

I have been contacted recently by several emerging composers and songwriters looking for career advice. Although I consider myself an emerging composer as well, I have had the fortune to collaborate with many musicians and artists over the course of my career, and garner a few grants and commissions. I wanted to share what I have learned to others in hopes of fostering a thriving collaborative musical community!

Advice for Young and Emerging Composers

- Become part of a musical community. It's not important to be the best-known composer in the area, but the more connections you have in your geographic region, the more likely you are to get repeat performers of your works.
- Befriend musicians and take seriously the ones who ask you to write music for them. If you can't do it right now have an ongoing list of people who have said that. Having people excited about playing your work is your greatest asset! If you are working with a new instrument for the first time, ask questions! Keep a list of people you have worked with who you would want to work with again, and where they live. Keep in touch with the best players from college who may live in another area. I know now a cluster of musicians in San Francisco who I went to school with in Boston, so it's nice to know if I wanted to, I could have a concert there!
- Have a comprehensive website. I have been contacted by many people out of the blue looking for a composer, a tutor, a musician, etc. Have a current resume on it and audio samples of your work. Several commissions have come from people who have just heard the music on my website. That being said, make sure your website is linked to other websites and organizations for maximum exposure. If you're not already a member of the American Composers Forum, it's a great organization.
- Know who you can and can't work with. This is very important and a lesson some people never learn. Trust your gut. If you have an uneasy feeling about someone you're probably right.
- Treat everything like a learning experience and don't get discouraged. There is something to learn from every bad performance, review, reading or workshop!
- Only submit to competitions, workshops, residencies that you are absolutely ready for. Don't scramble at the last minute. If you have something that fits perfectly, great, otherwise, save it for next time and focus your energies elsewhere.
- A good reputation is created by being professional, polite and very grateful. Let people know how much you appreciate their interest in your work. If you can't pay them handsomely at the moment, be the kind of person you would want to work for.
- Venues are important for your own compositions, unless you are lucky enough to have enough performances regardless. I teach at a school that has a hall in it and a faculty concert series so I'm very lucky in that respect. I also work at a church, so I can play my compositions or hold recitals there. What are the best venues in your area? Does it normally offer the sort of music you are showcasing? Is there a built-in audience of sorts? If you are holding a concert in a venue that does not traditionally have music, or at least your kind of music, it may be less on people's radar.
- Don't write what you think other people want to hear. Only you can write the music you write. You are not really in competition with anyone else.
- I'm a list maker, so keeping lists of short-term and long-term projects is very helpful for me. For example, I have lists of goals for specific projects, lists of goals for this month and then long-range goals too. They can change though, so be open for that to happen.

- Work on what you are most excited about right now!

And last but not least:

- Do at least one thing every day to advance your career. This is my golden rule. Don't save up all of your business related stuff for your one day off. It can be working on music, contacting a potential future client, updating your bio, working on your resume. If you get into the habit of doing it you'll be less likely to be overwhelmed. People ask me how I get so much accomplished all the time, and I think it's through living by this rule. If you're disciplined and professional you can accomplish a lot!