress might arise during research interviews. This included the following: (1) If you (the researcher) observe any signs of upset in your participants, the first step is to acknowledge this. You can do so by saying things like ‘I can see that question upset you’ or ‘Is thinking about that difficult?’; (2) Give them the option to take a break from the interview, or to stop altogether; (3) If they would like to proceed, be led by them and give them time. Remind them that they are under no obligation to answer particular questions if they do not wish to do so (as per the consent form) and; (4) If appropriate, you may wish to direct participants to the debrief sheet after the interview or email it to them again (Open University, 2023, p.17). As part of the initial recruitment process, participants were given debrief sheets along with their information sheets, with the contact details of both the lead researcher and the lead supervisor. Informed by these guidelines, the research carefully planned for potential unforeseen emotional responses during the interviews.

Another important factor in the ethical process was that of anonymity. BERA (2018) places high importance on participant anonymity, which was particularly crucial in this research for two reasons. First, the competitive nature of admissions to UK music conservatoires, with limited places on highly sought-after courses, meant that revealing details like enrolment dates or instrument types could potentially identify participants. Second, the geographically dispersed nature of UK conservatoires, with a concentration in London and single institutions in other cities, necessitated caution. To ensure participant anonymity, specific locations outside of London were never disclosed along with the specific date of the participants graduation year. Additionally, the full names of the institutions were never revealed in any transcripts.

“ The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants’ data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy, and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. This could involve employing ‘fictionalising’ approaches when reporting, and where using such approaches researchers should fully explain how and why they have done so” (BERA, 2018, para.40)

All participants were assigned pseudonyms throughout the research process. This included interview transcripts, data analysis, and the final thesis write-up. Pseudonyms were chosen carefully to avoid any potential identification. Participants were also informed that the research would not collect any personal identifiable information such as names, addresses, or school details. BERA (2018) recognises that "anonymity may not be possible in some contexts and cases" (BERA, 2018, para. 41). This can be particularly relevant in research involving small, tight-knit communities, where participants discussing the study with others or observational clues might inadvertently reveal identities. Similarly, highly renowned conservatoires may be recognisable even with anonymised accounts. While this research prioritised participant anonymity through strategies like withholding specific locations and institutional names, it is important to acknowledge these potential limitations.

By adhering to these procedures, the research(er) endeavoured to demonstrate a rigorous commitment to the ethical research practices outlined by BERA (2018). Throughout the research process, from initial contact to the final write-up, the primary focus of ethical considerations remained the safety and well-being of all stakeholders. This includes the participants, the researcher, and the wider community who might identify with the experiences and issues explored in this research.

3.6.1: The practicalities

Data collection was achieved through using social media as a tool for recruitment. In recent years, social media has developed into a useful tool when recruiting “hidden populations” for social research (Sikkens et al., 2017, p.131). In their work on using

social media²² as a tool, Sikkens et al. (2017) found participant trust to be a key challenge when recruiting participants. They set out guidelines for approaching respondents who they claim might “not trust you” and approach this through the following steps: (1) create a researchers’ page to be transparent; (2) build trust and use a positive approach toward the research topic; (3) build trust and use a personal approach instead of an advertisement; (4) show sincere interest; (5) be persistent; (6) researchers should be aware that their online person is traceable on the internet (Sikkens et al., 2017, p.137).

Through following this guidance, I first started with establishing a page where perspective participants could visit which allowed me to be more visible to the online respondents:



Figure 3.6: Recruitment profile for Twitter

The next stage was for me to build trust and to use a positive and personal approach towards the research topic. To do this, I sent out personal invites to people who had engaged with the page and used direct messenger as a way to communicate with online users allowing them “to open, ignore, delete, or contemplate the request in their own time” (Sikkens et al., 2017, p. 137). The message included a short summary of the research and put forward a positive blurb on the possible outcomes the research aimed to achieve. The next step was to ensure that the outreach was “sincere” and

²² Sikkens et al. (2017) write from the perspective of using Facebook as their main tool. I have followed their guidance and updated where necessary for their practices to be aligned with Twitter.

“persistent”. Using tools on Twitter to respond to comments made by online users (i.e. liking tweets, retweets and comments and using hashtags) enabled me to show sincerity whilst also facilitating consistency throughout the engagement process.



Figure 3.6: Example of Twitter page

Lastly, my engagement with the Twitter page meant that my research was open for all to see. And whilst I had to ensure all prospective participants were recruited privately (through direct messaging), I also had to be careful of potential participants who were deemed to be untrustworthy or those who could possibly give false information. Having a public page also meant that discussions on the page were also open for anyone to comment (i.e. Twitter users). This is addressed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) who outline the ethical concerns researchers could face when recruiting participants online due the lack of control researchers have on their recruitment process (see Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). For example, public conversations (Twitter streams) on my Twitter profile began between online users on their experiences of studying at a conservatoire - experiences which were deemed to be rich in nature but ones I was unable to capture or implement within this research due to the online users not giving informed consent. Despite these comments being in the public domain and freely available for others to see, it nevertheless brought nuances to the conversation. Were these Twitter users completely state schooled educated? Did they study western classical music? For example, one Twitter user had mentioned how they were bullied and made to feel ashamed of their background whilst studying at a UK music conservatoire. What was not included in this statement was whether or not they attended a non-selective state school. However, as to be discussed below,

this was problematised through me reaching out to those users individually, asking if they would like to be part of the research and to further find out about their backgrounds and incentives.

Whilst this generated discussions and aided to the page's popularity, I also had to keep in mind that this could also impact those who wish to engage with the research. For example, those who might want to participate to share positive experiences might be hindered by the prospect if they noticed a stream of negative comments. Fortunately, all respondents engaged and communicated safely and respectfully and in trustworthy manners (i.e. through offering their private e-mail addresses to be contacted further and avoided any derogatory or offensive language etc.).

Once contact was made through direct messaging via Twitter, participants voluntarily forwarded their e-mail addresses where I was able to send both the information sheet and participant consent form before setting up the interview. Furthermore, people and organisations began to promote my research outside of Twitter on other social media platforms (such as Facebook and Instagram) where I had very little control over engaging with and implementing the procedures above. Jones (2011) also acknowledges the difficulty of researcher control in his work for BERA and asks:

“Is a Twitter stream a document, treatable as text, or is it a discussion? If a Tweet originates in one area but is then re-tweeted out of its original context does it retain the originator's restrictions on its use and re-use or is it simply public?” (Jones, 2011, p.2).

To help problematise the grey area of informed consent, I began following and direct messaging all those involved in the Twitter stream to express interest in both them and their thoughts through following the steps outlined above. As for the retweets and posts outside of Twitter, I was able to keep a log of the people and organisations who publicly shared my 'call for participants' to ensure I could keep prospective participants up to date on any upcoming news or deadlines regarding the recruitment process. This was largely through communicating with organisations who reposted original Tweet on platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn.

Once participants had read the information and signed the consent form, they were asked to send their date and time preferences to set up the online interview. All requests for participants preferred times were fulfilled which ranged between Mon-Fri during 9:00 AM-8:00 PM. However, as stated above, signed consent goes much further than just the institutional guidelines. Girvan and Savage (2012) report that “informed consent became and continues to be one of the most important ethical practices in research involving humans” with “the field of online research” proving further challenges for researchers (Girvan and Savage, 2012, p. 242). Such challenges are also documented by Jones (2011) who explains the complexity as an outcome due to:

“...the mediated nature of online research the relationship between the researcher and the participant may be more difficult than in a less mediated face-to-face setting. It may be more difficult to determine whether the participant genuinely understands what they are consenting to, and it also may take more time and explanation to gain consent” (Jones, 2011, p.3)

Acknowledging that online interviewing brings such challenges, I ensured all informed consent was obtained at the beginning stages and made this clear in the recruitment e-mail sent to participants who were asked to return signed consent forms before the interview. At the beginning of the interview, I then asked participants if they had any questions about the information sheet and consent form, offering online interviewees the opportunity for me to share my screen and walk them through the documents at their request. All participants had vocally confirmed that they fully understood the consent form and were happy to proceed with no further guidance required.

All online interviews were conducted using the platform Zoom with all interviews being password protected. Online interviews were conducted as a direct outcome of the COVID-19 restrictions. However, in the later stages of recruitment, participants were given the option to attend an interview online or in-person due to the lifting of restrictions. Once online interviews began, I gained further consent from participants to record the interview and re-asked the question once they had confirmed so their response was noted in the recording. The same process was taken for in-person interviews and was recorded via a password protected smartphone device. In

preparation for interviews, I also considered the various needs participants could have (such as SEND, language barriers, health conditions etc.) and factored into the interview breaks (if needed) and offered questions in text format inside the chat. All interviews ended with a de-brief where participants were able to ask any follow-up questions before offering them the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time (BERA, 2018). Interview recordings were stored on a password-protected laptop/ smartphone and upon being transcribed, pseudonyms were given to participants and recordings were permanently deleted.

3.7: Thematic Analysis: the rationale and process

After locating my research within the qualitative paradigm, I was then faced with the task of choosing a qualitative approach – one which would allow me to not only analyse the data but one which would fit within my wider ontological and epistemological philosophies. As mentioned by Teherani et al. (2015), before a researcher engages in a qualitative study, they should consider how their views about what is possible to study will impact their approach (Teherani et al., 2015, p.669). Given my own background as a low socio-economic state-schooled conservatoire student and the importance of my experience in carrying out this research, I wanted to remain present throughout the research and belong to the journey as much as possible. After moving back and forth between research designs²³, I had decided to employ a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) given the close alignment this approach had with my beliefs and research aims.

Often referred to as one of the most widely used approaches in qualitative research (Xu and Zammit, 2020), TA is a “method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data” Braun and Clarke, 2014, p.1). Despite the history of TA being traced back to works of Gerald Holton²⁴ in the twentieth century (see Joffe, 2012 in Terry et al., 2017, p.17), “it has up until recently been a relatively poorly demarcated and poorly understood method” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.77). In their

²³ I started my research journey using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This method for my research appeared too clinical and did not allow me the freedom to belong to my research without bracketing my experiences. I then moved to Grounded Theory but as I was testing the relevancy of established theories as set out by Bourdieu, I was unable to proceed with this method.

²⁴ See for example, his work on ‘Themata’ (Holton, 1975).

work on TA, Terry et al. (2017) divide TA into two broad schools: “(1) Small q’ TA that retains a foothold in positivist research and is concerned with establishing coding reliability; (2) a ‘Big Q’ approach to TA, that operates within a qualitative paradigm and is characterised by (genuine) theoretical independence and flexibility, and organic processes of coding and theme development (Terry et al., 2017, p.20). Yet, despite their epistemological differences, what both of these approaches share in common is their aim of identifying and making sense “of patterns of meaning across a dataset” (Braun and Clarke, 2020, p. 4), a crucial component to this research given the application of Bourdieu’s frameworks in the data analysis.

The Big Q approach is that best known by Braun and Clarke whose 2006 paper gave TA the aptitude to be recognised as a method “in its own right” (Joffe, 2012, p. 210). To this degree, TA can be thought of as an umbrella term for a wide variety of different approaches with meaning-making and data interpretation at its core (see Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2020; 2021; 2022). Still, whilst TA remains one of the most “widely used” methods within qualitative research, “there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It is therefore common for researchers to often feel overwhelmed during the research process (see, for example, Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2019).

As a novice researcher approaching qualitative research, it was Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2020; 2021; 2022) approach to TA which remained both accessible and most relevant to my topic of study. In their version, Braun and Clarke (2006; 2020; 2021; 2022) successfully conceptualise TA to help give the researcher both clarity and autonomy to minimally organise and describe data in rich detail to interpret the many “aspects of the research topic” (Boyatzis, 1998 in Braun and Clarke, 2006). They achieve this through their six-step guide which offers clarity on their approach whilst acknowledging the active role of the researcher in the co-creation of data. And, whilst these six steps might first appear to seem proceduralist, Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022) advocate for the researcher to move back and forth between phases, arguing that their guide should be seen as “recursive” as opposed to “linear” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 86).

The first step in the six-phase process is that of familiarisation. It is about developing a “deep and intimate knowledge” of the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.42). In action, this involves “reading and re-reading” the interview transcripts (ibid, p.43). Braun and Clarke (2022) advocate for the researcher to become so familiar with the data that if the “data got stolen”, the researcher would still be able to “describe the broad content fairly well” (ibid, p.43). The next phase is that of data coding and “involves systematically working through each data item” (ibid, p. 61). This begins by reading the data and stopping when the researcher thinks they “have spotted something relevant” to the research question (ibid, p. 61). Upon finding something relevant within the data, the researcher then tags this with a “code label”, doing this throughout the whole dataset, repeating codes and creating new ones (ibid. p. 61). Phase three consists of generating initial themes and “involves a range of processes of engaging with the data codes to explore where there is some similarity of meaning” (ibid, p. 79). The outcome of clustering the codes is to generate what Braun and Clarke (2022) refer to as a “candidate theme”. This is where the initial clustering of codes develop into potential themes, requiring the researcher further explore these through reading and re-reading the transcripts before developing a “stepped theme” (ibid, p. 79). Extending onto this is phase four where the researcher performs a “vital check” on the theme development through reengaging with “all the coded data extracts” before then doing this on “the entire data set” (ibid, p. 97). This is where the researcher will hopefully acquire a rich and nuanced analysis of themes that directly address the research question(s). Phase five is where the themes are refined before being named. Braun and Clarke (2022) advise researchers to draw up a list of theme definitions to test the quality which in turn helps with “thinking about the organisation and flow” and “the overall story” the analysis builds towards (ibid, p.110). The final stage in the process is named ‘writing matters for analysis’. Perhaps the most important part of the process, phase six is about “deep refining analytic work to shape the detail and flow of the analysis” (p. 118).

3.7.1: Towards a reflexive approach

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) reinforces “that the application of TA requires a reflexive practitioner” (Trainor and Bundon, 2020, p. 2) – one who captures and fully embraces “the subjective skills the researcher brings to the process” (Braun and Clarke, 2020, p. 7). This approach (still influenced by the qualitative paradigm) “has

big Q qualitative underpinnings along with certain paradigmatic and epistemological assumptions (e.g., qualitative paradigm, subjectivity, recursive coding, continual reflection)” which Trainor and Bundon (2020) deem a “necessary” component to RTA (Trainor and Bundon, 2020, p.2).

Unlike other qualitative approaches, such as Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith and Osborn, 2003), RTA is understood through Braun and Clarke (2020) as not belonging to a specific theoretical framework. From this point, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that epistemological positioning of TA can be employed from various perspectives to “reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81) – a very important aspect of the method given the influence of Bourdieu’s frameworks in the analysis. This flexibility also allows my Critical Realist approach to use RTA to gain “access to situated, interpreted realities, not simple, decontextualised truths” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 171).

In their paper on RTA, Braun and Clarke (2020) argue how the flexibility of RTA as a method “means it can be undertaken with quite different guiding theories (albeit constrained by qualitative paradigmatic and epistemological assumptions about meaningful knowledge and knowledge production), and using quite different orientations to data, coding practices and theme development” (Braun and Clarke, 2020, p. 4). This does not mean that RTA is atheoretical per se but instead, can offer the researcher the freedom and choice in deciding the most suitable philosophical approach to their research. Braun and Clarke (2021) identify different ways in which RTA can be approached:

Table 3.7: Different orientations in RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2021)

Approach	Description
Inductive	Coding and theme development are directed by the content of the data.
Deductive	Coding and theme development are directed by existing concepts or ideas.
Semantic	Coding and theme development reflect the explicit content of the data.
Latent	Coding and theme development report concepts and assumptions underpinning the data.
Critical realist	Focuses on reporting an assumed reality evident in the data.
Constructionist	Focuses on looking at how a certain reality is created by the data.

As Bourdieu's frameworks have helped inform and guide this research, part of my research orientation is deductive in nature. However, as I have also retrieved new themes from the participants lived experiences which in turn have expanded upon Bourdieu's theories, thus my approach will also be inductive. Braun and Clarke (2020) state that RTA "can be used for a more deductive or more inductive analytic process" whilst also "recognising this can be a continuum, rather than dichotomy" (ibid, 2020).

3.7.2: RTA: the active role of the researcher

Embarking on this PhD journey as someone with lived experience of the topic under investigation presented me with a unique set of challenges. As a state-schooled, white working-class man from the north of England navigating the world of classical music and UK music conservatoires, I found myself positioned at an interesting intersection. My background offered an insider's perspective, yet it could also create biases and blind spots. As a result, reflexive journaling became a crucial tool in

navigating this terrain, allowing me to acknowledge my positionality and utilise it as a strength rather than a limitation (see for example, Smith, 1999).

Lincoln and Guba (1982) write on reflexive journals as a process of improve research reliability and remove bias. For me, this practice became somewhat of a basis of self-discovery, a space to grapple with the complexities of my own positionality and its impact on the research process(es). It was not just about safeguarding against bias; it was about harnessing my background as a strength and fostering a deeper understanding of the themes emerging from the research. Reflexivity is often a crucial component of most social research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2002). It is a process that is often viewed as a “continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2013). In other words, it allows the researcher to bring their own set of experiences to the table and to acknowledge these as an integral part of the data collection and analysis. However, it is much “more than just one’s positionality – it is about the role of the researcher as an active agent in the production of knowledge” (Trainor and Bundon, 2020, p. 3). This is what forms the core of RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2020; 2021). In this sense, it is viewed as “the impact one has on the research process” (Trainor and Burdon, 2020, p.2) and how this impact “is transformed from a problem to an opportunity” (Finlay, 2002, p.212). Unlike other qualitative methods, it gives a greater sense of agency to the researcher.

The endeavour to problematising researcher subjectivity requires the researcher “to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their (my) biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal (Berger, 2013, p. 2). Throughout the research process, my journal became a repository for raw thoughts and ideas. It captured the excitement of breakthroughs and the frustration of dead ends. It documented moments of self-doubt and the immense satisfaction of overcoming challenges – especially those which were exacerbated through the pandemic. This constant documentation allowed me to trace the evolution of my thinking, highlighting

how my understanding of the research topic deepened with my positionality continuing to inform the meaning-making process.

Reflexivity in TA “places emphasis on the reflexivity of the researcher” and the “theoretical independence/flexibility (without being atheoretical)” to help guide the “presence of the research question” (Terry and Hayfield, 2020, p.430). Braun and Clarke (2020) suggest for researchers engaging in RTA “to identify, and ideally articulate in their reporting, the theoretical assumptions informing their analysis” (Braun and Clarke, 2020, p. 4).

I argue that my positionality is not a barrier but rather, a lens through which I can offer a unique perspective on the experiences of state-schooled classical musicians on their journeys’ to a UK music conservatoire. Through the practice of reflexive journaling, I have learned to harness the power of my background while maintaining a critical and objective approach. This research journey has not only expanded my knowledge base but also allowed me to develop as a novice researcher who embraces subjectivity as a powerful tool in understanding complex social phenomena. Not only has it instilled certain dispositions that have aided me throughout this research journey, but it is also the very foundation upon which this PhD project is built. Without that lived experience, this research simply would not exist.

Table 3.7: Guidance on conducting RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2021)

Reflecting, understanding and interrogating:	My positionality within the PhD
Values and personal positioning	As a former state-schooled conservatoire student, my positioning within this research stems from my own lived experiences as an underrepresented conservatoire student. My lack of belonging and failure to ‘fit in’ pushed me to leave the conservatoire. I am now dedicated to levelling the playing field of conservatoire study with the hope of widening participation and increasing access.
Assumptions and expectations about the topic of their research	The attempt to separate my experiences from my assumptions has largely been aided through a self-reflective journal. In doing so, I was able to further break down the assumption that every participant from a similar background to myself would also have similar experiences.
Relationship to and with participants	My relationship with participants was strictly professional with no pre-existing relationships identified.
Design and methodological choices	I have to acknowledge that my research is subjective in the sense that it could be authored very differently if someone without my experiences set out to answer my research questions. Also, it is my previous exposure to Bourdieu as an undergraduate student which lead me to test his theories within this PhD. On his work on Bourdieu, Grenfell (2012) echoes my methodological design by acknowledging how “as researchers, our choice of research topic is shaped by our own academic backgrounds and trajectories” (Grenfell, 2012 p.220).

	<p>Whilst doing so, I also acknowledge that Bourdieu (a white male) developed his theories in 20th century France and in a different context to the conservatoire. This does however leave room to renew and improve his concepts to better align them with contemporary cultural studies.</p>
Disciplinary location and standpoint	<p>My disciplinary location and standpoint is an outcome of my knowledge acquired through my training in both the conservatoire and university along with my wider lived experiences of navigating my way through higher education institutions and the classical music industry. From this angle, I feel that I must be careful when attempting to analyse experiences as not everyone will know theories I will be using nor will they have the same standpoint as me – giving me the task of ensuring I hold the reader's hand throughout this thesis to ensure my standpoint is accessible.</p>

3.8: Bringing in Bourdieu

As made evident throughout the thesis thus far, Bourdieu's key concepts are woven throughout the entirety of this thesis. Grenfell (2012) writes how Bourdieu is distinguished as both a theorist and a researcher by concluding:

“A theorist is interested in developing hypotheses to account for the particularities and functioning of an object of study, whereas a researcher collects empirical data and analyses it in order to obtain a picture of how the “real world” is constituted” (Grenfell, 2012, p. 214)

Grenfell (2012) goes on to discuss how “either of these viewpoints gives only a partial view if used alone” observing how Bourdieu's “own approach seeks to do both” (ibid, p.214). It is through this methodological approach where I also wish to position this research. That being, a way of collecting empirical data to “obtain a picture” before “developing hypotheses” to understand and make meaning on the “object of study” – a process which also allows me to utilise my critical realist position. I will do this by bringing together both the six-step process set out by Braun and Clarke (2022) in their version of RTA before aligning this with Bourdieu's ‘Field Analysis’ (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Illustrated by Grenfell (2012), Bourdieu sets out his field analysis through three distinct levels: (1) analysing the position of the field *vis-à-vis* the field of power; (2) mapping out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of authority of which the field is a site; (3) analysing the habitus of agents through the systems and dispositions they have acquired by internalising a deterministic type of social and economic condition (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 in Grenfell, 2012, p. 221).

These levels are mentioned by Grenfell (2012) as having flexibility in regards to what order they are approached and implemented and can be shaped to fit the nature of research. For example, Grenfell (2012) writes how “data collection possibly presupposes an initial gathering of personal – habitus - accounts as a way of building up an ethnography of field participants” (ibid, p.223). This would mean placing step 3 first. In doing so, the researcher will start by analysing the “field positions, structures, and their underlying logic of practice” whilst drawing on the important relationship between field and habitus and “not just one and/or the other” (ibid, p.223). In practice

this allowed my themes and codes to be placed into a process which allowed me to explore experiences deeper and to do so through analysing participants' "background, trajectory and positioning" (ibid, p.222). After setting the scene through step 1, I then implemented step 2 which gave me the chance to explore the concept of capital and the relationship this holds to participants' journeys to the conservatoire. The final part to analysing my themes and codes was achieved through drawing on stage 1 which examined the "field in relationship to other fields" (ibid, p.222). This is where I started to explore classical music education in relation to other sites. This process allowed me to capture and explore the 'practice' of participants' journeys which is equated by Bourdieu as: $(\text{Habitus} \times \text{Capitals}) + \text{Fields} = \text{Practice}$ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101).

3.9: Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology and methods – exploring how the empirical data was collected and analysed. Firstly, I explored the research questions which sought to address the current gaps in knowledge before forming the rationale as to who would be recruited and why. Following this, I then addressed my ontological and epistemological positioning which outlined the critical realism approach. This was an important part of the methodology as it is through this approach where I was able to put forward the importance of meaning-making, highlighting the pivotal role of both the participant and the researcher along with Bourdieu's influence on both the data collection and analysis played in the thesis. The chapter proceeded by outlining the methods and tools used to collect data, more specifically the role of the semi-structured interview. Ethical considerations were then outlined, providing insights into some of the challenges faced by recruiting participants online during the COVID-19 pandemic – issues which were addressed through drawing on guidance from literature and guidelines set out by BERA and researchers. The chapter concluded by exploring RTA as a methodology in analysing the data before bringing in Bourdieu to explore how themes and codes would be analysed through his conceptual framework.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

4.1: Introduction

This chapter will begin by noting the contextual demographics of the research participants within this study before illustrating the identified themes and subthemes which have been developed through a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). Whilst these themes have been formulated through RTA, it is important to remember that each theme has evolved from individual experiences. The themes, along with their codes illustrate the participants' journeys to the conservatoire and are all unique to each participant. Also, given that each individual's experience is unique, participants' quotations reflect realities that might not be true for others. For example, Black state-schooled students might experience their journey to the conservatoire from a different viewpoint to white state-schooled students. The same also applies to social class. Experiences can become further nuanced when also acknowledging other factors, such as the year in which they attended school and so on. Where this has been the case, every effort has been made to bring clarity to any experiences documented. It is also important that the reader considers the sample within this thesis against the size of the student bodies of UK music conservatoires to determine the relevance of the findings and to not make generalised claims according to particular demographics and/or groups. When generalised claims have been made, the findings have drawn on wider research and sources to seek further clarity on the nuances and dispositions at force.

4.2: Participant Demographics

Despite all the participants in the research being state school educated, there remains differences between them which in turn contribute to their experiences, such as gender, class and race. Running alongside these factors are also generational differences²⁵. Given the emphasis placed on participant's background throughout this research, the following chapter will now illustrate the demographics of recruited

²⁵ The data in this thesis captures experiences which range from 1990 to 2018. Throughout the discussion, national policies which impacted music education across state schools in the England will also be examined to provide further insight to the varied experiences.

participants demonstrating the importance of exploring lived experience through an intersectional lens - showing how experience is both unique and contextual.

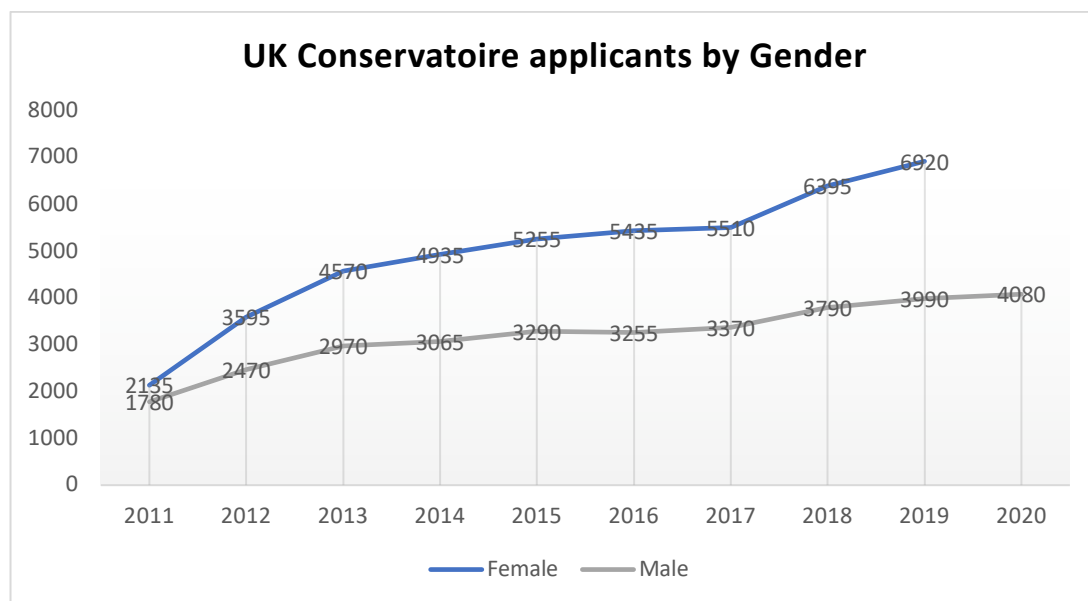
4.2.1: Gender

Information power (see Braun and Clark, 2022) was reached after conducting 21 interviews which uncovered participants’ journeys to the conservatoire between the 1980s and 2010s. In total, nine participants identified as male and eleven as female. The latest data on UK HE enrolments²⁶ by gender is that published by HESA (2022) which show how in the academic year of 2020/ 21, females accounted for 58% of enrolments with males representing 41%. This is seen to be the case since the academic year of 2016/17, with the majority of enrolments being female:

Table 4.2: UK HE enrolments by gender (HESA, 2022)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Female	57%	57%	58%	58%	58%
Male	43%	42%	42%	42%	41%

Similar figures are also reflected in the student body of UK music conservatoires with female identifying applicants representing the majority from the years 2011 to 2020 (UCAS Conservatoires, 2021):



²⁶ This data only accounts for enrolments made by home students.

Figure 4.2: UK Conservatoire applicants by Gender (UCAS Conservatoires, 2021)

Such trends also continue when exploring the gender of accepted applicants in UK conservatoires:

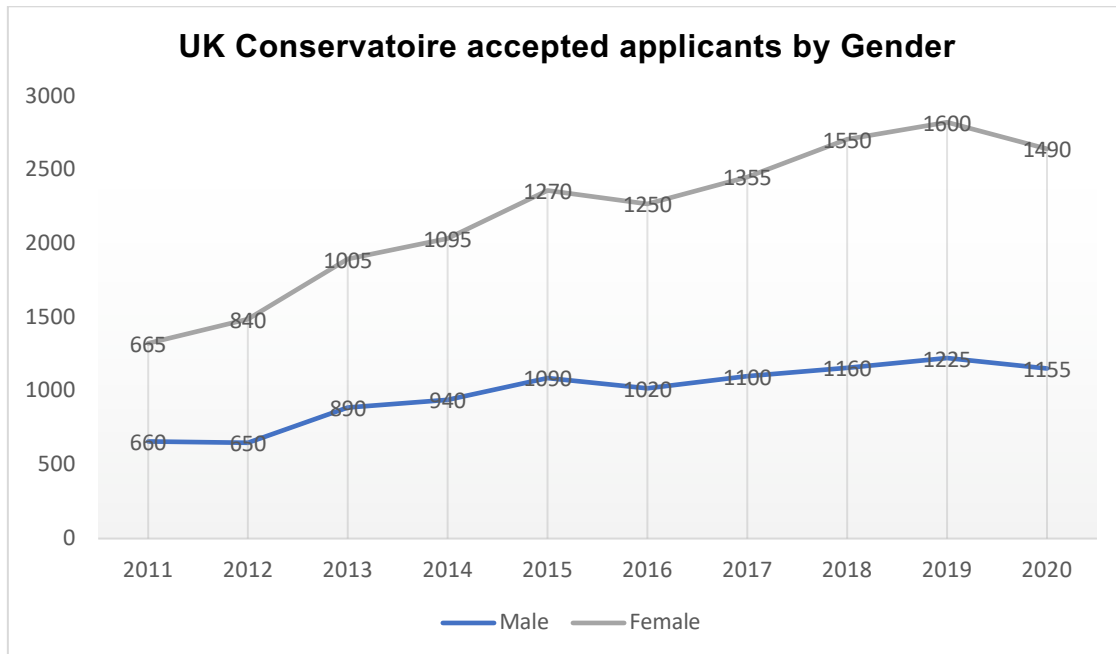


Figure 4.2: UK Conservatoire accepted applicants by gender (UCAS Conservatoires, 2021)

However, despite females accounting for the majority of applicants and accepted students into UK music conservatoires, there remains a noticeable gender disparity in acceptance rates. Statistically, male applicants have a higher chance of securing a place compared to their female counterparts. This discrepancy raises important questions about potential inequities within the admissions process of these institutions (see UCAS Conservatoires, 2020)

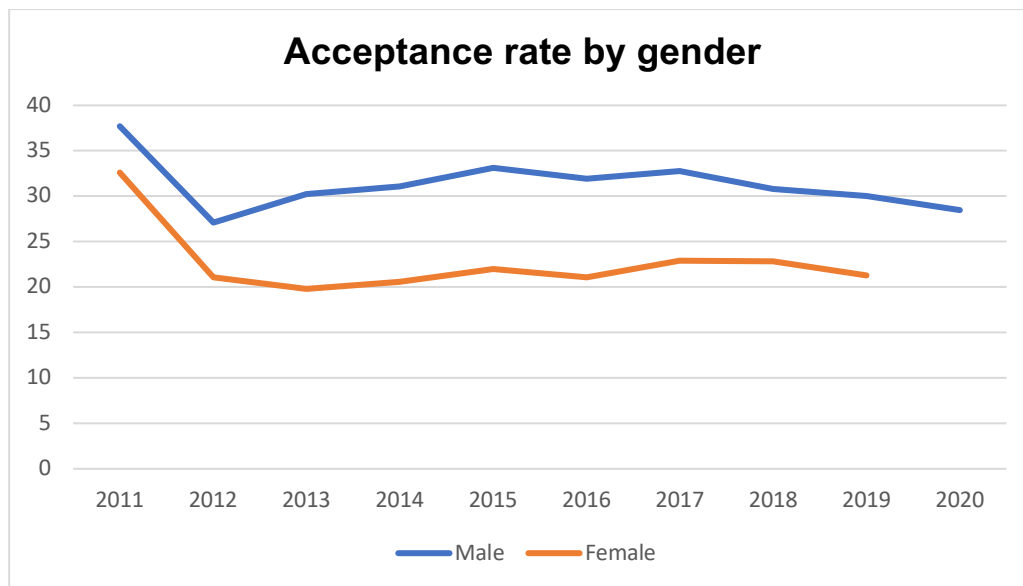


Figure 4.2: Acceptance rate by gender (UCAS Conservatoires, 2020)

Additionally, these disparities are also reflected in the data collected within this thesis. In the interviews, all participants were asked how many auditions they attended and how many were successful. The responses showed the female participants applied to more conservatoires and received fewer offers than the male participants. Such trends are also cited by de Boise (2017) who writes how “women were significantly less likely than men to be offered a place in UK conservatoires when taking into account proportionately larger numbers of women applicants” (de Boise, 2017, p. 31). Not only are female applicants less likely to be offered a place in a UK music conservatoire in comparison to male applicants but also, they are “less well represented in senior roles like orchestral principals, as solo artists, in artistic leadership roles and elsewhere” (Cox and Kilshaw, 2021, p. 1).

