

Success Principles for the Freelance Flutist

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What is a freelancer? “Person who works as a writer, designer, performer, or the like, selling work or services by the hour, day, job, etc., rather than working on a regular salary basis for one employer.” “Person who sells services to employers without a long-term commitment to any of them.” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>)

Types of musical activities

- Orchestral – stage and pit (symphony/chamber/musicals/cabaret/opera/ballet)
- Solo work (recitals, concertos) and chamber music
- Jazz/Folk/Rock/Pop/World music
- Educational: concerts, masterclasses, workshops, teaching/tutoring, coaching, lecturing, conducting
- Recording
- Corporate/private events (weddings/funerals/parties etc)
- Adjudicating/ examining
- Concert programming, booking artists
- Arranging/composing/publishing

Requirements

- Good sight-reader; ability to learn music quickly
- Good sense of rhythm/intonation (all genres, including classical, pop, jazz, rock, folk, world).
- Solid background in harmony, history of music and styles.
- Proficient on flute/piccolo (hopefully also alto flute/bass flute)
- Ability to work with other instrumentalists, including those from other musical genres

Useful

- Ability to sing or play other instruments, as it increases your employability
- Ability to present, or be a “front” person, in other words, speak well and build a rapport with audiences.
- Be comfortable talking to the media.
- The ability to be theatrical

Take a business-like approach from the start

- Set up a business, with official invoices, business name, logo, business cards.
- Answer phone calls, emails, text messages promptly.
- If you don't place value on yourself, then don't expect others to. Set fees at award rates, and include costs of rehearsals and travel when setting fees. Also consider opportunity costs. (What are you giving up to take the gig?)
- The precedents you set affect other musicians and the industry as a whole, so don't undervalue yourself!
- Negotiate terms so that there is a win/win situation for both parties

Responding to work offers – what's NOT acceptable!

- “Yeah, should be alright. Remind me again next year.”
- “I can't even think that far ahead” (9 months)
- Extended silence before accepting work (write some sort of reply, even if just to say that you will send a proper reply later)

Responding to work offers – what is courteous

- “Thanks so much for the opportunity. I’d be delighted to take part in this project.”
- “Thanks for thinking of me. I’ve set aside the date in my diary.”
- I’m really looking forward to working with you.

Deposits

- People can be notorious for late cancellations, so ask for a 50% deposit at the time of booking, with the remainder of the fee to be paid one day prior to the gig, or on the day.
- Make terms of work CLEAR and IN WRITING. e.g playing flute and harp music for [name of event/address] on [date] from 3:30 – 5:00pm at [venue] for a fee of [\$].

Networking

- Like it or not, musicians generally book friends, colleagues, students, students of friends/colleagues, and so on. Get to know the people who do the booking.
- Join a flute society committee.
- Build a profile: play in competitions, auditions, write articles (and be seen generally!)
- When you move to a new town, cold call to let industry people know you are available to perform/teach etc.

Be an event creator

- Set up masterclasses and workshops; CD launch/concert tour
- Create your own concert, show, event, workshop, summer school. e.g design educational concerts for children in libraries or schools

Advice

- Be computer literate (Excel, Access, Word, Publisher, Power Point and email).
- You will spend a lot of time doing administration!
- Networking is essential
- Constantly be planning ahead.
- Don’t be a musical snob! Be prepared to play a variety of styles and listen to as many genres as you can, so that you have a feel for them.
- If you have another skill apart from flute playing, use it! (Arranging/singing/ other instruments etc). It makes you more employable and interesting as a performer.
- Have a strong web presence: *YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Artist Website, Ning, Wordpress, Flickr, Posterous* etc.
- Be willing to be theatrical

The world is small

- Treat every musician as a potential employer (because they may end up being that some time!)
- Play as well as you can at every gig, no matter how insignificant you may feel it is
- Speak well of others. Don’t whinge and criticize other musicians (like so many others!)

But it's not THAT small:

- If you make a mistake and burn a bridge, then learn from it for next time, but it's not the end of your career.
- Create a new project (apply for grants if needed)
- Try to find work in another environment/city
- When there is little work, up skill or create projects: Excel/Access/PowerPoint; Small Business Management ; Negotiation Skills; Marketing; Website Design; Typing; learn to improvise; record; learn new repertoire; plan concert programs
- Write an article for your local flute society newsletter or music teachers' association