

# Lecture VI: Working

Welcome to my final talk of the season, “Working”. Today I’m going to attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the landscape of musical careers, going into some detail about all the ways I’ve seen musicians working.

This course or series of talks has had a sequential design. We began back in September exploring how each of us can use what we’re really made of as a starting point and a guiding asset as we develop into professional musicians. Secondly, I put forth my own theory that what distinguishes a successful musician is artistry, and I spent some time illustrating the qualities that truly make one an artist by means of describing the lives, experiences and qualities of several of history’s most famous artists, not all of them musicians.

Next we discussed the all-important technique of learning, and once again I put forth my own theory that a state of perpetual learning is something that distinguishes the most interesting and successful artists around. After learning we moved to performing, where we talked about everything that goes into a successful performance and how to prepare to give yourself the greatest odds for success.

My most recent talk dealt with the importance of relationships in a musical career, emphasizing the human side of the music business and illustrating the tremendous range of contacts available to us all that can make a real difference in the success of any artistic venture.

So we are now at the end of one path – the road of preparation for the career in music – and we are about to embark on journey we must all take, where each of us seeks a course that will lead to truly being a musician, which is the title I gave this whole series of six talks.

In the early 1990’s my wife and I had lunch with the famous violin pedagogue, the late Dorothy Delay, who was the teacher of many of the greatest violinists of our time, from Itzhak Perlman to Sarah Chang and hundreds or maybe thousands of other talented students along the way. Lunches with Miss Delay were an opportunity for anyone to ask for words of wisdom from someone with a unique perspective on the music business, and during this lunch we asked her how she advises her students on their careers. Without missing a beat, she said: “I tell them that if you are a soloist, you may perform with orchestras on the A level, the B level, the C level and even a D level. I tell them they may find a very busy and thrilling musical life in an orchestra. I suggest to them that they all learn the chamber music repertoire because there are a lot of opportunities there. I tell them that teaching creates performing possibilities – that one of my recent students got a teaching job in Georgia and reported back that she has sixty recitals across the state next year, all connected to her position. These are all careers in music, and there are many, many ways to go about it.”

I thought that was one of the most sensible approaches I’d ever heard, and even though it was something that seems if we should already know, it’s good to remember that this scenario was the guiding principle in career discussion used by one of the most productive and successful music teachers of all time.

Some of you may be aware that since 2003 my wife and I have run a summer chamber music festival in California called Music@Menlo. Since the beginning, each festival has had a theme we've explored through the series of concerts and numerous discussions and lectures. Some of the festivals have focused on the history of music, some have delved into the music of different cultures, and others have explored the life and work of a single composer. Several years ago, we designed a festival about Felix Mendelssohn, and in the process, learned an incredible amount about him and his music. And I have to say, reading a detailed biography of Mendelssohn turned out to be one of the most inspiring things that's ever happened to me.

Mendelssohn was born into a Jewish family in Hamburg, Germany, in 1809. His father and uncle were prominent bankers, and their father, Felix's grandfather, was the eminent German-Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Felix and his three siblings enjoyed privileged childhoods during which their talents were nourished by means of a first class education in a wide range of subjects considered essential to the growth of a successful and cultured person. They studied languages including Greek and Latin, philosophy, literature, and aesthetics to the point of becoming fluent in all subjects. In music, Felix was tutored in theory and counterpoint by a former student of one of Bach's sons, and developed deep respect and formidable composition technique through the study of Bach. In addition, Felix was an accomplished gymnast and also a watercolor artist. At the age of 20, Mendelssohn single-handedly engineered the revival of public recognition of Bach through a performance he mounted of the St. Mathew Passion – an unbelievable feat when you consider that it took a Jewish musician to make the Christian community aware of one of its greatest works of art.

Shortly after, Felix's parents sent him off on what is still known as the Grand Tour, which for northern Europeans and the English was a traditional journey south through Austria to Italy, all the way to Naples, back up through France, and in Felix's case to England as well. During the Grand Tour, one was supposed to absorb first-hand the essentials of culture as part of one's education. Felix certainly did, and the stories of from his travel are some of the most fascinating you'll ever read.