These gender differences are also noted by Scharff (2015) who acknowledges that despite women “making up high percentages” of numbers in Higher Music Education, they tend to remain “underrepresented in positions of authority and prestige (Scharff, 2021, p. 5). Furthermore, in the classical music industry, “being a soloist” or “an orchestral musician” can be “perceived as the most prestigious” lines of work and are the careers which conservatoires tend “to value” (Bull and Scharff, 2021, p. 686). It is within these areas where we can start to see the gender imbalances played out. For example, in the UK, “only 22 of the 371 conductors represented by British agents were

female” (Royal Philharmonic Society, 2022). So, whilst female students make up higher numbers in the conservatoire, this data should not be taken at face-value. It is clear that a much more nuanced relationship between gender and inequality are behind these statistics.

4.2.2: Race

Another group which faces challenges in accessing UK music conservatoires are those from Global Majority backgrounds. Whilst race and ethnicity did not form a prerequisite for participant recruitment for the doctoral research, the final sample included two Black participants. The latest data from HESA (2021) show student enrolments by conservatoire provider²⁷ and ethnicity marker:

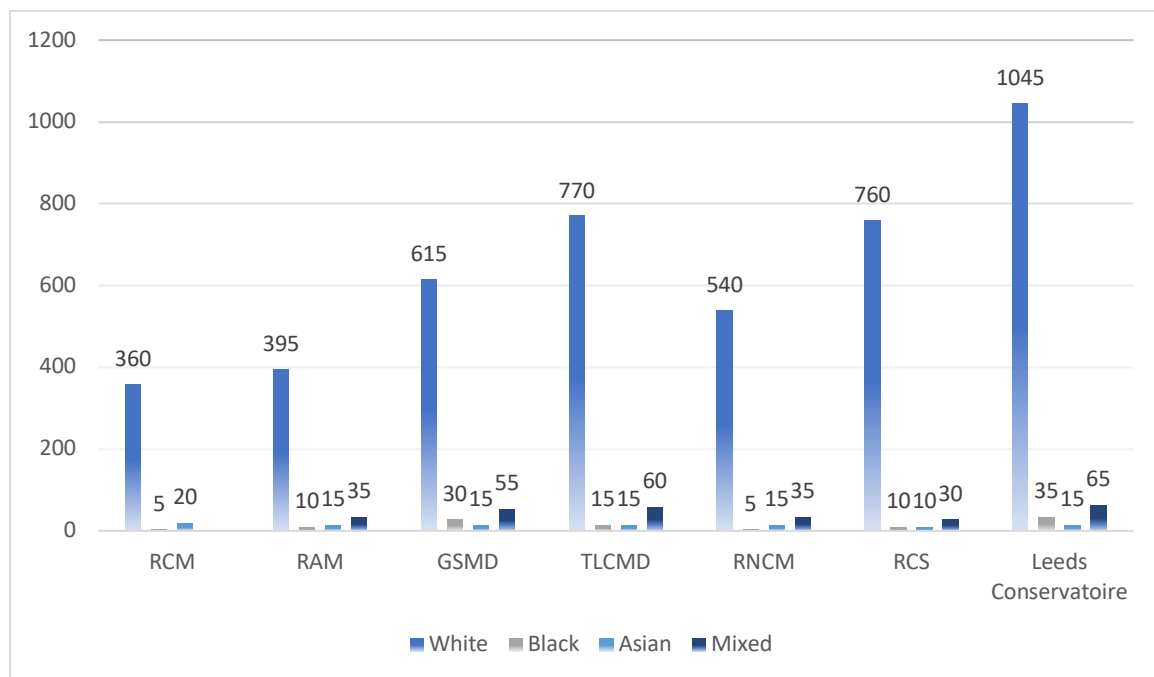


Figure 4.2: Conservatoire enrolments by ethnicity for 2019/20 (HESA, 2021)

In general, Black (HESA, 2021) and British Asian/ East Asian (Bull et al., 2022) remain the most underrepresented groups in UK music conservatoires and as music students in HE in general. For example, as Bull et al. (2022) write:

“There was a notable underrepresentation of British Asian/East Asian people among music students during this period. While 11% of the UK student

²⁷ Data on RWCMD and RBC is not available on HESA.

population were British Asian, only 2% of UK-domiciled music students were. There was also an underrepresentation of Black British students in music: 4% of the music student population was Black British compared to 8% of the total UK student population. Roughly two-thirds of both of these groups were male students, so these inequalities are even starker for British Asian and Black British female students” (Bull et al., 2022, p. 48)

In general, very little data exists on Global Majority student experiences in music education and also, within the wider classical music industry (see for example, Scharff, 2015). However, more recently, this has not been the case, with insights from recent reports capturing both qualitative and quantitative data on these experiences. An example is the Black Lives in Music (BLiM) Report which is a first-of-its-kind survey on ‘the lived experience of Black music creators and industry professionals’ (BLiM Report, 2021). Through illustrating structural barriers for Black musicians and their journeys to the music industry, the report acknowledges the role of the conservatoire as a gatekeeper, also acknowledging the barriers Black musicians face when accessing these institutions. A key finding in the report is the cost of participation which the report outlines as disproportionately affecting Black musicians (BLiM Report, 2021, p. 29) – something we are also yet to understand further. The data also show how white music professionals are more likely to have a music-related qualification compared to Black professionals (ibid, p. 53). This could also be a direct outcome from the lack of Black representation in the study bodies of conservatoires – institutions which as this thesis has outlined, act as gatekeepers to the industry. On the topic of racial diversity in the classical music industry, the report quotes:

Western Classical music is still so heavily a part of our education in music and is so inherently white, that it creates an accidental culture where we don’t see enough racial diversity in our musical education through school and into University.” (ibid, p. 53)

The history and evolution of Western classical music has been largely dominated by white men. This is mentioned in the research by Gaztambide-Fernández et al., (2018) who exemplifies the processes of musical subjectivities and demonstrates how musical experience is both “gendered” and “raced” to white conformities (such as white and male). Such musical subjectivities are also transparent in the findings within this

thesis – exemplifying how such attitudes impact experiences. Understanding the experiences of Black state-school students has allowed this research to deep dive into the nuances at force between the different forms of disadvantage. This is particularly important given the wider data which illustrates how “applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to have lower entry qualifications than do White applicants” and can be seen as a result of the “structural inequalities in secondary education” (Richardson, Mittelmeier and Rienties, 2020, p. 17).

Highlighting the role of race, from the public data in HESA and UCAS to reports conducted in the classical music industry allows the thesis to build a picture of the many inequalities Black musicians may face on their journeys to UK music conservatoires. The limited representation from Global Majority participants in this research also requires wider investigation to fully understand the racial inequalities within UK conservatoires. For example, a report by Arts Council England in 2020 mapped the South Asian Dance and Music community in England and uncovered that participation in the arts for South Asian communities “have historically been largely- in common with western art forms - comprised of people from higher socio- economic backgrounds” (ACE, 2020, p. 36). Despite this, no data exists on South Asian experiences in classical music education here in the UK. This is despite Asian ethnic groups²⁸ making up the second largest percentage of the population (9.3%), followed by Black (4.0%), mixed (2.9%) and other (2.1%) ethnic groups according to the latest 2021 census (UK Government, 2022).

4.2.3: Class

In this research, 13 of the 21 participants (62%) identified as working-class during their upbringing with 11 participants (85%) also being the first in their family to attend HE²⁹. As part of the interviews, participants were asked to self-identify their class type. Aforementioned, this was purposively done given the challenges of not only measuring class but the complications such class-types bring with them. Social class remains an

²⁸ Asian or Asian British groups as defined by the UK Government include those from: Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; Chinese and any other Asian background.

²⁹ Whilst conservatoires are considered to be specialist higher education providers, they still remain exclusive to the higher education sector and should still be considered as such when exploring HE first generation experiences.

enigmatic concept in social research, but its measurement however, lacks a single, agreed-upon method in literature (see Romero-Vidal, 2021). Bottero (2004) suggests class identification is a way for people to reflect about their social position, with Wright (1997) affirming how this allows people to then communicate their experiences in order to explain “what is salient about their lives” (Wright, 1997, p. 497). However, it should be noted that in giving participants the autonomy to self-identify their own class can also pose a risk of misidentification. For example, in their work on class identity and the intergenerational self, Friedman, O’Brien and McDonald (2021) find how misidentifications of class can happen regularly when interviewing participants through interviewees building trajectories on “origin stories” which in turn, can “downplay interviewees’ own, fairly privileged, upbringings and instead forge affinities to working-class extended family histories” (Friedman, O’Brien and McDonald, 2021, p. 716). To problematise this, the interviews were designed to further understand the participants socio-economic conditions (i.e. parent educational background, economic factors such as cost of tuition and their trajectories from early life up until their conservatoire auditions etc.) which enabled the research to build a ‘bigger picture’ of their class type – understanding that class is much more than just economic background (see Savage et al., 2013) or something born out of intergenerational reflections and therefore falls into a more objective measurement.

“Social class is sometimes measured using objective indicators like occupation, income, education, or a combination of them. Alternatively, some scholars rely on the subjective identification of respondents to classify them, but different survey questions influence respondents expressed identities differently. Thus, the lack of consensus on how to measure social class is a major challenge for social scientists, in particular for those interested in class politics” (Romero-Vidal, 2021, p. 2).

The subjective approach to social class measurement allows individuals to self-position within a class hierarchy based on their own perceptions and understanding of the concept. Conversely, the objective approach utilises predetermined criteria (such as income, occupation, and educational background etc.) to assign individuals to a specific class category. As highlighted by Oesch and Vigna (2023), historical critiques of subjective class positioning have come from Marxist sociologists. They argue that

this approach can lead to false class consciousness, where individuals mistakenly identify with the interests of the dominant class (see Oesch and Vigna, 2023).

To provide further context, it is useful to accompany participants self-identifying class types with the POLAR4 data from UCAS conservatoires ranging from 2013 – 2022. This data set show that students in quintile five (i.e. the most advantaged group based on their postcode) were the most likely group to be accepted to study at a UCAS Conservatoire in contrast to those in quintile one (i.e. the most disadvantaged group based on their postcode) who were the least likely to be accepted (UCAS Conservatoires End of Cycle Report, 2022). The data from UCAS Conservatoires also show that the most disadvantaged group (quintile one) reached its peak in regards to the proportion of applicants who were accepted in 2017 and fell to its lowest in 2022. This is despite a steady increase in applications across all quintile groups since 2013. To accompany this, a recent report by Arts Council England (ACE, 2021) which focuses on pathways into the classical music industry found “young learners from state schools fare less well in competitive processes for elite training opportunities, and that this is also the case for young people from areas of lower participation in higher education applying to conservatoires” (ACE Report, 2021, p. 17). The evidence also shows middle-class classical musicians tend “to be more comfortable with informal elements of ‘making a living’, like networking, and likewise in developing relationships with key influencers at other stages in the pipeline to the profession, for example, in seeking consultation lessons with conservatoire teachers prior to auditioning” (ACE Report, 2021, p. 20).

Given the nuances to measuring class along with the specialist nature of conservatoires on an institutional level it was deemed appropriate for the participants economic, social and cultural dispositions to be fully understood when exploring their journeys’. As Oesch and Vignal (2021) emphasise, there is no single, universal measure of social class. Examining the relationship between objective indicators (e.g., income, education) and class identity can help us understand how social class influences various outcomes (dependent variables) and the extent to which subjective class identification mediates this association. To address the limitations of relying solely on self-identification, as discussed above, the research employed a multifaceted approach. Participants were empowered to self-categorise their social class, but this

was complemented by a series of questions that delved deeper into Bourdieu's notions of capital, and habitus. Additionally, when interviews permitted, the exploration extended to participants' early life and family experiences. By incorporating both subjective and objective elements, this research aimed to achieve a more nuanced understanding of social class within the sample group.

4.3: The Themes

Themes were produced through a series of codes which then developed a list of subthemes around a “central concept” (see Braun and Clarke, 2019). An example of this is illustrated in each theme throughout this chapter through an illustrative figure, with the codes and subthemes also illustrated (left to right). In general, the primary direct influences on the participants' journeys to a UK music conservatoire were found from variables associated with: early life and family influence, school experience, socioeconomic background, one-to-one music lessons and membership to extra-curricular activities. As a result, the following themes were developed: **(1) Parent Empowerment; (2) The ‘Meritocratic Musician’; (3) Becoming ‘Serious’ and (4) Fish out of Water**. These themes are outlined below with introductions and insights to their development from an RTA approach, along with relevant theoretical frameworks to provide greater clarity. The themes are interconnected and support each other, and do not stand alone as separate to one another but instead, intertwine and overlap. For example, understanding the participants socioeconomic background along with the varying levels of their cultural capital are codes which contribute to each theme. Put simply, all themes intertwine and share underlying factors. An overview of participants can be found in Appendix B.

4.3.1: Parent Empowerment

The theme of parental empowerment is used to explore how the participants' parents influenced their journeys to the conservatoire and how significant this influence was throughout their journeys'. Developed through both the participants' lived experiences of both parental engagement and parental involvement, this research has adopted the term ‘parental empowerment’ bringing together these two concepts. While the

influence of family and early life experiences has been explored in the literature throughout this thesis, the profound impact of parental involvement has not been adequately addressed. Not only is there a gap in wider literature on this topic, but it also emerged as an unexpected yet significant area of interest during the interview data analysis.

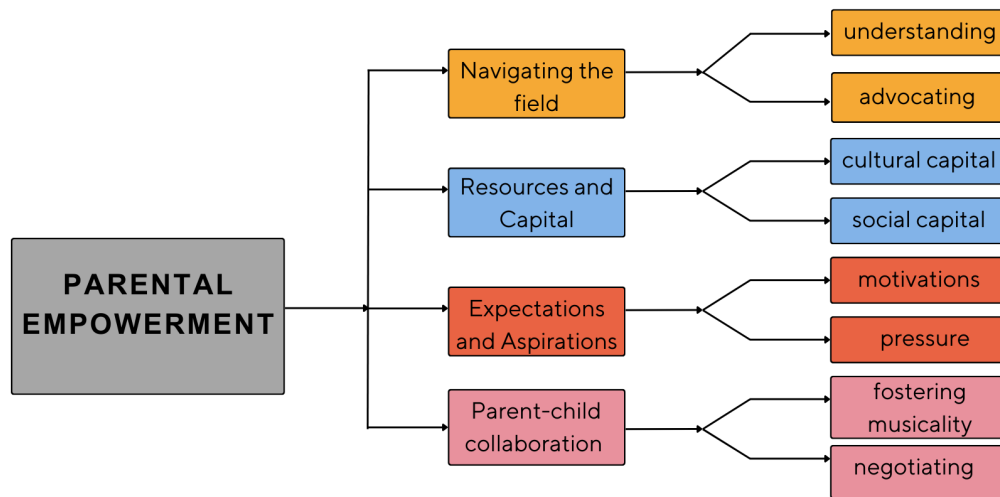


Figure 4.3.1: RTA Theme Development: Parental Empowerment

The term itself is best outlined in the work by Hsiao, Higgins and Diamond, (2018) who write how “empowerment is the facilitation of participation focused on attainable goals and parents’ ability to work alone or with others to devise ways to reach specific goals for their child” (Hsiao, Higgins and Diamond, 2018, p.44). The authors draw on the work by Rappaport (1984) and Yukl and Becker (2006) to further understand the involvement parents have in their child’s learning process. They write how “empowerment, as a process, does not occur linearly” and instead “develops recursively and interactively” (Rappaport, 1984 in ibid, 2006, p.45). The mechanisms to understanding parental empowerment are thus “not separate in nature but are interdependent, often overlap, and work as change agents on one another” (Yukl & Becker, 2006 in ibid, 2006, p.45). This has been illustrated in the figure below:

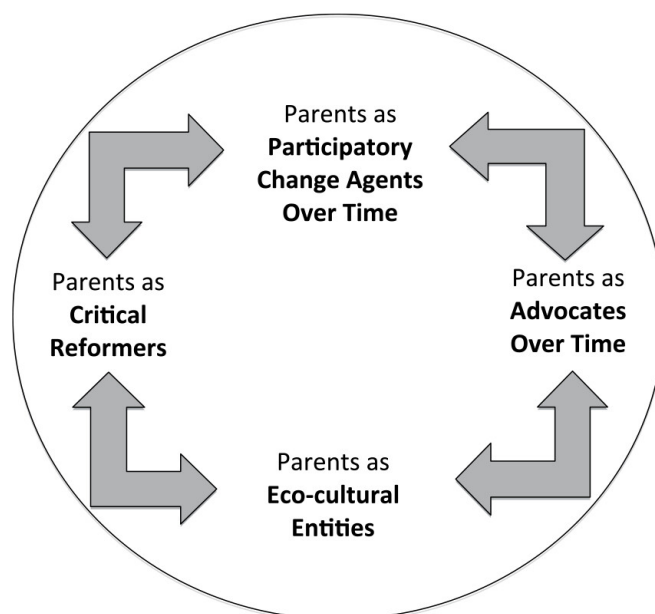


Figure 4.3.1: Theoretical components of parent empowerment (Hsiao, Higgins and Diamond, 2018)

In short, the ultimate “goal of parental empowerment is the realisation that parents should not be passive recipients of decisions made by others” (for example, teachers) but instead, must remain “active advocates focused on self-control, self-efficacy, and self-determination” (ibid, 2018, p.44). As both parental involvement and parental engagement were the two codes which formed part of this theme in this thesis, it will be useful to unpack further what these entail and how they relate to the participants journeys to a conservatoire whilst also exploring why they were conflated in ‘empowerment’ and are now being addressed separately.

A good starting point is to bring in the work by Goodall and Montgomery (2014) who describe the continuum between parental “engagement” and “involvement” and who explore this “continuum” in relation to education and the school environment. They conclude how the continuum often begins with “parental involvement” which then leads “to the far more effective point of “parental engagement”” (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014, p. 407). Interestingly, for working-class participants in this research with non-musical parents, this was also seen to be the case: involvement being the starting point with engagement for their parents happening once the participant had reached a certain level of musical ability. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) define “involvement” as “the act of taking part in an activity or event, or situation” whereas “engagement

may be defined as the feeling of being involved in a particular activity” (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014, p. 400). For the purpose of this research, involvement happened at the very early stages of the participants’ musical journeys. This was captured in the interviews through the participants’ experiences of music lessons, concerts, being present at music exams and so forth. The latter (i.e. engagement) was later developed, especially for those from non-musical families and happened when the participants’ parents became more active in their musical journeys. Examples include the many moments when parents would engage with music teachers about the participants’ music learning and for some, this also included actively helping the participants explore the range of conservatoires and choices available to them for higher education study or even driving them to music lessons.

Interestingly, while interviews consistently used the term "parents" to describe the support participants received throughout their lived experiences, closer examination revealed a stronger maternal influence on a handful of participants musical journeys’. This finding resonates with Hall's (2018) concept of "Musical Mothering." In her work on choirboys, Hall (2018) argues that mothers often play a pivotal role in fostering musical interest and commitment in their children:

“On a practical level, these women get the boys to and from rehearsals and volunteer a multitude of hours in many facets of the choir’s organisation. They work on camps, co-ordinate uniform fittings, maintain the music library, assist overseas tours and fundraise. But also, on an affective level, the boys describe their mother as a central figure in their life as a backstop’ for dealing with a range of complex emotions that go hand-in- hand with singing in this choir” (Hall, 2018, p. 101).

Similarly, this research provides further evidence for the concept of "Musical Mothering." For instance, Laura, a working-class pianist, described her mother's support as a significant part of her early musical experiences. As she recalls, Laura's mother would sit with her during practice sessions, helping her grasp the basics of the piano syllabus and offering encouragement, emotional support and driving ambition in the process. Similarly, Nicola, a working-class vocalist, highlighted her mother's crucial role in her musical journey:

“When you get to the conservatoire you become aware, very quickly that whether or not you was in an area in the north of England or the South of England, many of these people had already met... and I have to give my mum credit because even though she had no clue about this world she was perhaps and still is my biggest supporter and I think my dad also being if you'd like that very traditional breadwinner, my mum was someone who was able to give me that extra time and make sure that I was able to do the best I could with the resources that we had” (Nicola, Vocalist).

As Hall (2018) writes, the notion of ‘Musical Mothering’ “is not to discredit the significant and valuable input many fathers have in their son’s musical lives, but in the stories these boys told, it is their mothers who feature as the most significant providers of emotional and educational care in regards to their musical development” (Hall, 2018, p. 101).

The terms parental engagement and parental involvement are usually used in the context of home-school relationships. For example, Epstein (2010) defines parental engagement as “the process by which parents and schools work together to improve student learning” (Epstein, 2010, p. 2). Parental involvement can be seen by some as more important than engagement and it is argued that engagement is unable to happen without schools providing parents with the right environment to become involved (see for example, Mapp, Johnson, Strickland, and Meza, 2008). For the context of this research, the ‘school’ in these definitions has been replaced with the broader field of ‘music education’. For example, engagement can only be seen to happen once gatekeepers within the field (i.e. music teachers, music institutions, concert halls etc.) help provide parents with access and an environment they feel comfortable within – something particularly important for those from working-class and non-musical backgrounds. For example, if a school desires to engage more parents, they will first need to get them involved and provide them with a space which empowers them. To do this, they must provide access, allow parents to feel at ease within their environment. Teachers might also have to change their language in order to facilitate the engagement process. It was clear that once the parents became involved, they then became more engaged (and vice-versa) which resulted helped drive the participants’ journeys. Bringing in Bourdieu here is extremely advantageous,

in particular, his concepts of capital and habitus which allow the research to dig deeper into understanding the theme of parental empowerment in music education.

As outlined earlier in this research, Bourdieu (1984) argues that a person's position within society is impacted by their possession (or lack of) of capital, in particular, economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Whilst all participants attended a non-selective state school, markers on their socioeconomic background were not part of the recruitment criteria. As a result, the participants were recruited from different social backgrounds. The participants' economic capital, which refers to the amount of financial resources a person has (Bourdieu, 1984) was seen to impact the way in which their journeys to a music conservatoire were shaped. These resources were seen to impact the participants parents' involvement and engagement. An example of greater parental engagement, was attending concerts together. The participants who attended classical music concerts with their parents also claimed that they felt better supported by their parents in their musical journeys.

“I was really shy and I tried to keep my musical hobbies very low key during primary and secondary school because I would say despite growing up in a very middle class environment it just wasn't the norm in the area that I was in and nor was it the norm amongst my peers at school. I didn't really want to feel like an outsider and I suppose the only time is where I'd really feel that sense of belonging was either when I was in a music lesson or when my parents would take me to concerts. I always remember very vividly going to a concert at the Barbican and my parents gave me that opportunity, an opportunity which is now a core memory...” (Nina, Saxophonist)

Additionally, for two participants from middle-class backgrounds, it was clear that their parents had stronger relationships with both the school and their music teachers.

“I was really dedicated to music at school and I felt as if the school was also very dedicated to me in return. As I've mentioned to you, my mum really I think forged that and was able to capitalise on me being quite brilliant in music and use it to gain, well... I suppose perhaps additional benefits from my wider studies, she was always in constant dialogue with the school and whenever I

was doing a concert or whenever I'd come home with an award she would already have known about it before I got through the front door" (Alice, Flautist)

On the other hand, participants who self-defined as working class, claimed that financial difficulty brought many challenges for their musical journeys. Many of the participants claimed that their parents struggled to afford private music lessons, instruments, and other related expenses. The lack of access to such material costs left some participants claiming that their parents felt overwhelmed and at times, would stray away from engaging with the school and their private one-to-one teachers.

"Their [his parents] financial situation or whatever, I think they felt a little bit embarrassed about it I think and they were so quick to just accept what a teacher would tell them. I told you about how it took me quite a while to persuade and convince them that music was something that I really wanted to do and that in a way reflected their position they were in I suppose. They were very traditional working class people with no formal qualifications and all of that, and if a teacher was telling them something they felt obliged to kind of listen and take it as gospel.. they would be very yes to everything that the teachers would tell them and I think they knew the reality of their situation and they tried to keep very little contact with anyone in a position of authority and I think that trickled into my music lessons as well" (Zachary, Violinist)

Cultural capital is the social, cultural, and educational resources that individuals possess and is manifested in three main forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised (Bourdieu, 1984). In their study on parental cultural capital and how this influences musical journeys, Kong (2020) found that "cultural capital first translates into parental support, which in turn enhances students' participation in instrument classes and furthers their musical development and musical cultural capital" (Kong, 2020, p. 297). Kong (2020) also found cultural capital to inform "parents' financial support" for their children's music education supporting "Bourdieu's theory of the interconversion of capitals and offering insight on how parental economic capital can be transferred to students' musical cultural capital" (Kong, 2020, p.297). The findings from Kong (2020) and this thesis demonstrate a clear connection between Bourdieu's

concept of cultural capital and the theme of parent empowerment. This connection holds particular significance in the earliest stages of the participants' musical learning. Firstly, embodied cultural capital explains a person's knowledge, skills, and dispositions through their socialisation and experience (Bourdieu, 1984) with institutionalised cultural capital referring to the credentials and certifications that individuals possess (Bourdieu, 1984). Examples in this research included participants' familiarity with classical music, an understanding of the classical cannon and a sense of comfort and confidence in the classical music world. For one participant whose parents derived from musical backgrounds and who had also obtained higher degrees in music, the participant's parents' embodied and institutionalised cultural capital was seen to influence the level of involvement and engagement their parents had throughout the participant's music education.

"I come from one of those families who just love music... my mum did music at university and my dad is a big Baroque fan so I'd say in that sense I do come from a musical family" (Victoria, Composer)

Referring to their (the participant) earliest memories of music education as something which felt "natural", they also explained how their parents were able to navigate the classical cannon, providing them with higher levels of engagement in comparison to participants with non-musical parents. The participant also claimed they were provided with more opportunities to experience classical music, such as attending classical concerts across the UK (enabled by economic capital). Objectified cultural capital refers to the physical manifestations of cultural knowledge such as books and instruments (Bourdieu, 1984). This form of cultural capital also contributed to parental empowerment. For example, one participant who identified as middle class, grew up with access to what they referred to as "a library of classical recordings" which they claim served as a "significant part" of their musical journey – just one example of how the middle-class participants benefited from their parents' possession and perpetuation of objectified cultural capital. Another middle-class participant [reference?] also documented how they grew up in a home which had a "collection of unusual instruments" and described the influence their family piano had on their musical journey (Victoria, Composer). For example, they described how the piano would serve as a focal point at family celebrations and special occasions (such as

Christmas and birthdays). It was clear that this heightened form of cultural capital fostered a rich musical environment for the participant, allowing them to feel greater engagement from their parents in their music education in return. In contrast, a working-class participant (Fred, Pianist) described having very few cultural resources whilst growing up, stating that his family could “only afford a digital keyboard” for the first five years of his early musical journey (Fred, Pianist). The digital keyboard was kept in the participant’s bedroom and he recalls how this was done strategically to minimise noise disruption to neighbours. Another working-class participant (Laura, Pianist) also reiterates this and explains how her piano was originally used as a “clothes horse” before she started piano lessons. However, rather interestingly, there were some working-class participants who discussed how their parents, despite being non-musical would try to be involved as much as possible in the early stages. Some examples include experiences of the participants’ parents working through beginner books, forming positive relationships with music teachers at school as well as through positively reinforcing the participants’ talent and ability to others outside of their family home.

