

Lecture V: Relationships

Today's talk is about your relationships – professional, personal, institutional, casual, formal, long term and short term – and how they can affect and develop your careers, all for the better.

We are not in the business of music alone. One might say that half your friends are your colleagues, and the other half your competitors, but might they all be both? It's safe to say that performances alone cannot possibly build a successful and happy life in music. We rarely make music all by ourselves, and even if we do, we still must build personal bridges to our listeners. The wonderful opportunities in a musical career to build 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. Are you the type to handle those interactions with skill, or might you need some help?

The word relationship implies an association which evolves. In many cases, it will be up to you to nurture and develop these relationships. How you handle them makes all the difference, and we'll get into that in detail.

Here is a list of the people with whom any of us could potentially interact with during the course of a career in music. The list runs a kind of circle, beginning and ending with family, so there is some sequential sense to it:

Family I: Parents and siblings

Friends

Teachers

Fellow students

Advocates

Advisors

Enablers

Sources of information

Connectors

Mentors

Sponsors

Collaborators

Representatives

Concert presenters

Local staff

Board of Directors

Donors

Press

Institutions

The public

Family II: Spouses and children

So let's jump in:

Family I: Parents and siblings

Your parents and siblings are your first relationships, and yes, they can certainly have an effect on your career, even if it is coming down the road. From what I have seen, parents can be of two minds on the idea of a musical career: they either get it or they don't. Your well-being is their chief concern. They need reassurance that you are OK, especially if they don't understand why or how you are making a life in music. Because they are concerned for you, they are less tolerant of your taking risks. But they are likely your best and possibly only source of unqualified personal support. Don't burn bridges with them; stick by your convictions until they see your logic. You can share your highest and lowest ups and downs with them. They will be your toughest but likely your most forgiving critics. They may interfere, derail and jeopardize. You have to know when and how to stop them and assert your independence. They can be over-the-top career Moms. Many of them want to see you do what they could not. They can instill either false confidence or unnecessary fear. You may eventually befriend surrogate parents who take on the role of mentors, and I'll talk about them later.

Siblings

I don't have siblings, but have a lot of close musician friends who do. From my observation, my friends' siblings are either in awe of them or think they are crazy. Remember they are in the same boat as you genetically and you are bonded by that whether you like it or not. On some level they understand you more completely than either of your parents. You will share responsibility for your parents as you age with them. They are usually good advisors who don't hold back, and they are not afraid to be honest. They will be the first to come to your aid if your parents can't, and even then, they will likely be the first responders. Keep them, you'll need them.

Friends

Remember that the music world is small and can be easily shut off from the rest of life. Therefore it's good to have a diversity of friends as your career expands. It's extremely healthy to be able to talk about things other than music, and a wide range of friends is your best source of fresh perspectives on the world and even on you. To be a citizen of the world today is more important than ever, and I don't mean just on social media. Real friends, new friends, amazing friends will deepen you as an artist, which is something I've talked about all year. Go find them, make friends easily, and try to sustain the relationships you feel are really paying off for you personally, intellectually and artistically.

Teachers

The way you interact with your teachers past and present changes over time, but the basic relationship always seems to stick, like magic: No matter how old or accomplished you become, your teacher is somehow always your teacher. My grown students still treat me like I'm their

teacher, and it drives me a little crazy. But I know how they feel, and I'm partially to blame. I will never hold back telling a former student if I think they are making a mistake, musically or otherwise.

What teachers have that you don't is more experience and wider perspective, not necessarily more talent or ability. They are trained in the art of helping and problem-solving, and they've heard a lot of people who can play and who can't. It all adds up to something very valuable, and if you know how to use it, you can benefit enormously.

It's important that you figure out, after a certain number of hours with your teachers, where they are coming from. This will affect the relationship to your advantage, setting the relationship parameters so that you benefit the most.

Teachers often teach what they know they do well. If what they do well is what you need, great. If not – say you have sloppy technique and the teacher is disorganized – or if you need artistic input but the teacher is more a clinician – then you should consider a change.

I recommend up-front mutual disclosures at the beginning of a relationship. You tell them what you want, they tell you what you need, and you try to agree.

If you know what to expect from a teacher, you can make quicker progress. For example, I like to follow markings in the score. My students waste much less of my time, and theirs, if they come to a lesson having learned the composer's markings and are executing them.

Your teacher is not necessarily your parent, psychiatrist or even your friend. What they should be are your collaborators to improve your playing and artistry. They may or may not be able to advise you strategically, either musically, personally or professionally. They may or may not be able to help your career.

