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Today's Musicians Profiled: Success Redefined ♦

What characterizes the newest generation of musicians? What kinds of successful careers are they creating for themselves? Here are a few examples of not-so-traditional approaches.

Cellist Matt Haimovitz garnered national media attention several years ago when the *New York Times* ran a piece about his unorthodox national tour—solo cello recitals played in rock clubs, coffeehouses, and even a pizza parlor. He had become frustrated with the traditional concert experience and missed seeing his generation in the audience. He wanted to reach out to new audiences with the music he was passionate about—from J. S. Bach to living composers to his own arrangements of rock standards. He has championed performing in nontraditional venues; for his “Anthem” tour of American works, Haimovitz performed Jimi Hendrix’s improvisational version of *The Star-Spangled Banner* and recorded it live at former New York City’s punk palace CBGB. Shortly after his initial forays into alternative spaces, Haimovitz hired a former singer-songwriter to find and book appropriate clubs for more extensive tours in support of his latest projects.

In 2000 he and composer Luna Pearl Woolf founded an indie classical label, Oxingale Records, and since then have released over 15 albums encompassing a wide range of artists and genre-blending collaborative works. Recent projects include *After Reading Shakespeare*, featuring literary-themed solo cello suites by three Pulitzer Prize–winning American composers. Haimovitz has toured the album in over forty cities, including exclusive appearances at Borders bookstores as part of “Borders on the Road.” Oxingale has also launched a YouTube channel featuring his performances and on the label’s website (<http://www.oxingale.com>), fans can download free ringtones of Matt’s signature cellistic pyrotechnics.¹

Here is an example of another music career path with a different focus: ICE, the International Contemporary Ensemble (<http://www.iceorg.org>), is a flexible group of thirty musicians who play everything from duos to chamber orchestra works, multimedia pieces using extended techniques, non-Western instruments, as well as improvisatory and electroacoustic works.

Claire Chase, flutist and cofounder of ICE, wrote about her experience as a musician-entrepreneur in 2008:

When I formed ICE in Chicago the summer after I graduated from Oberlin, I had no money, no business experience, very few contacts in

the area. I produced our first concert on a budget of \$605, which was exactly the amount of my first check working for Wolfgang Puck Catering Company.

Seven years later, we have given more than 250 concerts, including the world premieres of over 400 new works, and we have two solvent companies in Chicago and New York (with California coming soon), four albums on the way this season, and upcoming tours in three continents.

Our generation of young musicians, despite the economic challenges that we face, is experiencing an unprecedented freedom. We can do anything we want to do. We can produce our own concerts, release our own albums, create our own communities and our own movements, and we don't need a lot of money to do this. We just need great ideas, we need a spirit of adventure, and we need each other (thick skin is good to have, too).

ICE is an outgrowth of this early 21st century trend of the musician as entrepreneur, the artist as the producer. Although it might be too early to make this prediction, it is my hope that this spirit of entrepreneurship in the arts will be one of the defining characteristics and contributions of my generation of artists.²

And here is a third example and another ensemble demonstrating an alternative career path: the Providence String Quartet developed its innovative urban residency, Community MusicWorks ([http:// www.communitymusicworks.org](http://www.communitymusicworks.org)), over ten years ago in Providence, Rhode Island. Violinist/violist Sebastian Ruth founded Community MusicWorks on the conviction that musicians have an important public role to play in creating and transforming communities. Lauded by Alex Ross in the *New Yorker* as a "revolutionary organization," the quartet lives, rehearses, and teaches in an underserved urban neighborhood. Ruth, a Brown University graduate, started the project with a \$10,000 grant from the university's Swearer Center for Public Service. Community MusicWorks is now funded through grants and private donations. By 2009, their budget had grown to \$630,000. The organization provides 100 neighborhood children with lessons, the use of instruments, and transportation to performances throughout the region. A substantial waiting list of students is evidence of the program's popularity with young people and their families.

In terms of having an impact beyond their immediate community, in 2006, the organization started a two-year fellowship program that trains young professional musicians in the methodology of community-based performance and teaching careers. Fellows teach, perform, and design programs

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 . . .”³

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