In later life, Felix Mendelssohn directed music festivals, gave charity concerts, and founded the Leipzig Conservatory and directed the Gewandhaus orchestra. He was an accomplished enough violinist to serve as concertmaster of various orchestras if needed to, and he was acknowledged as the greatest organist of his day - able to improvise, like Mozart, complex works on demand. He also revived the music of Schubert some ten years after Schubert had died forgotten. Mendelssohn visited London ten times, becoming friends with Queen Victoria. His life was so filled with a variety of activities that he literally had no time to rest, and still managed to have a happy family around him. His early death at the age of 38 was brought on not only by exhaustion and stress, but also by the recent death of his beloved sister.

It was out of admiration of this incredible musician and human being that we decided to title that summer's festival *Being Mendelssohn*. We openly embraced the idea that, especially as a musician, if you wanted to find someone to emulate, you couldn't find anyone better than Mendelssohn. He was arguably among the happiest as well as most productive and successful musicians in history – a rare combination of emotional and social stability and artistic genius. So

for three weeks, we walked around trying to Be Mendelssohn, immersing ourselves to the extent possible in his many interests, broadening our knowledge, expanding our range of skills. It was an incredibly inspiring summer.

The reason I went off on this Mendelssohn exploration was to preface my explanation of the premise of my talk on the subject of music career. In response not only to the inspiration the enviable career of Mendelssohn provides from way back in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also to the most current thinking about careers in music, I am going to discuss the possibilities of careers in music that may include a wide variety of activities, not all of them by any means playing an instrument.

I'd like to read you an excerpt from the brilliant book, titled *The Artist as Citizen*, by Joseph Polisi – from a speech that he gave in 1986, two years after becoming the sixth president of the Juilliard School. Referring to the responsibilities of today's conservatories, he said: p. 124

My objective in this talk is to present as many possibilities as I can for you to stay as close to music as possible in your careers, even if you wind up not necessarily doing, as your main focus, what you were trained to do in school. There are so many examples of these kinds of careers out there that it would take all day for me to describe them, but I think probably each of you knows some people who you could say are in music but not as they expected to be, many of them having combined playing their instruments or composing with other activities that support or augment their musical careers.

The design of where I'm going from here, in this talk, is as follows: We are going to begin with the most music-centric careers possible and work our way outward to what I think you'll agree later is an astonishing range of options.

**Career 1** is the most idealistic that any of us can imagine: we are so famous, so well-off, and so artistically secure that we can literally decide when and where and what we want to do in music, and it is possible to make that happen. I've only known of a few people like that in all of history: one of them was the great Russian pianist Vladimir Horowitz, who, after many retirements and comebacks, became such a cult figure that he could literally dictate his concerts and everything about them. Another artistic still among us who I believe has the capability to function like this – but chooses not to – is Yo-Yo Ma, arguably the most famous classical musician in the world today. Even though these careers seem impossible to imagine for ourselves, I'm going to come back to Career 1 later to describe how it could become a reality for almost anyone.

**Career 2** is one where you put your goods out on the market and wait for the phone to ring, and it does ring enough to make a living. You are still dictating your artistic product but the world is interested enough in it to buy whatever you are making. There are a select number of musicians today who function under this model; they have stellar track records, they have always delivered, and so the presenter simply lets them do exactly as they want. You can find them often on big recital series advertisements that say "Program to be announced", and still people will buy all the tickets necessary for the presenter to pay the artist's fee and other

expenses. Once again, this is an enviable career to have, and not many artists do. I certainly don't: in my career as a soloist and chamber musician I have not been able to simply show up and play what I want. It's always been a negotiation, but there are ways to control this that I'll discuss later.