You should monitor the amount of personal relationship you develop with a teacher. You will know from your teacher's style if they are comfortable with you personally. If they don't seem to invite you to be their personal friend, don't try to go there. If they do, go there only if you want to.

The idea of having a good teacher is not to be dependent on them, but rather the opposite. At least they should teach you how to teach yourselves. We may have all known people who became overly dependent on their teachers. You can learn from them, perhaps throughout your career, but you should eventually not be dependent on them. I believe the best teachers don't want that.

There will come a time when your teacher will likely feel the time has come to push you out of the nest. They will say "I've taught you all I know or can" or "It's time you learned from someone else with different perspectives". Sense and respect this decision and make it easy for both of you to make the transition. It's in the best interest of your career, and your ongoing relationship.

Fellow students

These are some of your most valuable relationships through which you can potentially learn as much as from your teachers. In the future, your fellow students may become your colleagues or competitors or both. They are the easiest sources of information, from gossip to technical insights, musical and personal advice. It's likely that everything you do can be done better by this or that fellow student if you look around carefully enough, but remember it's unlikely that everything can be done better by one of them. If you foster open, trusting relationships with your fellow students, they will be willing to help you with your needs in all areas.

They are your shipmates. You are all in the same boat, trying to graduate and become a professional musician. They can be full of practical and creative advice and ideas. You can argue with them like you can't with your teacher, family or friends. Do not overlook their ability to help you become deeper artists.

Advocates

Your advocates are people who believe in what you do and can talk about it.

They are not necessarily your fellow students, teachers or mentors, or even your friends. They may have little or no vested interest in promoting you.

But if you have advocates you need to nourish those relationships. They see and sense your value. Your work speaks to them and they understand it. And they are willing to tell people about it, usually without your asking them to. You never know what one of them may say or do that can change your life. You likely have no idea of or control over what they say or who they talk to. They are your wild cards. If you can figure out what you did that impressed them, do it twice as much and make sure they know about it. Keep them informed of your activities. Don't obligate them. Keep their advocacy voluntary – it will be more genuine. Be consistent. Make it possible for them to say to people "I told you so". Don't let them down. Be grateful but not overly so. Thank them in a genuine way. Let them know the results of their advocacy.

Advisors

Advisors are people you go to in order to ask specific questions, either musical or career related. They are not necessarily your advocates, friends, mentors, teachers or colleagues. You pick your advisors. Be incredibly respectful when you ask for their time. Pick them because they know what they are talking about. You can have as many as you want and need. Don't bother anyone chronically. Remember that when they get really good at it, they call themselves consultants and charge astronomical fees. Don't push them there. I would recommend not talking to many advisors about the same subject – your problems and challenges could become easy gossip. When you are with them, present your situation clearly and succinctly. Don't go on and on about your problems. Don't complain about the industry. Don't look for therapy. Best is to show that, given your situation, you have come up with several options, and what might be the pros and cons of each? That you have already done some constructive and creative thinking, taken it as far as you can, will make them feel you are not just dumping problems in their laps. And remember that, if you choose not to follow your

advisor's suggestions, there may be consequences. Think strategically in order to protect your reputation.

Enablers

Enablers are people who have the influence or authority to make something possible. They are sometimes just doing you a favor, or they choose you, as part of their job, to receive an opportunity. They may be, for example: the school official who gets you a scholarship; a family member you pays for your travel to study or compete; someone who loans you an instrument; someone who teaches you French. If you are gracious, earnest and determined, you can gain their respect for simply asking. You may get a "no" now, but "yes" down the road. You never know without trying.

Sources of information

Ask, ask, ask. How do you keep your violin sounding so good? Where did you get that great-looking tuxedo? How much do you pay for your instrument insurance? How did you get that concert date? Do you know the Brahms sonatas really well, and what's the best recording? What's the best biography of Beethoven? Can you explain Schenker analysis to me over a coffee? Where can I find a good bow? Who tunes your piano? Who takes good publicity pictures? How does my web site look? All those who you ask should be chosen for good reasons. You must ask the people most qualified to answer, and you need to be the judge of that or seek them out through recommendations. And through their recommendations, you build your storehouse of useful knowledge and practical assets helpful to your career.

Connectors

Connectors are people who put you in touch with other people or institutions you need to accomplish things in your musical life. Often they are the ones who will make an introduction for you to speak to someone. They are very important relationships, even though they may be only temporary and used once.

Connectors are often not your teachers, advisors, or advocates. They are, however briefly, your friends, in that it is their knowledge of your needs, and the pleasantry of your time with them, that will make them want to make a call on your behalf, give you someone's name, steer you to the right place to get what you want.

