

MUSIC RESOURCES

Getting what you want: How to jump start your career

Start it and work it!

'Start now!' may be among the simplest and most effective suggestions for building a career. Rather than wait for an elusive 'perfect time' to begin your career, consider performing (and/or teaching, composing or producing) during your university/college years as skills and ambitions develop. Jump-start your musical career while still a student, because the more professional experience you can amass, the easier it is to continue and further expand your work once you graduate. Instead of starting essentially from scratch at that point, you will already be building repertoire and contacts as well as musical and business abilities. Perhaps you are already gigging with a chamber ensemble or teaching a few students. Maybe you are composing jingles or repairing instruments or conducting a choir. With some strategic thinking, deliberate ['circle building'](#) and focused action while you are still immersed in your studies, you can prepare yourself for a smoother transition after graduation. While it can be challenging to make the time in a busy schedule, music-related work can pay much better than many traditional unskilled jobs. Bobby and David's story illustrates this approach beautifully.

As roommates at a liberal arts university in the Midwest, Bobby and David started their career dreams early and put those plans into immediate action while still college students. Bobby majored in music (classical voice and guitar) with an entrepreneurship minor, and David majored in marketing with a music minor (keyboard). The two composer-performers started out with a good balance of skills and attitudes towards making a living in music. They wasted no time getting started. As college sophomores they began composing and recording music together, compiling original CDs, which they shopped around to local music houses that licensed music for film and advertising. After a while, one of these music businesses asked them to do a couple of ad spots on spec (unpaid) for a client. That led to some paid work, which continued throughout the rest of their college years. By the time they were ready to graduate, one of the music houses was ready to 'hire' them as independent contractors. They were given the space and equipment to jump into their work full-time, along with a modest monthly stipend and percentages on any work they did that was sold or licensed. In the several years since they graduated with BA degrees they have created music for numerous ad spots and film trailers and have licensed original work for films, TV and advertising. They have figured out what they didn't already know about the music business and technology through a willingness to explore and practice. They always say "yes!" to clients' requests and then figure out how to make it work. In addition, they keep their personal artistic vision alive and well by composing and performing in their own musical projects on the side. Nimble, prolific and creative, Bobby and David have developed expertise that is built on the foundation of their formal education but which



extends far beyond what they learned in the classroom.

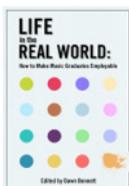
Bobby and David are terrific examples of how a university (college) education prepares students to continue learning over a lifetime and build on the opportunities and changes that come along.

A second, important action that will help increase the effectiveness of any career-building strategy has its roots in the thinking of pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, who suggested simply, "Just work it". It is unnecessary to solve every challenge or opportunity completely or immediately. Instead, make a start (see above) and do what you can. 'Just work it' is a terrific mantra for action, and can free you to simply begin a project rather than worry if everything is perfectly aligned or if you have enough skills or preparation.

Many of life's most exciting and unexpected opportunities happen quickly (remember the quote that led Chapter 4: "Luck favors the prepared mind"). Preparation is an important key to building a successful and sustainable career, in both musical readiness and in the 'business of you.' A little future planning also ensures readiness for those last-minute opportunities on which careers can be launched and later sustained. It is vital, therefore, to keep skills sharp at all times and to cultivate the ability to recognise, create and accept appropriate opportunities as they come along.

It was after 11pm on Friday night and Raoul had finally made it back to his apartment after an exhausting week at his day job. A bit discouraged that his musical goals hadn't moved forward much that week, he sat down with a soda to relax and think about making weekend plans. Just then, his cell rang. It was Brad, a college buddy he hadn't seen in a while, inviting Raoul over to his place. "Hey, I'm here with an old high-school friend of mine and her boyfriend, Mike," Brad explained, "c'mon over!" Raoul really just wanted to fall into bed and forget his uninspiring week, but agreed to meet them at Brad's place. It was at that last-minute chance meeting that Raoul started talking with Mike, a fellow musician. By the time Raoul left Brad's apartment that night, he had an appointment to meet Mike the following Tuesday, and that meeting turned into a paid gig. A year later, Raoul and Mike had completed well over a dozen projects together, landed a long-term contract, and were planning their own production company.

Raoul was well prepared as an artist, and getting out of his apartment that night worked out for him in a very productive way. Luck truly favoured Raoul's prepared mind, as it has for Bobby and David. These stories both illustrate another vital career-building element: *It's not just who you know, it's who knows you.* It is to this that we turn in resource 33.



This resource was developed by Dr Janis Weller, [McNally Smith College](#) of Music in the US. The resource comes from *Life in the Real World: How to Make Music Graduates Employable*, published by Common Ground in 2012. You can order it [here](#).

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