It was also clear that Bourdieu’s notion of social capital was a key agent in the findings and a concept which facilitated this theme. Social capital is understood by Bourdieu (1986) as the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21). In other words, it is the “networks, norms and the trust” which exist within a social field enabling “coordination” within collective groups “toward shared objectives” (Putnam et al., 2003 in Julien, 2015, p.359). Bourdieu (1986) also argues that social capital is a direct outcome of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and again, is also aligned with class inequalities. The level of a person’s social capital “depends on the size of the network of connections” they “can effectively mobilise and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21). For instance, one working-class participant (Richard, Brass Player) recounted their parents’ struggles in finding a music teacher due to a lack of social connections in the music world, eventually resorting to their local music shop for help. Even after securing a teacher, they faced financial hurdles in sustaining the lessons. On the other hand, one middle-class participant (Victoria, Composer) had stated how their parents were able to draw on

their connections to source a music teacher and in doing so, was able to find one that was reasonably priced and one who also as they state, “came with good reviews”. The research by Freeman (2010) is particularly fitting to this theme. Freeman (2010) explores ‘positioning theory’ to view the narrative accounts of working-class parents as dynamic, intentional acts of positioning their children’s education (see Freeman, 2010). In doing so, the research found that working class parents are able to acquire the recognition of “school personnel as full partners in the education of their children” (ibid, p. 181). The research found that working-class parents are aware of the stereotypes that exist about them and they are actively trying to fight against these and do this by demonstrating their knowledge and involvement in their children's education. To achieve this, working-class parents use dialogue and deliberation to build cultural and social capital:

“Creating spaces for dialog and deliberation around real issues that matter to parents and teachers has the possibility of increasing social and cultural capital, decreasing power inequalities, and developing cross-cultural understanding. Social capital, which is an important part of cultural capital, refers ‘to the material and immaterial resources that individuals and families are able to access through their social ties’ (Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003, 323). Conversations, especially where several parents and teachers get together, would enable the development of those ties” (Freeman, 2010, p. 195)

Before concluding this theme, it is useful to revisit the definition of parental empowerment as set out by Hsiao, Higgins and Diamond, (2018) who write how “empowerment is the facilitation of participation focused on attainable goals and parents’ ability to work alone or with others to devise ways to reach specific goals for their child” (Hsiao, Higgins and Diamond, 2018, p.44). For the participants who described higher levels of parental involvement and engagement it was also clear that this led to higher levels of parental empowerment. This was evident in their descriptions of their musical journeys and their parents' confidence, involvement, and engagement in their music education. This, in turn, also appeared to contribute to their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. It is also evident that the participants' levels of empowerment were significantly influenced by their parents' social background, as

reflected in their cultural capital and social dispositions. And not only did this reinforce the status quo of classical music as outlined earlier in this thesis but also, it helped shape, influence and (re)produce the participants habitus in return. As a result, this left some participants developing greater agency within their musical journeys and consequently, left others feeling like a ‘fish out of water’ (see Reay et al., 2009). This perception of classical music as a highbrow cultural art form may contribute to its exclusionary nature, perpetuating the status quo of the middle and upper-middle classes (Bourdieu, 1984). Once the participants’ parents became more involved in their musical journey, they were more likely to become engaged in the wider journey to the conservatoire. This is because parental engagement in this research was seen to be a cumulative process by which each small act of involvement built on the previous one. As the participants’ parents became more engaged, they were better able to identify and address the challenges the participants might face, and on some occasions, some parents appeared to become better equipped at facilitating the overall journey. However, despite these challenges, this is not to assume that the working-class participants’ parents were not supportive or discouraged the participants in their journeys. Instead, it could contribute to the ongoing conversation around the stigmatisation against working class parents – something which is found to be rooted in “access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differences, construction of stereotypes, the separation of labelled persons into distinct groups, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination” (Link and Phelan, 2001, p. 367). It became evident throughout the interviews that the parents of all participants played a crucial role in supporting them to overcome barriers in their journeys to a conservatoire. However, the levels of parental involvement and engagement varied significantly, highlighting the need for closer scrutiny of inequalities in music education – an area which remains underdeveloped in the context of British music education.

4.3.2: The ‘Meritocratic Musician’

“She was good and a no-nonsense kind of teacher but we got on, we spoke the same language and when I had finally chosen the repertoire from [ABRSM] the syllabus, she would go out of her way and record the accompaniment and leave it in the classroom so I could put it on and practice relentlessly” (Alice, Flautist)

The theme of the "meritocratic musician" recognises the dedication participants invested to reach a UK music conservatoire. It brings together their experiences which expose the complex realities of their journeys'. It is evident from the data that social, economic, and cultural factors significantly shape a musician's trajectory, highlighting the uneven distribution of agency among participants. Below is the figure which shows the reader the key themes and subthemes from the RTA process:

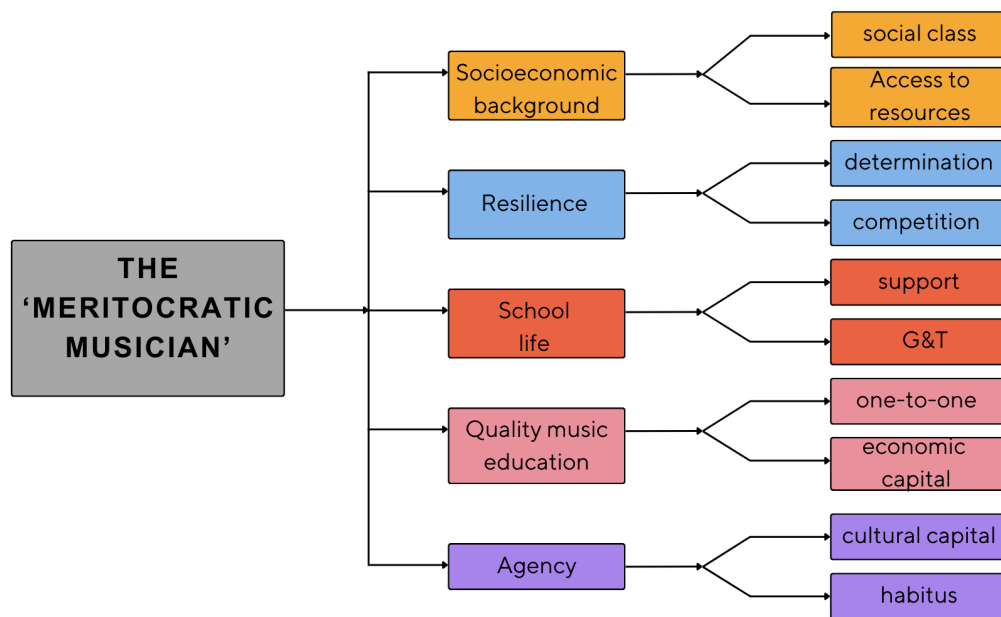


Figure 4.3.2: RTA Theme Development: Meritocratic Musician

At this point, it is useful to revisit the quote by Davies (2006) outlined earlier in the thesis who writes how conservatoires:

“Offer training that reflects the neo-liberal ideal of a meritocracy whereby the degree of ‘talent’ and ‘effort’ that students bring to and invest in the learning process determines their subsequent musical progress and success” (Davies, 2006, p. 804-805)

In its simplest terms, meritocracy is the notion of a system by which a person's outcomes are based on the basis of their merits and capabilities, as opposed to their social background and positioning within society (see for example, Young, 1958; Bellows, 2009; Imbroscio, 2016; Littler, 2018). The idea which stemmed from American sociologists such as Daniel Bell, in the 1960s and 70s is a concept which

“concerns the relationship between individuals’ class origins, their educational attainment and their eventual class destinations” (Goldthorpe, 2003, p. 234). It is in Goldthorpe’s (2003) critique of education based meritocracy where he outlines three issues which modern societies face in achieving an education-based meritocracy: (1) children of less advantaged class origins do not translate academic ability into higher-level qualifications to the same extent as children of more advantaged origins; (2) there is no good reason why employers should only be interested in, or be increasingly interested in, the formal qualifications of potential employees; ‘non-meritocratic’ characteristics that derive more from socialisation than from education may also, to a growing extent, have productive value and ;(3) children from more advantaged class origins who do not do well educationally have other resources available to them to protect them against downward mobility which include “economic resources” along with “socio-cultural resources” which result from a persons “socialisation and that as already suggested, may be of greater value in today’s services-dominated economy than yesterday’s” (Goldthorpe, 2003, p.238). Littler (2018) clarifies this further by writing “meritocracy today entails the idea that whatever your social position at birth, society ought to offer enough opportunity and mobility for ‘talent’ to combine with ‘effort’ in order to ‘rise to the top’” (Littler, 2018, p.1) and also indicates that society, does not do this. Expanding further on Goldthorpe (2003), Littler (2018) brings the idea of meritocracy into the example of music education and writes:

“whether you have the opportunity to touch a musical instrument, spend time practising it or becoming accomplished at it depends on the availability of the instrument and the demands on time as much as anything else (such as physiological facility, self-identity or available tuition)” (Littler, 2018, p.5)

The quote above by Littler (2018) highlights that the ability to succeed in music education and achieve success in this field is not solely determined by talent or hard work – contrary to the underlying beliefs. For example, in his work on inequalities in education, Ball (2010) writes how “right from the beginning of primary school”, a students identity becomes “tied to routes and programmes inscribing social barriers and academic boundaries which are constantly re-privileged within education policy and schools” (Ball, 2010, p. 162). He goes on to write how this the varying degrees of

capital which condition educational outcomes “are obscured, their properties simply seen as “legitimate competence”” (ibid, p. 162).

“This essentialism, which is evident within various policy documents (see Ball, 2008), is in part a reflection of New Labour’s commitment to the idea of meritocracy (a term frequently used by both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to characterise New Labour education policies), but is at odds with the commitment to raise achievements and close achievement gaps” (Ball, 2010, p. 162)

The idea between academic and ‘common sense’ ideas of meritocracy can be better understood in ‘*The Rise of the Meritocracy*’ (Young, 1958), a satirical work which defines meritocracy as an outcome of intelligence acquiring effort – a definition which Ball (2010) writes as now the very essence of many educational policies today. Unlike the political understanding of meritocracy, the academic understanding is influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors which shape an individuals' access to opportunities and resources (i.e. time, instruments, cost of tuition and so on).

It was clear throughout the interviews in this doctoral project that all participants, regardless of background, had at some point in their journeys believed in the idea that if you work hard and practice, you will ultimately ‘do well’. And for many, the more they practiced, the more proficient they became at their instruments.

“I definitely noticed a change in my playing I think when I was around 13 or 14 and that’s when I was able to kind of use that to influence my parents decision on investing more, perhaps at a time where they had to make sacrifices and it was difficult, it did put pressure on me but it was something that I really wanted to do” (Fred, Pianist)

However, hard work alone was simply not enough to gain them access into the conservatoire. This critique of ‘hard work equals success’ or as Young (1958) defined ‘meritocracy = intelligence + effort’ was however picked up on through several working-class participants experiences throughout the interviews. One in particular was through a working-class participant from the north of England who stated that despite their talent, they “had to work harder than everyone else” (Laura, Pianist). As

a result of their hard work, this participant's talent and dedication shone through during their conservatoire auditions. However, they also experienced the task of proving their worth to the audition panels and competing against other musicians, many of whom they claimed as deriving from more advantaged backgrounds. Similarly, a working-class Black participant (Curtis, Brass player), despite showcasing his musical abilities and performing to the best of his ability on the day felt that there was an "air of suspicion" about his presence during his auditions which he recalls feeling being down to the way he looked. This was also echoed by Sam, a Black working-class participant:

"I did feel different, I looked different and it was really funny because I was actually auditioning for western classical music and they thought I was auditioning for jazz when I first got there and that really threw me off" (Sam, Brass player).

Another factor which contributed to the theme of becoming a meritocratic musician was through the progression within the ABRSMs graded exams. The concept of meritocracy as outlined above can suggest that musical success for the participants in this research is solely determined by talent and hard work alone. In the context of classical music education, ABRSM music exams are often seen as a measure of a student's musical ability and dedication and can be found in the policies throughout UK music conservatoires as indicators of entry standards, for example:

"Children who are likely to become credible applicants for the RCM's single undergraduate programme, the Bachelor of Music degree, will have access to and be engaged with music making throughout their school lives and will usually have reached a high level of attainment by the time they are in their mid-teens. One or more distinctions at ABRSM Grade 8 level is usual" (RCM, 2019, P.1)

The majority of participants in this study shared their experiences of navigating their ABRSM graded performance exams and leveraging their success to progress through the graded levels, also accentuating the importance of achieving high scores. For example, one middle-class participant described attaining Grade Eight with 'Distinction' grades in two instruments by the age of 16, highlighting this accomplishment as a marker of success and a contributing factor to their successful application to a UK music conservatoire. This instance further illustrates Bourdieu's

(1986) concept of institutionalised cultural capital, which is reinforced through credentials (see Bourdieu, 1986) and one which is also influenced by economic capital. For one working-class participant, they opted to skip grades within the ABRSM syllabus (i.e., sitting only Grades one, three, and five instead of taking them in consecutive order) due to the financial burden of the exams.

“I remember my teacher saying why don't you grades one, three, five and eight and only sit those grades but we'll work through the rest of the syllabus as we normal, so we don't have to actually pay for the exam itself, and that was really useful for me with my parents financial position and at the time, their attitude to seeing this as maybe at times another thing to pay for... you also you have to factor in the cost of your theory as well because you can't go above grade five practical without grade five theory which is an added cost to the one to one lessons because you've got to navigate the theoretical world of classical music too and as I got better, the cost increased and began to increase right up until the point I got to the Conservatoire and even from there it was still a very expensive journey and I think this attitude of, you work hard and you will do well in life to an extent is true but that is also fuelled by how much money your parents might have and the people that you might know” (Zachary, Violinist)

It was clear that upon closer examination of the participants experiences that sociocultural factors played a significant role in shaping individuals' access to and performance in these exams, again, challenging the notions of meritocracy as outlined above. For example, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which refers to the dispositions and ways of behaving that individuals develop based on their social upbringing (Bourdieu, 1980; 1984) can be extremely helpful in understanding the role of ABRSM exams and the relationship this has on developing the meritocratic musician. Again, for the majority of interviewees they presumed that the more they practiced, they better they became and as a result, this would pay dividends to their outcomes, especially when auditioning at conservatoires. It was clear that participants from backgrounds with higher levels of capital possessed a habitus that was more helpful when undertaking ABRSM exams, as they were exposed to music from an early age, having access to private lessons and acquiring the cultural capital which was needed to navigate the expectations and demands of the classical music canon.

Another factor which was picked up throughout the interviews was the participation in 'Gifted and Talented' programmes (GTPs) in the school environment. It was clear that a handful of participants had participated in GTPs. Rather interestingly, all those who were part of a GTP all self-identified as middle-class.

"I actually felt that my school wasn't adequate and with music like I said I very quickly outgrew the music curriculum in school and being in the gifted and talented programme, it felt like the school was kind of tokenising on my musical abilities and it did provide me some extra time to practice and do what I actually love doing but it was difficult for me because I didn't enjoy music in school. You have me thinking now, maybe if I had been in a different school I would have really thrived in that but I will never know" (Michaela, Brass player)

There remain many definitions of what "gifted" and "talented" mean, especially in the realm of education. For Clark (2002), to be gifted in education is a "biologically rooted concept that serves for a label for a high level of intelligence and indicates an advanced and accelerated development of functions within the brain" (Clark, 2006, p. 26). In the context of music education, Gagne and McPherson (2016) expand on Clark (2003) by defining musical giftedness as a natural aptitude for music that manifests early in life and provides individuals with a significant advantage in pursuing musical education. In contrast, talent, in the musical sense is one which can help explain "how musicians demonstrate competence in an area of music after their natural abilities and a host of intrapersonal, environmental, and developmental processes have exerted influence and led to some level of achievement" (McPherson, Blackwell and Hallam, 2022, p. 34). In their report for the British National Association for Able Children in Education, Hymer and Michel (2002) write that establishing "robust, reliable, and educationally authentic definitions of giftedness and talent remains elusive" (Hymer and Michel, 2002, p. 9). They examine a "fairly traditional definition" of giftedness, which identifies a "more able student" as "an individual who consistently performs two or more years ahead of the majority of their same-age peers, in at least one area of the formal curriculum" (Hymer & Michel, 2002, p. 9). In their research, McPherson et al. (2022) go on to state how "whatever the underlying genetic makeup that facilitates" the understanding of being gifted and/or talented, "appropriate environmental conditions need to be present such as supportive parents and teachers and a high

level of motivation” (ibid, p.42). The rise and fall of the Department for Education’s (DfEs) (from 2001-2007 known as the Department for Education and Skills) Gifted and talented programmes were adjacent to the timelines of the experiences documented in this thesis. In their 2006 paper, the DfES defines the group supported by the then ‘national programme for gifted and talented education’ as an individual “with one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop those abilities)” (DfES, 2006, p.2). The problem here is that this was solely dependant on the teachers within the schools to select who was and who was not eligible to be part of the scheme. As documented in this thesis many working-class applicants felt discouraged from pursuing music at school with experiences documenting subtle bullying from teachers. Whilst this thesis does not have the room to fully critique the policy discourse surrounding the GTP in English state schools, it does however conclude that this programme only benefited those who were part of it, that being, the middle-class participants – a group which was deemed as the primary benefactors to this scheme at that time (see Radnor, Koshy and Taylor, 2007). This feeds directly back into the making of a ‘meritocratic musician’. Even when talent and ability were demonstrated and reinforced through the various forms of cultural capital (i.e. graded ABRSM qualifications), the basic principle of meritocracy is hindered by other factors which stemmed from economic, cultural and social factors. As McPherson et al. (2022) state, having “musical parents tend to provide a musical environment and also pass on genetic dispositions toward musical activities” or in other words, the scientific understanding of what it means to be gifted can also “seek out environmental experiences based on genetically influenced characteristics” (McPherson et al., 2022, p. 43).

While it is true that conservatoires admit students based on their talent, potential and ability, the notion that success is solely determined by talent and effort ignores the significant role played by social, cultural, and economic factors which are the underlying elements that contribute to an individual’s success at securing a place at a conservatoire. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, which refers to the dispositions and ways of behaving that individuals develop based on their social upbringing, is particularly relevant in the development of this theme (see for example, Bourdieu, 1984; 1986; 1993). For example, it was clear that some of the participants in this research developed a habitus that is more aligned to success in conservatoire training,

an outcome from their exposure to music from an early age, access to private music lessons, involvement with external groups (such as ensembles and orchestras), involvement with graded exams (such as the ABRSM) and access to conservatoire teachers (factors which are impacted by economic and social capital), and may also possess the right cultural capital to navigate the competitive and elite field of conservatoires and classical music. In contrast, participants from backgrounds with lower amounts of economic, social and cultural capital appeared to lack the habitus which classical music perpetuates. Some of these participants were not granted access to private music lessons until a much later age than their more advantaged counterparts and for those from non-musical backgrounds/ families, they also lacked the knowledge or social connections to navigate the field – creating an unequal playing field, contributing to the making of them becoming a meritocratic musician. Moreover, the quote above by Davies (2006) emphasises both "talent" and "effort" as the sole elements of success to gaining a place in a conservatoire. This research so far has shown how gaining access is much more nuanced than just being proficient at an instrument. Davies (2006) appears to overlook the impact of institutional practices that can perpetuate inequalities – something outlined earlier in the thesis through understanding the nature of 'elite education'. As outlined by Littler:

"We have been encouraged to believe that if we try hard enough we can make it: that race or class or gender are not, on a fundamental level, significant barriers to success. To release our inner talent, we need to work hard and market ourselves in the right way to achieve success" (Littler, 2018, p.1)

Furthermore, judgement of what is considered talent and even potential is perpetuated through the practices and understanding of the classical music cannon – something which this thesis has again argued to be reinforced through a middle-class culture, norms, values and institutions (see Bull, 2019). In the process, this can potentially favour those from more advantaged backgrounds, and those who have had access to the right training and resources. For these participants, perhaps meritocracy was seen as a legitimate notion of securing a place at a UK music conservatoire. For others however, merit alone was not always enough. This theme ultimately illuminates that the whilst the participants had the belief in meritocracy, becoming a meritocratic musician was not solely dependent on their talent, gifts or ability. It was impacted by

other sources which as outlined by Bourdieu, stems from their early life and access to economic, social and cultural assets. In other words, it was not just about being ‘good enough’. Instead, it was also about having the right habitus and when habitus and institutional habitus aligned, it was clear that feelings of belonging and overall confidence were developed.

4.3.3: *Becoming ‘Serious’*

Classical music is often seen as a demanding, challenging and serious endeavour (see Bourdieu, 1984), more than often requiring a deep passion, resilience, and fierce dedication in order to be successful within the industry (see for example, Rubin-Rabson, 1940; Jørgensen, 2001; McPherson, 2005; Bull and Scharf, 2017, 2021; Despres, Burnard, Dube and Stevance, 2017; Hallam, Creech and Papageorgi, 2020). An outline of the RTA theme development for ‘Becoming ‘Serious’ can be found below:

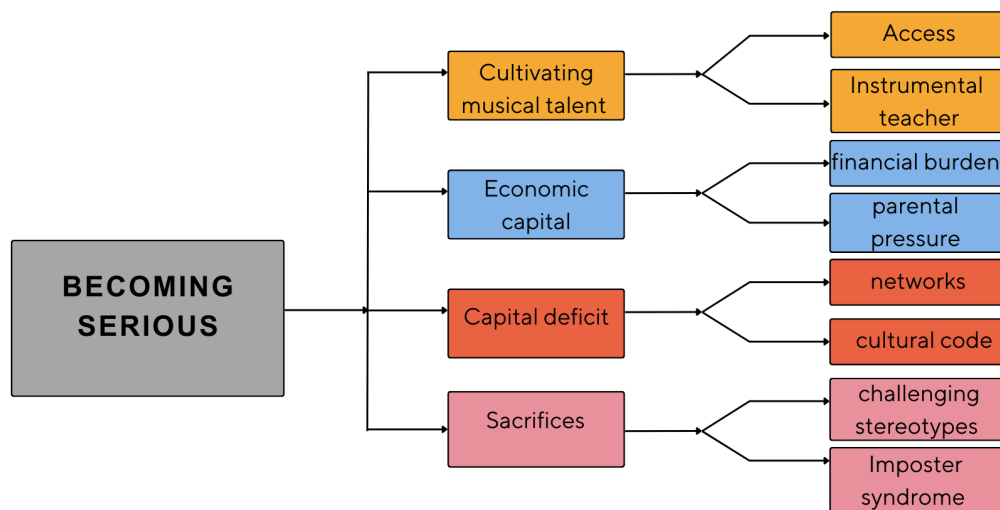


Figure 4.3.3: RTA Theme Development: Becoming ‘Serious’

In their research, Bull and Scharff (2017) found that classical music as a genre signified a level of seriousness and importance that set it apart from other genres and this was also found to be embodied in classical music’s listening practices, often regarded as being higher valued than other genres (see Bull and Scharff, 2017). In

their later research, Bull and Scharff (2021) examined data from 18 early-career female classical musicians based in London. Bull and Scharff (2021) delve into the interchange between genre and musical labour in the classical music industry. By analysing the experiences of musicians navigating genre classifications within the industry, their data gained insights into how genre categorisation shaped the lives of classical musicians and how genre considerations intertwined with inequalities and institutional structures. In essence, the research effectively builds on from their previous study on 'serious music' (see Bull and Scharff, 2017) and finds "that classical music is perceived as 'serious' rather than 'fun'" (Bull and Scharff, 2021, p. 687). This was also the case for the majority of the participants in this research, all of whom at some point experienced the process of becoming 'serious' musicians. This transformation was particularly evident throughout their secondary education, becoming particularly prominent towards the nearing of their conservatoire auditions.

Through exploring their journeys, an interesting distinction emerged between the working-class and middle-class participants in not only the timing of their transition to 'becoming serious' but also, though their understanding of what it meant to be a 'serious' musician.

I was passionate, I suppose I was really serious about it all and that's why I was so dedicated" (Alice, Flautist)

Working-class participants' journey to seriousness was clearly marked by their determination to succeed and gain recognition from their music teachers, schoolteachers, and the broader community (also including parents and family). For example, the working-class participants' focus on both recognition and validation which suggested a need to establish a kind of legitimacy within the classical music field, a field often associated with middle-class and upper-class cultures (see Bull, 2019).

"I had to work hard it wasn't just something I could kind of mess about at so it was very serious" (Laura, Pianist)

This again, aligns with Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986; 1993), explaining how the internalised dispositions the working-class participants manifested were understood. It was in fact their habitus which could be seen to reflect their need to navigate a field where their social and cultural capital may be perceived as limited – giving them determination to become more ‘serious’. In other words, the working-class participants' focus on external validation and recognition reflected their need to establish legitimacy within a field dominated by the middle classes. The feeling of having to prove themselves to be taken seriously was an underlying theme throughout all their experiences. On the other hand, the middle-class participants' emphasis on the social and emotional dimensions of classical music reflected the cultural capital both them, their parents and peers possessed. The middle-class participants, while sharing similar experiences of seriousness with their working-class counterparts, also emphasised the social and emotional dimensions of classical music. It was this group which perceived classical music to be a serious hobby – not only because they viewed the music as serious but also, they viewed the practice of listening and feeling as serious too. Their experiences aligned closely with Bourdieu's concept of social and cultural capital, especially through the relationships that provided them with access to resources and opportunities. For example, one middle-class participant had referred to classical music as a “serious thing” and had described how their musical journey was one which was instigated through their experiences of live classical music – reinforcing their cultural capital. In particular, this participant spoke about the norms and etiquettes required of listeners when attending classical concert. They further went on to discuss the “emotional connection” classical music yields on its listeners. This was also highlighted by Bull and Scharff (2017) who write how “classical music allows access to a mode of selfhood of ‘inner depth’ which, as Skeggs (2003) describes, has historically been afforded to the middle class rather than the working class” (Bull and Scharff, 2017, p. 288).

The perception of classical music as a serious art form was further reinforced by the participants' experiences with the school curriculum, particularly the music curriculum and the standards of teaching inside the school. Despite their experiences spanning three decades (1990s – 2010s), a commonality had emerged - all participants had encountered negative aspects of their secondary school music education. Some attributed these negative experiences to a lack of qualified music teachers at their

schools, while others pointed to the unchallenging music curriculum and the lack of musical knowledge among their peers. It is also worth noting here that whilst these experiences range from the 1990s- 2010s, these issues are still prevalent today. For example, a recent study by Ofsted (2023) found that some secondary schools have temporarily removed music from their curriculum due to a shortage of specialist teachers (Ofsted, 2023). These negative experiences with music inside the school had a significant impact on the participants' experiences and played a key role in facilitating becoming serious within their musical studies. A result which was also born out of others (both teachers and peers) not taking music as seriously as the participants did.

“It was hard because every time I told the teachers how serious I was taking this I felt that I wasn't being taken seriously but it pushed me to kind of say hey look at me now and I did prove them all wrong but that was something that was born from me having to work maybe twice as hard as perhaps everybody else” (Chris, Composer)

It was clear that in their later years of secondary school, the participants identified themselves as serious musicians. This also reinforced the importance of their private music teachers. They felt that the music they were being taught at secondary school was not representative of the true depth and complexity of classical music, and that their peers' lack of engagement and knowledge of the classical canon undermined the seriousness of the art form.

“..I also had a good teacher and that's really important for anyone not just going to a Conservatoire but for anyone that wants to make it in the classical music profession and other professions for that matter” (Alice, Flautist)

Not only this but some participants described how their musical proficiency surpassed that of their secondary school music teachers, creating an awkward power dynamic in the classroom.

“To be blunt, I was better than the teachers at playing the piano and it did feel awkward as my friends could get quite silly in class, they would say ‘oh play this or play that’ and they would then awkwardly ask the teacher if they could play

certain pieces that I could play and the teacher would just ignore them and kind of move on to the next part of the lesson but it was uncomfortable. I did feel like there was a little bit of 'yes you are good and we cannot really do anything more for you' and instead of being recognised I felt a little invisible which looking back is quite odd isn't it?" (Olivia, Pianist)

These experiences all contributed to feelings of isolation and alienation amongst the participants, ultimately leading them to rely more heavily on external private music tuition. This is also similar to the findings outlined earlier by Reay et al. (2009) who found working class students “being more like a ‘fish out of water’ in their largely working-class state secondary schools where their highly developed academic dispositions fitted uneasily into the field of predominantly working-class schooling” (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1115). This, of course, further disadvantaged many working-class participants, especially those who identified as having access to lower amounts of economic capital. As one participant recalled, they had to explain to their parents that their school music teacher was not adequate to support their aspirations of attending a UK music conservatoire. The parents' lack of understanding of the situation further compounded this particular participant's struggles, creating a financial burden. As a result, they described this as something they had to take seriously. This disparity in resources again highlights the inherent inequalities within the music education system, particularly in the context of fostering an inclusive environment for aspiring classical musicians, ultimately impacting the talent pipeline to the classical music industry. This is particularly fitting to the literature reviewed earlier which highlights the disparities between the quality of music education offered at both state and independent schools in the UK (BPI Report, 2019).

The lack of quality music lessons in some participants' schools also played a role in shaping their perceptions of their personal relationships with classical music. Without access to high quality music education in the secondary school, some participants felt that they were not being given the opportunity to fully explore the intricacies of classical music. Some had missed out on the guidance and mentorship and mentioned how this impacted their overall musical development. Others also noted the difference of experiences they might have experienced if they had studied for example, at one of the UKs MDS schools (such as the Chethams Schools or Purcell) – schools they

recounted many of their peers at the conservatoire to have attended. However, despite the overall dissatisfaction with the secondary school music curriculum by many of the participants, some did share positive experiences, primarily interactions with individual music teachers. One middle-class participant recounted the support and guidance they received from their music teacher, who had a personal connection as a former student at a UK music conservatoire. The participant acknowledged their privileged position in receiving such mentorship, recognising that this was likely an uncommon experience for many others in their position. Whilst in the context of education in general, Elliot Major, Tyers and Chu (2020) also discusses the role of one-to-one tutors in schools, explaining how this type of one-to-one mentorship can raise attainment and can also support “pupils to become more confident learners (Elliot Major, Tyers and Chu, 2020, p.1-2). The positive experiences in this research underscore the significant impact that individual music teachers can have on students' musical development and their perception of classical music. Hargreaves et al. (2007) do however acknowledge the difficulties, particularly “in the decade leading up to the millennium” where “there was a widespread perception amongst pupils, teachers, policy makers and professional musicians that there exists a problem of school music' teaching in England, especially at the secondary level” (Hargreaves et al., 2007, p. 666) – problems which were born from educational policies at that time.

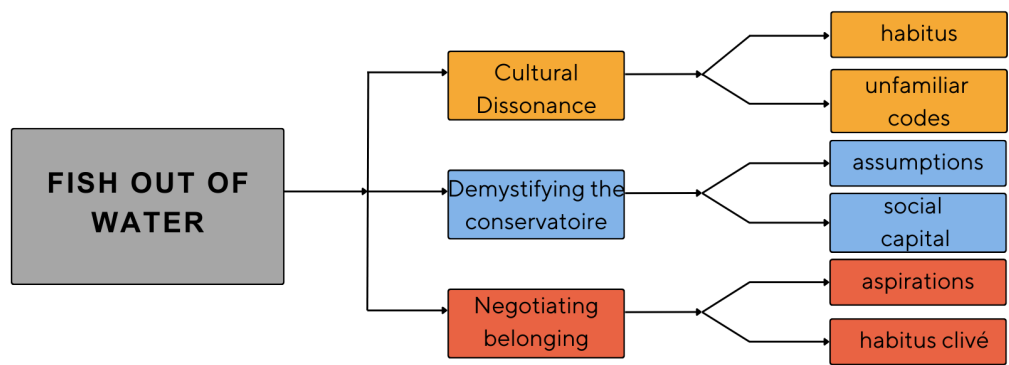
As the participants embarked on their journey to ‘becoming serious’ musicians, they gradually realised that excellence was a prerequisite for success in the field. This realisation fuelled their determination to consistently push their limits, refine their skills, and strive for the highest standards of musicianship. The work by Bernstein (1975) on student involvement in education is also useful in the context of this theme. Bernstein (1975) proposed that educational institutions foster two distinct sets of behaviours: (1) character development, referred to as the expressive order, and (2) the instrumental order, which is the acquisition of specific skills. Students' engagement with these orders varies depending on their acceptance of the means and ends associated with each (see Bernstein, 1975). Bringing this into the context of this particular theme, the instrumental order is straightforward: achieving a place at a UK music conservatoire requires a student to master specific musical skills and demonstrate general knowledge of music. This mastery is assessed through ability and the technical competency a musician reaches prior to auditioning. Accepting this as a valid means

of assessing musical competency signifies agreement with the instrumental order. On the other hand, acceptance of the expressive order requires students to believe in the intrinsic value of classical music education. It entails embracing the discipline, dedication, and creative exploration – all of which are factors which contributed to ‘becoming serious’. This commitment to the expressive order extends beyond technical proficiency, fostering a deep social and emotional appreciation for the art form – something many of the working-class participants struggled to achieve in their journeys given their lack of access to the wider musical opportunities and experiences. Thus, for all those aspiring to enter a UK music conservatoire, they must navigate and excel within both the instrumental and expressive orders. They must demonstrate musical skills, acquire a broad musical knowledge and commit to the rigorous training required for success. Simultaneously, they must cultivate a deep love for music, embracing the expressive order's values – something which Bourdieu (1984) classifies as being more readily accessible to the middle-classes. The framework set out by Bernstein (1975) which has been reiterated for this research provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by state school students seeking to enter music conservatoires. By understanding the interplay between the instrumental and expressive orders, they can effectively navigate their musical education, develop their talents, and pursue their aspirations to become exceptional musicians.

