

Oregon Musician

Sharing ideas about music and the teaching of music

Musical Entrepreneurship

A Note from the Editor



About the Editor

Rhonda Ringering, NCTM has crafted a career as a pianist, a writer and an instructor. She has released four CDs, is an active solo and collaborative performer of both classical and jazz, and her articles have appeared in *American Music Teacher*, *Piano & Keyboard*, *Flute Talk*, *Clavier*, and *Keyboard Companion*. She received her M.M. from Boston University.

We live in an interesting time: just this week I received the sad news that *Portland Piano International* will not be holding its summer festival this year. A couple of months ago many of us were informed that Sherman & Clay was closing its Portland store—a location of many of our OMTA events and one of the piano dealers to whom we have sent students for piano purchases.

Change is difficult. Many of us were trained for a reality that no longer exists. Long gone are the days of plentiful University tenure track positions, well-funded concert series, and live music venues. Orchestras are going bankrupt; the recording industry is nearly completely “indie.” The image of the piano teacher who works for “pin money” while her well-heeled spouse brings in the real money bears little or no resemblance to today’s independent music instructor. Each of us has had to adapt to survive.

Change is opportunity. In this issue of *Oregon Musician*, Dr. Harold Gray shares stories of starting and running PPI, and tells of his life plans now that he is no longer in charge of the organization. Sara Greenleaf Seitz writes of how she and her cellist husband started Kaiser Academy of Music and Arts (KAMA). Jennifer Wright shares how she upended the “traditional” concert and recital format for more creative and interactive performances. Molly Wheeler and her husband Bob Wall tell how they have created a living and a life as freelance artists. Dr. Jill Timmons (with special permission from Oxford University Press) gives us the preface of her soon-to-be-released book *The Musician’s Journey: Crafting Your Career Vision and Plan*. Each writer reminds us we all must be (to paraphrase Bob Wall) “entrepreneurs of ourselves.”

Change is exciting. In the wake of the PPI announcement, beloved pianist and clinician Paul Roberts is working with Northwest pianists and arts advocates to plan an independent master class, workshop, and concert event (watch *Music News* for details!). In the dearth of tenure track positions, a stable recording industry, and well-funded music venues, musicians everywhere are learning to stop waiting for opportunity to find them and to blend ingenuity, integrity, and artistry to their communities in brand new ways. Let this issue’s bold entrepreneurial writers spark your own creativity!

Professionalism and the Independent Music Teacher

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Good for Students, Good for the Community: The Birth and Growth of KAMA

By Sara Greenleaf Seitz



About the Author

Sara Greenleaf Seitz holds a B.M. in Piano Performance from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory where she studied with Richard Cass. Sara has held positions at the University of Oregon and Linfield College as an instrumental staff accompanist. She resides in Keizer with her husband and two daughters.

My cellist husband Noah and I often joke that we should have hung out outside the medical school to find mates instead of the music school. To most people, this probably doesn't sound very funny, but in our 11½ years of marriage, our comeback to the razzing of being "starving artists" has always included dry wit—that, and a little risky behavior.

In April of 2009, Noah and I decided to create a music, dance, and acting school in an unlikely response to the ailing economy and our financial instability. After eight years of paying the bills with a virtual patchwork quilt of jobs (think orchestra gigs, adjunct faculty positions, freelance performing, accompanying, independent studio teaching, and even wedding cake baking!), we were faced with a frightening reality. Almost all of our private students had decided to take a break from lessons for the summer. Miraculously, in the past, we had always had just enough students to get us through the lean months when our other gigs were on hiatus. But the summer of 2009 was to be exceptionally lean for everyone, including our students' parents. We were left with two choices: radically rethink the way we were running our studios, or quit teaching.

Keizer Academy of Music & Arts was born out of financial necessity, but our business philosophy was and is almost one of simple idealism, "If it's good for the students and the teachers, it will be good for the community, and it will be good for us." This ridiculously basic premise helped guide us, as did several expert friends whose brains we shamelessly tapped, through the myriad decisions we were faced with during KAMA's foundation. We read books on commercial lease negotiation, entrepreneurial discipline, business and personal success principles, and small business management, and we gobbled up advice from anyone who might have knowledge of anything even remotely related to what we were trying to achieve. A dear friend created a beautiful website with online registration capability for us, and we put "wanted" ads out on Craigslist for university-trained teachers

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who were currently working in their fields. We interviewed all our candidates in a local coffee shop, and within a month we had a talented, qualified faculty, and the website had gathered enough students to warrant taking on a reasonable lease payment.