In **Career 3**, the artist prepares the artistic product to satisfy the needs of the market. For example: if you see there are hardly any piano trios playing concerts, then you form a piano trio, as there is a need for that type of ensemble on the scene. If a contemporary composer becomes fashionable, then you put some of his or her music into your repertoire offerings. If you learn that a community somewhere has never heard the complete Beethoven string quartets, then you put that together as a possibility and try to sell it to them. This is not an unprincipled approach at all; in fact, you are being sensitive to artistic need and providing institutions and communities with something in music they don't have. But in doing so, your artistic work is determined not by yourself, but by what others want to hear.

**Career 4** is simply never saying no when offered a chance to work in music. I know people like this, and, unbelievable as it seems, they have always said yes to anyone, no matter what the date, the repertoire, the fee offer, the colleagues. And they've made it work and are happy musicians on top of it. You are totally out of control of your life personally and artistically, but your attitude is extraordinary, and somehow you find a way to deliver consistently, which is the most important thing to do if you spread yourself thin.

**Career 5** is one in which you give yourself to a larger institution, be it an orchestra or a chamber group or perhaps an educational institution, and that entity – your employer- determines what you do artistically. You may have little or no say in your artistic life, but on the other hand, you don't have many career decisions to worry about either – someone else is directing the career of the band you've hooked up with. For example, I'm good friends with a number of players who, after striving very hard for chamber and solo careers, all of a sudden took a good orchestra offer and are very happy with the security, the regularity and absence of career concern. I also know several musicians who were soloists who decided to join string quartets and other ensembles, once again, putting themselves into a situation where the career responsibility is far more spread between the group members and a management structure.

I'm sure you can see, if you look at the careers I just described, that they can be combined in creative ways. For example, you could have Career 5 as your primary source of security (such as an orchestra position) but put a touch of Career 1 in there on the side (you present your own solo recitals in a local church). You could combine Career 2 (you have your own web site that generates curiosity in your work) with Career 4, where you support yourself by not turning away any offer of work. You could combine Career 3 (where you are actively responding in some capacity to the needs of the market, say with an ensemble you've created) with Career 2, where you take in some instances the opposite approach with a presenter: they don't care what you do as long as you bring them your best.

Use your imaginations to come up with ways your particular talents and interests might fit into some of these specific career models, or combinations of any number of them.

I am now going to veer off the road to explore a wide possibility of lives in music that don't have performing as the main activity. They can, in many instances, exist alongside a performing career.

**Artistic Director/Programmer/Performer (A)** of an organization you create that organizes, programs and produces concerts

Things to consider and explore; decisions to make:

1. Potential locations
2. Local demographic
3. Competition
4. Dating and duration
5. Concept
6. Mission
7. Strategic plan, timeline, budget
8. Team – roles, infrastructure, responsibilities
9. Boards, donors
10. Marketing
11. Selling tickets

**Artistic Director/Programmer/Performer (B)** of an organization you take over

Things to consider and explore; decisions to make:

1. Timing and your availability
2. Your qualifications
3. Your needs, financial and otherwise
4. The institutional history
5. The institutional health
6. People you will have to work with
7. What does the organization want you to do?
8. Will they give you the authority what you need to?
9. Do they want you to perform as well or just be an administrator?

**Artist manager**

You will stand out from the crowd if:

1. You can really tell the good from the mediocre
2. Can guide your artists
3. Can speak about their work with authority
4. Can build trust with presenters
5. Can talk about repertoire with presenters and artists
6. Can guide presenters

The assets you need are:

1. People skills
2. Confidence
3. Negotiating skills
4. Organized mind
5. Ability to put yourself in the shoes of the presenter
6. A roster to start with
7. A business plan
8. Reasons for artists to trust you

Now we move into the field of **Education** (quote from Polisi p. 18)

### **Private Teaching (A) on your own**

Things to consider and explore; decisions to make:

1. Location
2. Demographic
3. Target age and ability to suit you
4. Recruitment and advertising
5. Networking with other teachers
6. Public events like student concerts
7. What and how to charge
8. Creating a multi-faceted experience for your students