The performative nature of classical music can often serve as a constant reminder of the high standards the participants were expected to uphold. While the pressure to excel was prevalent among all participants, the way they experienced this pressure varied significantly according to their social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. For instance, some working-class participants attributed their pursuit of excellence to the significant financial investment made by their parents, an investment that was not easily afforded due to their limited economic capital. For them, ‘becoming serious’ was not merely an aspiration but a necessity, or in other words, something they had to do. These experiences highlight the complex relationship between personal aspirations, external pressures, and socioeconomic factors that shape the experiences of state school students pursuing classical music education. The realisation of the need for excellence while common among all participants, was deeply intertwined with their individual circumstances and the unique challenges they faced.

4.3.4: 'Fish out of Water'

The sense of alienation was something all participants had experienced at some points in their journeys' to a UK music conservatoire. This was also regardless of their social class backgrounds, suggesting a broader cultural divide within the classical music sector. Participants were articulate in describing specific instances where they felt as if they did not 'belong', highlighting the pervasiveness of their lived experiences. The nodes which form this theme can be found in the RTA figure below:



4.3.4: RTA Theme Development: 'Fish out of Water'

The theme of being a 'fish out of water' is not a new concept in the field of education (see Macdonald, 2011; Franceschelli, Evans and Schoon, 2016; Winstone and Hulme, 2019). For example, in the work by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009), they use this concept to help understanding working class students' experiences in elite universities. Drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) who write that "when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). Reay et al. (2009) highlight the experiences of working-class students and their "superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination" whilst integrating and getting along at an elite university (see Reay et al., 2009, p. 1115). More recently, the concept of being a "fish out water" was used in a study by Moore (2021) who investigated the ways in which Bourdieu's theoretical tools of habitus, cultural capital, and field can help understand the varied musical

pathways that shape student experiences in higher music education (see Moore, 2021).

The experiences captured in this research echo the ongoing themes of feeling like a "fish out of water" that have been explored in other studies. Participants frequently encountered moments of unfamiliarity and displacement throughout their journeys to a UK music conservatoire, and as some put it, felt very much "out of place" in the classical music field.

"I still don't feel like I fit in and I still have that very classic impostor syndrome with me even as now a practising classical musician there are times whether or not I'm playing in a concert or when I look back and think about my time at the conservatoire... I did feel really out of place and I kept thinking when are they going to catch me out?" (Sam, Brass player)

Whilst this sense of alienation was not exclusive to working-class participants, their socioeconomic backgrounds unquestionably influenced their levels of comfort and familiarity in different contexts. For instance, early in their musical journeys, working-class participants often faced challenges that their middle-class counterparts did not. This was evident in the initial stages of their musical engagement, where their paths to music differed significantly.

"It was hard... period. I had lots of different friends who did lots of different hobbies and my hobby was by far the most expensive and the most challenging not only do I say that because playing a stringed instrument and mastering a stringed instrument is hard but because my parents didn't have the money a lot of my friends did and it just made me question 'should I be doing this'? 'is this something that is right for me'? I would ask myself, 'why is it so difficult if I love it so much'? (Jessica, Cellist)

These experiences continued throughout their school years, becoming increasingly more noticeable as their habitus and capitals interacted with the field of classical

music. For example, the working-class participants appeared to have encountered more hurdles during ABRSM exams, with some describing how this was down to economic factors and not knowing how to navigate the system. Some also felt less at ease attending live classical music concerts with many of the participants (from all backgrounds) experiencing heightened anxiety and feelings of discomfort when auditioning for entry into UK music conservatoires. It was also evident that the sense of being "out of place" extended beyond these specific instances and permeated their overall experiences. They often felt like outsiders in the classical music world, grappling with the cultural and social norms that they perceived as unfamiliar and intimidating. This dissonance between their habitus and the expectations of the field contributed to their feelings of isolation and marginalisation and resulted in some feeling that the conservatoire and classical music in general was "not for the likes" of them. Despite these challenges, all participants persevered, something which was largely driven by their passion for music and their determination to succeed and become excellent. They showed fierce examples of adapting to unfamiliar environments, sought guidance from mentors and peers and were seen to develop strategies to navigate the complexities of the classical music world.

The concept of being a "fish out of water" reached its height during the conservatoire auditions, a stage of the musical journey which was seen as the culmination of the participants' work to date. Here, all participants, regardless of their social class, experienced a heightened sense of discomfort and unfamiliarity.

"I just felt this rush of excitement and anxiety thinking I've worked so hard to get here and now I'm here this is my time to shine and something just didn't feel quite right and I think that was when I first kind of really realised that places like this [the conservatoire] were not for the likes of me" (Liam, Pianist)

This shared experience demonstrated the importance of exposure to similar environments as a means of fostering comfort and familiarity, thereby mitigating the impact of "cultural shock" during auditions. As Oberg (1960) defined in 1960, culture shock refers to the anxieties which result from the loss of familiar signs and symbols, particularly when a person enters a new culture (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). Interestingly, the participants' navigation of this discomfort revealed how their habitus and capitals

influenced their coping strategies. Some participants leveraged their social capital, seeking support and guidance from mentors and peers with experience in these institutional settings. For example, some brought their private music teachers along to the conservatoire auditions, drawing upon their teacher's familiarity with the conservatoire environment and audition process as a tool to help them cope. This strategic move highlights the role of social capital in providing access to resources and guidance that can alleviate anxiety and enhance performance. On the other hand, the physical environment of the conservatoire itself contributed to the participants' feelings of intimidation. The grandeur of the building, described as "castle-like," served as a blatant reminder of their distance from the institutional habitus perpetuated through the physical spaces – linking back to the work by Bull (2019) who defines conservatoires as “behemoths” (Bull, 2019, p. 29). The lack of exposure to similar environments reinforced their sense of being "out of place" and further solidified their status as "fish out of water". The participants' experiences at the conservatoire auditions emphasises the relationship between habitus, capital, and cultural dissonance. While all participants experienced discomfort, their ability to navigate this discomfort was shaped by their access to social, cultural, and economic capital. Those with greater access to these forms of capital were better equipped to develop coping strategies and alleviate the anxiety associated with the unfamiliar environment. Drawing parallels with Reay et al.'s (2009) work, the participants in this thesis demonstrate resilience, a characteristic often associated with working-class backgrounds. Reay et al. (2009) highlight that working-class students' resilience is often overlooked and interpreted as “stoicism” or simply "making the best of a bad situation" (p. 1108). However, Reay et al. (2009) argue that this very resilience becomes a valuable asset in navigating unfamiliar and challenging middle-class contexts (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1108).

For Bourdieu, the concept of habitus clivé or cleft habitus (see for example, Bourdieu 1999; Bourdieu 2004), provides a valuable framework for understanding the experiences of the working-class participants in this study navigating their auditions at the music conservatoires. Habitus, as defined by Bourdieu (1984) refers to the system of dispositions and practices that individuals acquire through their social upbringing and experiences, shaping their perceptions, behaviours, and interactions with the world around them (Bourdieu, 1984). In the context of this research, it was the working-

class participants who encountered a sense of disjuncture between their own habitus and the dominant habitus of the conservatoire, leading to feelings of cultural misalignment, unease and the general sense of 'not belonging' (again, see Reay et al., 2009). However, it was through their ability and understanding of classical music which allowed them to be 'strangers on the inside'. In this sense, it was not the classical canon per se which made them feel uncomfortable (i.e. the repertoire and style of music) but instead, practices and environmental factors which heightened their feelings of 'not belonging'. This was further enhanced for the Global Majority participants who appeared to face a double burden of disadvantage, simultaneously navigating the complexities of race and class within the conservatoire environment. As discussed in an earlier chapter of this thesis, Friedman (2018) introduces Bourdieu's concept of "habitus clivé" or "cleft habitus" to explain how individuals' dispositions can lose coherency and lead to a sense of self-division when their life circumstances undergo drastic changes. This feeling was described by some of the working-class participants as a sensation which they were able to put into words. On the one hand, the conservatoire environment aligned perfectly with their lifelong passions and musical aspirations. After all, this was the place they had been working to get to for many years. Yet, on the other hand, the institution's embedded middle-class habitus clashed with their own, creating a culture shock that left them feeling displaced and internally divided. Bourdieu (2008) later called this a "coincidence of contraries" (Bourdieu, 2008, p.100) – something which explains the clash of habituses which resulted in a state of (culture) shock for the participants, highlighting the challenges faced by working-class participants when navigating the conservatoire environment. It was also clear that some participants were adapt and had internalised some of the aspects of the middle-class habitus (reinforced through their classical music education), which in turn, helped them to navigate the cultural codes (see Wirght, 2015) and expectations of the conservatoire (Bourdieu, 1984).

Chapter 5: Mapping the Journeys

5.1: Introduction

The journeys are now presented through a chronological timeline, from their early years, all the way to the conservatoire auditions. This is beneficial as it reflects the content of the interviews, providing clarity and signalling at times, the varying points which highlight the challenges and points throughout their journeys which can also be used to bring benefit to the wider understanding of access and participation policies in UK music conservatoires. This thesis so far has shown how the path to gaining entry to a UK music conservatoire can often be one which tends to favour those from privately educated backgrounds, with state school students, especially those from working-class backgrounds facing a multitude of challenges. This chapter will now delve into the experiences of the participants, exploring the factors that shape their trajectories and the obstacles they encountered along the way. The following chapter is divided into three distinct sections:

1. **The Early Beginnings: an unequal playing field:** This section examines the factors that influenced the participants' initial engagement with music, highlighting the disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and support that exists.
2. **Navigating the Secondary School (and beyond):** This section explores the experiences of the participants' time within the state secondary school system, exploring the challenges they faced [keep tenses consistent] in achieving their musical aspirations and the limited exposure they have to the classical music canon.
3. **Against All Odds:** This section focuses on the participants' auditions for entry into conservatoires, perhaps the most critical part of their musical journeys. It examines the psychological and emotional challenges they encountered in preparing for and participating in the auditions, as well as the role of capital and habitus in influencing their overall experiences.

5.2: The early beginnings: an unequal playing field

Mapping the participants earliest exposure to music was explored during the first part of the interviews. As Campbell (2011) puts it, children often “begin the formation of their musical identities within the nuclear culture of their families” (Campbell, 2011, p.61). This is also echoed by Hallam and Burns (2017) who write how “families play a crucial role in supporting young musicians, particularly in the initial stages of learning” (Hallam and Burns, 2017, p.4). To bring in Bourdieu here would be particularly useful, especially given the literature discussed earlier on habitus, capital and field:

“When the child grows up in a household in which music is not listened to (on hifi or radio nowadays) but also performed (the ‘musical mother’ of bourgeois autobiography), and a fortiori when the child is introduced at an early age to a ‘noble’ instrument – especially the piano – the effect is at least to produce a more familiar relationship to music, which differs from the always somewhat distant, contemplative and often verbose relation of those who have come to music through concerts or even only, record” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.68)

Using the concept of art to distinguish this further, Bourdieu (1984) writes how:

“...in much the same way as the relation to painting of those who discovered it belatedly, in the quasi-scholastic atmosphere of the museum, differs from the relation developed by those born into a world filled with art objects, familiar family property, amassed by successive generations, testifying to their wealth and good taste” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.68)

Using Bourdieu’s concepts to understand aspirations, Bowers-Brown (2019) suggests that young people more than often develop the same aspirations as their parents which is reinforced through their familiarity to the field (see Bowers-Brown 2019). This is otherwise known as ‘social reproduction’. In a report by This is Music (2021), research found how the parents in their research desired music to be a core element of their children’s education at school. As a sample, this was “54% of parents” stating how “the quality of a school’s music education was an important factor in deciding to send their child there” (This is Music Report, 2021, p.35). A criticism of this report was

the lack of information given about the socioeconomic background of such parents and as a result, this has somewhat hindered the data as this is not representative sample of all parents in England. What this report does, however, is to help understand some of the experiences captured in this research. For example, it was evident throughout the interviews that participants, in particular, those from middle-class backgrounds found they had acquired greater agency within the field of music education as a result of their parents' involvement in their musical education. Many middle-class participants alluded to the conclusion that their agency throughout music was a direct outcome of their parents' familiarity with the field. In contrast, some of the working-class participants explained how their parents lacked certain knowledge needed to navigate the field of music education. However, despite this, the majority of participants professed to their parents seeing music as a way to enhance and enrich their life outcomes, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Also, it was interesting to see the difference of experiences when participants also referred to their intergenerational experiences. For example, Laura, a working-class pianist from the North of England described her experiences as a struggling working-class classical musician. However, some challenges for her were not as problematic as others given her mother's cultural capital.

“My mum sat with me and kind of taught me how to play from John Thompson’s piano teacher book even though she couldn’t play herself and kind of sat with me and went through the book, you know, this is a semibreve, and this is a quaver and that sort of thing...” (Laura, Pianist)

Her working-class background suggests a habitus that may not naturally encompass the cultural capital required to navigate the music education field. However, her mention of her mother's cultural capital highlights the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and resources. This cultural capital from her mother could encompass elements such as familiarity with classical music, access to resources like instruments or lessons, or an understanding of the knowledge of the music itself. Bourdieu (1979; 1984) would argue that Laura's mother's cultural capital can serve as an advantage, mitigating some of the challenges she faces as a working-class classical musician by providing her with a degree of cultural familiarity within the field. And whilst some experiences can be distinctly depicted (that being, understandable through the notion

of Bourdieu's key concepts), some experiences require further context to understand the participants' journeys.

5.2.1: Role of Parents and Teachers

In their research on parental engagement in music with young children, Yim and Ebbeck (2016) write how "parents are commonly regarded as being an indispensable factor behind young children's musical experience" and attribute parental involvement to improving both "the quantity and quality of the musical environment at home" (Yim and Ebbeck, 2016, p. 93). To understand this further, Laura (working-class) further describes her early experiences of parental involvement and describes these as "high pressured" and perpetuated through her mother's desire for Laura to "have a better life":

"I actually really hated it um, because my mum had been a dancer when she was younger and she was pushed into that profession, so there was a very sort of disciplined approach to doing things and I think my mum wanted me to have a skill, she wanted me to have a talent and she saw that I was becoming quite good at it [the piano] and so it became very very [sic] high pressured... I had to work hard it wasn't just something I could kind of mess about at so it was very serious, it was all very interesting because you know I grew up in a very deprived environment and yet there was this real need to be excellent and for everything to be rigorous and I think that was more the case because this was kind of an opportunity for me to be really good at something, to be different from everybody else at school and so that did happen eventually" (Laura, Pianist)

The parents of the participants were not the only people who played a role in their early experiences. For Katie, a middle-class Brass player from East England, it was in fact her grandmother's husband who played a key role in her very early journey.

"Like I said my grandma's husband taught me little tunes on the keyboard and I would practise this little bit and then show them off to my parents and they would willingly listen and the same with the recorder and I think, just the fact that they were quite happy to take an interest in what I was doing was very helpful" (Katie, Brass player)

Just like parents, grandparents can also play a role in early music experiences. Again, Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus also help explain the role of grandparents and older generations in aiding a child's musical journey. Richard (working-class), just like Laura (working-class), professes to having somewhat of a challenging starting point to his musical journey. Deriving from a non-musical family with what he describes as "extreme unfamiliarity" to the classical music world. He recalls this to be the case from the very beginning, with his parents having to source his Brass teacher from reaching out to a local music shop – something they did through using the "yellow pages"³⁰.

"My first teacher, well I don't think he was so good, actually that's a bit of an understatement, he'd miss lessons and when he did he turn up he was totally unprepared and after about a year or so, my parents kind of got involved and said you know what, this is this isn't working so they went to the music shop where we got my instrument, and it had like a board full of different teachers that you could contact, like you know, if you wanted to learn trombone or if you wanted to learn percussion and they went back there and they found another teacher... I remember him being a little bit more expensive but he was the one that eventually got me on the right tracks... it was actually him who pushed me into joining my band and he really brought me into the world of brass" (Richard, Brass player)

Above, Richard's experiences highlight the importance of both habitus and cultural capital in shaping the experiences of working-class students in classical music education. For example, his teacher's lack of preparation and lack of engagement with Richard's learning may have reinforced Richard's negative expectations of classical music education. However, Richard's second teacher, who he recalls as being more supportive and engaged, helped Richard to develop a more positive habitus towards classical music and to accumulate more cultural capital in the process. Economic capital is also seen to play a key factor in Richard's early experiences with him stating

³⁰ The Yellow Pages were a telephone directory of businesses which began in 1886 and ended in 2019.

how the second teacher was “more expensive”. When asked about this in the interview, Richard stated how his parents “made sacrifices” in order to sustain his music lessons. As a result, Richard felt as if he had to “do well” and “not let down” his parents sacrifices. In contrast, Victoria who defines her early life as “very middle-class” gained exposure to music from what she calls her “very earliest memories”:

“I come from one of those families who just love music... my mum did music at university and my dad is a big Baroque fan so I’d say in that sense I do come from a musical family ” (Victoria, Composer)

For Victoria, she declares music as “*just a thing*” she did unlike Richard who described having music in life as a “privilege” that many of his peers did not have. It became clearer throughout each participants’ earliest journeys just how influential their parents and family members were in these journeys – especially in regards to understanding the practices and norms of classical music. For example, Holly (middle-class) who is from the North-West of England describes how she would regularly travel across England whilst growing up to attend classical music concerts. It was through her exposure to the concert hall which Holly recalls as being the most influential aspect to her wanting to sing professionally.

“I just remember being amazed by it all. We went all over but I think one of my favourite places had to be London, especially for Opera... At home my mum would always have a Puccini record playing, I actually look back and can see her doing some gardening and hearing the music... the Proms was also another big thing in our house, especially the last night” (Holly, Vocalist)

Holly defined her upbringing as “middle-class by style but not by nature”. When asked to explain this further, Holly regarded her mum as “middle-class without the financial resources” and someone from a working-class background. Holly remembers her upbringing as influential in her musical journey but mentioned how her parents did not have enough money to send her to a private school but were still able to provide significant exposure to the arts and other cultural opportunities:

“Well we weren’t financially wealthy but we were privileged in other ways, we would travel quite a lot and always be doing something but we never had enough for me to go to a private school... and that was a big thing I think for my parents as my cousins all went to a nice school and I don’t think they ever wanted to admit that they couldn’t afford it so I think they made up for it in other ways... I was fortunate enough to have had private music lessons and other things outside of the school and we’d go to some really amazing places but I am told to this day that if I was an only child it might have been possible but I guess the school I went to was just something that made me want to do even better” (Holly, Vocalist)

Lucy, also middle-class, started her musical journey on the piano at the age of six before beginning singing lessons at the age of eight. Lucy referred to her upbringing as one which allowed her to participate in music both inside and outside of school.

“I sang in the school choir and also had singing lessons privately with a local singing teacher. I was ok at the piano at the time and I think it was clear to my parents that this was something I could potentially be good at so they invested quite heavily... I was having singing and piano lessons and also doing all the other stuff such as the youth choir and local competitions...” (Lucy, Vocalist)

Bourdieu (1984) signifies these different starting points as being linked to “social origin” and “are no doubt most marked in personal production of visual art or the playing of a musical instrument” which are strongly influenced by “economic means (especially in the case of piano-playing) and spare time” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.68). Both Victoria and Holly, despite being educated in a state primary school both identified their starting points being linked to cultural activity which was aided through their parents and within the family home. Fred who described his early life as being very working-class reflected on his parents’ involvement:

“I don’t think they were really involved like you know to a point where they would sit with me and do all of that. I mean I now feel really sorry for them having to have listened to me practise because the piano was in the living room, but they did make effort in the sense that you know they would play Classic FM on the

radio when driving and you know, we would tune into music events like if they were on TV and stuff like that. So, they were involved as much as they possibly could be but without having that knowledge which I mean for me that was enough to have got me on the musical path” (Fred, Pianist)

These experiences as outlined by Fred are similar to that captured in the research by Davidson et al. (2011) who “discovered that the most successful children had parents who were the most highly involved in lessons and practice in the earliest stages of learning” (Davidson et al., 2011, p. 2). The research concludes that “it is not necessary for children to have musician parents in order for them to develop as musicians themselves” (ibid, p.24). However, the role of social background is one which Davidson et al. (2011) failed to consider when attempting to understand experiences of their participants (both for the young people and parents). For example, their research, Davidson et al. (2011) recruited 257 young people between the ages of 8-18 and were split into five groups which reflected the “different levels of musical competence” – these “groups” were “comparable in terms of the proportion of male and female participants, and in the kinds of main instrument played, socio-economic backgrounds, and the range of the participants’ ages” (Davidson et al., 2011, p. 9). It is through understanding a contrast of experiences, especially in relation to social background where research can attempt to understand why levels of parental involvement and engagement may differ according to background and to further understand the wider inequalities which music education might perpetuate, especially for those from working class backgrounds. This is something this research found, especially in the early years of participants’ journeys. That being, working-class participants experiencing challenges in relation to musical agency in comparison to their middle-class peers. For example, those from middle-class backgrounds described themselves as having more agency within their musical training and provision and relied much less on the provision within the school (unlike the working-class participants). In turn, this allowed these participants to get ‘ahead of the game’ and reap greater awards in the school environment. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) explain throughout their work, it is parents who remain pivotal to bestowing their children with various capitals which are then amplified and rewarded in the school environment.

5.2.2: Music in the Primary School

Across the interviews, the majority of participants (regardless of class type) identified their primary school as a place which offered, in some capacity, musical provision³¹. This provision included choirs, group music lessons and small ensembles. Curtis, a Black working-class participant from London recalls the significance of his free music lessons within his school in aiding his early journey, attributing his musical success in later life to the music provision offered within the primary school:

“I would never have been able to have learnt to play an instrument without the system being such that instruments were free to learn with free lessons and teachers were free as well. I was very very [sic] keen to have the opportunity to play an instrument and so I practised very very [sic] hard and I went from becoming very academically and sporting focus to being musically focused” (Curtis, Brass player)

The above statement also needs to be brought into a historical context. Curtis attended his primary school during the 1980s - a time when music education, especially in London was beginning to improve and expand (see for example, Adams, 2013). Katie (middle class) who had influence from her grandmother’s husband in her musical journey also refers to her primary school as playing an important role too:

“The thing that really sticks with me the most was the recorder in primary school. I had a headteacher who was very musical and so if you were interested in playing or you wanted to have chance to further your experiences, he would run a club for us to go and do more things which was free which were very lucky to have” (Katie, Brass player)

Like Katie, Victoria (middle-class) also remembers being very active in her primary school choir and retells how she would often perform, which she recalls helping her “grow in confidence”:

³¹ There was only one participant who had experienced no musical provision in their primary school.

“I dabbled here and there in competitions growing up and sometimes won so my school really capitalised on that and whenever I won something or whenever I did something they would always get me up in assembly [laughs]. I even remember at one point being put into our local paper and it was, it was very much that classic star student sensation when looking back but it made me grow in confidence” (Victoria, Composer)

In contrast, Nina and Laura, retell their early experiences in the primary school and both reveal the barriers which they believe stemmed from their social background. Nina, a middle-class saxophonist who attended primary school in the 2000s reflected on her time at primary school as being “happy” and as a place which “had a community feel”. It was, however, not a place which Nina describes as giving her the best start in regards to cultivating her musical journey:

“There was some kind of music provision in my primary school but it wasn’t very good. The school pianist was really good, I remember him being quite a skilled one but he didn’t give us music lessons. We were able to sign up to woodwind and brass lessons I think in Year 4 but because very few did we was only offered lessons on the clarinet or flute” (Nina, Saxophonist)

Nina said how she would “shy away” from playing in front of others in primary school, remembering how her peers had occasionally mocked classical music and had identified playing a musical instrument with notions of being “different”. Similarly, Laura (working-class) from North-West England, lived with her grandparents whilst growing up, before eventually moving onto a council estate when she was seven. Laura’s journey to the conservatoire began out of curiosity with her grandparents’ piano:

“It had become just a bit of a clothes horse...when I was old enough to try and lift the lid on my own without doing damage to my fingers, I did, because I wanted to see what it was and I was just a bit curious. I realised that this thing made music” (Laura, Pianist)

Laura (who attended primary school in the 1990s) reminisces her time at primary school as a place which offered very little, if any musical provision. This proved to be

further challenging for Laura as again, like Nina, she describes how classical music “was not the norm” for young people like herself in her local community. As a consequence to being “the only one”, she detached herself from her musical studies whilst at school:

“I actually hid playing the piano from everybody because where I grew up you just didn't play an instrument... I mean people didn't read books, people didn't do things like that so it was something that I kept quiet for very long time” (Laura, Pianist)

This distinction between Laura's and Nina's early musical experiences and the school environment is described by Reeves (2019) as examples of how ‘class structured oppositions’ in highbrow consumption” both “differ” and remain “elusive” according to context (Reeves, 2019, p.3). Reeves asserts how “income, education, and status” contribute to “whether people identify with particular symbolic communities”, with “these identities” also shaping the “symbolic value of specific class labels (such as ‘middle-class’)” (ibid, p.4). For Laura, the symbolic community of classical music was seen as a practice which brought with it a conflict of class. On the one hand, Laura wanted to fit in to her home community and her school, on the other, she describes how there was a “real need to be excellent” within the family home:

“I think that was more the case because this (the piano) was kind of an opportunity for me to be really good at something and for me to be different from everybody else where I was at school, and that did happen eventually but by then that created other issues” (Laura, Pianist)

For Bourdieu, the conflict of identity often manifests in the context of class conflict. As Laura navigated the classical music world in her early journey, it appears she grappled with a tension between her inherited identity and the demands of the classical music field – one imbued with its own set of cultural norms and values, associated with privilege and elite social status (see Bull, 2019). To fit into this world, Laura found herself at times adopting new behaviours that aligned more closely with the dominant class, thereby undergoing a transformation of her habitus. This transformation, however, triggered an internal struggle as Laura attempted to reconcile her working-

class roots and upbringing with the demands of the field, otherwise known as habitus clivé. In doing so, Laura questioned her sense of belonging. Other participants also recalled challenging experiences just like Laura's – experiences whereby parents would cultivate an environment which viewed music as a tool to facilitate upwards social mobility and/or a means to be 'better'. Megan (working-class) remembers being strongly encouraged by her parents to start taking piano lessons at school.

“The school offered the lessons but it wasn't through the day, it was straight after school and actually, I remember the teacher being really committed and before we did exams they would come into the school on the weekends to give us more time... my dad would come after work and the poor soul, would sit and have to listen to me and a few other kids but he never moaned [laughs]” (Megan, Vocalist)

Megan felt that this was her way of “being better” during a time when she recalls people like her, in similar circumstances had “restrictions” on how far they could go through lack of cultural opportunities. Megan further noted that her parents turned to the primary school as their main source of knowledge about her musical instruction:

“Well they weren't musical so they didn't really have an idea of what was out there and obviously when I got to the conservatoire and just before I had actually got there I realised how much was out there and how little I actually knew about it... (primary) school seemed to be a place which had resources but to an extent if this makes sense and they did what they could but, if you're not at one of the music schools or in the national choirs, you don't have that level of exposure and you are not going to get that same level of training” (Megan, vocalist)

In his research, Reeves (2015) explores how parents express and actualise their desire for their children to learn to play a musical instrument (see Reeves, 2015). Interestingly, Reeves (2015) discovered how parents “do not strongly associate musical practice with developing valued character traits nor with social or educational attainment” but instead, “parental encouragement to play music” was “shaped by family ties and the parental perception of ‘natural’ talent in their children” (Reeves, 2015, p.1). There are some similarities between the data by Reeves (2015) and the

experiences captured in this research. Firstly, parents from “high cultural capital” families (as Reeves puts it) are “very likely to encourage their children to play musical instruments” (Reeves, 2015, p. 15). This was the case for most participants in this research who considered themselves to be from middle-class backgrounds. For example, Victoria, who cites her early music training as “*just a thing*” she did, referenced her parents as key to helping her throughout her journey to the conservatoire:

“I actually started off on the piano, went to the violin and then later started to play the early instruments... I was lucky because my mum taught me how to play, probably a red flag for others and I say this with the most respect for my mum but I know how others feel about musicians teaching their own children but my mum really understood me and was able to communicate the basics to me [laughs]... I do remember having had a bit of a moment understanding my circle of fifths though [laughs]” (Victoria, composer)

Secondly, Reeves (2015) found how those from “low cultural capital” families had been brought to music through either “tradition” or “something external to the family”, for example “peers” (Reeves, 2015, p.15). This was the case for Liam, a working-class pianist from the South-West of England:

“I had recorder lessons in primary school and got some piano lessons from my friends dad when I was about 10 or 11 but it was actually when I turned about 13 that I started taking proper lessons...” (Liam, pianist)

5.2.3: Private Instrumental Tuition

Liam was introduced to music through a friend’s parent before pursuing private one-to-one lessons with a local teacher. For Liam, his friend’s parent provided a gateway to music education for his parents. For example, instead of his parents having to look for lessons (like Richard’s), these were instead readily available at no cost through an external peer to the family. Laura’s (working-class) trajectory was similar but instead of having access to lessons like Liam, Laura had access to the instrument – a considerable economic cost, especially for other working-class participants within the

research who identified this as a barrier in their early journeys. For example, Fred (working-class) recalls “pleading” with his parents for piano lessons. Not only did his parents consider the cost of lessons but also, he recalls their concerns over the cost of the instrument. The school choir was described by Fred as the moment in which he realised “how bad at singing” he was but that “inspired” him to start learning the piano.

“It wasn’t a serious one by any means (the school choir), more of one of those things you did during lunchtimes and sometimes after school but it did make me realise how bad I was at singing [laughs]... the teacher who set up the choir was the only person who could actually play the piano and so she would sort of conduct us all from behind this really out of tune upright piano and I just remember thinking I wish I could play like her” (Fred, Pianist)

A report by the ABRSM in 2021 showed the cost of instrumental tuition remained a “significant barrier” with “children aged 5 to 14 from the wealthiest backgrounds” being “27 percentage points more likely to be playing a musical instrument than children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds” (ABRSM Report, 2021, p. 27). Fred’s mum eventually found him a local piano teacher as the primary school did not offer any lessons at the time and soon after, Fred began having lessons at home. This again is just another example of how this work translates to the concept of ‘musical mothering’ by Hall (2018) as outlined in the previous chapter. Large cuts from government funding for music provision in schools since the late twentieth century has produced further pressures for parents to contribute to their children’s early musical journeys (see for example, Purves, 2017). Interestingly, the cost of instrumental tuition was flagged more times in the interview transcripts for those who attended primary school post 1999 in comparison to those who attended school during the 1980s and early 1990s. Furthermore, it appears that participants from London and the South of England had greater access to music lessons at the primary school level compared to their counterparts from other regions. This disparity became more pronounced in the post-2000 era, with nearly all participants from this period reporting limited exposure to one-on-one or group music lessons during their primary school years.

