

YOU ARE THE ART, YOU ARE THE PRODUCT: MAKING YOUR MUSIC AVAILABLE TO THE WORLD

With Alex Shapiro

Tuesday, November 2, 2010, 3:00 p.m.

Saint Peter's Church, New York, NY

Alex Shapiro led a broad discussion of the business, digital, and psychological tools a composer or performer needs in order to create a viable, income-producing career. Below is Shapiro's summary of the workshop.

It's a four-step program

Being a maker of music and having a *career* in music are two different things. Assuming that you have the music part of the equation under control, the ingredients necessary for a happy professional life include the following. Let's work backward from the goal:

- A professional needs business knowledge about copyright, commission fees, contracts, publishing, distribution, and other topics that will lead to income. This is Step 4.
- But none of this knowledge will be needed very often unless you understand how to best use the many tools that will make the world aware of your music. So this is Step 3.
- But in order to use those tools, one must have acquired them in the first place, and so it's essential that the composer or musician have all his/her materials ready to present. This is Step 2.
- But in order to know what it is you are actually preparing to present to the world, you must have a strong vision of what you want to communicate and achieve. And this is where we begin. Step 1.

Philosophy

First, look inward and address the philosophy that drives you to share your work with the world. Identifying what you really want to compose or perform, what your passion is, and what you want the look and feel of your life to be, is a vital and honest first step. Without a clear sense of self and of mission, we can't communicate the worth of our music to others. And if we don't reflect the worth of our art, it's difficult to expect others to respond to it—or to be willing to pay for it.

All of us have a potential audience, and we must take initiative to find that audience. At the core of a viable career is the willingness to embrace the concept that you deserve to be remunerated for your work.

Steer away from the passive tradition of asking for grants and awards, and focus instead on active, entrepreneurial thinking. We all need to generate a

client and fan base willing to pay for our art. The good news is that, with the tools we all have available to us now, it's possible.

Attitude

A positive attitude will make life a lot easier. If you believe that you will not do well, you are likely to fulfill that prophecy. Others pick up on our negativity, and most people prefer to surround themselves with people who emit a good energy.

Abundance

Reject the common notion of the arts being a competitive field, and shift your belief to a vision in which there is enough opportunity in the world for anyone with talent and initiative who seeks it. The reason we are artists is because we have something unique to contribute. Especially in the jazz and concert music realm, we are hired to do what we do because we sound like ourselves, and are not necessarily interchangeable with another artist. Take heart in this, and think in terms of what distinguishes you from everyone else.

Jealously and competitiveness feel terrible and they're destructive. When a colleague of ours does well, we should celebrate, because what's good for one artist often ends up being good for our art.

So, now that you have a distinct goal and ethos in mind, you must prepare the materials needed to have on hand.

Being prepared

If, when opportunity knocks, we don't have the materials at the ready, we can't promote our music very effectively. Below is a partial list of some of the basics that music-makers need to have in their tool box:

- well-recorded music on CDs, AIFs and MP3s, with necessary performer usage agreements on file if applicable, so that these recordings, or excerpts of them, can be posted on the web;
- great-looking, properly bound scores, also in pdf form (if your music requires notation). And, if you're a multimedia artist, videos ready to upload;
- updated bio (a longer one and a short one), photos, business cards, C.V., concert info, and catalog of works and/or repertoire;
- continually updated website with MP3s and links to deeper levels of information;
- updated web presences on numerous social/media networks, all linked to one another
- all composed works registered with a performing rights organization, such as ASCAP, BMI, or SESAC: you cannot be paid for performances and broadcasts of your music unless the PROs know that your pieces exist;
- a good entertainment/copyright law attorney for your contracts.

Now that you're prepared

It's not enough to simply have a web presence. You need to know how to use it so that it generates income. Make sure that you—and most importantly, recordings and videos with your music—are present in the 24/7 international world of the web. There are many virtual locations in which people from around the world will find you:

- personal website;
- personal blog;
- Facebook;
- Twitter;
- YouTube;
- ReverbNation;
- MySpace; and
- countless others!

You may think that you're in the music-making business, but you are in the relationship-making business. There are many ways to get involved in what's going on around the globe, and it's up to us to show up to the party. Build up a database of e-friends on the various social networks. Take a sincere interest in other people and get involved in conversations on other blogs, not just your own. Make the time to comment on Facebook postings or blog essays and begin to become a known quantity in the community, by dint of people seeing your name (which almost always will link to your web presence). But the responsibility that goes along with this is that you should always try to contribute to the conversation rather than make it about you. You should always consider the tone of what you post and how it may be perceived, and... you should always spell-check! Once something is on the web, it's cached, and it's there for good.