### **Private Teaching (B) in an institution**

Things to consider and explore; decisions to make:

1. Institutional health
2. Reputation
3. Fellow faculty
4. Administrators
5. Fee/salary?
6. The number of students and schedule
7. Facilities

There are myriad other educational avenues open to qualified musicians:

1. Teaching multiple instruments (my own father did that in a private elementary school)
2. Coaching chamber music, either on a professional or amateur level
3. Beginning a community music program, like Chamber Music Connection in Columbus, OH
4. Found an educational institution, like a summer music camp or annual workshop
5. Become a professor in a conservatory. (Remember that teaching can involve almost any amount of playing of your instrument, either as faculty recitalist, collaborating with students and faculty, or simply playing in lessons)
6. Start an adult amateur educational program
7. Lecture about music; give pre-concert talks

## Media

Media is huge today with communication technologies exploding off the shelf. There's plenty of work in media out there if you are interested and talented, develop skills quickly and are ready to innovate. Because you can often work on media from anywhere, anytime, it can be developed as a side line that supports your career and others.

In order to begin a career in classical music media, you need to:

1. Take stock of your skills, experience and interests
2. Learn from others
3. Copy things you like
4. Experiment and dream –nothing is that expensive or too crazy when it's all digital – Google example
5. Be careful with viral information – think before you hit send
6. Figure out how you can use your media skills to help your career, others, and the industry.

Now I'm going to venture the farther away from a career as a performer, into the world of **Arts Administration**.

Let me say up front that this option is not as dismal as it sounds. On the contrary, venturing into arts administration can lead to a life of unimagined salaries, job security, marvelous friends and colleagues both musical and otherwise. But to be honest: the jobs that I'm talking about are full time, and none of them requires you to play your instrument.

The reason so much is possible in arts administration is that it's virtually impossible – kind of like a music career course – to teach it or to learn how to do it in school. I know there are any number of arts administration departments and teachers all over the place who would like to kill me for saying that, but I also think that they would agree that being an executive director for one musical organization can be vastly different with another. Arts organizations, while they may have the same non-profit structures, are all unique to their own art forms and communities, and what works in one is not necessarily going to work in the other.

I also know that most arts administration teachers would have to agree with me that the potential for upward mobility in arts administration is huge. People rise through the ranks by virtue of the knowledge and skills they acquire in the job, not before, and the longer someone remains with an organization, the more they are capable of handling, even switching between departments.

Two stellar examples of this which I mentioned in an earlier talk here are Joseph Volpe, who was a carpenter at the Metropolitan Opera before he became its General Manager, and the late Robert Harth, who as a child sold lemonade at the Aspen Music Festival and eventually became not only its President and CEO, but later Executive and Artistic Director of Carnegie Hall, before his untimely sudden death at the age of 47.

Sometimes, a career in arts administration is morphed into rather than sought out intentionally. Let me read to you this excerpt from the biography of Clive Gillinson, current Executive and Artistic Director of Carnegie Hall:

*Mr. Gillinson joined the London Symphony Orchestra 1970 and was elected to the Board of Directors of the self-governing orchestra in 1976, also serving as Finance Director. In 1984 he was asked by the Board to become Managing Director of the LSO, a position he held until becoming the Executive and Artistic Director of Carnegie Hall in 2005.*

*Under Mr. Gillinson's leadership, the LSO initiated some of that city's most innovative and successful artistic festivals, working with many of today's leading artists. In the international touring arena, the LSO established an annual residency in New York from 1997 and was a founding partner in the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, in 1990, with Leonard Bernstein and Michael Tilson Thomas. Mr. Gillinson believes in taking great music to the society at large. In this area, his initiatives with the London Symphony Orchestra included the development of the LSO Discovery music education program, reaching over 30,000 people of all ages annually; and the creation of LSO St. Luke's, the UBS and LSO Music Education Center; which involved the restoration and reconstruction of St. Luke's, a magnificent, but previously derelict 18th-century church. Mr. Gillinson also created LSO Live, the orchestra's award-winning international CD label.*