When discussing the role of parental involvement and engagement, many of the working-class participants accentuated how their parent’s reluctance was born

through an amalgamation of both financial worry and time-commitment anxiety. To put the above into perspective, the economic impact of learning an instrument was referenced by six of the working-class participants who also mentioned how in turn, they felt more pressure to 'do better' as they did not want to let their parents down. Jessica, a working-class cellist from the South-East of England remembers how she would more than often find herself frustrated when practising as she never had any extra support - something she was able to reflect on further upon attending a UK music conservatoire and when comparing her early experiences with others from advantaged backgrounds:

"It was, um, not difficult that's the wrong word to use but I suppose I found it challenging playing the violin at first because I didn't, well looking back now I realise I didn't get the best start ... my memory is vague but I'm sure my school offered some form of violin, cello and some woodwind type group lessons and I took them but my parents caught on that I was becoming more devoted and they asked the peripatetic teacher who came into the school if he could teach me privately and that's when I really remember it becoming this thing. So I had lessons for about one year or so and then my teacher ended up moving to Devon [laughs] so we found another teacher but I remember her being, well she was actually a violin and cello teacher and did some singing on the side. I don't know how I managed to convince them to let me do both but I ended up having the lessons side by side and I progressed as you do, you know, doing grades and all that" (Jessica, Cellist)

After Jessica achieved her ABRSM Grade 2 examination, her teacher told her parents that they would have to start investing in a new instrument for she had both outgrown her current cello and the quality of her violin needed to improve if she was to progress further with her repertoire:

"I don't think they realised you get different sizes and standards and I actually don't think they thought they would have to replace the instrument as often as they did... it put pressure on me as I could see they were struggling but they threw everything at my music and really, whether you think like me or not, that meant to me that I couldn't let them down" (Jessica, Cellist)

When asking Jessica to elaborate further on her comparison between herself and her conservatoire peers, she refers to this as being the people “who had parents who were aware of that world” and who “could support them in ways” her “parents couldn’t”. To provide further context, Katie, Victoria, and Holly (all middle-class) described their parental engagement in ways that reinforced their parents' cultural capital, granting them greater agency within their music education. This cultural capital was described by these participants as being embodied, objectified and institutionalised through their parents' consumption, practice and understanding of classical music. Firstly, the embodied state was demonstrated by Holly who described how her love for classical music was born from her early experiences of travelling across England to attend classical music concerts. Largely driven by her parents love for opera, Holly's early cultural capital was embodied through her parents' cultural tastes. Bourdieu (1986) gives an example of this manifestation of cultural capital and explains how this can be found in highbrow cultural art forms more commonly consumed amongst the middle classes (i.e. opera and classical music). This embodied element of cultural capital is also a crucial node to understand cultural reproduction and how this is (re)produced from parents to their children (see for example DiMaggio, 1982; Sullivan, 2001). The objectified state is the physical product of the embodied cultural capital. For Katie, Victoria and Holly this was the type of music they played. In Katie's case, this was determined by her dad's embodied cultural capital which was brass music. Katie was largely inspired by her dad's love for brass and cited this in her aspiration to becoming a brass musician. As stated in earlier chapters, objectified cultural capital is heavily driven through economic capital and this was apparent across all middle-class experiences. Having access to instrumental tuition at such an early age also required the participants' parents to have access to greater amounts of economic capital – something which middle-class participants reflected on. Lastly was the institutionalised state which is “a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17). This was driven through membership of ‘out of school’ organisations such as local bands and was also seen to be reflected in participants' progression throughout ABRSM exams and competitions – something which many of the working-class participants also experienced but at a much later stage in their musical journeys. Understanding

cultural capital according to class not only allows us to understand the development of taste but also, it can give further insight into the reproductive practices which heavily contribute to the participants' journeys to a UK music conservatoire – especially their earliest ones.

5.2.4: The Role of Capital

The working-class participants' experiences also brought with them varying forms of cultural capital. For example, Fred's parents had bought him an electric keyboard when he was in primary school. Fred, like Jessica (working-class) remembers them having "to upgrade pretty quickly" to "a real piano" due to his quick progression and commitment. With this, he noticed a shift from his parents being involved to becoming more engaged with his music education.

"I didn't really tell my teachers that I'd been having lessons and I remember just before leaving the school we had a big assembly, it was like a talent show, and I played the piano and I remember the teachers coming up to me after the assembly and being completely stunned and I remember my parents being there and I think that was when they realised that this was something I really enjoyed doing... it was the first time I think my parents kind of recognised that this was something that made me a bit different and I think they liked it" (Fred, Pianist)

In her research on "how working-class children succeed" Siraj-Blatchford (2010) found that "the quality of the home learning environment (where parents were actively engaged in activities with children) strongly promoted intellectual and social development in children" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010, p. 465). This research also reinforces the experiences of those in this research. Laura, despite her working-class upbringing, was afforded ~~with~~ the opportunity of a home environment in which her parent(s) emphasised the importance of learning. It was clear from Laura's experiences that whilst her parents lacked economic capital, her mum had exhibited forms of cultural capital from her own early life which she instilled in Laura's music education, otherwise known as cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973). This was seen through her mum's involvement with piano lessons despite having no prior musical experience or

knowledge but born out of her own early experiences of academic excellence. In their research on the role of family influences in the development of musical performance, Davidson et al. (2011) find that “parents of the most successful children will be those who have attended some lessons and have also provided some support or supervision for the child's practice sessions” (Davidson et al., 2011, p. 5). Just like Davidson et al. (2011) found “parental involvement in music” to take “the form of listening to music rather than performing it”, this was also similar for some participants in this study who described their parents as being non-musical (ibid, 2011, p. 2).

Lucy (middle-class) was starting to become known in her school for her singing abilities and unlike Laura, took advantage of the exposure she received:

“I remember starting to get asks from teachers to start doing solos in assemblies and they always got me to sing whenever there was anything special happening like a visit from the Lord Mayor [laughs], it's a funny one, looking at it, perhaps it was that exposure they gave me and how I was able to really take advantage of being really good at something which set me on my way... I hadn't really thought about it until now” (Lucy, vocalist)

Not only did social background play a role in the social and emotional experiences which music provision brought, (such as performing solos and performance anxiety) but also, the quality of music tuition differed across the interviews. On a general note, all those who identified as middle-class had much more positive experiences with their early musical provision than their working-class peers. In general, those from middle-class backgrounds felt more confident about their musical abilities and reflect on being different as a positive experience. However, not all working-class participants had negative experiences of their musical provision. For example, Chris who defined his family as “very working-class” explained how the music provision in his primary school was “fantastic”, offering lessons on a collection of instruments:

“I think it was the time that they gave us which was really important, one of my class teachers was very musical and looking back, he actually seemed quite well connected... because we had group lessons but because not many others wanted music lessons there was enough to have them, we got a little bit more

support so it felt like a one-to-one but you was in a group, that's when I think, I realised, oh I can do this and yeah it was just something that grew from there but was definitely instigated by my teacher at school" (Chris, Flautist)

Similarly, Richard (also working-class) who had joined a local brass band describes his involvement with the band as "a turning point". The cost was a significant aspect on both his dedication and commitment to brass alongside the fear of not wanting his musical journey to be maintained within the primary school – similar to the experiences of Laura and Nina. It became clear to Richard from a young age that he had a skill for the trombone and when he was 10, he entered his first brass band which he remembers feeling like "a whole new world". When asked whether or not he felt he fit in, Richard explained how his band never displayed "the usual snobberism" which he mentions you might "find in the orchestras" but he did soon realise how he was amongst a few who did not come from what he calls a "brass background". Richard explained how this was never a problem in regards to his learning but did at times make him wish he was a bit more "like the others". When asked whether or not he showcased his musical talent in the primary school, he mentioned how "everyone knew" he played an instrument but he "felt timid at times" to platform his abilities within the primary school environment, again, from fear of being othered. Like Richard, Katie (middle-class) is also a brass musician and despite her middle-class origins, acknowledges the important of class in the brass community:

"it's the whole mining working-class type of background, that's how banding grew and so that whole community aspect and the accessibility thing is always with any band I've been involved with put this at the front and centre" (Katie, Brass player)

However, unlike Richard, Katie comes from a musical family. When she was old enough, Katie joined her local brass band and was provided with her instrument free of charge. As she explains:

"My dad is a is an amateur tuba player, I hate the word amateur, I should say hobbying [sic] tuba player because it's not fair and I grew up hearing and seeing him play in brass bands and so when I was about seven I started asking

questions about how I could start playing brass and I was told that until my adult teeth grew I wouldn't be able to so when I was about nine, I went and joined my local brass band and was provided my instrument free of charge and I was provided my brass tuition free of charge, brass bands are a wonderful community service that I can't overlook" (Katie, Brass player)

Curtis and Megan, also working-class musicians attribute their starting points to free lessons. However, unlike Katie who received her free tuition through her local brass band, Curtis and Megan had received theirs through their primary schools. Megan distinguishes her starting point through the tuition she received via peripatetic teachers from her local music hub at her primary school:

"I was incredibly lucky to have had that early exposure and my school was fab... I think what was really crucial for me was that I was able to learn the piano which I did until about grade five and then I had stopped because you know, for singing, you only need about grade five to be able to do what you need to do... I didn't start singing properly until I started secondary school, but I wouldn't of been able to do that without the piano lessons I got at primary school" (Megan, vocalist)

Whilst social background plays the biggest role in determining the participants' starting points, for Curtis, his background as a Black working-class musician brought with it further barriers. Curtis attended primary school during the 1980s and recalls his provision at his school as being, "fantastic", stating how the school had "one of the best school bands" he has ever come across. Taught by the Royal Artillery "who were very inspiring and very inspirational", Curtis explains that it was his early exposure to music at school which planted the seeds of his musical journey. Curtis grew up in London in a first-generation immigrant household which he described as being "very working-class". Whilst acknowledging music as an opportunity, Curtis also recalls how this came with great difficulties. Curtis grew up in London in "a climate in which "race" was becoming increasingly salient and ideas of black pride and black power (not only those imported from the US) were finding resonance among post-colonials in Britain, education came to be identified as one of the principal sites of racial(ized) oppression" (Modood, 2001, p. 306). A period which Modood (2001) identifies as challenging, in

particular for Black boys who “were increasingly in conflict with teachers, unemployed, and/or in trouble with the law (see Coard, 1971 in Modood, 2001, p.306). Curtis, reflecting on his experiences during the 1970s and 1980s in London narrates these trajectories identified by Modood (2001) through his own lived experience:

“Most of my contemporaries went into crime or have since died and that is not an exaggeration. Doing a lot of stretches in in prison. So in terms of the school I think if there were league tables then it would be very low but music was very very [sic] high” (Curtis, Brass player)

Music for Curtis was seen as something which could help him better himself but also, an escape from his everyday realities. These experiences were still very much embedded in the practices of his musical provision, with Curtis remembering the lack of diversity in his earliest exposure of music through school:

“It wasn't too diverse, there was a lot of black people there but the military musicians were obviously, mostly white [laughs] in fact, they were all white” (Curtis, Brass player)

In the recognising classical music’s “Eurocentric focus”, Hess (2018) argues how this then “reinscribes hierarchies of race—hierarchies with a historical basis” (Hess, 2018, p.129). Often considered a site which is seen as the “preserve of the white middle classes” (Bull, 2019), classical music can create “an accidental culture where we don't see enough racial diversity in our musical education through school and into University” (BLiM Report, 2021, p. 34). This “whiteness” is described by Hess (2021) as being:

“Present in our repertoire and in our curriculum. It is present in our emphasis on notation over aurality. It is present in the instruments that are available to students and in the comportment we expect of them. Moreover, it is present in who participates in ensembles and who can ultimately become a music teacher” (Hess, 2021, p.16)

Allen and Boyce (2013) in their research on Black cultural capital acknowledge the critique of Bourdieu’s conceptual frameworks from a Critical Race Theory perspective.

Exploring the intersection of race and class, they assert how “Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital presumes White middle-class values and norms as the most appropriate and privileged forms of cultural capital” (Allen and Boyce, 2013, p. 20). It was clear throughout Curtis’s experiences of his early music provision that he was already seen as different to those who were teaching him music, the ‘all-white’ military band. The lack of racial diversity in classical music and structural barriers which the musical style, notation and participation reinforces could also be a contributing factor to why admission rates for Black undergraduate students in UK music conservatoires have remained consistently low over the years (see data in CUKAS Annual reports 2006-2013; UCAS Conservatoire reports, 2014-2020; HESA, 2020) – an area of research which needs more focus moving forward if we are to see more of a diverse cohort in both UK higher music education institutions and the classical music industry itself.

5.2.5: Conclusion

Up to this point, the analysis has captured the early experiences of the participants, differentiating these experiences through the lens of sociological factors such as social class, race, generational dynamics, and geographical positioning. Furthermore, the above has delved into the familial influences and parental roles, illuminating how these factors have contributed significantly to the initial trajectories of the participants’ musical journeys. In doing so, the analysis has aimed to illustrate the intricate and multifaceted nature of these experiences. Even when a participant self-identified as “very middle-class,” their musical experiences have not invariably followed a distinct and linear path. A common thread among all participants, however, is their attendance at state primary schools. Nevertheless, this shared educational background does not imply equality within their early experiences. Much like the variation in musical tuition available at different state primary schools, parents from the same social class groups may provide their children with dissimilar musical opportunities. Conversely, it is evident that within this early stage of the participants’ journeys, distinctions between social class categories (working and middle) do exhibit resemblances, particularly in terms of exposure to and accessibility of musical tuition.

5.3: Navigating the Secondary School (and beyond)

This section explores the participants' experiences of their journeys throughout secondary school – examining the pathways that the working-class and middle-class participants navigated on their journeys toward achieving their aspirations to reaching the conservatoire. The transition represents a critical stage in their journeys, where both (working and middle class) groups grapple with multifaceted challenges and opportunities that intersect with their social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Specifically, the integral roles played by their families and one-to-one music teachers, the quality and availability of music education resources, their school peers and the attitudes and perceptions of conservatoire institutions by their educators. Through these themes, the analysis starts to build greater insights into their journeys and starts to explore the role which capital and their habitus plays in influencing their musical aspirations.

“Previous research found that whilst the majority of children initially learn an instrument in schools, those who progress further, were more likely to learn privately or at specialist music schools” (Shepperd, 2014 in Henley and Barton, 2022, p. 211).

The quality of music provision in the secondary school and the influence of one-to-one instrumental teachers outside of the school appeared to be the biggest influence in impacting the participants' aspirations at this stage of their lives. Through having access to private instrumental tuition, it appeared that the participants' experiences relied less on the quality of the school's music provision and instead, more on the instruction from their external music education. However, access to one-to-one tuition was not fairly received, with some participants facing more challenges than others. Holly's (middle-class) parents sent her to one of the best state-secondary schools in her region. As a result of unsuccessfully auditioning for a place at one of the UK's Music and Dance Scheme (MDS) specialist schools, Holly recalls how her determination to be a successful musician only grew stronger through this rejection:

“I wasn't that surprised that I didn't get a place and the reason for that was really, to be quite blunt, was down to me not having a high enough grade in my second instrument and I didn't audition again in the years following but not because I

was worried of failing again but I think because, well really what I had found was that not going actually gave me more determination and drive and my school ended up supporting me in the way I needed them to” (Holly, Vocalist)

Holly's continued instrumental lessons with her private teacher outside of school enabled her to advance through her ABRSM graded exams. Additionally, she also utilised the school environment not only for practice but also, as a place to perform, allowing her to demonstrate her cultural capital and gain greater agency within the secondary school environment – something Holly also credits as boosting her “confidence”. Through continuing her lessons with her private instrumental teacher outside of the school, Holly advanced in her ABRSM graded exams and eventually reached the grade she desired in her second instrument, Grade Eight. Furthermore, Holly found opportunities to perform at school and would regularly perform at school events, allowing Holly to display her accumulated cultural capital. This strategic use of the school environment aligns with Bourdieu's concept of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’, as Holly leveraged her cultural capital (for example, her musical skills) within the educational field to enhance her agency. Her school had a strong music department and boasted a series of practice rooms where Holly would often spend the majority of her time.

“The school wasn’t as big, like you see some secondaries schools are today but it had a good mix of people and what I remember was it was also quite a diverse school I think in terms of what was on offer you know, we had the opportunity to go skiing every year and had frequent trips abroad and even had art exhibitions and other creative opportunities so there was a lot on offer” (Holly, Vocalist)

Holly studied with two private instrumental teachers outside of school and would also get extra support from her teachers inside the school, especially when preparing for exams and concerts. In Holly's usage of school resources, particularly the support she received from her teachers for exam and concert preparations, she was further able to navigate the educational field – something she also professes to have been made easier through her mother's involvement in school life –serving as a parent governor. This further accentuates her family's accumulation of social capital, which appeared to have further shaped her educational experiences. This aligns very neatly with

Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital (see Bourdieu, 1984), emphasising the ways in which individuals and families position these forms of capital to enhance and reinforce their position within a particular field. This very clearly highlights the crucial role these forms of capital play in shaping an individual's educational trajectories and again, reinforces the importance of parental engagement and involvement.

“She [Holly's mum] really tried to make everything that little bit better, very involved but not overbearing and it made a big difference I think, especially for my brother who wasn't as committed or maybe as involved with things like music like I was, I think she [her mum] worried about him but she also wanted to make sure the school was doing right by me as well so she was always there and pushing for better things” (Holly, Vocalist)

Despite attending secondary school at the same time as Holly, life at school was very different for Curtis (working-class). Curtis found himself in a situation where he felt compelled to make a choice between his passion for music and his interest in sports. Unlike Holly, Curtis experienced a more singular focus on his musical and academic studies and experienced a very limited scope for exploring other interests due to the quality of the academic provision at his secondary school. Or in other words, Curtis was not afforded the luxury of being able to participate in both sports and music at the level he desired. However, it was the quality of the music education on offer through external services which drove Curtis to pursuing his musical journey. This external service was primarily delivered through his peripatetic teacher, which he describes as outshining the educational offer in other subjects – something afforded to the school through at the time, their Local Education Authority (LEA). As Curtis explains:

“The experience in the wider school wasn't anywhere near as good in terms of the teaching or the dedication to students but my instrumental teacher was absolutely fantastic. I think at that point I thought I had to take music and I was such a keen sports person and that had to all go...I had one to one lessons which as I say, were 20 minutes long. I had a very good teacher I mean I simply can attribute my dedication to music simply because of the experience that I had there and the experience in the wider school wasn't anywhere near as good

in terms of the teaching or the dedication to students but my instrumental teacher was absolutely fantastic. I still remember his name” (Curtis, Brass player)

The dedication and commitment from LEA instrumental teachers was also highlighted in the work by Mills and Smith (2003) who found these teachers to be “highly committed and professional individuals, determined to provide effectively for the wide range of pupils that they teach” (Mills and Smith, 2003, p. 22). Alongside clarinet lessons with his music teacher at school, Curtis also began lessons at the Centre for Young Musicians – a Saturday music school in central London which offered music lessons through means tested bursaries. He recalls seeking to join the army as a musician during his time at secondary school, but he described this to be a challenging time given the racism he encountered during the process. For Curtis, the Centre for Young Musicians which took place on a Saturday morning was a space which he later described as a “bubble” – one he refers to being “locked into” and a place where he was first made aware of the conservatoires.

It was through joining the Saturday school where Curtis's experiences reflect the role of social and cultural capital in shaping his journey to the conservatoire. The music lessons offered via an external music teacher at school and the additional training at the Centre for Young Musicians, not only enhanced his musical capital but also positioned him within a specific cultural field, helping Curtis to shape his habitus. For example, through having exposure to the Centre for Young Musicians, Curtis was also given exposure to other young musicians from diverse backgrounds. He was also given access to professionals operating within both the conservatoire sector and the classical music industry – something he would not have received through his school music services alone. These Saturday schools, sometimes run through conservatoires (separate to junior conservatoires) offer high quality instruction, usually with lower entry requirements than the junior departments and can also come with financial assistance in the form of means tested bursaries for those from low-income households. His characterisation of being "locked into" this space seemed to imply the immersive nature of his engagement, aligning with Bourdieu's notion of individuals being influenced by the fields they inhabit (see for example, Bourdieu, 1984; 1999). It

was clear that the Saturday school changed Curtis's trajectory and was one which allowed him to access the 'talent pipeline' to the conservatoire.

Like Holly, Alice (middle-class) also had positive memories of her secondary school. Alice's initial exposure to private instrumental tuition illustrates her access to cultural capital. However, as Bourdieu contends, social capital is equally crucial in shaping educational outcomes (Bourdieu, 1984). Educated at a non-selective state secondary in inner-London, it was Alice's private music teacher who first introduced her to the "world of conservatoires":

"My music teacher at school was, very invested and took an interest in my music and noticed that I had quite a love and real passion for it so she connected my parents to a teacher at the College [Royal College of Music]... I remember this as a moment where everything changed. It was the first time I think I realised what a conservatoire was and actually it was the first time I had ever heard about the college and I remember thinking this is it, this is where I have to go"
(Alice, Flautist)

In this context, Alice's private music teacher became a source of social capital, linking her to the world of conservatoires. The teacher's introduction to conservatoires not only highlighted the role of social networks but also emphasised the potential for social capital to generate opportunities. For Bourdieu (1984), social networks and their role in the advancement of a person's outcomes are born from a symbolic exchange. In this instance, the exchange was music. Bourdieu goes on to argue how they also become guaranteed through mutual commonality. The comparison with Curtis, who became aware of conservatoires through his Saturday music school – an organisation which he was only able to access through a means tested bursary, demonstrates how different forms of social capital can lead to similar outcomes (i.e. the knowledge of and becoming aware of conservatoires). These contrasting experiences also accentuate the importance of individual music teachers and the influence their knowledge can have on others. More so, it emphasises the importance of having access to these teachers. Whilst both Alice and Curtis became exposed to conservatoires through their music education outside of their secondary school, the way in which they accessed this education was quite different. The impact of Alice's music teacher was clearly

transformative, offering Alice the guidance and mentorship she needed to navigate the complex and competitive world of classical music education. In the absence of this teacher, Alice's experiences might have been very different:

"I felt special and very privileged to have had that opportunity [music lessons with a conservatoire teacher] and it is without doubt what drove me to the career I am in today" (Alice, Flautist)

As a result, Alice was given access to what she described as "that world". She adds:

"I would probably say that that exposure to that world from that age without doubt helped me in my journey and the level of playing I got to during that time is all down to I believe having lessons with the people I did and I was committed, I was passionate, I suppose I was really serious about it all and that's why I was so dedicated but I also had a good teacher and that's really important for anyone not just going to a Conservatoire but for anyone that wants to make it in the classical music profession and other professions for that matter" (Alice, Flautist)

Alice's quote above highlights the significance of both individual determination and the support from her private music teacher in shaping her musical journey. Her early exposure to classical music education was seen to instil in her the cultural capital and dispositions necessary to thrive in this field. Meanwhile, her commitment and dedication demonstrated the embodiment of cultural capital in action. The support of having access to a quality music instruction further reinforces the importance of social capital in the journey to a conservatoire. Alice also explained how her school remained dedicated to her music education and would let her use the school's main hall and other rooms to practice during her lunchbreaks.

5.3.1: Resilience and Agency: becoming serious

Alice stated how she gained a growing reputation amongst her wider school community as a 'serious' musician. Becoming a serious musician and as Alice put it, "taking it seriously" was a common theme throughout the participants' experiences during secondary school. However, becoming serious was something which was

experienced differently across the interviews. For Laura (working-class), her exposure to the conservatoire was not instigated through a teacher at her secondary school but watching the finals of the BBC *Young Musician of the Year*. As she retells:

"I was about 14 or 15 and I was watching the BBC Young Musician on TV... and I remember watching there was a guy and he teaches at the college now, he's incredible pianist and he won... I thought that's what I have to do, that is what I have to be and it was so far from me, I didn't realise how far away I was from that standard you know, I thought I was quite good and I remember sat crying my eyes out, I remember my parents were watching it and they were kind of wow you know, this is a level beyond which they were even aware of, I remember being really upset because I thought I can't, I'm not, that was so, it was a million miles away" (Laura, Pianist)

Upon seeing the standard of other young musicians like herself, Laura became further inspired, and her ambitions and aspirations grew from that one key moment.

"...but that's when I became aware of them [the conservatoires], you know they have those interviews with the kids you know on the BBC Young Musician and they're all from Chetham's or from the Menuhin or the Junior departments of one of the conservatoires and you know, they have these interviews and you see little video clips of them having piano lessons... and they were at the College in Manchester and I thought that's only half an hour from Liverpool, I thought well maybe I could go there and that was when I thought if I want to do this, I'm going to have to go somewhere where somebody can help me to learn how to do that and so the honest truth is I practised every hour of everyday I mean, I used to get up at 4 in the morning, I'm not joking and I couldn't even practise at home properly cos we lived in terrace council house and the lady next door used to bang on the wall with her walking stick you know, I couldn't practise at home and I would go to church to practise and I would practice before registration at school, on lunch breaks, the morning break, in the afternoon after school, you know if there was something that had keys on it and I could press them I would be practising on it, even if it's a really crappy instrument" (Laura, Pianist)

Building resilience was a skill both Laura and Alice demonstrated whilst studying at secondary school. However, becoming self-reliant was an additional skill Laura acquired. She was never signposted or given any additional help at her secondary school – even from her music teachers. Her self-reliance instead, was built and developed through what she recalls as having “no opportunities” available to her at that time. Spending time in the library and what she describes as being largely “self-taught” led her to achieving “quite a high standard, quite quickly without very much guidance” as she puts it.

“I found the music curriculum in school so removed from the books that I had read, from the music that I listened to you know and from the things I’d found out about in the library... it was what I wanted to do and I knew that from very early on but there were no opportunities at school to really support that” (Laura, Pianist)

There were no opportunities for Laura within the school environment to enhance her musical training. Unlike Laura, Alice was able to continue her musical journey at school with her music teacher (alongside her private musical tuition):

“She was good and a no-nonsense kind of teacher but we got on, we spoke the same language and when I had finally chosen the repertoire from [ABRSM] the syllabus, she would go out of her way and record the accompaniment and leave it in the classroom so I could put it on and practice” (Alice, Flautist)

When asked to elaborate on the comment regarding speaking the “same language”, Alice clarified with the following:

“Well it was music... my love for it and how when you get two people who are passionate about the same thing, you speak the same language... I haven’t really thought about it but maybe, I think at least anyway that perhaps my upbringing and exposure to the world of music gave me that opportunity to have those relationships with teachers.. I’m not sure” (Alice, Flautist)

Alice's middle-class upbringing significantly influenced her agency both in her secondary school and in her musical endeavours, aligning with Tan and Liu's (2022) assertion that habitus facilitates learners' socialisation into academic discourse and learning (see Tan and Liu, 2022). Alice's upbringing provided her with the cultural capital and dispositions necessary to navigate institutional expectations and to participate meaningfully within her musical education. Unlike some of the working-class participants, many of whom relied heavily on the school and its curriculum for guidance and support, Alice's background granted her greater autonomy. Of course, not all the middle-class participants within this study had the same experiences as Alice. Katy, who also identified as middle-class reminisced on her secondary school experience with mixed feelings. She describes how attending her local state secondary school was the "norm" for young people where she grew up:

"It was in my catchment area I lived about a mile away from it so it was walkable for me which was good, it wasn't a great secondary school the year after I left it was put into special measures so it definitely was not fancy. I literally went to the secondary school in the town where I lived, we didn't necessarily look for the "best" secondary school we didn't look for some specialist secondary school, I was just following what was kind of the norm for where I lived" (Katy Brass player)

Whilst defining the school itself as not "great", it did however provide music provision across a range of instruments. As Katy progressed throughout her studies, she also described an expansion in the school's music provision.

"It wasn't bad, we did have visiting peripatetic teachers in I'd say probably most disciplines, you know we had the brass teacher... we had a strings teacher, we had the woodwind teacher, singing teacher almost certainly guitar and drums we had some groups too, we didn't have like a stellar school orchestra and again actually as I got closer to leaving and we got new music staff, that aspect, the ensemble provision was getting better, when I first started I was just in the music department really for class music, my brass lessons and nothing else really to start off with" (Katy, Brass player)

Katy eventually transitioned from her brass lessons within the school and began to take lessons with the same teacher on a private basis. This was an outcome to Katy demonstrating to her parents the progression she had made. In addition, Katy also received private tuition on the piano with a separate private instrumental teacher.

“I was not bad for where I lived and was sort of slightly, big fish small pond but I think my teachers saw beyond that and in the wider world of brass I was doing OK but not brilliantly and I wasn’t encouraged to go after those things and I wasn’t encouraged to look into junior conservatoires, like I say my trombone teacher no I mean like to say my trombone teacher is a current professional on the freelance circuit so really I wouldn’t have benefited from the tuition at like a junior Academy necessarily more than the teacher I was working with.. I do sometimes kind of wish a little bit that maybe I knew more about the National Youth brass band... I think the brass band would have been better fitting to me I think I was good for my age, I was ok at the level of things I wanted to pursue and perhaps not anymore than that” (Katy, Brass player)

For the working-class participants who had begun private instrumental tuition in the primary school, they also continued to receive lessons during their transition to secondary school. Digging deeper into their experiences, it became apparent that many found the music curriculum in their secondary schools to be insignificant and unchallenging³². Michaela explains that she was the only student in her year group who was “serious” about music as a subject:

“I was known as the girl who was good at or should I say, I was known as ‘the musician’ but perhaps, well I was only able to do very little with that... I remember the school having a little band but I was never part of it... I think they played pop or jazz and that wasn’t for me...I got dragged into a lot of stuff, teachers were like ‘oh Michaela could do this’ and it did I suppose draw me further in to music in the school itself but it wasn’t easy as there wasn’t much going on for classical music I don’t think” (Michaela, Brass player)

³² Out of the 21 participants who were interviewed, only 4 did not take music as a GCSE option.

Michaela went on to state how she felt like a “one man band” and outgrew her music provision very quickly, working at a considerably higher level than everyone else during GCSEs (including her teachers).

“I found it quite easy to be frank and by that I mean not my actual playing but the curriculum I think is what you’re asking, there wasn’t anything they taught me I didn’t already know and there wasn’t a huge emphasis on brass or advanced orchestral music at all... the band at school was actually more of a pop band and we would occasionally do some film music but I didn’t get involved with them after Year 9 because it was GCSE year after that and I found it a bit of a wasted effort, I think because by that point, I was close enough to doing my Grade 8 and was more involved in things outside of school and it felt like at the time for me all very amateurish...my teacher actually couldn’t play that well and I remember being asked to play a solo but I couldn’t find an accompanist and my teacher couldn’t do it as they just didn’t have the skill” (Michaela, Brass player)

Similar experiences were also echoed by Eric and Chris (both working-class) who describe how they had surpassed their school teachers’ musical ability which led to both their parents having to rely on their private instrumental teachers more than their music provision inside the school:

“I did play [the piano and flute] at secondary and was having lessons with a teacher who I was introduced to through my teacher from primary school and you know, I don’t think, I couldn’t fault them at all, they were very much to the point and I’d always come away feeling more confident and knew where I stood kind of thing... I started to take an interest in composition as well at around 14 and it was only through getting a high grade on my theory exams that I actually thought about doing it more [composition]... the school itself was ok but I think there was only a handful of music teachers and I don’t think they were great [laughs] actually, my music teacher could barely even read music so I never relied on them for feedback on the stuff I was working on” (Chris, Flautist)

5.3.2: Economic Capital

Throughout navigating their journeys, the role of their private instrumental teachers was becoming more apparent. However, whilst all the participants had experienced private tuition, access to the tuition differed according to their socioeconomic backgrounds and as a result, came at a cost – a cost which brought with it other issues for those from working class backgrounds. Richard (working-class) who began taking private music lessons during primary school (as an outcome to the fear of “standing out”) had to pause his tuition for two years due to what he describes as “significant financial troubles”. Restarting his lessons in Year 9, Richard struggled to pick up the pace required of him to fulfil his ABRSM grades and changed teachers on two occasions to try and overcome this issue.