There is no way to place a high enough value on the importance of these connectors. They can save you untold amounts of time and guesswork.

Also, they can also often double as advocates in that the people they recommend you speak to might not even pick up your call without having heard about you.

You can select your connectors and work on them proactively. Let's say you want to be in touch with Carnegie Hall, but have no contacts there. The first thing to think about is who among those you know does or might have some contact, and start there. "Do you know anyone who works at Carnegie Hall?" is a perfectly reasonable question and is not one that is threatening or

that would necessarily impose on someone. If the answer is yes, then the next question might be: "I'm trying to contact so-and-so, do you think your friend might be able to lead me there?" and so on. It's not that hard. People are usually willing to help, and it's often very easy for someone to just offer a name if not a phone number or e mail address. These days, usually a name and an institution is enough to track someone down.

A strong connector is often the only way you can get to meet someone completely out of your league. Let's say you want to meet the Queen of England and are determined to do it. I believe it's possible to do if you want, but you have to be savvy and use lots of connectors, working your way up, positioning yourself and creating a possibility along the way for some reason it will happen. I'm not sure that for any of you it's necessary for your musical careers to meet the Queen. But could it hurt?

It's an interesting idea to think about the possible connectors in your lives from another direction. Don't think about the people and institutions you want to make contact with, but rather think of your good or important or influential friends and make lists of places and people that you know they could connect you to. You might be surprised at what avenues open up that hadn't occurred to you before.

Mentors

Mentors are of course among the very most important people in your career. They can be artistic, strategic, personal or a combination of all.

They are by definition wise, thoughtful, experienced, and have your best interests at heart. They are people you trust and listen to very carefully.

Mentors are not necessarily your close friends or your teachers. They qualify as advisors but on a much broader scale, as your contact with them is ongoing. You keep them aware of where you are and what you are doing so that they can guide you.

Someone who agrees to be your mentor is someone who is interested in you, who respects your ability, judgment and determination, and expects and wants you to succeed.

A mentor can be someone you emulate, or simply someone whose opinion and perspective you trust in the highest degree. People usually don't have multiple mentors, as not many are qualified to guide a serious artist in a comprehensive way.

People who qualify as mentors may seem out of reach, but it never hurts to try. That you wish to place yourself in someone's hands is usually flattering, even if the answer is no. In other words, you can't really lose by asking. My advice is to shoot for the moon.

The late violinist Isaac Stern was a mentor to me and my wife. In the first place, we admired him tremendously as a musician, but he also exhibited the most extraordinary powers of persuasion when it came to leading arts institutions such as Carnegie Hall, and also raising funds for many other institutions, causes and the like. He was an incredibly influential teacher who was totally dedicated to the highest quality of music making. He had the clearest mind

when it came to business and could go to the heart of a complicated matter in seconds. He spoke eloquently about the importance of the arts, about human rights and dignity, and about the value of a civilized society. He kindled our desire to follow in his footsteps in the service of music, and at the moment we're doing the best we can. All told, he inspired us, encouraged us, scolded us once in a while, and his principles continue to guide us, as left us with many of them about right and wrong, what in our music industry is worth going to bat for, and what is garbage. And there are a lot of both.

Another great mentor for me was my teacher Rostropovich. That he was, in the opinion of most, the greatest cellist to have ever walked the planet would have been enough for me to identify him at least as an example to aspire to, but that he took the time with me not only to teach me cello but how to live life to the fullest, to find fun and good everywhere, to love and trust people abundantly, and to fight to the death for what you really believe in, made him a very special guiding force in my life. I know that many decisions I make today are informed, now mostly subconsciously, by the incredible mentoring influence these two great men had on me.

Sponsors

Sponsors are financial enablers. They pay or loan money either to you, or to someone or someplace that will do something you need.

Sponsors are different from enablers in that their sponsorship gives them something more tangible in return. Sometimes that's as simple as a tax deduction, but when it's done right, it also gives them the satisfaction of knowing that their money is working for them in a great way.

Raising money is an art: people who are good at it can reap huge salaries – they are called development directors. But you can learn to do it too. There are two very important things to remember about raising money. One is that people who are good at heart and have a lot of money need good causes to give to. If you think your project or your needs are really worthwhile, and if they will do you and possibly others much good, then don't be ashamed or afraid to ask for money. The worst you can hear is "no", but if you hear "yes" then the second most important thing about raising money is to remember to say "thank you". It's amazing how many forget to, but that is really, really important.