Arts organizations, as well, are always looking for fresh perspectives. Some go about it the right way and some don't. In the 1990's, when the classical recording industry started to into turmoil, I remember department heads of Deutsche Grammophon, the most distinguished and traditional classical label, saying to me how excited they were that their new incoming President knew nothing about the classical record business, and that this would afford him all the genius he needed turn the company around. I said "good luck" and they turned out to have really needed it as he failed and was gone in no time. But remember that your perspectives as real musicians – and artists if you work on it – are something that many people who are purely administrators will never have.

Let me go through the various arts administration positions you could hold if you pursued them hard enough, what your talents would lend to your performance, and what skill sets you need to do the jobs well:

**Executive Director/President** – run the organization

1. Need skill with numbers. Have to make sense of budgets and be responsible for them.
2. People skills – you manage the staff
3. Learn fast as you have to come up to speed on the whole organization, not just a part
4. Charisma and charm don't hurt. Often have to convince people to do things they don't want
5. Decision making – you have to call it at the end of the day and take responsibility
6. Your knowledge of music gives you enormous credibility, forcefulness, passion, all genuine
7. Your experience as a musician will help you to deal with wacky, irresponsible artistic directors

### **Director of Development** – raise money

1. People skills, charm
2. Belief in product
3. Strategic thinking
4. Conscientious to an extreme degree
5. Once again, your deep knowledge of the product allows you to speak with genuine enthusiasm
6. Sensitivity – figure out why people want to give, or why they should, and lead them there.

### **Director of Marketing** – promote image, sell tickets

1. Sensitivity to messaging, accuracy
2. Communication skills (you already have them!)
3. Work creatively within a budget
4. Honest marketing

### **Artistic Administrator** – make the arts projects happen.

1. Organizational skills
2. Nothing falls through the cracks
3. Follow up, realize ideas
4. Communicate with artists, negotiate fees, programs
5. Musical knowledge a must, sometimes you have to learn a new genre
6. Steady, mature, calm in the midst of chaos
7. Don't bring own agenda to job. Job is fulfill vision of artistic director.

In all of the above administration jobs, it will be up to you to find ways to continue your musical life – the one you trained for here – on your own. I know plenty of administrators who continue to play in community orchestras, who have their own chamber music groups, who give their own concerts publicly. But none of them, because these jobs have set, salaried hours, is able to prioritize performing over showing up for work.

At the beginning of this talk, when I described the idealistic Career No. 1 in which you only ever do exactly what you want in music, I promised that I'd return to it and reveal that it's easier to attain than one might think. But there's a catch: you can have that career in music, but you will likely have to do something else to support it.

I think that many of us have to decide, at some point, whether we'd be happier in music doing more exactly what we want some of the time, rather than doing something in music all the time that we don't find fulfilling or inspiring.

Some of the truly happiest musicians I know are ones who don't depend on music for a living. And that does not mean they don't produce. I own a CD of the complete works of Mendelssohn for Cello and Piano, recorded by musicology professor and Mendelssohn biographer R. Larry Todd. Larry studied piano at Yale, and judging from the formidable playing on this recording,

has kept his chops in fine shape. At some point, Larry obviously decided against a performing career, and his decision and current activities are perfect illustrations of the kind of career flexibility and creativity that this whole talk is about.

So one of the last mental exercises you can do in planning your career is to ask yourself if there just might be something that you are good at that would make you a living and support a music career of choice rather than necessity. Believe it or not, this option could often be one of greater artistic integrity and richness than another. Don't limit your imagination when it comes to planning your career. There are really no rules, and there's room for everyone to do it differently.

So now I've come to the end of my list of roles that you may seek in the music business. That said, God knows there are more ways to be in music than I just described. But it's a start and I'm certain that just looking over the landscape I presented will inspire new ideas.

I'd like to close by offering a kind of strategy that might help guide you towards the career you want.