“It was really hard actually, I don’t recall forgetting how to play and I think I still continued to play quite seriously even when I wasn’t having lessons but that meant my technique had sort of slipped and I ended up picking up quite a few bad habits which I found a real struggle to get rid of... I did end up achieving my [ABRSM] Grade 8 but it took a lot longer than what it was meant to and I know that probably sounds like me being harsh or a bit judgy but that two year gap had quite an impact, quite harshly I’d say” (Richard, Brass player)

The financial cost of private musical tuition and Richard’s parents’ lack of economic capital amplified the challenges Richard was facing. He explains how even when his parents were able to afford lessons again, they still struggled. Upon returning to his lessons, he explains how this brought “enormous pressures” for him to do well, pushing him to what describes as, “showing them all” he “could do it”. When asked who he meant by this, Richard explained how he was referring to his family and teachers at school. In other words, Richard was determined to prove his ability and somewhat questionably, his own self-worth. His challenges seemed to also highlight a social element. That being, his agency within the field of classical music. As a brass player, Richard was also part of a brass band in a neighbouring village which he joined when he was 11. He notes how despite the “world of brass” being “a bit friendlier” than his orchestral experiences, it still reinforced a culture which he felt isolated within. More recently, the quality of music education in English state schools was raised in a special Ofsted publication in the autumn of 2023 which gathered data from Ofsted

inspections – the first report of its kind since 2012. In general, the report found that there is significant variation in the quality of music education in both primary and secondary schools. HMI inspectors also found a “considerable variation” in the amount of curriculum time allocated to music in secondary school. For example, in “just under half the schools visited”, Ofsted (2023) stated how school leaders “had not made sure that pupils had enough time to learn” the music curriculum as “planned by the school” (Ofsted, 2023). Furthermore, in line with the findings discussed thus far, Ofsted (2023) have also raised concerns about the increasing trend of schools reducing or eliminating subsidies for instrumental lessons, citing broader budget constraints on schools as a key factor in these decisions. While these financial pressures may be understandable, the reduction in subsidised instrumental lessons could have a detrimental impact on those from working class backgrounds, particularly those demonstrating a strong commitment to their musical education and aspiring to pursue a conservatoire education.

Access to subsidised instrumental lessons is a crucial gateway for students to acquire the cultural capital necessary to thrive in the classical music world (see Bourdieu, 1984). By providing access to subsidised instrumental lessons, schools play a vital role in levelling the playing field for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, allowing them to develop their musical talents, receive guidance from experienced teachers, and participate in ensemble playing and other performance opportunities. More so, in the recently published NPME (2022), recommendations are put forward to schools, particularly on subsidised lessons (see NPME, 2022, p.32). To be more specific, the NPME (2022) recommend that schools could dig into their Pupil Premium monies in order to fund the subsidised costs of music lessons. This could potentially have huge benefits, especially for those with similar experiences and backgrounds to some of the working-class participants within this research. This is particularly important given the data to come out of the ‘*Music Education: State of the Nation*³³ (2019) report which argued that if schools were to reduce music teaching within their music curriculum, this would negatively impact those from disadvantaged backgrounds, ultimately becoming “the preserve” for those who can afford music

³³ The Music Education: State of the Nation report (2019) was published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education in collaboration with the Incorporated Society of Musicians and the University of Sussex.

lessons “outside of the classroom” (State of the Nation Report, 2019, p.10). This could also further increase the gap which shows how disadvantaged pupils were more likely to achieve lower grades in their music GCSE than their advantaged peers (EPI, 2020).

Laura (working class) also highlighted the impact of the economic cost to private musical tuition and recalls how this brought with it further pressures for her to excel. As she explains:

“This was something that I had to be very good at [the piano] as the cost of everything was so much you know, we didn’t have a car in our house and we lived on a council estate so I had to be you know very mindful of that and you know doing exams and things you know my father had to save up for a long time in order for me to be able to do those exams and so I had to be good you know, I just had to” (Laura, Pianist)

This push for Laura “to be good”, was a direct result of the financial sacrifices her parents had made towards her musical education - describing how little her parents had in their everyday lives and despite this, the sacrifices they had to make to ensure Laura was able to pursue her musical interests and ambitions. For Laura’s parents, music was seen as an investment as opposed to expenditure, something which many of the middle-class participants had reiterated throughout their interviews. This is also something Gupta (2023) discusses in their research on middle-class parenting and investment in private schooling. Gupta's (2023) study underscores the “heterogeneity” of middle-class advantages and disadvantages, reinforcing Bourdieu's (1986) concept of the relational nature of social class and privilege in the education field (Gupta, 2023, p.40). While middle-class parents can leverage their cultural capital to make seemingly homogeneous school choices that provide their children with a home advantage, there are instances where perceived gaps in cultural capital, stemming from parents' own educational backgrounds, can hinder the home-school relationship and limit their involvement in their children's schooling (see Gupta, 2023). This was not the case for Laura – whose parents had this knowledge but lacked the economic capital to further enhance Laura’s journey through private tuition. As a result, this allowed Laura to involve her parents more with her music education. However, as evidenced throughout

all participants' experiences, the need for extra music provision outside of the school came at a serious financial cost - a cost which many of the working-class participants described as impacting the way in which they engaged and practiced with their instruments.

It was the financial burden of extra music provision which placed an additional layer of pressure on the participation and practice on the working-class participants. This pressure stemmed from their habitus, which gave them a sense of obligation to honour the significant financial sacrifice made by their parents. This obligation, coupled with the fear of disappointing their parents, shaped their engagement with music and their efforts to excel in their chosen field – making what was once a hobby now, a serious endeavour. In contrast, some of the middle-class participants, with their greater access to economic capital, were less burdened by financial constraints, which allowed them to approach their musical pursuits with greater ease. Nevertheless, still becoming serious in the process. And as we see, this disparity begins to highlight the impact of economic capital on cultural capital and the subsequent shaping of the participants' dispositions and practices in their musical journeys.

5.3.3: A-Levels

Heading into their A-levels, a handful of participants continued to pursue post-16 education in the sixth-form provision at their secondary schools. The remaining participants decided to leave their schools and instead, attended a collection of institutions including further education colleges and other sixth-form centres. For those who continued at their secondary school, it was clear this was not always a decision of their own choice but instead, a result of the lack of other institutions nearby. Geographical location seemed to be a factor which influenced some of the participants' lack of choice for their A-Levels, as Nicola (working-class) states:

“I regret having stayed there but it was my only option at the time, I didn't have any other options and I wasn't well equipped to know what was out there at the time, some of my friends went to study at a college which did things like hairdressing and more vocational stuff but my school was the only one which I

*knew of what had a sixth form and the only one what offered music nearby”
(Nicola, Vocalist)*

When asking Nicola why she regretted staying on at her sixth form to study for her A-levels, she described how this was down to the school not having the resources or capacity she needed to excel at music and as she put it “be the best she could be”. She explains how this resulted in her having to retake a year and needing a gap year before she was able to consider studying at a conservatoire:

*“They [the school] were really rubbish and being polite it was like I think they just offered things they didn't have a clue on and it did feel like, like a bit of a guinea pig moment... there was only me and a few of us that got to study music and actually when I got to the second year in my A-levels they ended up slashing music because so little took it but I passed my A-level in music... I actually didn't get the grades I needed in my other subjects so I retook the year and ended up having to take a gap year anyway because even when I was at school I didn't know much about conservatoires and it was in my gap year when I started having lessons and doing more things... someone asked me or someone actually told me I should say, about conservatoires and that's when that all happened but massively regret staying at the school but I had no choice”
(Nicola, Vocalist)*

Nicola elaborated further and explains how her parents were unaware of the opportunities and other educational choices available to her. Again, like many other participants, Nicola referenced the specialist MDS schools and the regrets her parents had on not knowing these schools existed at that time in her journey. Furthermore, it was not until Nicola left her sixth form that she became fully aware of the undergraduate courses available within conservatoires. When asked about this further, she retells an experience she encountered whilst being a member of a local amateur singing group:

“The [singing group], as we would call ourselves, well we travelled to Coventry and when we got there we met groups of singers from around the country and put on workshops and that sort of thing and I got talking to somebody who said

they were studying at a conservatoire and I remember thinking wow like, I've heard of the name and you know doing my ABRSM exams I knew these institutions existed but nobody ever sat me down and told me these were places I could go...my school ever told me about, oh well you know you can go here and you could really do this as an option and that was when I began looking into it all and started looking at alumni and got well, I got quite overwhelmed” (Nicola, Vocalist)

Nicola expressed that if she had received early guidance and support during her secondary school years, specifically in identifying and pursuing her path to the conservatoire, she would have avoided the need to take a gap year altogether. Although she did not meet the academic requirements for university admission, she did possess the necessary qualifications to enter the conservatoire. Some participants not only faced a lack of choice and autonomy in their post-16 choices but also, they faced a lack of encouragement from teachers in pursuing music at higher education. As Laura recounts:

“The teachers at school were very anti me being a musician, I was told I would never get into music college and that I wouldn't be good enough and I mean there was a lot of subtle bullying going on... I ended up teaching myself A-Level music” (Laura, Pianist)

Reflecting on her experiences as a now PGCE music teacher, Laura looks back at her experiences and attributes her teachers' lack of enthusiasm and encouragement to their lack of skills.

“I teach on a PGCE course for music teachers now and when I look back I think they really didn't have the skills, they weren't equipped to teach somebody who wanted to study music as a profession and I really felt again quite isolated and I didn't really know anything about the profession... all I knew is that I wanted to play the piano and I wanted to be the best I could be at it and I wanted to be a professional musician but there was no support, there was no careers advice, there was nowhere to go to get help” (Laura, Pianist)

When further discussing the freedom of choice, especially for post-16 choices, many of the participants (from all backgrounds) stated how they lacked options suitable to their aspirations. However, these experiences were again nuanced and it was through Bourdieu's key concepts where we can start to see the disparities between the participants based on their socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, some of the middle-class participants had stated how despite their lack of post-16 options, they were able to stay in their current schools' sixth form provision (or move to another close-by) and were able to make up for the lack of opportunities and guidance at the school through being involved in wider musical opportunities. Victoria (middle-class) had several discussions with her parents about what type of post-16 was best for her and applied to several different institutions.

"We went through my options and decided what was best and at that time, I definitely wanted to do music I just didn't know where I wanted to do it and I've just said, my sixth-form or my school should I say was good, they were actually really good and I couldn't decide if I wanted to stay there or move... I actually decided at that point to head to a different sixth-form which was quite some distance away from where we lived and I suppose that decision came from, well it was down to them [the sixth form] being known for being better for their music and arts programmes and I didn't get the chance to go there for school because I wasn't in the catchment area but the sixth-form didn't admit in that way so your location didn't matter... It wasn't selective but they did interview me and it worked out really well because it was actually there where I ended up having a very different experience and met someone else who also went to study at a conservatoire..." (Victoria, Composer)

As Victoria and her parents were aware of the skills and technical abilities required by conservatoires, largely through her parents being musicians, Victoria also continued her private musical tuition and began entering competitions and attended concerts hosted by the conservatoires alongside her A Levels – something she described as a "strategic effort" in helping her "get familiar with it all".

"I would watch very carefully, the way the students played and everything from them entering to every movement the conductor made and it became a thing to

do in my spare time and I become more obsessed with the idea of studying there [the conservatoire]" (Victoria, Composer)

It was clear that Victoria's journey at post-16 can also be seen to exemplify Bourdieu's concept of habitus and capital. Her middle-class background provided her with the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986), encompassing knowledge, skills, and dispositions, necessary to navigate the competitive world of classical music education. This cultural capital was further reinforced by her parents' involvement in music, who were able to better guide her towards the latter part of her journey to the conservatoire whilst also supporting and encouraging her musical development. Polesel, Leahy and Gillis (2017) write, "it is not the student who creates his or her own failure through the over-whelming impact of his or her social status or 'intellectual ability'" but instead, "it is the way in which the cultural capital of the student is mediated by teacher values, by the values of the school as expressed in curriculum offerings, streams (or tracks) and subject hierarchies, by schools' and teachers' implicit cultural expectations of their students and by the differential capacities of schools to select their client groups and to impose meritocratic values which determine the success of different groups of students" (Polesel et al., 2017, p. 797). For Victoria, through having the choice to study at another sixth form which was better known for its music provision, this in turn allowed her to enter an educational environment that better valued and nurtured her musical abilities. This alignment between Victoria's cultural capital and the school's commitment to music and arts provision created a supportive learning environment that fostered Victoria's musical development. Furthermore, Victoria's strategic engagement with conservatoire-related activities, including attending competitions and concerts, ultimately provided her with the ability to leverage her cultural capital and further her social connections. In contrast, Liam's (working-class) secondary school which also had a sixth form was the only option he had when progressing to post-16 education. It appears Liam faced the same struggles as Nicola when exploring post-16 opportunities but also, he was faced with further challenges given his geographical location. As he explains:

"We weren't really in the middle of nowhere, I think the best way to probably describe where I lived would be 'semi-rural'.... I just simply didn't have the money to get there and back every day [the college] and it just seemed so

difficult... where I grew up people, people went and stayed on at the sixth form or my mates went and got jobs or whatever, so I ended up staying there [sixth-form] ...my mum and dad they, they didn't know that schools like the Purcell or Menuhin existed and if they had well I think they would've supported me... I know they [the Purcell and Menuhin] offer scholarships and some form of grant but it just wasn't a thing so I stayed there" (Liam, Pianist)

Both Nicola and Liam declared an interest to study at another institution for their post-16 education but were denied the opportunity because of their location and what appears to be their lack of social capital at that time. Limited social capital, as understood by Bourdieu, can significantly impact educational choices for students (Bourdieu, 1986). The work by Portes (1998) furthers Bourdieu's (1986) understanding of social capital by writing how social capital is "decomposable into two elements – first, the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by their associates, and second, the amount and quality of those resources" (Portes, 1998, p. 49). This understanding can help describe the advantages of middle-class parents in the school choice process – more so, the experiences outlined by Victoria and other middle-class participants who highlighted greater agency in their post-16 choices. Through having broader (and specialised) social networks and access to the right information, such as private music teachers and knowledge of the music education field, this in turn can help empower parents to make informed decisions about their children's music education. At the same time, the lack of awareness and knowledge can hinder students' exploration of these options and limit their access to institutions (see for example, Brooks, 2008). Additionally, it was clear from the experiences that the lack of social capital was also linked to the lack of access to financial resources (such as MDS scholarships and bursaries). As highlighted by Laura, when she got to the conservatoire³⁴:

³⁴ The original research interviews explored experiences to and within a UK music conservatoire. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the focus of this research shifted and changed throughout the previous year to reflect the growing body of literature surrounding UK music conservatoires. However, certain excerpts have been included from participants experiences where relevant to accompany the discussion.

“Everyone went to a specialist music school and I think I was the only person who hadn’t so I was again, you know, found myself being quite isolated” (Laura, Pianist)

In terms of location and geographical inequalities, in their recent research, Henley and Barton (2022) analysed 723 interviews from children and young people and contextualise findings through twenty years of policy initiatives seeking to address barriers to music learning (Henley and Barton, 2022). A key theme within their analysis illustrates the role of a young person’s location and the challenges this can bring when accessing quality music education. They write how “one of the most significant factors in restricting people’s access to musical opportunities was transport”, stating how the former NPME (2011) failed to address this issue. Just over ten years later, the recent NPME (2022) also arguably fails to address the geographical issues facing young people when accessing quality music education. Whilst the NPME (2022) puts forward guidance for schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) to work with Music Hubs to improve the quality and breadth of music education for children and young people, there is no specific guidance outlined in the plan for how work ore strategically with ‘out of reach’ schools (i.e. schools in semi-rural/ rural areas). There is also no official guidance on how music and arts organisations might best fulfil the demands of the non-statutory guidance despite the NPME advocating for this. Therefore, it was through having greater amounts of economic capital which allowed those in more geographically challenged areas to continue to have access to the wider opportunities available to them (such as attending concerts at conservatoires and accessing certain post-16 institutions).

It is here where the discussion will also raise the academic requirements of conservatoires and how this further impacts the role the sixth form (or post-16 institution) plays in facilitating a journey to a UK music conservatoire. For those seeking to pursue entry into a conservatoire, A-Level music is not necessarily needed. UK music conservatoires do not admit applicants based on A-Level grades like universities. Instead, they use the audition as the main form of evidence to assess potential for recruitment onto their four-year undergraduate degrees. In most cases, conservatoires ask for two GCE A-Levels usually at grade E or above. However, for universities, A-Level music for university entry is typically the norm. Whittaker (2018)

writes how “A-level music is taken by many higher music education providers, especially music departments in universities from the so-called “Russell Group”, as a partial indicator of foundational knowledge of diverse musical contexts”. He states how “it is often used in conjunction with an audition or music performance qualifications (principally those offered by examination boards such as ABRSM and Trinity College London) to make entry offers at undergraduate level, along with formal interviews and other written examinations” (Whittaker, 2018, p. 17). The contrast between entry requirements for conservatoires and universities simply reinforces the knowledge and skills needed to fulfil the demands of each type of education at HE level. It was evident that even when participants had highlighted the positive impact of their A-level music on their journeys to the conservatoire, it was still their outside music tuition provided through their one-to-one private music teachers which contributed largely to their success at auditions.

Conservatoires, in general, require a minimum standard equivalent to that of Grade 8 Distinction for those auditioning on their principal instrument. As discussed earlier, to obtain that level, a student will often need access to one-to-one tuition – either outside of the school or if lucky, within the school (through peripatetic teachers). After extensively reviewing wider literature, there appears to be no peer-reviewed sources which focus on experiences for those studying A-Level music and also wishing to pursue entry to a conservatoire, especially for those studying in state education here in England. The only data relevant to this research was outlined earlier in the literature review which found that at least 60% of A-level music entries came from schools in postcodes with POLAR ratings of 4 or 5 (Whittaker et al., 2019) - the same POLAR ratings which this research showed align with those more likely to enter a UK music conservatoire (Whittaker et al., 2019; UCAS Conservatoire 2022). Whilst more qualitative data and greater amounts of participants would be needed to draw representative conclusions from the experiences within this research, the data is nevertheless a good starting point. The analysis of the interview transcripts shows the challenges for those from working class backgrounds when studying A-Level music. Their lack of economic, social, and cultural capital restricted their wider music education offer and in turn, created challenges that their middle-class counterparts were able to overcome.

There also appear to be further challenges when accessing quality music provision for A-Level, depending on geographical location. This is a growing concern across research in England and one highlighted in a report by Whittaker and Fautley (2021) on disadvantage attainment gaps in 16-19 education (Whittaker and Fautley, 2021). Their research analyses quantitative data from the Education Policy Institute and argues that A-Level Music might no longer be an available option to students in state schools by 2033 if cuts at local and central government continue (Whittaker and Fautley, 2021). They write how “those who lack the means to support private instrumental study are unlikely to have sufficient income to pay for school fees, even if a bursary supports them to a greater or lesser extent” (Whittaker and Fautley, 2021, p.4). This is further pointed out in the report ‘Elitist Britain’ by the Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission (2019) which explores the educational backgrounds of Britain’s leading people. Through highlighting how schools in disadvantaged areas are less likely to offer music at A-level, Professor Colin Lawson³⁵ states how this “crisis” leaves conservatoires unable to “recruit from the greatest pool of talent and, ultimately” with “the music profession” then losing out (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission Report, 2019, p. 79).

5.3.4: Conclusion

The participants' experiences in this part of their journeys clearly demonstrate the crucial role of economic, social, and cultural capital in shaping opportunities, particularly in their music education. These forms of capital played a pivotal role in facilitating positive outcomes and enabling the participants to navigate their journeys. For example, participants from families with limited economic, social, and cultural capital appeared to face greater barriers in identifying and accessing quality music education, limiting their options and choices at this stage of their journey. Again, the participants' experiences evidence the pivotal role their parents played in their lives and the research confirms the role parental capital plays in perpetuating privilege. Access to extracurricular music opportunities, such as choirs, youth orchestras, and music hubs, proved beneficial for many participants. However, geographic constraints posed a significant challenge for those living in remote areas and this funnelled into

³⁵ Professor Colin Lawson CBE is director at the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London.

their post-16 experiences whereby choice and agency were further limited for those from working class backgrounds.

5.4: Against all odds

'Against all odds' was the overarching theme which captured the participants' conservatoire application and audition journeys. It was data from HESA and UCAS Conservatoires which provided the rationale for this research, data which show that students who gain entry to UK music conservatoires tend to be those from more advantaged backgrounds (see UCAS Conservatoires 2015-2020; HESA, 2020). It is clear from the experiences throughout this chapter that the participants' early sociocultural experiences had impacted their primary, secondary, and post-16 journeys. But what becomes more evident throughout this part of their journeys was how these starting points affected both the way they selected and applied to the conservatoires as well as their experiences of the audition itself – all of which contributed to their outcomes and destinations. Indeed, social class appears to play a key role in the journey to a UK music conservatoire. For those from middle-class backgrounds, despite these participants also encountering challenges, their economic, social, and cultural capital gave them greater agency and as a consequence, enhanced their outcomes. Becoming aware of UK music conservatoires and their existence happened at different stages for each participant. For many, this was through their private instrumental teacher. For others, this was through family, friends, individual music teachers at school level, membership to external groups (such as Saturday schools, choirs, and orchestras) and for some, this was achieved through the media (such as watching the *BBC Young Musician of the Year*). However, when it came to making the application, the level of support participants received differed greatly. Resilience and determination played a crucial role in attaining admission to a UK music conservatoire and this section explores how the participants defied such challenges.

5.4.1: Conservatoire Application

Unlike university applications which are usually completed via UCAS in the January of the same academic year a student wishes to gain entry (for example, a January 2023 deadline for a September 2023 start), UK music conservatoires usually require home applicants to have their applications submitted at a date in early October in the academic year prior to their course starting (for example, an October 2022 deadline for a September 2023 start). The deadline dates are similar to the deadlines given for courses at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and for most university courses in medicine, veterinary sciences and dentistry (see UCAS, 2023). A breakdown of the number of applications according to the participants class-type against the number of acceptances can be found in the table below:

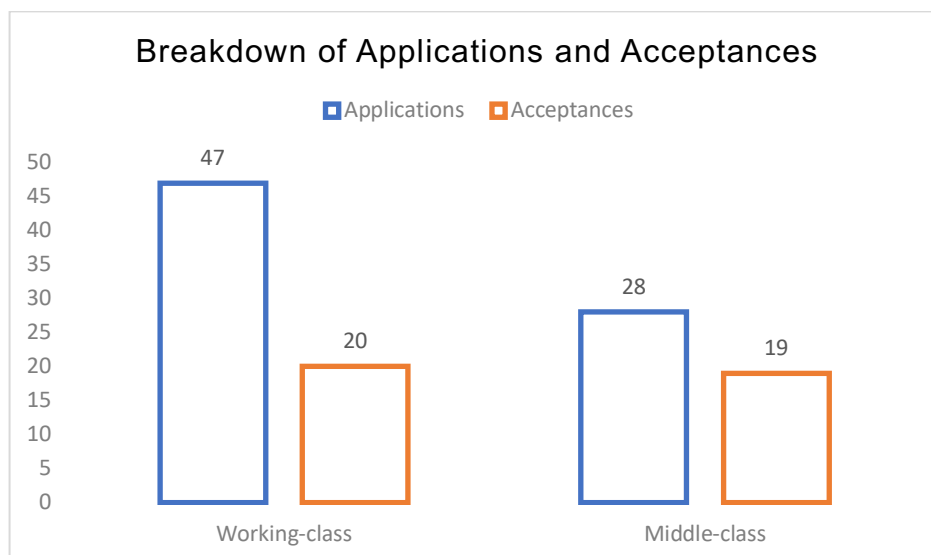


Figure 5.4: Breakdown of Applications and Acceptances

From the data above, it is evident that despite making fewer applications, middle class participants in this research were more likely to have received an offer from a UK music conservatoire than their working-class counterparts. However, in all cases, participants had reported how they felt overwhelmed by conservatoire applications. One of the biggest challenges participants faced was the lack of clarity on when and how to apply to the conservatoires. Jessica (working-class) who applied to four UK music conservatoires reported how she nearly missed the deadline and was only

made aware of the application cycle through her own research. This issue was also echoed by Alex (working-class) who ended up missing out on applying during Year 13 at his sixth form and subsequently had to re-apply the following year.

“That was pretty infuriating because nobody told me, nobody even knew the dates were different to the UCAS and my teachers knew I was wanting to study music as a performance based subject but nobody really helped me... I guess they were also not in a position to know any better...” (Alex, Saxophonist)

As a result, Alex decided to take a gap year following his A-Levels and reapplied to the conservatoires the following academic year. Again, this lack of clarity on when to apply was individual to each participant based on the level of support they received from their school and at home. During the interviews, another significant issue that came to light was their confusion about where to apply, as many of them were exploring the conservatoire sector for the first time. Unlike UCAS applications, applicants to UK music conservatoires have no restriction on the number of institutions they can apply to. To quote, Katy (middle-class):

“I had gone to a handful of open days just because you know I didn't have the worldly experience let's say like my friends did who ended up going through junior conservatoires.... there were several things that were familiar to me, the things I was interested in, and the things that I wanted to develop... because he [the professor] taught there and I knew him and I liked him, I liked his playing style, I had had a couple of lessons with him... so that was like both the prestige and the familiarity” (Katy, Brass player)

Despite Katy expressing how she still felt unfamiliar in the conservatoire in comparison to peers, she was able to draw on her wider support outside of the school when making her application choices. Katy shared her experience of having prior lessons with the conservatoire's professorial staff, which made her feel more acquainted with the institution and influenced her choices during the application process. By leveraging her social networks and prior interactions with teaching staff, Katy was able to make well-informed decisions about her preferred study destination and the teaching staff she wanted to study with. Her choice of where to study was thus significantly shaped

by her familiarity with the teaching staff and the course curriculum for her principal instrument at the conservatoires.

“The thing that was appealing... the fact that they had orchestral brass and brass band courses so I already knew that there were several things that were familiar to me, the things I was interested in, and the things that I wanted to develop... (Katy, Brass player).

In this research, only four participants mentioned attending an open day at a UK music conservatoire. The rest of the participants revealed that they visited the conservatoire after receiving an offer to study. This was due to the conservatoire application timelines, with many participants also being unaware of these events. Holly (middle-class) had consultation lessons with staff at three different conservatoires in what she described as “getting a feel” for the place, their teaching styles and hoping to take away “advice” for the “big day”. She recalls her consultation lessons being undertaken at least one year in advance of the actual auditions which gave her time to follow any advice and allow for preparation. Highlighted by Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (TLCMD) (2022) in their auditions and application advice, “a consultation lesson is a one-on-one discussion between a prospective student and professor to assess suitability for conservatoire education” (TLCMD, 2022). The fee for a consultation lesson at TLCMD in 2022 was £72 with slightly higher charges of £90 payable to professors at the Royal College of Music (RCM) (see RCM, 2022). At present, none of the music conservatoires in the UK offer a consultation fee waiver, a significant concern given its potential implications for aspiring musicians from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Only two participants in this study had consultation lessons at a UK music conservatoire before making their applications – both of whom identified as middle-class. This observation aligns with Bourdieu's key concepts of economic, social, and cultural capital and social class, as these notions play a crucial role in understanding the access and participation patterns across the conservatoire sector. For example, Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital refers to the non-financial assets possessed by individuals, such as educational credentials, skills, and cultural knowledge, which can significantly impact their social mobility and opportunities (see Bourdieu, 1986).

In this research, and as demonstrated so far, the middle-class participants described throughout their experiences as having greater access to cultural capital, including exposure to music from a young age, private music lessons, and access to staff at music conservatoires through their access to greater forms of both social and cultural capital. On the other hand, the participants from working-class backgrounds faced more barriers when applying to UK music conservatoire, limiting their chances of both access and their overall desire to pursue a musical career. As previously discussed, Bourdieu (1986) outlines various forms of capital, including cultural capital, and explores how these can reinforce social stratification and perpetuate inequalities in society. Applying this framework to these findings, the lack of a consultation fee waiver at UK music conservatoires can be seen as an institutional practice that may inadvertently favour prospective students from more advantaged backgrounds as they are more likely to both know about and be able to afford consultation lessons. However, irrespective of the participants' social backgrounds and their amount of exposure to the conservatoire, a consistent finding across all interviews was that the support they received from their educational institutions during the application process was generally inadequate. This was true even for those who had additional support from sources outside the school environment.

“It was absolutely horrible, I remember like in the week of the deadline going to my head of sixth form being like hey, I still need references, my deadline is the same as Oxbridge and they were like, ‘but you’re not applying to Oxbridge’ and I was like no, but the closing date is the same week so all those candidates you’ve already done for Oxbridge, I need you to do the same for me... I was having to be very pushy, the people in my school were like ‘I really don’t understand this system’...” (Katy, Brass Player)

For instance, even though Katy possessed the necessary resources to make informed decisions about her preferred study destination, the absence of clear guidance on the application process for UK music conservatoires from her school staff negatively impacted her overall application experience. It has only been in more recent years that conservatoires have started to publish step-by-step advice for applicants, with very few (if any) offering dedicated support to schools. As a result, Katy felt isolated throughout the entire process. Some participants also experienced forms of “subtle

bullying". As highlighted earlier by Laura (working-class), the teachers at her school were very against Laura becoming a musician. In fact, Laura recalls that the teachers at her school reinforced the idea that Laura would not be "good enough" to gain a place at a conservatoire. When it came to applying, Laura also faced further challenges:

"There was no support and it was beyond that if you can think in negative numbers... I remember there was two music teachers at school and they were friendly with the English department and I did English A-Level and my English teachers and music teachers said to me, don't bother going or applying, you're wasting your time, you're wasting money you are never going to get in, you're not good enough and you don't have the skills you don't have the experience"
(Laura, Pianist)

Eric, a working-class pianist from the South-East of England, shared similar experiences to Katy and Laura. He described feeling not only "unsupported" but also discouraged from applying to a conservatoire. This lack of encouragement had a broader impact on him, affecting his parental support as well:

"...Actually unsupported doesn't even begin to describe you know that moment where I was really trying to get somewhere and it really did feel like that I would have been able to get to the conservatoire regardless of where I went to school because the school actually didn't help, in fact they actually put me off from going and that had a bit of a knock on effect with my mum and dad... the teachers were saying well you know music you know it's a good hobby to have but you know you might want to reconsider other options and my mum and dad also became victim to that because they really bought into the fact that music at that point should be a hobby and not profession and that was all down to teachers at school not really knowing about that world" (Eric, Pianist)

Despite facing challenges at school during her conservatoire application process, Katy shares how her parents' independent research contributed to expanding the options available to her. Utilising her cultural knowledge and experiences, she successfully overcame the obstacles she faced in the school environment, distinguishing herself

from Laura and Eric by displaying greater autonomy – something she achieved through access to greater amounts of cultural capital:

“It was through my private teacher... he had studied at Guildhall, he was aware of the sorts of courses that were available you know above independent research my parents were sort of ok, well are you going to do music academically or do you want to follow performance you know and so looking into different courses we realised there were different things available” (Katy, Brass player)

Zachary, who comes from a working-class background, encountered similar challenges as Eric. He describes how his school undervalued the importance of music, which made it difficult for him to pursue his passion. Like Eric, Zachary also had to navigate the obstacles of convincing his parents to support his applications when applying to conservatories. As he notes:

“I possibly spent the best years of my life persuading my parents that music was something that I should be doing... teachers have a big influence right, and when one teacher says ‘oh you know we think your child might be better suited at, I don't know science’ or whatever, it can open up a can of worms” (Zachary, Violinist)

Asking Zachary further about this, he explained how he felt the support from his teachers may have been beneficial if he had been unsure about his choices after school. However, he expressed that he felt disappointed with the teachers' views given the amount of time he had dedicated to studying his instrument.

