

alongside the members of the Providence String Quartet. The idea is that with this training, the fellows can go out and start their own community-based programs in other parts of the United States and the world.

A common mission runs through the stories of this new generation of musicians: they are finding new ways to connect music with audiences. Musicians are no longer content to perform only in traditional, formal venues, disconnected from audiences and from communities. Musicians today explore ways to find a sense of immediacy, connection, and relevance.

## What Does It Take? Part 1 ♦

Keep in mind that careers are developed over years, not hatched overnight. The overnight success story is a media myth: when musicians are interviewed in depth, the overnight success invariably turns out to have been ten or twenty years in the making. There are substantial data that show that it takes 10,000 hours, or roughly ten years of study, work, and experience, to become an expert in *any* field. As detailed in the recommended *Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance*, “The ten year minimum has been documented in every field of human endeavor that has been examined . . . This rule holds for musicians, novelists, poets, mathematicians, chess players, tennis players, swimmers, long distance runners, live-stock judges, radiologists, and doctors . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Though this should come as no surprise to musicians, it is comforting to realize that everyone—genius or not—needs the ten years or 10,000 hours of hard work. Malcolm Gladwell, in his excellent book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, offers examples of Bill Gates and others, detailing how their early years provided them the crucial 10,000 hours of exposure and training necessary to their later success. Mozart, though a prodigy and a genius, had been composing for ten years before he wrote his first “important” work. The point is that genius and talent are not enough. Hard work is essential; there are no shortcuts.

Gladwell also details the experience of the Beatles. As teenagers, when they were just getting started as a band in Liverpool, they hooked up with a local promoter, a fellow with connections in Hamburg, Germany, where they could get ongoing work. In Hamburg back then, Gladwell explains, strip clubs hired rock bands to play exceptionally long sets: *five or more hours each night, seven days a week, for continuous shows*. The Beatles ended up traveling to Hamburg five times between 1960 and 1962, Gladwell explains, “performing for 270 nights in just over a year and a half. By the time they had their first burst of success in 1964, in fact, they had performed live an estimated twelve hundred times. Do you know how extraordinary that

is? Most bands today don't perform twelve hundred times in their entire careers."<sup>4</sup>

They had to hone their performance skills, learn a huge number of songs, and figure out how to capture and maintain an audience's attention (not easy when you're competing with strippers). Gladwell quotes Philip Norman, who wrote the Beatles' biography, *Shout!*:

"They learned not only stamina. They had to learn an enormous amount of numbers—cover versions of everything you can think of, not just rock and roll, a bit of jazz too. They weren't disciplined onstage at all before that. But when they came back, they sounded like no one else. It was the making of them."<sup>5</sup>

Success is a process. As a music career counselor, my job is to help people articulate their dreams, clarify their goals, and determine their next steps. Long-term career goals are realized through everyday choices about the use of time, energy, and money. Whether you're just starting out or are in midstream, these everyday choices are critical. Confucius had it right: the journey of a thousand steps *really does* begin with just one.

### **Defining the Profession: What's a Musician's "Job"?**

In thinking about your dream, it may be useful to reflect on what it actually means to be a musician. The job of "musician" involves far more than performing. Musicians' careers are multidimensional. Working musicians typically "wear different hats" over the course of their workweek and over the course of their working lives. In talking with most active professional musicians, you will find they have multiple ongoing projects that involve performing, composing, recording, teaching, or other arts-related activities. What's more, musicians are often involved in handling performance contracts, publicity, and fundraising for their projects. Most musicians spend a portion of their work lives teaching—not just for the income but because they find it challenging and satisfying. Musicians advocate for arts education and public funding for the arts, and serve their communities on advisory boards and as consultants. So my first tip is this: ask professional musicians about their work lives. You will find there are very few who make a living solely from performing. Musicians' "jobs" encompass a wide variety of fascinating and rewarding work.

### **Debunking the Myth of Music Career Success**

The myth that fuels many young musicians' dreams goes like this: "If I practice really, really, REALLY hard, do everything my teacher tells me, go to the best school, and win competitions, then with luck (and maybe the connections my teacher has), I will 'make it.'" For many, *making it* means becoming

an international “star,” making a living as a soloist, and performing with orchestras and in recitals worldwide.

This is a very narrow view of success. In the protective bubble of a music degree program, students can be oblivious to the difficult realities of the “real world.” Unfortunately, the bubble also keeps musicians uninformed about the many other nontraditional and entrepreneurial music career success paths.

Only a fraction of the total number of musicians actually makes their living strictly as performers. And only a handful of those musicians are soloists. So, although there’s nothing wrong with “going for gold,” it can be a problem if a musician views anything short of this as failure. With a narrow view of success, musicians unconsciously limit their careers, their satisfaction, and their professional fulfillment.

“When musicians have a narrow view of the profession, they limit themselves in finding their own best career path,” says bassoonist Ben Kamins, faculty at Rice University, former principal with the Houston Symphony, and active freelance chamber player. “There is a misconception amongst music students that you get a job in an orchestra and you live happily ever after. It’s incredible to get and keep that job, but it doesn’t guarantee artistic satisfaction.”

If these are myths, then what can musicians actually do to be successful? When they don’t find ready-made work opportunities, or when they simply want something other than what’s available, they create their own opportunities. The history of the arts, after all, is a testament to the human drive to create. Musicians compose new works, invent new instruments, and develop music software. They launch new ensembles and performance series, and, in the process, they build audiences and transform communities.

The essential challenge for today’s musician is to create a meaningful life’s work and a livable income in a highly competitive, evolving marketplace.

