

Introduction:

Being a Musician

A career course led by David Finckel

Dear Musician,

This is not a conventional career course. We will observe the human qualities, habits and skills of successful musicians, and attempt to discover and nurture those attributes within ourselves. *Being a Musician* is a course about each and every one who reads it, and I hope to inspire you and shine a positive light on the music industry of today and tomorrow.

The fact that truly effective music career courses seem to be urgently needed speaks volumes about the difficulty of mounting such courses intelligently. If it were easy to do, they would be all over the place, producing great results. But offering any course, program or even a single lecture that promises young musicians better careers is walking out on a huge limb, and I'd like to mention some reasons why:

1. The industry has changed vastly in the last 25 years. Young musicians used to go from conservatories into the rosters of managers, sign with record labels, or join orchestras promising security. The recording industry has fragmented into many labels small and large that don't pay artists for their recordings. In terms of managers, there are only a handful that command across-the-board respect. Many of the major ones are commercialized and rocked with scandal, and boutique managers have very small and exclusive artist lists.
2. There's virtually no conventional media left for classical music: No TV, increasingly little worth reading in newspapers, sketchy content online, a dearth of respectable editors and authorities, and a shrinking number of educated music critics. And visible classical music institutions, like Steinway, Patelson's, and Tower Records, are disappearing from the centers of major cities like New York. What's left to us is largely social media.
3. It's not going to work for the student like it did for the teacher: I, for example, made my career in a different age, and what helped me is not necessarily going to be there for young musicians today. I had Deutsche Grammophon, the NEA, for example.
4. The arts are not fair: We all know that diligence plus hard work and passion does not turn everyone into a successful artist, and that even if someone is a true artist, there's no guarantee that their work will appeal to and resonate with enough public to sustain their careers.
5. Every career is made differently: We could interview one hundred commercially successful musicians, but they are not going to tell the same stories. How many careers

were launched by being in the right place at the right time? No one can teach students how to be lucky, to meet the right person, to have someone in their audience who comes forward to help them.

6. Students are often better informed about today's world than their seniors. Only those who spend all day keeping up with current events, technology, popular culture and social media, and the arts in general, are really equipped to say what's going on out there. I'm not one of those people: I have multiple performing and programming obligations and I rely on a young staff of multiple backgrounds to inform me and help communicate my artistic products to the world.

My thinking about this course focuses on what schools today can possibly promise their graduates. I do think there is a lot we can and should give them, but it is more in the area of self-development: Becoming a musician and the kind of person whose knowledge, experience and character make them stand out in a crowded field. How students prioritize their time, select their experiences, who influences them, and what happens to them over the next years is either going to turn them into desirable artistic commodities or not.

I am concerned about advising on careers before ensuring that students are developing into interesting and vital musicians. All the letter-writing, networking, photo sessions, demo recordings and social media in the world are not going to help if a person is not an artist who generates curiosity and excitement about and through their work. Musicians today need artistic vision, inspiration, and the desire and ability to contribute to a community in a valuable ways.

I believe that the best contribution I can make in the career area would be to concentrate on what I believe to be the most important requirement for a genuine career, which is a glowing artistic core in each individual. Helping students to find that core, to nurture and inspire it, is something I think we can try to do for our students. I think our goal should be to turn our students into the most engaging, energetic, caring, fascinating, curious and experienced artists we can, so that when they put themselves forward, or when that lucky moment comes, they rise to the top.

Course Overview

I. Who Am I?

During our first session, we will explore the most fundamental questions about a life in music: What is it that compels me to be a musician? How did I get to where I am? What are my dreams, and are they attainable? How can my other interests and skills play a part? How do others see me, and how do I want them to see me? Am I equipped to do what I want? Are influential people prepared to stand behind me, and why? How much do I really know about the world, and the music industry? Have I been well-guided and inspired, and by whom? Answering these questions will undoubtedly lead to a firmer footing in the shaky and turbulent world of classical music in the 21st century.

II. What is an Artist?

In the second presentation, I will relate the fascinating stories three great artists. One can find inspiration and guidance in each of their lives, and perhaps even choose a path to being an artist based on a story which resonates

in a personal way. When looking at the world's great artists, few can be found who made their careers in the same way, but we will identify common traits among them which made their work – whether it came to be appreciated in their lifetimes or not – universally acclaimed. We will talk about the balance of traditional and innovative, about conforming or being provocative, and most of all, how to ensure that whatever emerges from the artist is genuinely from the heart.

III. Learning

What does a musician need to learn, and how are you going to do it? Does it come from institutions, colleagues, teachers, study, the internet, or all of the above? How should you handle conflicting opinions? Who can be trusted to guide your musical development, and how do you find them? Can we learn anything from competitions? What can we learn from successes and failures? Is there a point where you should stop taking lessons? How do we know if we should change teachers or schools? Are we really learning from our colleagues, and are we being well-influenced? These are tough questions that have many possible answers, and in this session we'll explore as many options as possible.

IV. Performing

As musicians, we are measured by our performances, like it or not. In this session we will talk about every element that goes into making a successful performance, covering aspects these topics ranging way beyond playing in tune and dressing nicely. Audience engagement on a continuing basis, for the right reasons, is the only sure way to a long and healthy career, and we will explore the many facets of a successful public performance, from the innermost feelings of the performer to the sensation of the listener, and the challenge of connecting them in meaningful and lasting ways. How do you know how what the audience is really hearing and thinking? How does programming affect a performance, and the audience's engagement? We'll also address conventional challenges of stage fright, memorization, dealing with criticism from colleagues and the press, and most importantly, proper preparation to play in public.

V. Relationships

One is not in the business of music alone. We rarely make music all by ourselves, and even when we do, we still must build personal bridges to our listeners. Performances only can't build a successful and happy career, but the opportunities as a musician to forge rewarding and meaningful relationships are practically endless. A busy, successful musician interacts almost constantly with the public, with colleagues, mentors, the press, and professionals in the industry. But are your colleagues also your competitors? How do we manage our musical relationships? Are you the type to handle those interactions with skill, or might you need some help? Come to this session to find out, and to learn about musicians whose relationships have become essential components of their thriving careers.

VI. Working

At day's end, we all hope for the same thing: the phone rings with someone offering us a chance to do what we were born and trained for. How can we make that happen? In this day and age, will someone make our career for us or must we make our own? How many kinds of careers are there? For some it's to perform, and for others it might be to teach, present or a combination of all three. To be able to work even a bit is a valuable opportunity, and to work a lot is to truly thrive. What do presenters, institutions and colleagues really need from us? How can we please them and secure a re-engagement – the golden nugget of a successful career? What if you don't have an entrepreneurial instinct, or are simply shy? How do you push yourself without being obnoxious? How do all the subjects we've discussed in the past five sessions add up to providing us the tools to make a career? Tricky questions, but an in-depth discussion will hopefully prove enlightening and instill confidence in all.