“It was no shock that this was something I wanted to do because I had spent hours every day practising and the support from the school or, let me rephrase, the appreciation or even the encouragement was just never there” (Zachary, Violinist)

Laura, too, encountered similar difficulties:

“The more they [the school] sort of told me I wasn't going to do it, the more determined I was to prove them wrong so I was very obstinate, I suppose I was really determined and I had sort of decided from a very young age that the only way I was going to be able to have a life where I could afford to have my own home, have my own car and have a you know some decent kind of existence was to be really brilliant to whatever it was I decided to do and so music was the thing that I had chosen and so there was no option to not get in... It was a good day when I proved them all wrong” (Laura, Pianist)

Laura, like many others viewed the conservatoire as an important milestone in the next step of her musical journey. This was also echoed by Liam (working class):

“Where else, even now as a professional musician would you ever get to spend that much time dedicated to perfecting your craft... I think they are special for a reason and that is to get your foot into the profession so going to one as an aspiring musician is the ultimate goal I think for many” (Liam, Pianist)

This lack of support from the schools can be shown to have had a significant impact on the participants' conservatoire applications. It is clear that when music is not prioritised or adequately supported within the school environment, it can result in limited access to quality music education and opportunities for students wishing to pursue this at a higher level. Working-class students often relied on their schools as a primary source of music education due to financial constraints. The lack of guidance, and exposure to develop their musical abilities to fulfil their potential for many also impacted the way in which they came to know about and then apply to UK music conservatoires.

Furthermore, the undervaluing of music as an academic subject was seen to perpetuate a bias against pursuing music within higher education – something which was particularly a constraint for the working-class participants. It was clear that when the teachers did not emphasise the value and potential career prospects associated with studying music, students and more importantly, their parents appeared discouraged or unaware of the possibilities available to them. This lack of recognition for some led to a disparity in representation, whereby the participants from more advantaged backgrounds and those with access to higher amounts of capital, were

more likely to receive greater support. We can see the important role of economic, social, and cultural capital in shaping musical journeys. Challenges in accessing consultation lessons, application costs, and knowledge about audition processes reflect the role of all these capitals in facilitating opportunities. The lack of support from sixth forms and teachers, often stemming from a lack of understanding of classical music and the wider industry indicates the impact of social capital on access to guidance and encouragement – something which was only available to middle-class participants. However, the discouragement and lack of support also fostered resilience and reinforced the participants' passion for music, emphasising the role of cultural capital in shaping individual motivations and determination. In essence, the participants' experiences further outline Bourdieu's notion of the 'habitus,' the embodied dispositions and practices acquired through socialisation, which shaped their perceptions of opportunities and their commitment to pursuing their musical aspirations – something they were able to do through their private music teachers and through their extra curricula activities (see Bourdieu, 1984; 1986; 1991).

It is important at this point to also explore the barriers and challenges faced by teachers in regarding music as a serious subject in schools. To this point, the research has not acknowledged the role teachers play and the difficulties they face when facilitating students on their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. Teachers face significant challenges from government policies when attempting to embed music as a core part of the curriculum (see Ofsted, 2023) and this has become evident in recent years. For example, the large cuts made to arts subjects by the then Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson, who referred to music and the arts as not being part the DfEs “strategic priorities” (Musicians Union, 2021). The Government's push for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects also brings significant challenges for the music curriculum, potentially dissuading teachers from encouraging students to study at a UK music conservatoire (Burnard et al., 2019; Burnard and Colluci-Gray 2021; Ashton, 2023). The prioritisation of STEM in educational policies and funding allocations often leads to a marginalisation of arts subjects, including music (see for example the emphasis of STEM in PISA rankings and OECD frameworks; Britton et al., 2016). Furthermore, recent government rhetoric, which for example states how “UK graduates from STEM degrees are typically able to access a higher starting wage, with research showing that achieving 2 or more A

Levels in STEM subjects adds more than 7.8% to earnings” creates further disparities and could enforce greater challenges for those wanting to pursue music at a higher level (see DfE, 2015; 2022). Not only this, but the impact music teachers have faced in the changing of education policies throughout the past three decades have been enormous. From having instrumental tuition managed by the Local Authority during the 1990s to instrumental tuition largely delivered through hubs (see for example, DfE, 2011; Ofsted, 2012; NPME, 2012; NPME 2022; Cox, 2022). The decline of music education in state secondary schools, with reduced music curriculum staff and the elimination of music from the Key Stage 3 curriculum in over 50% of schools (Daubney and Mackrill, 2018), poses significant challenges for music teachers in these settings. The retention of music teachers is particularly crucial for state school students, as the disparity in staffing levels between independent and state schools (Daubney and Mackrill, 2018) could also be a contributing factor to the outcomes of conservatoire auditions. More research is needed in this area to fully uncover what is happening on the ground across state schools but as previous literature highlighted, high-quality music education should be the right of every child, regardless of background or circumstances (see NPME, 2022) with the government needing to do more to sustain the music offer across the country (see for example, Daubney, Mackrill and Spruce, 2020).

Another barrier many participants faced when applying to UK music conservatoires were the application costs. Prior to 2019, UK music conservatoires offered very little (if at all any) financial assistance with audition fees and travel expenses. Since 2019, more financial support has become available. On the UCAS Conservatoires (2022) application help page, advice for students who are struggling to pay audition fees are signposted to both the individual conservatoires for help and further assistance³⁶. In 2019, the Leeds Conservatoire became the first UK music conservatoire to abolish audition fees “to ensure that talented musicians and performers are not precluded from attending an audition due to their financial position” (Leeds Conservatoire, 2019). In addition to removing audition fees, the Leeds Conservatoire also offers “to refund travel expenses for applicants from low-income households in order to reduce financial

³⁶ UCAS Conservatoires also signposts students to the charitable organisation ‘Open Door’. However, for those seeking to pursue music at a conservatoire, financial help is only available through the individual conservatoire as Open Door is for drama students only.

barriers within the application process” (Leeds Conservatoire, 2019). In more recent years (from 2019 onwards), audition fee waivers have since become embedded across all UK music conservatoires widening participation and access policies. The eligibility criteria for audition and travel fee waivers differs depending on the conservatoire but in general, household income and nationality are usually the two main requirements. For example, at the Royal College of Music (RCM), to be eligible for an audition fee waiver a student must: (1) “be applying for a first undergraduate degree (i.e. the Bachelor of Music Programme)”; (2) “Be ordinarily resident in the UK (i.e. not just for the main purpose of education)”; (3) “Have an annual household income equal to or below the eligibility threshold set by the Student Loans Company for a full student maintenance loan” which is currently set at £25,000 per year (RCM, 2022b). Other UK music conservatoires set out similar guidelines except the Guildhall School of Music and Drama which sets their threshold for household income at £33,000. When asking participants about the costs of applying, many middle-class students also faced challenges with the cost of audition fees and declared that despite their middle-class status, the financial obligations to music were still something that needed to be factored into their expenditures. As Olivia recalls:

“I still am middle-class but that doesn't take away the fact that auditions were expensive and still are for that matter... you also have this grey area where you've got a group of young people who are on the brink of earning just above the threshold which I mean now you can get audition fee waivers but when I was applying that, well that wasn't a thing, and if it was, I wouldn't have been eligible. We were middle-class but we weren't wealthy so this is a real grey area that you know, even when you do offer audition fee waivers that doesn't necessarily mean everyone gets a piece of the cake but it's better than what it was. It cost my parents a lot of money and I'd probably of got a lot more offers if I'd auditioned to a lot more places, but I was restricted because it was so expensive!” (Olivia, Pianist)

Auditioning for music conservatoires can also require travel, accommodation, and preparation expenses, which can be significant and potentially prohibitive for individuals from low-income backgrounds. This financial barrier also meant that for many, the number of applications they could make became limited and in turn, could

be argued to have limited their application outcomes and future destinations. As Ding and Wu (2023) write, “capital is significant in one’s life because those who possess capital have more opportunities” to achieve and receive greater outcomes (see Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990 in Ding and Wu, 2023, p. 1410).

The application process for Victoria (middle-class) was, however, slightly different to the others who auditioned interviewed in this research. As Victoria applied to study composition, her application required her to submit a portfolio of work and if shortlisted, required her to attend an interview as opposed to a practical audition on her principal instrument:

“Applying as a young musician at that age and to balance exams along with the whole process, you have to be switched on and really think about which ones you want to target, for me those were the institutions in London. Who I wanted to study with was probably one of the biggest factors and for others I presume... and it's not just the reputation of the place but actually what people are there. As I went to study composition the alumni was also another important factor”
(Victoria, Composer)

Nevertheless, just like others in this research, Victoria had to pay application and travel costs – something which she also stated was a financial barrier despite her middle class background.

“Yes, it was expensive and I think even now there are bursaries to cover the applications I think, the financial constraints of actually owning an instrument, keeping and maintain the instrument and then paying for all the lessons, it really does outweigh the cost of a few auditions so it's a catch twenty-two” (Victoria, Composer)

In general, the underlying factors which influenced the participants’ application choices stemmed through financial factors which encompassed application and audition fees, travel cost and the cost of living, especially for the conservatoires situated in London. This was however, predominantly spoken about by the working-class participants:

“You know, I’m actually from London but because I wanted to live away from home it meant I couldn’t afford to stay in London so I auditioned for everywhere but London” (Chris, Flautist)

Beyond location, the reputation of certain conservatoires, especially those in London, significantly influenced participants' application decisions. For some, the allure of applying to and auditioning at a London-based conservatoire, particularly ones associated with the ABRSM, presented an aspirational goal that fuelled their determination to succeed. For others, especially those from London and/or those from working class backgrounds, the idea of applying to the likes of the RCM and RAM brought anxiety, even before they made their application. As Richard recalled:

“I think when you hear an institution with any type of title that includes the words royal you instantly get this kind of image in your head where everything is going to be prestigious and very elite and you know rather regal... the conservatoire [where Richard wanted to go] was known to be one of the friendlier conservatoires despite being quite tough to get in. I remember the likes of you know the College and the, and the Academy they were known I suppose just by people that I'd met. They were known to be extremely extremely elitist and you heard that they only accepted the best of the best” (Richard, Brass player)

Factors which aided many of the middle-class participants application choices included teaching staff, alumni and, reputation. In fact, the cost of living, especially for those auditioning in London was never raised as a potential barrier by any of the middle class participants and whilst this does not imply that this group would not have had financial struggles, it does nevertheless show that living cost factors played more of a significant role for their working-class counterparts. As Fred put it, living in London “was a nice idea but not very practical”. As outlined above, auditions for UK music conservatoires often require travel, accommodation, and other associated expenses, creating financial burdens that can deter talented musicians from pursuing their dreams. For the working-class participants, the biggest challenge to applications were impacted by their limited financial resources. Travel expenses, especially for those living in rural areas or outside of cities was also significant. Additionally, the need for accommodation and accompanists during auditions added further financial strain.

These costs, along with lessons to prepare for auditions (whether through their private music teachers and/or through consultation lessons) and the lack of guidance and help provided by their educational institutions at that time were seen to create barriers, regardless of the participants' backgrounds.

5.4.2: The Audition

The conservatoire audition held great importance for the majority of the participants and was seen as the culmination of their musical journeys to date. Within the context of aspiring classical musicians, excelling at a music conservatoire audition holds utmost importance (see Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009). As stated by Eastop (2001), entry into a music conservatoire “is by audition and the standard is extremely high” (Eastop in Paechter, 2001, p.128). These auditions play a critical role in the selection process at conservatoires, shaping the prospects and opportunities available to musicians in their future careers. Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge that the audition is the sole form of entry underpinning the selection process. As outlined by Carey and Lebler (2008), “the performance culture is well entrenched not just in the classroom of conservatoires but in the selection process which is largely based on demonstrating an ability to perform in an audition setting” (Carey and Lebler, 2008, p.18). They also go on to state how “most students who audition for conservatoires come from a background of one-to-one learning through private lessons” with many having “undertaken annual external examinations where the tools for assessment are largely designed “to rank pupils according to what they know or can do” (Bridges, 1992, p. 51 in Carey and Lebler, 2008, p. 18). This was also the case for the participants within this research.

The experiences for the participants surrounding conservatoire auditions appeared to be multifaceted. Firstly, there is intense competition among aspiring musicians competing for limited spots, making the audition process highly competitive and rigorous. As noted by Richard (working-class):

“I knew a few others from my brass band who were also doing auditions the same year as me and I was competing against a few people who I knew were better than me and that doubt lingered in my head before I even got the

audition... I doubted myself from the moment I applied and I think having any shadow of doubt well I think if I look back that it made me even more nervous about the whole thing” (Richard, Brass Player)

All participants, regardless of background, found the audition process daunting. For Fred (working-class), who applied to four UK music conservatoires, the months leading up to the audition were both stressful and as he states, a “life changing moment”. As he notes:

“I had already been working on the repertoire which I was going to be playing and everywhere but the Royal Academy, I was playing the same programme and I sort of knew that I had to switch my game up for them [the Royal Academy of Music]. I experimented which I shouldn't have done at the time, but I remember the months if not I'd say the full year leading up to that [the auditions] I didn't feel like I had practised enough. I just remember thinking ‘oh god this is not going to turn out the way that I'd hoped it would’... (Fred, Pianist)

It was clear throughout the interviews that both social and educational backgrounds of participants directly influenced the participants' experiences of the entry auditions. A theme which ran throughout all experiences was anxiety, unease, and a sense of not being ‘good enough’. This was the case for participants from both working class and middle-class backgrounds. However, it became clear that those from working class backgrounds faced further barriers in the auditions. The limited access to private music lessons, masterclasses, information about the conservatoires (including consultation lessons) and insufficient economic resources which impacted the quality of instruments were all themes which were consistent throughout the working class participants experiences to date. Chris (working-class) applied to audition at UK music conservatoires on the flute which at the time, was his principal instrument. When asked about his experiences of auditioning, he describes how despite him thinking he was “well-prepared” it was not until he got into the warm-up room and heard others practising that he realised “how serious” the auditions were going to be.

“I thought I was prepared and I couldn't have been more wrong [laughs]. I don't think it helped that my first audition was at the College [the Royal College of

Music] and I remember a girl, maybe around the same age as me who had her audition and I remember hearing her warm up and I just felt myself becoming so stiff and embarrassed... I think I actually spent half of my time warming up just listening to her play which was not a great start [laughs]... my parents didn't have much and at the time I was playing what I thought to be a pretty decent flute [laughs]... boy I was wrong" (Chris, Flautist)

During Chris's audition, a panel member suggested that he might experience improvement in his playing if he was to invest in a more expensive flute. The comment left Chris feeling what describes as “deflated” and even more anxious about his upcoming auditions at other conservatoires. Perkins (2013) showed how, when capitals are unevenly distributed, position in the field is then affected, allowing for hierarchies to be structured and for the institutional habitus to play out. For Chris, it was through hearing the standards and abilities of other applicants along with the comments about the quality of his instrument which affected his habitus during the auditions. Bull and Scharff (2017) outlined three stages of understanding the (re)productive nature of classical music, whereby a key factor of the second stage is “the role of cultural institutions as spaces where inequalities of production and consumption may influence each other and be reinforced” (ibid, 2017, p. 295). It was through a lack of economic capital and wider cultural capital which was seen to impact how Chris was positioned when playing the game (see for example, Bourdieu, 1986, p. 46). The panel member's comment about investing in a more expensive flute also perpetuates Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990).

Symbolic violence helps understand the various structures which control processes that are generated through habitus and again, depending on the field in which the agent is located will determine how comfortable an individual feels in their surroundings (see for example, Lehmann, 2013). For Chris, it was clear that his habitus did not align with the institutional habitus of the conservatoire. Furthermore, it was clear that his lack of access to capital, more specifically, economic capital was one which further made him feel like ‘a fish out of water’ during his auditions. Power (1999) explains this system of practice as “the result of the relationship between an individual's habitus, different forms of capital, and the field of action” (Power, 1999,

p.48). The comment about his inexpensive instrument led “to the constraint and subordination” of his experiences (Connolly and Healy, 2004, p.15). The comments about the quality of his instrument were able to demonstrate the very notions of symbolic violence this through “explicit acts” (ibid, p.15). In other words, through someone in a more privileged position to subtly impose their values, norms, and expectations on those with less power, often without realising the impact of their words or actions, ultimately led to Chris’s habitus to head into a state of (culture) shock. And whilst the panel member might not have intended to be harmful, the comments made reinforced the existing disparities in the conflicting levels of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). As a result, this left Chris to feel othered in an environment in which he had already felt like a fish out of water and led to a shift in his habitus and position within the field.

“I wouldn't even dream of asking my parents for a new flute especially after how much it cost getting to these auditions and doing the audition and the years of tuition building up to it but I then had another worry because now I thought right well you've now got an instrument that's not going to, well it's not going to do me any justice or any favours and that became another problem that I just did not need at that time. Luckily, I was successful in one of the auditions and ended up getting a place but I do look back and think if I had a better flute or if I had other things that many others are fortunate enough to have well I ask myself... could that outcome have been different? I think you are asking me this right because it begs the question, do these auditions recruit on potential or do they recruit based on the fact that you have an expensive instrument, you are a polished performer and that you come with the right background... no I'm not the only one but I know there's many others like me going to these auditions feeling underprepared coming out feeling even more or even less prepared and I don't think that's how we should be defining talent, if anything I think we should be doing the opposite but maybe I am biased” (Chris, Flautist)

So far, we can see how audition experiences of state school students aiming to study at a conservatoire are largely shaped by their backgrounds, presenting unique challenges and opportunities that can be understood through the sociological concepts put forward by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's theoretical framework

emphasises the significance of cultural capital, habitus, and social reproduction in understanding the dynamics of power which are perpetuated within the conservatoire. Another constraint which was highlighted throughout the interviews was those connected to the costs for those bringing an accompanist to auditions. Usually, UK music conservatoires have accompanists available on the day of auditions. However, for the majority of those in this research who needed an accompanist, bringing their own was preferred. Alice (middle-class) brought her own accompanist to her auditions and was the only participant who said they did not have to pay extra fees for this. As she recounts:

“My flute teacher as I said was also a very accomplished pianist and was already in one of the conservatoires. It was really lucky that I had her and I was having lessons with a teacher at one of the conservatoires and they [the teacher] gave a lot more than what I gave them... that was a God send because in those auditions you really do need somebody who knows how you play because at that age despite being at a high level, you are a very vulnerable player. You need someone there who knows you, knows how you play and who kind of carries the weight of the audition and brings to life you're playing because they know exactly your strengths, your weaknesses...” (Alice, Flautist)

Jessica (working-class) also brought her private instrumental teacher to her auditions, but this came at a great expense. As she recalls:

“I paid for my teacher’s travel and his time to accompany me for two of my auditions... I haven’t really thought about the impact he had until now but oddly, the ones he accompanied me at were the conservatoires which offered me a place, so I think it did help yes but I think my dad silently screamed when he calculated how much the auditions were going to cost” (Jessica, Cellist)

Having a sense of familiarity in an unfamiliar environment was largely a key factor for many when deciding whether or not to bring an accompanist or someone to help support them in the auditions. This for some, was a strategic endeavour which eliminated many of the factors which contributed to the sensation of feeling like a “fish out water”. As Reay states (2015), drawing on Bourdieu, when “dealing” with

“unfamiliar education fields”, this can generate “conflicts and tensions, as well as the difficult and uncomfortable feelings that accompany them” (Reay, 2015, p. 16). And of course, this is not specific to just the participants in this research. As Nash (2002) rightly points out, it is those who are usually underrepresented in the larger sphere of education (i.e. the working classes) who are “more likely to be intimidated by the unfamiliar settings of higher education” (Nash, 2002, p. 285) and rather unusual in this situation, the conservatoire environment also elicited feelings of not belonging among many middle-class participants. Having the advantage of working with someone they know, and trust allowed for some of the participants to feel more comfortable and confident during the audition. In doing so, they reported a heightened feeling of agency over their instrument, fostering their musicianship and increasing their confidence in the process. This is in line with the research by Persson (1996) who acknowledges the profound impact of mentors when accessing HE. In a policy context, the NPME (2022) also emphasises that “when families are less familiar with what is possible, mentoring for pupils (organised by a Music Hub, for example), can help to support and track progression” (NPME, 2022, p. 34). For one of the participants who did not require an accompanist, bringing their private instrumental teacher to their audition was a strategy which they defined as a “game changer”. As Alex (working-class) recounts:

“I ended up auditioning a year later than most others so I was actually a bit uncomfortable when going to the auditions... I was working in retail at the time and the only music in my life was gigs on the weekend or my lessons so my teacher offered to come to my northern audition with me which was the college I really wanted to study at and having him there was a game changer” (Alex, Saxophonist)

Acting as a mentor to Alex, his instrumental teacher was able to offer support and encouragement throughout the audition process – something which Alex recalls brought him a “sense of ease” on what he describes as one of the most “important” auditions of his life. His teacher also accompanied him to the audition at no extra cost. Such support however was not very common amongst the other participants with experiences of auditions differing drastically depending on the conservatoire, and their economic, social, and cultural circumstances. To understand the audition experiences

further, when asked about his audition experience, Curtis, a Black working-class musician from London responded:

“My first audition was the Royal Academy, I easily thought that was the best audition that I did but I think they must have sent someone round to my house while I was auditioning because I got the decline that quickly” (Curtis, Brass player)

As a young Black man, Curtis, experienced further challenges with his audition experience in comparison to some of the other participants. As he recalls:

“It was... it was totally grim is the only way that I could put it, I've felt very much as a person of colour, I felt very much like I didn't belong there. I didn't see very many people of colour if any that I can remember particularly at the London colleges particularly the Royal College and Royal Academy where I felt very much like I didn't belong there” (Curtis, Brass Player)

Curtis noted an "air of suspicion" surrounding his presence in the conservatoire, drawing connections to broader experiences of alienation he had faced as a young Black man. He described an immediate sense of not fitting in, and as a result, very quickly internalised a feeling of not belonging. Similar to the findings of Reay (2005), the participants from global majority backgrounds in this study also experienced feelings of alienation in the conservatoire environment, mirroring the narrative of “whiteness” captured by Reay (2005) in elite HEIs, along with the “overriding” role elite HEIs play as reinforcing this as a “normative” culture (Reay, 2018). The data highlighted in this thesis from HESA and UCAS Conservatoires show UK music conservatoires recruit very few Black students and that these institutions are dominated by white and more advantaged young people. It was evident that Curtis's experiences were significantly influenced by the institutional habitus and forms of cultural capital in the conservatoire environment. This along with the whiteness of the classical music canon (see Hess, 2021) which is perpetuated throughout UK music conservatoires curricula and pedagogical practices can make those from Global Majority backgrounds fear being rejected. This was something Jackson-Cole and Chadderton (2023) also found in their research on whiteness in elite universities and

their role as gatekeepers'. Even more fitting to these experiences is the research by Meghji (2019) who explores the dynamic between black and white cultural capital in the UK. He writes how "the equilibrium of the white space is often maintained by acts of putting the supposed outsider 'back in their place'" and in doing so, "the racialised outsider 'is powerfully reminded of his or her putative place as a black person'" (Anderson, 2011 cited in Meghji, 2019, p. 6). For Curtis, he recalled the London conservatoires as having a profound negative impact on his overall audition experiences –reflecting the elitist nature and ranking order of conservatoires identified in earlier chapters within this thesis.

Victoria, (middle-class) applied to UK music conservatoires to pursue an undergraduate degree in composition and was invited to interviews at all the conservatoires she applied to. While time-consuming, she considered these interviews crucial in gaining a sense of each institution. Victoria stood out among the other participants as she was the only one who described feeling like she was interviewing the conservatoires rather than the other way around. As she articulated:

"I didn't want to go to somewhere I was not going to be pushed and my biggest fear was losing my ambition and seeing that reflected in my work so I needed to make sure the staff, the location and everything about the energy was right so I went into the interviews with lots of questions and at times I think I probably asked too many questions but looking back I'm glad I took that approach"
(Victoria, Composer)

Victoria's assessment method, which took the form of a portfolio instead of a practical audition, might have influenced her perception of the conservatoire culture. This finding is particularly noteworthy given Victoria's unique experience of fewer negative encounters compared to the rest of the participants who all experienced a practical audition. It is possible that her composition-based mode of study contributed to lower levels of anxiety, which in turn, could have affected her overall experience.

Delving deeper into the audition experiences, participants were asked if they were able to describe their audition experiences in three key words. An overview of these words are shown in the table below:

Table 5.4: Audition experiences key words

Key word	Frequency
Sterile	2
Scared/scary	5
Anxious/anxiety	11
Underprepared	3
Cold	4
Challenging	5
Unique	1
Unfriendly	5
Different	1
Educational	1
Elitist	3
Surreal	1
Formative	1
Stressful	5
Tense	2
Blunt	1
Reflective	2
Proactive	1
Thrilling	1
Unexpected	1

The words used by the participants to describe their audition experiences revealed a range of negative and on some occasions, positive emotions, including fear, anxiety, stress but also, formative, and proactive. The majority however did highlight experiences of feeling anxious, scared, and stressed – something which was to be expected. However, when asked further, many of the negative emotions appeared to be amplified by the lack of familiarity with the conservatoire environment. In other words, it was the notions of the institutional habitus and culture which perpetuated and further reinforced their sense of ‘not belonging’. Rather interestingly, both the working-class and middle-class participants' capitals and habitus, which were shaped by their backgrounds, were not always well-suited to the conservative environment during the audition stages. However, despite these challenges, some participants did find their

audition experiences at times to be more enriching and formative than others. Some highlighted how they appreciated the opportunity to perform in front of and receive feedback from experienced musicians. It was also clear that there was a distinction between experiences based on the conservatoires ranking and status. As noted, it was the two conservatoires positioned in London which yielded the most negative experiences by the participants. Those who auditioned for conservatoires outside of London, still faced challenging experiences but some experienced these spaces differently. Interestingly, Jessica (working-class) also pointed out that having the London auditions first (in the overall audition cycle) made the other auditions less “nerve wrecking” and as she put it, allowed them to “better prepared” for what to expect:

“I don't think anything could have been as bad looking back as my audition at the college. I think when you're auditioning on an instrument like the cello or strings in general, conservatoires are known to attract you know the greatest or even the best of the best and not to say that places like Birmingham or or the Welsh didn't... but it just felt less stuffy and I think having my audition at the college first and having such a bad audition, I did go into the auditions after that with this preconceived idea that oh, this is how the audition is going to be. Actually, not all of the auditions that I had from what I remember were as intense as the college... at the Welsh, I felt like that was more of a conversation you know, they asked me why I wanted to be at the Welsh and they asked me about music at school so they wanted to, well what I felt like they wanted to understand me on a holistic level... the college just, I felt like they wanted to hear me playing and if I didn't match what they were looking for it was... it was a straight, goodbye!” (Jessica, Cellist)

Interestingly Jessica stated how she was offered a reserved place at the college despite having such a negative audition experience. When Jessica was asked how she responded to her audition outcomes, she replied:

“Well even though it was a shock to get a reserve at the college I felt like again, just from the experience that I had at the audition that was not a place what would have given me the best or what I wanted from being a musician. It's like,

you have all these people kind of saying how it's about the reputation, it's about the people who are there to teach you but for me it was much more than that, it was about where I was able to feel comfortable. Out of all of the auditions, even though I did feel a little bit uncomfortable at them all they all had their own distinctive feel to them and I ended up taking the offer at Birmingham. It was the feel that I got from there and the way that they treated me... and I had the best time there” (Jessica, Cellist)

It was evident that when receiving offers to study, many of the participants had responded to their offers based on their experiences at audition. Alex (working-class) was not surprised by their outcomes:

“I was successful, I mean I got offers from three conservatoires and I got declined from two. I already knew that the two that declined me were going to do that and I don't think that was just because I performed badly but I think, I think it was just because I didn't fit. I don't know, how do I say this, I don't think that from what they seen of me and what they heard, it was like they knew I wasn't going to fit in when I got there, so I think they maybe, I felt like they might of given a place to somebody else who might have been a better fit. I noticed that the ones where I'd received offers from, they asked more questions about me, they were intrigued. I felt like they wanted to know more about me and I think looking back actually, well I'm glad that I didn't get offered places where I got declined because maybe based on their reputation I would have gone there and I might not have had the experiences that I had... so I suppose everything happens for a reason” (Alex, Saxophonist)

The experiences documented above by Jessica and Alex also feed further into the work by Bourdieu. Understanding the institutional habitus and having the ability to reflect on the positioning of oneself within the field is central to his understanding of “practice” (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Reay (1998), individuals who possess the habitus of an institution are more likely to succeed within that institution, as they are already familiar with its unspoken rules and expectations and educational institutions have distinct institutional habituses that are linked to wider socio-economic cultures. It was clear from both Jessica and Alex's experiences that their habitus, which was

shaped by their working-class upbringing did not align with the institutional habitus of the two London conservatoires they auditioned at. Thomas (2002) further emphasises the nature of institutional habitus, suggesting that it is deeply embedded in the institution's practices and structures. Thomas (2002) writes that how “institutional habitus should be understood as more than the culture of the educational institution; it refers to relational issues and priorities, which are deeply embedded, and sub-consciously informing practice” (Thomas, 2002, p. 431). For Jessica and Alex, the institutional habitus was not just about the values and norms of the institution, but also about the way in which these values and norms were enacted and played out in the auditions.

5.4.3: Conclusion

All the participants had successfully auditioned at a UK music conservatoire despite the challenges they encountered along the way. From becoming aware of degree choices at the conservatoire, the difficulties of making an application, the cost of applying all the way to the feeling of being a ‘fish out water’ once inside the building – the application process was for the majority of participants, challenging and difficult. For some, this was further rooted in their unequal starts, reaching back to their early years in primary school education and drawing on key moments throughout their secondary school experiences. It was clear that many of the participants state schools were ill-equipped at navigating the conservatoire application process with the role of the private instrumental teacher along with their parents being key to facilitating this stage of their journeys’.

5.5: Summary of Journeys’

This chapter explored the journeys of former state school students who entered UK music conservatoires from the 1990s to the 2010s. Their early beginnings revealed significant disparities in their starting points, influenced by their socio-economic background, their primary school experiences, and the varying levels of parental engagement. Through a Bourdieusian lens, it became clear that social background correlated with differences in the participants levels of social, economic, and cultural

capital. Middle-class participants often benefitted from earlier exposure to classical music, frequently within the family home and facilitated by their parents³⁷. This bestowed capital influenced their habitus, instilling a sense of familiarity and ease with the world of music at a younger age. For these participants, primary school music provision often played a less significant role in their initial engagement with classical music. Conversely, for working-class participants who lacked exposure to classical music within their families, music provision in the primary school became a crucial factor. It served as the key entry point, exposing them to music and igniting their musical journey.

