

FREELANCE

10 Commonsense Keys to Making
YOUR Music YOUR Business

JOSH GOTTRY

with a foreword by

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CONTENTS

Foreword by John Wittmann.....	vi
Prologue.....	2
1 Learn New Things.....	4
FIELD NOTES: Figure It Out on the Fly – Matthew Watson	
2 Every Gig is Your Next Audition.....	10
FIELD NOTES: Recruitment and Retention – Angela Kepley	
3 Be Visible and Vulnerable.....	16
FIELD NOTES: Value the Virtual Gig – Dr. Jeremy Peterman	
4 Find Your “Unique”.....	22
FIELD NOTES: Prioritize Perspective – Brandon Fraley	
5 Diversify.....	28
FIELD NOTES: Entry Expectations – Patrick Sheridan	
6 Be Involved.....	36
FIELD NOTES: Steps to Being Seen – Danny Taylor	
7 Work with Quality People.....	42
FIELD NOTES: Choral Connections – Aimee Stewart	
8 Invest.....	48
FIELD NOTES: Lifelong Learning – Teddy Hall Jr.	
9 Embrace Change.....	56
FIELD NOTES: Preparing for Potential Paths – Drew Worden	
10 Know Your Worth.....	62
FIELD NOTES: Composer Compensation – Fred Emory Smith	
Epilogue.....	68
About the Author.....	72

FREELANCE



PROLOGUE

The post read something to this effect: *A private student of mine, a sophomore undergraduate student, has expressed to me his intent to pursue a career as a percussion specialist. As such, since his income will be based on teaching pre-college students, he is reluctant to continue preparing advanced college level literature and wonders if that time might be better spent elsewhere. Suggestions?*

My response (tongue firmly in cheek): *Wow! How I wish I had gotten a peek into that student's crystal ball when I was an undergrad; it would have been so much easier for me to know what the future held for my life as a freelance musician.*

In reality, what I expected to do when I began my undergraduate studies in music, what I planned (and moved across the country) to do after graduation, and even what was the bulk of my income in my 20s and early-30s, were all uniquely different parts of my career as a freelance musician. I really didn't have the first idea of what I would be doing then, now, and all parts in between. Despite this unpredictability, I am extremely blessed, because I continue to have a successful career doing what I love, even as it requires that I consistently adapt to new opportunities, new demands, and new realities.

Up to this point in my career, in 25 years since I completed my undergraduate studies, I have spent a grand total of nine months gainfully employed in a full-time job with benefits. That one stint of full-time employment was for a one-year-only community college faculty position teaching music business, which I held while simultaneously continuing a small private studio, directing an after-school jazz band at a local charter school, and running the percussion ensemble at another community college; so even for those nine months I was still freelancing quite a bit. Other than that handful of

job titles, I have also been (or continue to be) a composer, arranger, music engraver, publisher, reviewer, editor, humanities teacher, theory instructor, private music composition teacher, substitute classroom teacher, drumline instructor, clinician, mallet manufacturer, improviser, teaching artist, and performing percussionist (everything from symphony gigs to poolside steel drum). I can safely say that I'm rarely bored.

With few exceptions, this is the best way I can imagine designing my career. My job security is actually very high (it's not like all of those jobs would fire me at the same time), I can shift the pieces as circumstances require, either to accommodate a particular weekly schedule for family demands or simply to devote more of my working schedule to an area of interest or higher income potential, and I get to explore multiple interests within the music industry.

This certainly isn't for everyone, but if you think it might be for you, I hope that my experiences and stories will be helpful. The concepts they illustrate have been critical to my success and I hope that by sharing them, you can consider how you can be most successful in your own freelance career.

Chapter One

LEARN NEW THINGS

Every skill is potential value

I consider myself a lifelong learner; in some respects, I need to be. Society, technology, and our global community are all evolving continuously. The day I stop learning is the day I become less relevant.

This concept is also true, possibly to a greater extent, within the music industry. The demands on musicians continue to increase: repertoire is being created with greater complexity, a wide range of styles is the norm for performers, teaching techniques are expected to adapt to an increasingly diverse student body and a variety of platforms, and incorporation of new and continually changing technology is a must. All of these require musicians to better themselves just to keep up.

Of course, I was once (and at times may still be) foolish and naïve. I once thought that I had learned what I needed to know—what I needed to be diversified enough to be successful. I was wrong, and the lesson learned from one particular incident served its purpose well in reminding me to never stop learning.

As an undergrad pursuing a degree in percussion performance, my schedule was full. With only one exception, each semester was loaded with 18 or more credit hours. Typically, three or four of those credits were one-credit ensembles that took far more rehearsal and practice time than the credit they paid out. That, coupled with private lessons (three credits earned, many hours required), preparations for recitals, a few private students of my own, etc., meant that free time was minimal. It was a very good thing I was studying in a field I loved.

