MUSIC CAREER GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on taking the next step in thinking about your career as a musician! Whether you are a freshmen or nearing graduation, now is a good time to start thinking about your future. This career guide is meant to give you broad information to think about as you picture yourself working in different environments. As a musician, you may work as a performer, educator, or administrator, or likely a combination of all three. We hope reading through this will spark your own curiosity, and that you will come meet with Fine Arts Career Services for an appointment. We are highly skilled in helping you to find the perfect job, internship, or just to brainstorm different career paths.

CAREERS IN MUSIC

As we talk about your future as a professional musician, let’s consider your options in three broad categories:

Music Education
- Classroom Music Teacher
- Private Lesson Instructor
- Music within academia/universities
- Education within arts organizations
- Education Manager

Music Therapy
- Music Therapist
- Licensed Professional of the Healing Arts

Music Performance
- Full-time Ensemble Musician
- Freelance (Gigging) Musician
- Recording/Session Musician
- Military Musician
- Liturgical/Church Musician
- Forming a chamber ensemble

Music Administration
- Music Business
- Music Library/Publishing
- Arts Administration
- Commercial Music Production
- Music Venue Manager

VIEW YOURSELF MULTI-DIMENSIONALLY

In the modern arts world, the more you can see yourself as a multi-faceted artist, the better. Sure, you may teach primarily, or you may want a full-time orchestra job, but the more that you can combine the aforementioned skills, the more opportunities you will have.

Teaching gigs lead to playing gigs. Developing arts administration skills could improve your portfolio as a music educator. Diversify your skillset! It will make you a better musician, and a better professional.
MUSIC PERFORMANCE

In the form of freelancing or seeking full-time employment in an ensemble, finding a career in music performance can be challenging but rewarding. If you wish to go down this path, seeking opportunities in summer music festivals (such as Aspen or Brevard) while you are in school is a great place to start. Many professionals audition to get on “sub lists” early in their career, as well as playing in smaller, regional ensembles.

The process of auditioning for a first full-time position can sometimes take years, so many musicians subsidize their income as a freelance musician, teacher, and administrator while they are on the audition scene. All of these opportunities give you exposure to more networking opportunities, as well as income.

Freelance musicians work in theatres, clubs, private events, and religious settings. Pay for freelance work can vary, and work schedules can fluctuate greatly. Freelancing is an industry that is built on strong relationship-building, so networking for future work is crucial. Working as a freelance musician also comes with viewing yourself as a small business: keeping track of income taxes, business expenses, your calendar, and maybe even some marketing.

Many musicians also audition for ensembles within the U.S. Military. These opportunities are well-paid, and come with many of the great benefits that come from being in the military. While you will have to complete basic training and meet certain health requirements, many musicians are enrolled in the military in a manner where they will never see combat.

Many music auditions are based solely on your playing/singing ability. Some performers seek graduate studies to study with certain people or gain more experience, but graduate degrees are not necessary to land a full-time ensemble job.

MUSIC EDUCATION

For the purpose of this guide, we are defining music education as more than just jobs within a school district. Music is taught in many places, and many musicians can become educators, even if their degree is not in music studies.

To get a job as a school music teacher, you will need to hold a state teaching certificate. If you are a music studies major, this process will be laid out by your faculty, but usually involves student teaching, a criminal background check, and the passing of licensing exams. If you did not earn a degree in music studies but choose to become a teacher after graduation, many certification programs exist. Through a combination of coursework, exams, and student teaching, it is possible to become a credentialed teacher after you graduate.

Working as a school music teacher is a highly rewarding career that combines musicianship, pedagogy, and advocacy. Many music teachers thrive on the feeling of teaching young people how to make music. The experience of teaching music at the elementary, middle, and high school level is entirely different, so it is essential that students explore their strengths and interests when it comes to these settings.

If your goal is to work in the schools, find any way you can early to get in front of students, even while you are still in college. You could help with after-school rehearsals, work as a sectional instructor, or teach private lessons. Many of these opportunities pay, and could be a very useful part-time job while you are still in school. Getting these experiences early and often will strengthen your resume for your first teaching job.

The Texas Music Educator's Association (TMEA) maintains a large and thorough job board at www.tmea.org. Many other state music education agencies maintain similar job boards.
MUSIC EDUCATION (cont.)

If you enjoy being your own boss and teaching, building a studio as a private music instructor could be an enjoyable career. Most school music teachers maintain lists of lesson teachers, which serves as a source of students. Teaching privately involves preparing students for concerts, auditions, and overall development on the instrument/voice.

Working as an academic in a university combines a musician’s passion for research and teaching. Professors often possess a doctoral-level degree, either a DMA or PhD, based on the discipline.

There are many opportunities for a music educator to work for a community or arts organization. Most organizations have education departments, with staff whose purpose it is to educate the patrons and consumers. Most symphony orchestras have education departments that put on educational experiences for kids and adults. Some nonprofits exist to support music education in low-income regions. Some concert halls and performing arts centers have education initiatives of their own. These positions combine strong administration and advocacy skills, as well as a drive to bring music to all audiences. While these positions may not involve making music every day, they certainly require a passion for it.

MUSIC ADMINISTRATION

Music administration requires high organization and methodical skills to ensure quality music experiences. Professional music organizations have departments that focus on marketing, development (fundraising), education, and operations. For more information, check out our Arts Administration Career Guide!

LET’S TALK ABOUT MONEY

Any conversation about potential earnings for musicians starts with deciding if you seek full-time employment or more of a freelancing lifestyle. In some cities, the local chapter of the American Federation of Musicians may post some salary information. Music educators can often look up salary scales on school district websites. For broad salary information, Glassdoor (www.glassdoor.com) and The Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/ooh/) are great resources. The latter provides average salary ranges, estimated growth for various industries, and more, and it is compiled by the U.S. Department of Labor.

If you are a freelancer, it is wise to sit down with a certified financial planner and develop a plan for how you will process payment from various organizations and venues, and how much you need to put aside for income tax.

FURTHERING YOUR EDUCATION

The Master of Music (MM) is a degree that students often use to gain more experience, build their resume, or study with a new mentor after the bachelor’s degree.

The Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree is a performance-based degree that culminates in a recital or large-scale performance project.

A Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in music culminates in a dissertation, and is common for the disciplines of music theory, musicology, and music education. Doctoral-level degrees are necessary if you are interested in pursuing an academic career at the university level.
Maybe reading this has left you with even more questions, and feeling even less sure about what career opportunities you may want to explore. That is okay!

Setting up an appointment with Fine Arts Career Services is a great place to brainstorm possible career pathways and help to make your application materials reflect you in the strongest way possible.

...NOW WHAT’S NEXT?