

Where music can take you

Almost nobody who studies music ends up a concert soloist, and almost nobody who studies music regrets it. The honest map: the jobs that exist, what each involves, and what to do next.

PLAYING AND SINGING

Orchestral player	Salaried, audition-based, a fixed seat. Few posts, many applicants.
Freelance player	The commonest professional life — sessions, shows, deputising, teaching.
Chamber musician	A group you build and run yourselves. Part artist, part small business.
Pit and theatre	Musicals and opera: steady runs, hard reading, one rehearsal.
Session work	To a click, in tune, first take. Reading is the whole job.
Defence force band	One of the few full-time playing jobs advertised in Australia.

WRITING AND MAKING

Composer	Commissions, almost always alongside teaching or another job.
Screen and games	Deadlines in days, notes from a director, everything to picture.
Arranger	Making other people's music playable by a given group.
Producer	Shaping a recording: ears, software and people skills.
Engraver, editor	Scores and parts prepared for publication. Precise, in demand.
Songwriter	Own act or written for others — royalties and co-writes.

TEACHING AND LEADING

Instrumental teacher	The most reliable music income there is, and a craft of its own.
Classroom teacher	A teaching degree, a salary, a whole school's music.
Conductor	Score study, rehearsal technique, years of asking to be let in front.
Répétiteur	The pianist who runs opera rehearsals. Reading at the highest level.
Music therapist	Clinical work, postgraduate. Music for someone else's benefit.

AROUND THE MUSIC

Sound engineer	Live or studio. Technical training, unsociable hours, work everywhere.
Management	Programming, contracts, tours, budgets. Rare and valuable skills.
Librarian	Parts marked, bowed and on the stands before rehearsal one.
Instrument trade	Making, repair, restoration, retail — an apprenticeship, not a degree.
Broadcast, writing	Radio, programme notes, criticism, publishing.

WHAT TRANSFERS

Preparing to a date. A recital is a project delivered on a fixed day.

Working under eyes. Interviews, presentations, theatre — a practised skill.

Taking correction. Weekly feedback, acted on. Rare in any twenty-year-old.

Listening properly. Detail, balance, what is not being said.

TO GO FURTHER

Keep grades moving. Grade 8 or a diploma is the usual audition entry point.

Play in something larger. Panels look for ensemble experience.

Theory and aural. These are the gate on most courses, not the playing.

Record yourself. Applications want video before they want you in the room.

THE HONEST PART

There are more good players than paid seats, and most professionals hold several roles at once. That is the shape of the industry, not failure.

You also need not choose. Doctors, engineers and tradespeople fill amateur orchestras every week of the year.

Deciding not to do it professionally is not the same as stopping.