Collaborators

Collaborators can be musicians with whom you play, or friends or administrators who work together with you to mount a project. They are some of your most valuable relationships as you and they together are working towards the same goal, whether it's a great performance of a work or a great idea that you are bringing to fruition. Treat them as you would want them to treat you. You are equals in the process. Your reputation as an inspiring, flexible, capable collaborator is worth its weight in gold. Be prepared; don't waste your collaborator's time, no matter how good friends of yours they may be. When you work as a team, no matter how small, you are building your reputation as a useful musician. And that reputation can be stellar,

and put you ahead of other choices, if you are careful with and very respectful of your collaborators.

Representatives

If you are lucky someday you will have people who book you concerts, get you interviews in the media, or even assist you in the capacity of personal assistant. Even though they technically work for you, that doesn't mean they are candidates for abuse. People who work in arts administration deal daily with innumerable problems and obstacles. The best you can do for those who work for you is to supply them with a steady diet of inspiration and great ideas. Give them something great to talk about and to sell. Otherwise, their jobs are very unrewarding. It's up to you, not to them, to make your career. They can't work with nothing.

Concert presenters

Now we really come to the meat of this lecture. There is no group of people more essential to the careers of performers.

They are a very diverse bunch. Some old, some young. Some who know music and many who don't. Some really know artists, but many who only book artists because they are hounded by managers, or because they read a great review and believe it.

What to remember about presenters is that they are essentially gamblers. They commit to you with a contract that specifies date, fee, and often program, and then all they can do is hope that their public will buy tickets, that you will play well and make their listeners happy and keep them coming to the series concert after concert. So your job for them is to make them successful in what they do. If you get the chance of a re-engagement, nourish that. It's the golden nugget of the entertainment business. Many artists go somewhere and play once, but only the truly successful are invited back.

Local staff

While the concert presenter is the person who decides to book you and oversees your performance, the people who work under him or her are the ones you will interact with before, during and after your appearance. I'm talking about the people who pick you up at the airport, move chairs on stage, get you a sandwich, or record your concert. They may not seem essential to your career, but remember that you depend on them, and in this day and age, people in arts administration climb the ladder very quickly. The person who was the carpenter when you played there last could be the executive director the next time you show up. That's what former Metropolitan Opera CEO Joseph Volpe was. Or you could sell lemonade in front of the concert hall and wind up as artistic director and president. That's what happened to Robert Harth at the Aspen Music Festival and School.

Board of Directors

It's helpful for musicians to learn how a non-profit organization is structured. Most places that present you in concerts are non-profit, meaning that they don't exist to make money primarily,

and don't have stock holders or pay dividends. A non-profit can make money, but the money is to be used to support the organization and its operations.

Non-profits, sometimes called Not-for-Profits, are incorporated and have boards of directors. A board of directors is an either elected or appointed group that oversees the functioning of the organization. Most boards require members to contribute annual dues to the organization, and are expected to financially support in other ways, like contributing to special capital campaigns, buying tables at gala dinners, and very importantly, recruiting as needed more board members with significant wealth, connections or both.

The quality and expertise of board members is crucial to these organizations. A badly run board, and poor decisions, can sink an organization. A great board member is of incalculable value and influence, and in many ways can control the organization: the board must approve budgets, can limit or raise salaries, determine the scope and scale of activities, and fire or hire any staff, including the executive and artistic directors, who report to them.

When you encounter board members of organizations you are interacting with, it's good to praise the organization for what you feel it does well. It matters to them – or it should matter to them – how the artistic community regards their organization. Usually, contact with an artist is the icing on the cake for a board member. When they meet you, or hear you perform, they are seeing the fruits of their labor and investments materialize. Needless to say, be highly respectful of these people: they are the ones approving the budgets that pay your fees. To become friends with them, if it comes naturally, can't hurt either you or the organization. And of course, if you have any great ideas to help organization raise money, go ahead and share them.

Donors

We are now talking about people who give money to concert organizations, educational institutions, any place that you may find work as a musician. They might be board members who contribute heavily, depending on the board, but the majority of them give smaller amounts. Presenting organizations make it as easy as possible for people to give money in any amount, and offer privileges like preferred seating or parties to those who give above a certain amount.

You should know that these organizations spend an enormous amount of time working on donors, which they call "donor cultivation". That means gradually convincing them to give, and once they give once, getting them to give again and encouraging them to increase the amount. The person in an organization in charge of this is usually the Development Director, who works with the Executive Director and the Board to identify and cultivate donors.

A good donor gives money because he or she believes the work the organization is doing is good, that the place is well-run, that their money is being used wisely, and that, in the case of music, the artistic product is on a level that is respected and enjoyed, especially by them. The problematic donors only give money to elevate their society status, and, while we still want

their money, they are a lot harder to take care of because they are not really giving for the right reasons.