## **The Big Picture** ♦

The Higher Education Arts Data Service tracks information for the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). Of the 606 institutions reporting, the findings for 2007–2008 included these: more than 110,000 students were enrolled in NASM-member college-level music programs in the United States. And in that year over 20,000 people graduated with music degrees.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, competition for “traditional” jobs, such as full-time orchestra positions and college-level music teaching, is exceedingly high. Unfortunately, most graduating musicians have their sights set on these types of traditional opportunities.

To put supply and demand in context, though there are over 1,800 orchestras in the United States, the majority of these are volunteer and educational ensembles. The 52 largest budgeted professional American orchestras have roughly 4,200 total positions for players. In 2003, there were just 159 openings in these orchestras.<sup>7</sup> And the number of applicants requesting an audition for any one of these positions is typically 100 to 200.

As for college-level music teaching jobs, the majority of full-time positions require doctorates and prior college teaching experience. Here, too, the market is flooded with qualified applicants. A single full-time opening can attract more than 100 candidates. In 2008, the Career Services Center at New England Conservatory tracked the numbers of U.S. college music teaching opportunities for specific instruments and found the total number of full-time openings for cello faculty was thirteen; for clarinet, eleven. According to the Higher Education Arts Data Service, the total number of cellists enrolled in doctoral programs for 2008 was 155, and the total number of clarinetists was 138.<sup>8</sup>

However, these highly competitive traditional jobs are only a fraction of the work actually available to musicians. The U.S. music industry is vast and includes a huge variety of work opportunities. And because musicians are generally multi-talented, they often have marketable skills in more than one area. The majority of today's professional musicians create satisfying "portfolio" careers, braiding together part-time work and entrepreneurial ventures to capitalize on their talents, interests, and experience.

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"Realize there are many different ways to make a living in music," says Boston-based freelance clarinetist Michael Norsworthy. "Remain flexible, look for opportunities at every turn, and be ready to adjust your viewpoint. There's no ONE way, there are MANY ways."

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The U.S. music industry employs roughly 295,000 people in the *core* music industries, which include performers, ensembles, those working for publishers and record labels, and those doing studio and radio work, music instrument manufacturing, and retail. Another 899,000 people are employed in the *peripheral* music industries: those at music schools and recording reproduction companies, and those working as agents, promoters, and venue managers. The total annual revenue for the music industry includes \$3.1 billion from the core industries, and another \$23.5 billion from the peripheral ones.<sup>9</sup>

What do all these numbers mean for individual musicians? However you slice it, there's a huge range of opportunities for people with music skills

and a passion to share music with others. Musicians generally have marketable skills in more than one area, leading to multifaceted careers. If you are creative and open-minded, there are dozens of ways to put your music training and talent to work.

## What Does It Take? Part 2 ♦

Winning and keeping an orchestra job demands skills and talents different from those needed to lead a jazz ensemble, write film scores, launch a music software company, or teach at a conservatory. Though there's no formula, there are six important qualities that are critical to all music careers. Do a little self-assessment: do you have some or many of these?

**Talent plus hard work** are necessary but *are not sufficient by themselves*. You need more:

**Winning attitude:** You are motivated, focused, and resilient; you can handle rejection.

**Sales skills:** You communicate and present yourself well; your enthusiasm is contagious. You can articulate your strengths to prospective collaborators, clients, and employers.

**Support system:** You have emotional support and encouragement from a group of friends and mentors. And your goals and plans do not cause conflict in your close relationships.

**Strategy:** You have plans for how to reach both your short- and long-term goals; you have the skills and experience necessary to implement your plan.

If some areas need work, consider yourself in good company. No one has the “perfect package.” But knowing what needs improving is the first step to making positive change. The following chapters detail practical ways to enhance and develop these qualities.

Musicians who do well professionally and have the least trouble with the realities of the music profession are those who have most of these six qualities or who have an overabundance in one area that may compensate for a lack in another.



### Case Study

Helen O., a talented pianist, has built a good local reputation as a chamber musician/accompanist and has received a number of favorable reviews. However, she is passive in her approach to her career: she does not seek out opportunities but relies on her reputation to generate them. Helen shies away from dealing di-

rectly with the business side of her career. She does not actively seek advice from colleagues or networking contacts. She is frustrated that she's not getting more concert dates, doesn't have a manager, and is not commanding the fees she thinks she deserves.

Helen blames the unfair music industry, the competitive market, and the dwindling audience for classical music. *She does not see how her own behavior and attitude may actually be holding her back.*

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Musicians, like most people, are fond of complaining. It is easier to gripe about a lack of opportunities than to take control of your life. What could Helen O. do differently? Like most of us, Helen could make better use of her existing support system, cultivate new collaborators, and improve her self-management (until she can attract a manager). Identifying our shortcomings is essential to making improvements. Talking to others can be a great way to gain perspective. You may recognize a bit of Helen in you because there is probably a bit of her in all of us.

To help Helen and others, here are ten basic principles for advancing music careers. I call these the "Success Principles." See how many of these you use now, and consider adopting the others. They do not necessarily demand a lot of time or effort, but they do require adjusting your attitude, modifying habits, and venturing beyond your comfort zone.

## Ten Success Principles ◆

There are many practical steps you can take to advance toward your career goals. But over the years, by observing musicians make their way in the world, I've noticed certain kinds of thinking and behavior that works well. I've distilled these habits into the principles below. These are lifestyle recommendations, ways to think about and deal with the world. Many of these principles are developed further in subsequent chapters.

1. *Know yourself.* Know both your strengths and weaknesses. Know what you have to offer the professional world. Get feedback from colleagues, teachers, and mentors. Their suggestions and advice can help you chart the path that's best for you.

2. *Get to know your industry.* Get savvy. Your research should include both talking to colleagues and mentors as well as reading about the arts and the music profession. Stay current by reading relevant music trade journals, blogs, and websites specific to your particular areas of interest. Reading this book is a great start!