Reach out to people with whom you'd like to collaborate and introduce them to your work in a professional manner. Personally targeted, unsolicited emails to a specific ensemble or performer are acceptable, especially when they include a link to the specific place on your website where the recipient can hear the piece about which you're emailing. But never harvest other people's email lists and blast out unwanted announcements. Socio-cultural blogger Seth Godin coined an excellent term, "permission marketing." Put people on your mailing list who have interacted with you in the past in one way or another, thus ensuring the likelihood that they may have an interest in whatever announcement you send out. And always offer people an easy way to opt-out of future emails.

Google Alerts are a marvelous tool for tracking what's going on in your own career that you might not even know about. Set up many alerts with various combinations of your name (in quotes, so that the first and last remain together for the search engine) or your ensemble, plus pieces in your catalog.

You will learn about broadcasts, performances and even recordings that you didn't know about, as well as mentions in articles and interviews. And each of these new pieces of information offers you a wonderful reason to build yet another new business relationship, by taking the opportunity to drop an email to someone to say thank you, or whatever the appropriate message might be. <http://www.google.com/alerts>

Okay, so you know what you want to do, you have all the tools at the ready to present to people who are interested in what you do, and you now know how to use those tools to generate more opportunity. The last step of this little scenario is to do everything you can to educate yourself about business and technology.

It's important to understand the basics of copyright, since everything you create will be affected by it.

Copyright basics

Registering your song or composition's copyright grants you the following six *exclusive* rights, listed here courtesy of attorney James Kendrick:

- the right to reproduce the work in copies or "phonorecords" (which term includes all forms of audio-only recordings);
- the right to prepare derivative works (e.g., choral arrangements of a song, translations of a lyric, sound recordings of performances of a musical work);
- the right to distribute copies or phonorecords of a work by any means, including sale, rental, lease or loan;
- the right to perform the copyrighted work publicly; and
- the right to display the work publicly (physically and online); and for sound recordings, the right to perform the work publicly by means of a digital transmission.

Publishing and distribution

You will want to learn about publishing and distribution. Signing with a publisher offers a number of benefits, but also means relinquishing your copyright, and thus, the control of how your music is used. Choosing to be self-published has the benefits of retaining control as well as all earned income from your work, but it entails the added effort of being the person responsible for running the administrative side of your art. Talk with your peers and educate yourself about this important aspect of the music business.

Distribution deals are available to self-published creators just as they are to larger publishers, and can be initiated with something as simple as a cold email. In such an arrangement, most often the copyright holder/publisher (aka the self-published composer) ships retail-ready bound scores and parts to a distributor at a 40 or 50 percent discount, indicating to the distributor what the full retail price is so that they will also make a profit. These relationships are often non-exclusive, so you can continue to sell your products and reap 100

percent of the proceeds, while also having them sold via outside retailers.

Commission fees

In a world as unregulated as art, artists need to talk openly with one another about money. If they don't, they run the risk of charging too little for what they do and undercutting the entire profession. Seek out peers with whom you can talk openly, and support each other in efforts to maintain a viable marketplace.

For concert-music composers, the service organization Meet The Composer has posted a helpful "ballpark figure" fee chart that is useful not only to the artist, but for the patron as well: <http://www.meetthecomposer.org/node/95>

Technology

The more comfortable you get with software and computers, the more efficient you'll be. Rather than being constantly dependent on others to do basic tasks, try to build a decent level of familiarity with the following:

- web presence design and software (website, blogs, themes, skins and customization on all networking sites);
- digital audio editing (to create MP3s, etc);
- photo editing (cropping and enhancing press shots, etc);
- printing and binding (if relevant to your work);
- desktop publishing (business cards, flyers, etc.); and
- managing file transfers over the web.

The list continues, but these are some basic tools that, if conquered, will save you a lot of money and frustration. Technology is now an inescapable and vital part of our work as artists and our ability to share what we do, and being comfortable with this concept rather than fighting it, is absolutely essential.

The above is merely a summary; the CMA *First Tuesdays* workshop ran for more than two hours, and I've done several that are twice that long. I'm available to speak in person and delve far deeper into these topics and more; feel free to email me through my website.

Two—of many—helpful career-building books I recommend:

Beyond Talent, by Angela Myles Beeching

The Savvy Musician, by David Cutler

Two articles I wrote for NewMusicBox that might be helpful:

- Making an Asset Out of Your eSelf:
<http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=5533>
- All The Things You Are: Five Suggestions for Composing Your Happiness:

<http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=5330>

Here's to success—whatever your personal definition of that is!
Best,

Alex Shapiro

Composer [Alex Shapiro](#)'s acoustic and electro-acoustic works—published by her company, Activist Music—are performed and broadcast internationally and have been recorded on more than twenty commercially released CDs. Shapiro serves on the board of directors of the American Music Center , the ASCAP Board of Review, and The MacDowell Colony.