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Classical Music Education in Thailand: Preparing Musicians for a Field with Too Few Openings

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, classical music education in Thai higher education has expanded substantially, with universities and specialist conservatoires producing increasing numbers of graduates trained in Western classical performance. This growth raises a structural question about the relationship between educational supply and the availability of conventional full-time performance employment, and about how higher education can better prepare graduates for sustainable careers. Drawing on a convergent mixed-methods design, this study combines graduation records for Bachelor and Master of Music students specialising in Western classical performance at seven Thai music faculties, publicly announced permanent orchestral and institutional vacancies, and an alumni career-tracking survey conducted in 2024. Findings indicate an average of approximately 360 classical performance graduates per year against 8–12 permanent openings nationwide, or roughly 2.8 openings per 100 graduates. Survey findings show that private teaching and studio work form the largest reported career pathway, followed by freelance and commercial performance, while full-time orchestral employment represents only a small proportion of reported pathways. These findings suggest that conventional performance employment can absorb only a limited proportion of graduates, making portfolio careers increasingly important. The paper proposes curriculum reform in music entrepreneurship and business literacy, pedagogical competence, technological and multi-genre adaptability, and career self-management. The central argument is not that classical performance training should be abandoned, but that it should be embedded within a broader employability framework reflecting contemporary music work in Thailand.

Keywords: Classical Music Education; Higher Education Reform; Portfolio Career; Music Entrepreneurship; Graduate Employability