First, I'd like to advise you to branch out. I know that some might argue that it's not essential to, say, playing your instrument better than the next person, but few would disagree that so many artists who opt for solitary confinement in pursuit of an artistic goal wind up neurotic, miserable and no fun to be around. I would rather you are not among them. Plus, having a wider perspective on life itself goes hand-in-hand with becoming an artist, and will undoubtedly broaden and deepen the quality of your work in music. You never know what opportunities may come your way from having tried new things and met new people. You will never know what you are capable of until you give yourself the chance.

Second, I'd advise you to look at the music world around you, and to ask yourself and others the question "How can I be useful?" As I have said before, everyone who presents and administrates in the arts is confronted with daily problems, crises, dilemmas and the unknown. If you bring them solutions and not problems, you can not only get ahead with them very quickly, but you might just find a role in music you didn't think possible.

But to begin crafting a sensible career strategy, I would recommend going all the way back to my first talk in this series, titled "Who Am I?", when we asked questions about ourselves. We can add to them the following which are forward-looking and good to answer when you are on the verge of a major career decision:

1. What is my nature? Am I a natural self-marketer, networker, or do I need someone to help me with that?
2. What comes to me the most naturally? What kind of music, situations, activities?
3. Do I have a mission in life, and how is that connected to music?
4. Why am I playing music? For myself, or to save the world, or because my parents expect it?
5. Do I have some goals you could write down? Are they realistic?
6. Do I possess the skill sets to achieve my goals?

Perhaps answering these questions in writing, for yourself, is a good idea before you make the next move in your career. Because in the 21<sup>st</sup> century your career is something that most likely *you* will both create and guide, not someone else.

I'd like to add here, at the end, some thoughts of my own that I feel compelled, out of principle, to pass along.

You don't have to look far around you today to see that the classical music industry is filled with people and projects and institutions that are desperately trying to sell themselves any way they can. My advice is to be honest and reasonable in your approach to marketing yourself and what you do in music. It will be a much better long-term investment in your career. To quote Joseph Polisi again: "Let us not be led down a path that presents gimmicks as the reasons for which we experience the great art of the centuries. Never make compromises that force you to draw down upon your own moral and artistic capital to the extent that you deplete the very resources that will support your future activities in the arts."

Believe in the quality of the music you play. Never apologize for it, and never question it, not for even a second, publicly or inside yourself. You know how great it is, that's why you are here.

Be proud that classical music is great because it is a sophisticated and complex art form, rich in content and variety. It is not always understandable to everyone on a first hearing. Don't apologize for that. Encourage people to listen again, more and more, and promise them they'll get more out of it, which they will.

Don't ever, ever, ever, underestimate the ability of your audience to rise to a challenge. Never, never, never, dumb down your presentation of music in any way because you think they will like it more. They won't, and even if they don't know music, they can sense the difference.

Do not apologize for expecting people to sit quietly and listen. Don't think for a minute that texting, dancing or eating is going to truly engage listeners in the art form. People don't do that while watching a Shakespeare play, and no one complains. And Shakespeare productions are filled with young audiences, as I've seen on two occasions within the last year.

Don't beat up the grey haired audience. We need them, and we'll all have grey hair someday anyway. Of course look for younger listeners, but don't change your product to attract them. Bring them for the right reasons – the exact same reasons you are playing music to begin with.

Be composer-centric. Invest in the composer, dead or alive. It is from them that the music really comes; honor their wishes, and present their music as you think they would have wanted you to. Respect their markings, read their biographies, and become intimate with them. Give their artistry a chance to rub off on yours. Represent the composer on stage.

Don't underestimate the vision of the great composers we have the privilege to play: If you think Beethoven would have truly loved the sound of a modern, state of the art 9-foot concert grand more than the pianos he had in his time, then use one with conviction and confidence.

Finally, remind yourself every day why you are playing music. Polisi once again, with an excerpt from one of his commencement addresses, to close my lecture series: P. 125

© ArtistLed 2019

5