Private music teachers played a prominent role in facilitating musical engagement at this stage of their journeys. However, access to private music teachers revealed significant disparities between social classes. Middle-class participants generally encountered fewer obstacles due to their access to financial, social, and cultural capital(s). Working-class participants faced greater challenges in accessing private music teachers due to resource limitations. Some participants explained how their parents lacked the right social and cultural capital to find music teachers with many highlighting the financial hardship of accessing and retaining private instruction. This occasionally placed some participants in a difficult position, grappling with the dual desire to pursue their musical interests whilst acknowledging their positions within the field.

Entering secondary school marked a significant shift in participants' musical journeys, with their pre-existing habitus influencing their experiences and navigations. The limited music provision at many of their schools often became a challenge, pushing some participants to rely heavily on external tuition, ABRSM graded exams, and membership in ensembles, choirs, and/or Saturday music schools. This part of their journeys' also amplified class differences in participants' descriptions of their musical experiences. Middle-class participants generally displayed greater ease navigating both school and home environments. Their developed musical habitus, often shaped by one-to-one tuition and parental involvement within the school, facilitated this ease. Some even reported finding mentorship from their music teachers within the

³⁷ The average age of starting an instrument across all the participants' journeys was six years old.

secondary school whilst also receiving strong parental support for their musical studies. Working-class participants faced greater challenges in secondary school, not only financially but also socially and culturally. Their journey towards becoming more serious musicians was more nuanced, often characterised by a sense of unease navigating classical music education. Limited exposure to cultural activities outside the school environment exacerbated these challenges. However, many participants found their passion and love for music to be a driving force to their resilience.

Bourdieu's conceptual framework proves useful in understanding their evolving positions within the field, especially his concept of habitus. As the working-class participants transitioned and progressed through their secondary education, they began to perceive and experience disparities in their journeys, often characterised by a sense of missed opportunities and limited exposure to wider musical experiences. Financial and social constraints often prevented them from accessing these experiences readily available to their middle-class counterparts, such as exposure to the conservatoire and membership to outside clubs/ organisations. However, this awareness of such inequalities did not discourage them from their musical journeys. Instead, it did quite the opposite, driving their determination to navigate these challenges and to succeed and excel.

At the end of their secondary school journeys, it was evident that all participants aspired to study music at higher education but applying to UK music conservatoires proved challenging for both middle and working-class participants. Schools lacked the knowledge and resources to adequately support audition preparation, forcing many to rely on private music teachers for help. In fact, for many, it was their private music teachers who first made them aware of conservatoires, with many teachers inside the school not knowing anything about these institutions. This created an uneven playing field, particularly for the working-class participants as their access to private music tuition was not always just. As a result, this left many feeling underprepared and frustrated, with one participant recalling how they missed the application deadlines entirely, requiring them to take a gap year.

The peak of these journeys was undoubtedly the conservatoire auditions, where years of time and effort had reached their momentum. Bourdieu's concept of "battlefield"

helpfully describes their audition experiences, where not only musical ability but also cultural capital and habitus came into play. Participants discovered discrepancies between their trajectories, often informed by school experiences, and the conservatoires' cultures and expectations. In other words, many of their worlds did not align. Application costs, unfamiliar settings, and microaggressions, particularly towards working-class Black participants, created a profound culture shock, throwing their habitus into disarray. This intersectionality of experiences became a powerful theme, highlighting the additional challenges faced by certain groups when accessing UK music conservatoires. However, despite their challenging journeys, all the participants successfully auditioned to at least one UK music conservatoire – beating all odds.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1: Introduction

This research has generated insights into the lived experiences of state school students' journeys to a UK music conservatoire – insights which have the capacity to make real impact to educational policies at all stages of a persons' journey to the conservatoire. It is clear from the data provided throughout this thesis that students from state schools, especially those from working class backgrounds face challenges on their journeys to a conservatoire. Given the gatekeeping role conservatoires play to the classical music industry along with the wider inequalities classical music education perpetuates, this creates a challenging situation for those wishing to enter the profession. There is a growing body of literature which is starting to highlight the inequalities in classical music – from education and practice to diversity in the industry. However, what there appears to be less of is effective policy reforms which are supported through evidence driven data. It is within this grey area where this PhD hopes to bring about change. This chapter will now conclude the research, before answering the research questions and providing recommendations for the future direction of travel.

6.2: Limitations

The initial research aimed to explore the experiences of state-schooled students in UK music conservatoires. However, during data collection, it became apparent that another study had already addressed this research question. Consequently, the research focus was redirected to delve deeper into the specific stages of the participants' journeys towards the conservatoire, utilising their rich narratives to inform the new direction. While this redirection constitutes a limitation, it nevertheless resulted in a valuable exploration within a Bourdieusian framework. Additionally, from a methodological perspective, an ethnographic approach might have been beneficial if the research were to be replicated again. However, the methodological underpinnings to this research still compliment the research and have allowed the researcher to play a part in the meaning-making process.

It could be argued that the sample size (21 participants) presents limitations in terms of diversity. For example, only two participants identified as belonging to Global Majority backgrounds, limiting the generalisability. Furthermore, the experiences from the Global Majority participants raised concerns in regards to racial inequalities which need urgently addressing to improve understanding within this area. Similarly, participants with disabilities and care leavers, both underrepresented groups within the conservatoire sector, were absent from the final sample. Consequently, knowledge gaps concerning their experiences remain and again, further research is urgently needed to address this. While gender inequalities within classical music have been explored in the data along with statistical data from HESA and UCAS conservatoires, very little has been explored in the findings and discussion on this matter. It must be noted that inequalities were captured in the participants' experiences inside the conservatoire but through the redirection as mentioned above, pre-conservatoire journeys offered limited insights into this topic. This too highlights a potential area for further investigation. To address this, the experiences captured have since been approved by participants to be used in additional research following the dissemination of findings from within this PhD.

Another potential limitation of this study lies in the use of both objective and subjective measures of social background to formulate social class groups. While relying solely on self-identification can miss nuances of economic and cultural capital, objective indicators like occupation may not capture the full picture of an individual's social experience. For future research, a model like Savage et al. (2013) could provide a valuable framework. Their nine-class typology, informed by the Great British Class Survey, offers a more nuanced understanding of social class by incorporating both objective and subjective elements. This could serve as a springboard for further exploration using Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus. By building upon a multi-dimensional model like Savage et al.'s, researchers could gain a richer understanding of social class and its relationship to subjective class identification, ultimately leading to more robust and valid research findings. For example, Savage et al. (2013) propose an alternative model that sheds light on how cultural and social boundaries operate in contemporary Britain. The nine-class model offers a significant advancement for research in social stratification, particularly when exploring the intersection of cultural practices and social class. This multidimensional

approach holds great promise for conservatoire research, a field where understanding the cultural hegemony of classical music is crucial. The nine-class model could allow researchers to move beyond the limitations of a tripartite working-middle-upper class model. By accounting for factors like cultural consumption and social networks, the model can help explain how access to and participation in classical music are shaped by different backgrounds and how research can better bring together the subjective and objective understandings of social class.

I also have to acknowledge that my own background and positionality may have influenced the research direction in certain areas, possibly generating directions of travel which have been instigated through my own lived experiences. As I have mentioned in earlier chapters, I am both working-class and state schooled educated and was also educated at a UK music conservatoire. While acknowledging this potential bias, I have followed a rigorous reflexive journey as outlined in the methodology to ensure the data in this thesis is portrayed in the most accurate of accounts.

Finally, this research emphasises the undeniable influence of social and educational background on navigating the pathway to a UK music conservatoire. However, a crucial element emerges that transcends these limitations: the unwavering passion and resilience demonstrated by the participants. While Bourdieu's tools provide valuable insights into the social factors shaping these experiences, a gap exists within his framework regarding the phenomenon of how young people from working class backgrounds both connect and excel within classical music. This highlights a need for further sociological exploration into the mechanisms fostering such resilience in the face of significant obstacles and warrants further research into the sociology behind consumption and practice. The emerging fields of technology and how cultural consumption is an obvious route here – something which needs to be further understood in the context of this field to build on Bourdieu and in some cases, help renew some of his key arguments on class and classical music.

6.3: Impact

Since starting this research, I have made successful attempts at generating impact with the key data addressed in the earlier chapters of the thesis. While ongoing

research has explored the elitist nature of UK music conservatoires (see for example, Scharff, 2015; 2017), my study builds on these insights, exploring further the recruitment practices and the gatekeeping role UK music conservatoires play within the classical music industry. This unique perspective has resonated with a broad audience since this PhD journey started, leading to publications in various media outlets (blogs, news articles, podcasts) and presentations at academic conferences. Notably, my findings on the racial diversity of students in UK conservatoires gained significant attention, particularly in the wake of George Floyd's death in 2020. This has since sparked crucial conversations at an institutional level across the sector, prompting conservatoires and bodies such as the ABRSM to address these issues with renewed urgency and commitment. This PhD acknowledges the rich body of prior research and builds upon it to offer a more nuanced perspective on the talent pipeline for UK music conservatoires.

6.4: Answering the Research Questions

As discussed in the background and rationale of this thesis, data from UK music conservatoires suggests a trend in admissions which favours applicants from middle class backgrounds – the dominant group being both white and privately educated. The literature reviewed highlighted the many factors which can impact individuals pursuing a conservatoire education, making the path to a classical music career even more challenging. It would be problematic to presume that everybody who attends a non-selective state school in the UK experiences their journey to a UK music conservatoire in the same way, but the core aim of this research was to find out more about these experiences with hope of answering the research questions:

- 1. To what extent (if any) does economic, social, and cultural capital influence the experiences of students embarking on their journeys to UK music conservatoires?**
- 2. In what ways do the conceptual frameworks proposed by Bourdieu contribute to understanding and interpreting the experiences of state school students navigating their pathways to UK music conservatoires?**

3. **Beyond the impact of economic, social, and cultural capital, are there any additional factors that play a crucial role in facilitating the successful journeys of state school students to UK music conservatoires?**

6.4.1: The Importance of Capital: an uneven playing field

The data in this thesis unveiled the intricate web of economic, social, and cultural capital that shapes a young person's journey towards a UK music conservatoire. Economic capital presented a significant hurdle, with participants facing limitations in affording quality instruments, private tuition, and audition expenses. This financial strain was seen at many times, to harness aspirations and placed barriers in key stages of their musical journeys'. Social capital also played a crucial role. Strong connections within the classical music world, through family networks or mentors could provide invaluable guidance, access to opportunities, and insider knowledge about the sector and the conservatoire application process. Conversely, a lack of such connections was seen to leave many of the working-class participants in this study feeling isolated and unsure of how to navigate the complex world of classical music education. Finally, cultural capital significantly influenced participants' experiences. Prior exposure to classical music through family background or access to enriching cultural experiences fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation for the genre and fostered a 'feel for the game'. This, in turn, created ease for some of the participants, the majority of which being those deriving from middle-class backgrounds.

It was clear from the participants' experiences that economic, social, and cultural capital do influence and impact upon the ways in which state school students experience their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. The role of capital, along with Bourdieu's wider conceptual framework show the significance of his framework(s) when understanding 'conservatoire readiness' for state schooled students. More so, Bourdieu's concepts prove to be useful in understanding the process of facilitating the talent pipeline to not only the conservatoire but also, the classical music industry in general. It is clear from the participants' experiences that economic, social, and

cultural capital do influence and impact upon the ways in which state school students experience their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. The role of capital accentuates the significance of Bourdieu when understanding 'conservatoire readiness' for state schooled students. More so, it is clear that Bourdieu's concept of capital (in all three forms) proves to be useful in understanding the process of facilitating the talent pipeline to not only the conservatoire but also, the classical music industry in general. Bourdieu's equation '[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice' served as a lens to help the research understand the power dynamics between individual predispositions, economic, social, and cultural resources, and institutional structures in shaping musical engagement and provision throughout the participants' journeys. The equation's application to the fields of classical music education also showcased the impact of musical habitus, cultural capital, and the sociocultural practices of classical music education on both an individual and collective level – ultimately addressing all the research questions, as demonstrated in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

On a practical level, it was clear throughout all the participants' experiences that economic capital was crucial to facilitating their musical journeys'. From private tuition to the cost of instruments all the way to funding auditions and exams – the financial element of the participants musical journeys' to a UK music conservatoire was unquestionably pivotal to their success. Unequal distribution of economic capital did however create diverse experiences. The data in this research emphasises the financial strain associated with a music conservatoire journey. From acquiring quality instruments to affording private tuition, audition fees, and exam costs, these expenses become substantial barriers for many of the participants in this research, regardless of their social background. For many, this created an uneven playing field, where students from wealthier backgrounds had greater resources to invest in their musical development. This limited access to essential resources that at times, hindered and significantly impacted experiences and on some occasions, overall success at conservatoire auditions. Examples from the data included the purchasing of high quality of instruments which were suitable for conservatoire study, opportunities for high-quality music lessons, and participation in junior conservatoire programmes, orchestras, external groups and/ or masterclasses. The financial burden to studying an instrument at a high level was also shown to discourage some participants from even considering a conservatoire as a place to pursue HE. Even when this hurdle was

overcome, some felt restricted to where they could study. For instance, some participants strategically avoided auditioning at London-based conservatoires due to the high cost of living associated with these institutions. This exemplifies how economic capital not only restricts access to resources but also influences decision-making throughout the conservatoire application process.

Limited economic capital was also shown to restrict access to opportunities that enhance competitiveness and musical skill and proficiency. Many of the participants did not have the same level of private instruction and/or exposure to professional musicians compared to their more economically advantaged peers. This created gaps in their skillsets and experiences with many of these experiences affecting their performance in auditions.

Other factors such as geographical location and generational differences (i.e. the participants ages) significantly influenced the level of access participants could acquire to these additional resources – something which conservatoires also fail to address in their APPs. All three forms of capital are not isolated forces, but rather interconnected threads that weave together the fabric of a young musician's journey. Economic capital provides the resources needed to invest in musical development, social capital offers access to networks and guidance, while cultural capital fosters a passion, understanding and sense of belonging in the classical music sector. Addressing these multifaceted aspects is crucial for creating a more equitable and accessible pathway to UK music conservatoires for talented young people from all backgrounds. However, whilst Bourdieu's notions of capital allow for us to contextualise the participants experiences, his theories fail to fully address the phenomenon of how participants were able to come to and continue to sustain their aspirations and render their resilience in pursuing classical music training.

6.4.2: Musical Habitus

It was evident that the participants musical habitus was deeply rooted in their upbringing and (early) socialisation, representing their dispositions, aspirations, and preferences towards pursuing higher level training in classical music performance. However, whilst Bourdieu allows us to understand the development of 'musical

habitus', his theories do not extend far enough to understand how certain groups, with no prior exposure to classical become accustomed and develop a passion for the practice itself. For example, how does Bourdieu help explain how a young person from a working-class background in the North East of England can develop such a passion and talent within classical music despite having no previous exposure or access to the right capital and habitus in order to initiate this? Whilst his notion of habitus *clivé* can start to make sense of this, his theories are sometimes left without further acknowledgement to the anomalies which exist. Addressing research question no.2, Bourdieu's theories and concepts have shown to make a significant contribution to interpreting the experiences of state-schooled musicians but there remain limitations. His framework may not fully address the underlying reasons or motivations behind these phenomena. In other words, whilst his concepts bring a wealth of new understanding to the experiences in this thesis, they do not always fully explain the "why" behind these observations.

Bourdieu himself identifies classical music as a highbrow cultural art form and it was in his work *Distinction* where Bourdieu (1979) wrote how "nothing more clearly affirms one's 'class', nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music" (Bourdieu 1979, p. 18). What does this then mean for the working-class participants who not only developed a taste for classical music but also, developed high levels of ability within the practice itself? To echo an earlier statement in this research, for Bourdieu (1979), classical music is a signifier of "legitimate" taste and closely associated with the middle-classes. It is something which he asserts as representing "the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, especially the social worlds, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art" (ibid, p. 11).

To build on Bourdieu, and in order to understand this further, I would like to draw on the recent study by Morel, Rezende and Oliveira (2022) who explore consumption and social distinction in music. In their research, they reference key arguments made by Bourdieu – ones which have also been made throughout this thesis but also, draw further on other scholars to understand musical taste and consumption. Starting with scholars such as Veblen (1980) and Simmel (1904), Morel, Rezende and Oliveira (2022) introduce the concept of "trickle-down consumption" which they state, "explain how symbols of high-class status became desirable among lower classes seeking

social ascension” (Veblen, 1980 and Simmel, 1904 in Morel, Rezende and Oliveira, 2022, p. 363). For some of the participants in this thesis, they had described how despite deriving from non-musical backgrounds, their parents viewed classical music as a hobby to improve their upwards social mobility given its highbrow status and associations with the middle and upper-middle class groups. This is similar to the findings outlined in earlier chapters by Bennett, Lutz and Jayaram (2012) who find comparisons in parenting strategies within education between working-class and middle-class parents. For some participants in this PhD, they came to music through exposure in primary school, instruments in their family home and sometimes, through technology and media (or a mixture). Morel, Rezende and Oliveira (2022) go on to write how “technological changes that boosted and expanded the potential for digital access led to greater and more complete proliferation of information” and as a result, led to a new understanding of cultural capital (Morel, Rezende and Oliveira, 2022, p. 363). We are now surrounded by access to a multitude of musical genres through online platforms and digital technologies, and accessing classical music solely through the concert hall is no longer required to gain exposure to this art form. One working-class participant had uncovered a piano in their grandparent’s home which initially instigated their curiosity for learning the instrument. This was propelled by watching the *BBC Young Musician of the Year* which further inspired them. However, despite the diverse paths that led the participants to pursuing training in classical music, it was their fierce commitment and resilience in pursuing their passions which truly stood out within from their experiences, particularly when encountering challenges arising from their limited capitals and resources. This research thus resonates deeply with the findings outlined earlier by Reay et al. (2009) and shares similarities with the role resilience plays amongst working class students in elite HE. While factors such as support from parents, private instrumental teachers, and exposure to ensembles and orchestras undoubtedly facilitated musical development for many participants in this research, it was resilience that emerged as the unifying force shaping their musical habitus, regardless of their social class.

According to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, the limited educational aspirations within the working-class habitus contribute to the perpetuation of educational inequalities, including those relating to aspirations (see Bourdieu, 1977; 1984). For this research, this would therefore mean that those from working-class backgrounds

would more than likely have fewer aspirations to pursue training in a highly stratified art form such as classical music given their lack of capital, resources and reinforced through their working-class habitus – ultimately impacting the development of their musical habitus. However, for many in this research, this was not the case. To address this issue, Jaeger (2009) explains how Bourdieu proposes that in order to break the cycle of reproduction, this requires parents to possess and actively instil cultural capital to their children, enabling them to convert this capital into educational success (see for example Jaeger, 2009). For example, this was very much the case for Laura, a working-class pianist from the North-West of England. Despite originating from a traditional working-class background and having limited economic and social capital, Laura evidenced notable levels of cultural capital, nurtured by her mother's influence in her musical instruction in her early years. In turn, this gave Laura more determination to succeed and fulfil her aspiration of studying classical music at a conservatoire. Could this be an example of breaking the cycle of reproduction? Many of the working-class participants primarily developed their cultural capital through private instrumental lessons. This instilled a strong foundation within the practice room environment, but limitations sometimes existed beyond those walls. Entering the conservatoire, a world vastly different from their individual practice spaces, sent many participants into disarray. This shift in environment triggered a change in their musical habitus, contributing to the classic feeling of being a 'fish out of water'.

It was also evident that throughout their training and progressing through the years leading up to their auditions that many participants began to see a shift in their attitudes towards their musical training. This was when they realised that this was something they no longer wanted to do but instead, had to do. Many described music at this point as a way of being, something which was now part of their identities. As explored in the theme of 'becoming serious' within previous chapters, the research pinpoints specific moments in the participants' journeys where their relationship with music shifted. These moments marked a transition from music being a hobby to a career aspiration. This passion and desire was also seen to alter their habitus. The field of classical music education itself, encompassing the social and organisational structures that define its norms, values, and practices was seen to further impact their experiences. For some, this resulted in a divided habitus, otherwise known as habitus clivé. This became more evident the more the participants progressed through their

musical training and became more apparent when the participants entered the conservatoire for their auditions. Upon reaching post-16 education, the majority of participants had developed high levels of skill and proficiency on their instrument. As a result, they were accustomed to many of the practices which classical music perpetuates. This was particularly interesting to see during the auditions period. Some were able to navigate their divided habitus whilst others were thrown into a state of culture shock. As noted throughout the experiences, the auditions reinforced many of the elitist practices which classical music brings with it – from the grand architecture of the buildings to the attitudes of the staff and students. It was clear that throughout the auditions that participants further encountered the expectations, standards, and pedagogical approaches that were required of them. For example, conservatoires, along with the individuals who occupy positions of authority within these institutions were seen to collectively define the boundaries and expectations of the classical canon – the wider field in which conservatoires play a gatekeeping position to the wider industry. In this context, Bourdieusian insights highlight the many inequalities which exist within the field of classical music education – again, addressing research questions no.1 and 2. Participants who lacked certain capitals, experiences, and exposure to these environments prior to auditioning were less likely to have their ‘practices’ valued during the conservatoire auditions. Again, the relevance of Bourdieu’s equation here, ‘[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice’ serves as a valuable tool for understanding state schooled students journeys to a conservatoire. It has allowed this research to examine the factors which shape engagement within the field of classical music education and further highlights the importance of recognising and addressing the inequalities that are (re)produced through the classical canon.

6.4.3: The Role of the Parent and Instrumental Teacher

Despite their varied economic, cultural, and social backgrounds, all participants in this study encountered challenges in navigating their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. For some, the constraints of limited economic capital restricted access to quality musical instruments and impacted on their ability to afford the costs of learning an instrument. Others faced the hurdle of lacking connections within the classical music world or grappling with the absence of prior exposure to the classical music canon – something others had the luxury of through their parents and the

reproduction of the cultural code (Wright, 2015). This was also demonstrated through having access to good, quality music teachers outside of the state-school environment.

Throughout their journeys, the support of parents and extended family played a crucial role in many of the participants' overall success. It was clear that even when participants described their parents as lacking certain capitals, it was through them becoming involved and engaged which at times, took them on the journey of navigating the pipeline to the conservatoire. As a result of them being more engaged, parents thus become more involved (and vice versa). Whilst increased parental support was evident for most participants by the time they reached conservatoire auditions, even for those with no prior musical knowledge, social background influenced its nature. Middle-class participants' parents often felt more comfortable navigating their children's musical journeys, whereas working-class parents, lacking economic capital, cultural capital, and general knowledge of the classical music world, found themselves in unfamiliar territory. These working-class participants often became the primary source of information about this space for their parents.

The role of the parent along with the role of private one-to-one instrumental teachers was vital for all participants in succeeding at their auditions. The role of the instrumental teacher relationship mediated the pedagogical practices required of them to fulfil the demands of the conservatoire and contributed to their positioning within the wider field. When a participant claimed to have a good, well connected instrumental teacher, they were more likely to demonstrate more of a sense belonging to the field of classical music throughout their lived experiences. However, access to the instrumental teacher and the quality of teaching were factors which further impacted participants' experiences. For some, cost was an issue. For others, the quality (or lack of) was another.

Many of the middle-class participants, often benefiting from their parents' social capital, leveraged these connections to secure high-quality instrumental teachers. Conversely, working-class participants often lacked access to such established networks. They relied on alternative, sometimes less optimal, methods for finding instrumental teachers. These included music shops, media sources promoting

local instructors, or even the state school system. This highlights the stark inequalities in accessing quality musical instruction – a crucial foundation for success in the competitive world of classical music. The reliance on alternative methods was shown to lead to a disparity in the level of training received by working-class musicians compared to their middle-class peers. This reinforces the notion that social capital plays a significant role in shaping musical trajectories, potentially influencing career aspirations and ultimately impacting the landscape of UK music conservatoires – reinforcing many of Bourdieu’s key concepts.

It was also clear that the relationship between the participants’ parents and the private instrumental teacher was one which was more productive than the overall relationship parents had with teachers in the wider state-school community. In return, it was the private music teacher who played a significant role in helping to inform the participants’ parents on the various aspects of the journey to a conservatoire – something many working-class participants had stated as important given their lack of guidance and instruction in the state-school environment.

6.5: Final thoughts

Rather remarkably, despite the challenges all the participants faced, all of those involved in this research secured offers to study at a UK music conservatoire. In a sense, they defied their own social backgrounds, echoing Bourdieu’s notion of individuals transcending their predetermined social trajectory as outlined in his theory of *habitus clivé* (see Bourdieu, 2007). It was also interesting to see how so many participants faced criticism from schoolmates, peers, and even parents and teachers in their pursuit of a classical music education, yet despite this, it was their passion and love for their instrument which further fuelled and accelerated their determination and resilience to succeed – a phenomena this research hopes to continue to be investigated. In fact, in some cases, the more they were discouraged from pursuing a career in classical music, the stronger their aspiration became – or as some put it, “proving others wrong”. The participants’ journeys to the conservatoire were shaped by their unique starting points and the varying levels of capital they possessed from the earliest stages of their life. Interestingly, some of these experiences are not

necessarily addressed in the widening participation and access agendas of most UK music conservatoires. And even when acknowledged, there is little evidence of effective institutional-level strategies to overcome such challenges to demonstrate how they will action this to yield impact.

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by state-schooled musicians, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, navigating their journeys to a UK music conservatoire. The narrative mirrors Gregson's (2003) insightful quote regarding the "blame game" within the classical music ecosystem:

*“Orchestras will say, ‘We can only take what the conservatoires give us’
Conservatoires will say, ‘We can only take what the schools give us’
Schools will say, ‘We could do more but we need more funding’
Government will say, ‘We are funding music and giving money for these reasons so sort it out’”*
(Gregson, 2003 in Burt-Perkins and Mills, 2009, p.832)

Despite over two decades passing since the above statement, similar arguments persist regarding who holds responsibility for widening the classical music talent pipeline. However, this thesis underscores the need for strategic and collaborative approaches to overcome these deeply-rooted obstacles faced by underrepresented groups. The research revealed the significant challenges faced by state-schooled and working-class musicians on their journeys to conservatoires. Even with external support, these challenges remained formidable. Yet, the participants in this study demonstrated remarkable resilience in overcoming them. We must strive towards a future where one's starting point in life does not dictate their musical destiny. This thesis serves as a call to action for a more equitable and inclusive classical music world. It appears to still be a world where social class and educational background is still more relevant in facilitating musical journeys' than the passion, talent, and dedication manifested by young, gifted, and talented musicians.

If we are to keep classical music alive and ensure our concert halls are filled with diverse people both on and off the stage, then it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure where a person starts in life, does not dictate where they end up.

Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance

08/01/2021

Scott Caizley

Dear Scott

Bravo Maestros: A Bourdieusian exploration on the experiences of state-schooled conservatoire graduates

Thank you for submitting your Minimal Risk Self-Registration Form. This letter acknowledges confirmation of your registration; your registration confirmation reference number is MRSP-20/21-21831

IMPORTANT CORONAVIRUS UPDATE: In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the College Research Ethics Committee has temporarily suspended all primary data collection involving face to face participant interactions, unless the data collection fall under one of the exemptions and fulfils the criteria outlined by CREC at the link below:

<https://internal.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/ethics/applications/COVID-19-Update-for-Researchers>

Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance for this project is granted. However, the clearance outlined in the attached letter is contingent on your adherence to the latest College measures when conducting your research. Please do not commence data collection until you have carefully reviewed the update and made any necessary project changes.

Ethical clearance is granted for a period of **three years** from today's date and you may now commence data collection. However, it is important that you have read through the information provided below before commencing data collection:

As the Minimal Risk Registration Process is based on self-registration, your form has not been reviewed by the College Research Ethics Committee. It is therefore your responsibility to ensure that your project adheres to the [Minimal Risk Guiding Principles](#) and the agreed protocol does not fall outside of the criteria for Minimal Risk Registration. Your project may be subject to audit by the College Research Ethics Committee and any instances in which the registration process is deemed to have been used inappropriately will be handled as a breach of good practice and investigated accordingly.

Record Keeping:

Please be sure to keep a record of your registration number and include it in any materials associated with this research. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that any other permissions or approvals (i.e. R&D, gatekeepers, etc.) relevant to their research are in place, prior to conducting the research.

In addition, you are expected to keep records of your process of informed consent and the dates and relevant details of research covered by this application. For example, depending on the type of research that you are doing, you might keep:

- A record of all data collected and all mechanisms of disseminated results.
- Documentation of your informed consent process. This may include written information sheets or in cases where it is not appropriate to provide written information, the verbal script, or introductory material provided at the start of an online survey.
Please note: For projects involving the use of an Information Sheet and Consent Form for recruitment purposes, please ensure that you use the KCL GDPR compliant [Information Sheet & Consent Form Templates](#)
- Where appropriate, records of consent, e.g. copies of signed consent forms or emails where participants agree to be interviewed.

Audit:

You may be selected for an audit, to see how researchers are implementing this process. If audited, you and your Supervisor will be asked to attend a short meeting where you will be expected to explain how your research meets the eligibility criteria of the minimal risk process and how the project abides by the general principles of ethical research. In particular, you will be expected to provide a general summary of your review of the possible risks involved in your research, as well as to provide basic research records (as above in Record Keeping) and to describe the process by which participants agreed to participate in your research.

Remember that if you at any point have any questions about the ethical conduct of your research, or believe you may have gained the incorrect level of ethical clearance, please contact your supervisor or the Research Ethics Office.

Data Protection Registration

If you indicated in your minimal risk registration form that personal data would be processed as part of this research project, this letter also confirms that you have also met your requirements for registering this processing activity with King's College London in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

More information about how the GDPR affects researchers can be found here: <https://internal.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/Research-Governance/how-does-GDPR-affect-research/How-does-GDPR-affect-research>

Appendix B: Overview of participants

Pseudonym	Instrument	First gen in HE	Hometown	Decade of conservatoire entry	Gender	Ethnicity	Class
Curtis	Brass	Yes	Greater London	1990s	Male	Black	WC
Alice	Flute	No	London	1990s	Female	White	MC
Megan	Voice	No	Yorkshire	1990s	Female	White	WC
Olivia	Piano	No	South East	1990s	Female	White	MC
Holly	Voice	No	North West England	1990s	Female	White	MC
Liam	Piano	Yes	South West	2000s	Male	White	WC
Laura	Piano	Yes	North West England	2000s	Female	White	WC
Katie	Brass	Yes	East England	2000s	Female	White	MC
Chris	Flautist/ Composition	No	London	2000s	Male	White	WC
Sam	Brass	Yes	West Midlands	2010s	Male	Black	WC
Richard	Brass	Yes	North East	2010s	Male	White	WC
Michaela	Trombone	Yes	Yorkshire	2010s	Female	White	MC
Fred	Piano	Yes	Yorkshire	2010s	Male	White	WC
Zachary	Violin	Yes	South East/ London	2010s	Male	White	WC
Victoria	Conducting/ Composer	No	South East	2010s	Female	White	MC
Eric	Piano	Yes	South East	2010s	Male	White	WC
Nicola	Voice	Yes	North East	2010s	Female	White	WC
Alex	Saxophone	No	South West	2010s	Male	White	WC
Lucy	Vocal	No	South East	2010s	Female	White	MC
Nina	Saxophone/ Flute	Yes	East Midlands	2010s	Female	White	MC
Jessica	Cello	Yes	South East	2020	Female	White	WC

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