

Chamber **MUSIC** America

Writing Workshop: Crafting Your Bio

with

Elizabeth Dworkin and Susan Thames

Dworkin and Associates

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SUMMARY: A well-written, compelling bio is a necessary tool at all career levels. It's needed for posting on your website, inclusion in CD liner notes and concert programs, and to pitch your work to a presenter. Publicists **Elizabeth Dworkin** and **Susan Thames** outline the elements of a bio that represents your career path, goals and priorities.

I. Background

A. Dworkin & Company is a national public relations, artist representation, and special events management firm. It focuses on:

1. Strategic planning
2. Image consulting
3. Career and project development

B. Organization head, Elizabeth Dworkin

1. Conservatory-trained violinist
2. Worked in arts administration and marketing for more than 15 years
3. In 2005 began writing for the *New York Times*
4. Writes about all styles of music, not just jazz.

C. Dworkin & Company mission: preserving the finest in our cultural heritage, championing the creation of new traditions, and reaching beyond the conventional media outlets and helping to cultivate new audiences

D. The company collaborates with some of today's premier performers, composers, ensembles, producers, and institutions in the arts and culture for the following:

1. National media campaigns
2. Broadcasts and telecasts
3. Galas and special events
4. Educational and community outreach
5. Short- and long-term public relations strategies
6. Strategic planning expertise

II. The Versatile Bio

- A. An artist may need a variety of bios to highlight certain parts of his/her career. Types of bios include:
 - 1. A bio for your recordings
 - 2. A bio for your programs
 - 3. A bio for press kits
 - 4. A bio for video games
 - 5. A bio for promotional materials
- B. Organizing a bio
 - 1. Order of information
 - a) Start with most recent information
 - b) The first line should be compelling, in order to keep the reader interested.
 - 2. It is important to remember who is viewing the bio:
 - a) Music press will be looking for specific details. Find out what these are and include them.
 - b) If the bio is not for music press, but for a presenter, then it must include details that separate the artist from others like her or him.
 - c) Assume people reading your bio are very smart, they will know if your bio is embellishing details.
- C. Tailoring the bio to the reader
 - 1. Pick items out of your résumé that will appeal to the person you're sending it to.
 - 2. Example: That you have composed or performed music for a video game may turn off some more conservative presenters but be quite appealing to a new-music presenter.

III. Formatting

- A. Pay strict attention to requirements and to how the bio is being sent.
 - 1. Bios in pitch letters
 - a) In a pitch letter, the bio should go below the signature line.
 - b) Keep the bio short, no more than three lines of type.
 - 2. Bios at a requested length
 - a) Sometimes the text must be streamlined; avoid the temptation to make the text choppy.
 - b) Combine sentences when possible to cut down on extra words.
 - c) Figure out which details are necessary—accomplishments from ten years ago are not as important as recent details.

IV. Quotations from Reviews

A. How many?

1. Too many quotations can be overwhelming.
2. Three quotes per long bio is a good rule of thumb—not too many or too few.

B. Quotations should come from press sources; try to avoid using quotes from colleagues. Some artists do not want to be quoted at all.

C. Exact quotes should be set off by quotation marks.

D. Contrary to some beliefs, there is nothing wrong with a bio that begins with a quote.

E. Best quotes first:

1. Put your eye-catching quotes at the top to catch reader interest.
2. If a particular quote relates to the particular reader, put that one at the beginning of your bio.

F. Citations

1. If the quote is not recent, you may not want to list the author, just the publication.
2. Keep in mind that some presenters may ask for a citation sheet.

V. Length

A. Keeping a bio to a given word count can be difficult; create several versions in the following lengths, and have them ready to send to presenters.

1. Long: approximately 400 words
2. Medium: approximately 225 words
3. Short: approximately 150 words
4. Mini: approximately 75 words

B. What to keep in a bio over time

1. Important quotes that define your music, or quotes from an extremely reputable source
2. Specific events that define you professionally
3. Recent dates are important; BUT keep the significant events, even if several of them are older.

VI. The opening paragraph

A. Getting the audience's attention

1. If possible, include quotes in one of your first few sentences.
2. Define what separates you from other professionals in your field.
 - a) List a specific event that defines you as an artist.
 - b) Define the style of music you compose or perform.

c) Mention an achievement that you feel recognized your unique talents.

3. List important credentials that the presenter reading the bio will recognize and take seriously.

4. Consider the individual receiving the bio and adjust your first paragraph accordingly.

VII. Ensemble Bio versus Individual Bio

A. Describe the ensemble as one unit.

B. Carefully define the vision of the ensemble, being careful not to skew it to any one member's vision alone.

C. Add integrity to an ensemble bio by including a quote that expresses how the ensemble envisions itself.

D. Do not focus on the ensemble members but rather how each member contributes to form the unique sound of the ensemble

VIII. Other Tips

A. Write carefully and thoughtfully

1. Presenters reading your bios are well versed at reading them and respond better to a well-written bio.

2. Presenters can read between the lines and know if you are embellishing the facts.

B. Do not include a picture in a bio; photos should be saved for press releases or when contacting the press.

C. Try to group like items together; list all performance information in one category and recording information in another.

D. Chronological order is not the best order of events.

1. Dates are not important in a bio.

2. Begin with your most important career event, whenever it occurred.

3. No need to list newer events, if older events are more significant to your career.

4. At the same time, don't mention older events if you have many important newer events in your résumé.

E. Do include dates for significant awards, performances or competitions—e.g., a President's inauguration or a receiving a Pulitzer Prize.

F. Watch for repetition in your bio; be concise and do not waste words on an item previously mentioned.

G. Update your bio at least once a year.

To hear the complete session, please download the audio recording that accompanies this summary.