For the good donor, often the most exciting benefit of arts patronage is personal access to the artists, and that's where you come in. You will be asked by concert promoters and arts administrators if they can bring the concert sponsor backstage to meet you, if you will have dinner with them after the concert, if you will inscribe a program or photo to them specifically. And your job is to always say yes, and to remember that because of their generosity not only you have gotten to play and are getting paid, but also that their support of the organization helps make ticket prices affordable, and fills your hall with listeners. It almost goes without saying that when you meet them, you look them in the eye and thank them for their support. They will appreciate that, and your presenter will appreciate it even more.

Press

The classical music press needs to be treated with care, respect, and intelligence. The first rule to remember is that anything you say in an interview you are likely to read in the paper, whether you thought they were going to print it or not. So think before you speak and choose your words carefully.

Arts writers who interview you come to their jobs with a wide range of experience in music. Some are experts; some are just starting out or have been transferred to the music desk from another department. You will learn quickly from their questions not only how much they know about music, but whether they have studied any of your materials and know you and your work. If you feel at any time in an interview that you are not getting your point across, feel free to elaborate on an answer to include information that you'd like to have the public know. Sometimes a reporter will ask you at the end of an interview if there is anything you'd like to add, but if they don't, it's perfectly fine to say "I'd just like to add one more thing" or something like that. Usually they are grateful.

Just remember that it's helpful if they like you. So be nice to them. They are working for the music business, they are constantly fighting for space in the media, their jobs are often threatened or disappearing. If you give them a great interview, it not only helps you, it helps the entire classical music media industry.

Institutions

This final category is not about your relationships with people but with entire organizations. Of course, arts organizations are run by people but often these organizations have long histories that outlast any particular individuals who work for them. Your relationship with an institution is made up of your relationships with many people past and present who work there. It has to do with the way the institution as a whole regards you. For you to build up strong relationships with institutions is a good thing, because the relationship will often exist as part of that institution's culture and history.

I see those kinds of relationships building right here at Stony Brook. I see people working here who were once students, and who have made themselves so useful and dedicated to this place that they have become a part of it, and Stony Brook is a part of them.

In the simplest explanation of this phenomenon, it is the generosity and spirit of the individual that drives the relationship. Those who are contributors by nature stand out from the crowd, and any place, no matter how big and prestigious, will gradually start to depend on them. That the institution senses loyalty is very important. Remember that what can contribute to a place – your loyalty, generosity, ingenuity, spirit, and of course your artistry – will likely earn you a special identity which you can call your own and which may well become an indispensable component of the institution. But it takes time: the kind of institutional relationships I'm talking about are built over time, and they are up to you to initiate.

The public

After your love of music and your artistic energy, they are the reason you play music. Treat them with respect, give them your best, and never underestimate their intelligence and ability to learn.

Family II

And finally, to close this long list, comes your family again, but now a different family, the one that you have as an adult. I'm no longer talking about your parents and siblings, but about your spouses, partners and children.

I'm not going to say a lot about this, because it's very personal and often entirely different from artist to artist. Possibly the most informative way to explore these relationships would be with a large panel discussion that could take hours, if not days.

It's safe to say that a career as an artist presents special challenges to sustaining a healthy relationship with a family. If I recall, from my second talk here, my description of what it means to be an artist, some of those essential qualities such as spontaneity, imagination, unpredictability can put a strain on anyone who lives with you and depends on you. At the same time, so many of the artists I know and respect would have a hard time doing it without their families, so somehow, they've worked it out. For this, the entire family is to be admired.

If you marry a musician, like I did, you don't have to explain to them why you are nervous before a concert, why you have to practice instead of taking the family somewhere on the weekend, or why you are so distracted, perhaps because you are memorizing a piece.

If you do not hook up with a musical partner – and many musicians I know absolutely have not wanted to – you can still have a wonderful relationship but the other person needs to understand as deeply as possible what it means to you to be an artist and to do it successfully. At the same time, committing to a relationship with another person will always mean giving something of yourself to them. You just have to make sure it's enough to make the relationship work, and that whatever time that may take away from your artistic work does not compromise

your product to the extent that you wind up threatening the security of your family, or even worse, resenting your family's effect on your artistic life. And that can happen, especially to the passionate, driven artist who feels – as real artists usually do – that they were born to create and serve their art.

I hope that the detail I've just gone into is enlightening and useful, and that you leave the room inspired to further your existing relationships and build many new ones.

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