Because we had no startup capital at all, we promised ourselves that if everything wasn't going to fall into place just perfectly, we wouldn't forge ahead with opening the school. We simply did not have the luxury of settling for anything that would be less than ideal in the future. With that in mind, and freshly armed with the bit of knowledge we had managed to acquire, we called a local real estate agent whose name and number was listed on dozens of vacant storefronts in town. We told her what we wanted, and predictably, she told us it probably wasn't going to be possible. I can only figure that because commercial real estate was just as slow as everything else was at the time, she decided to humor us. The first space we asked to see had been vacant for years, and the landlord had been losing money on the rest of the property for years, so we figured we had a fair shot at negotiating with him. We were wrong. He told our agent, "no way," and didn't even submit a counter-offer. In the spirit of the promise we had made to ourselves, we decided not to bend our terms. Our agent, in the kindest way, offered us an "I told you so," and suggested we see a few other spaces.

A day later, she called us to tell us that she had mentioned us to one of her own clients, a landlord based in Portland, and that he was very interested in talking to us. Our agent showed us his building in a nice little strip mall, two blocks from the local high school and right on the main road in town. It was completely gutted, but it took very little imagination to visualize our school with its five small teaching studios, one larger piano studio, a computer lab, a moderately sized dance studio, and a large enough lobby to accommodate waiting parents and students. It was perfect! We put in an offer, and the landlord responded positively within hours. We met with him a few days later, hashed out the details of our lease (which included a free build-out, an incredibly small deposit, monthly rent and fees at a rate we could afford, a five-year lease commitment, and first right of refusal for expansion, among other terms), and within a week we had successfully negotiated a contract with which both parties were satisfied. We were as amazed as anyone to find that the tips we had picked up from all those books we had read actually worked!

Within a few weeks, the landlord's contractors began the remodel from plans drawn for us by my musician-by-night-contractor-by-day father, and a month after that, the building was finished. My mother, who is an interior decorator by training, scoured garage sales for computers and bookcases and matching furniture and art for the lobby, and our friends helped us move my grand piano from our house into the piano studio. Meanwhile, the local newspaper wrote a big feature article on us, which dramatically increased our website registrations. In August, we held a well-attended grand opening (also advertised on Craigslist) where we announced the winners of our scholarship essay contest that had been announced in the newspaper. By September we were holding ballet, acting, guitar, and preschool music classes, and piano, cello, violin, percussion, and

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clarinet lessons. I'll never forget the first time I walked into KAMA and heard the glorious cacophony of lessons and classes in session all at once. I couldn't believe it had all actually come together.

For us, the benefits of having a studio at KAMA instead of at home are many. Auto-billing, keyboard-based theory classes before each private lesson, easier to enforce studio policies, opportunities for student collaboration between studios, faculty camaraderie, availability of substitute teachers, a secretary who can reschedule lessons and deal with office work, better visibility, convenience, and a beautiful facility, are just a few of the perks. At home, I always wondered if students who quit would find something they loved, or if they would find another teacher they connected with, but at KAMA if students aren't thriving in my studio, they can try our other piano teachers' studios, or they can take lessons on another instrument, and I can feel relieved knowing they're in good hands.

Owning an arts school isn't for everybody; I know plenty of colleagues who have run wonderful, vibrant, home teaching studios for years. But for us, having two studios running out of our little 1200 square foot house didn't feel professional, convenient, or even pleasant. And though an enormous amount of work went into creating KAMA, we were amazed by the friends, family, and complete strangers who were willing to share their knowledge with us, and who helped us in dozens of ways we couldn't have guessed. For example, when we planned our first all-school recital, our church volunteered to let us use their beautiful facility and pianos for free. This was something we never would have expected, but it reminded us that accepting help from outside sources was the reason we had gotten as far as we had. We were and continue to be simultaneously humbled and encouraged.

As fortunate as we have been, it still takes unwavering dedication and motivation to keep any small business running well, and there are days we wonder if bringing our studios back home would simplify our lives. But mostly, Noah and I are so grateful for all the lessons we have learned on our risky little adventure. And perhaps more importantly, we are pretty darn happy we didn't hang out in front of the medical school after all.



Entrepreneurship of Yourself

by Bob Wall and Molly Wheeler, NCTM



Bob Wall

Bob is a Portland-based video producer. His entertainment industry production experience includes work for Paramount Pictures, ABC Television Features, and several independent production companies, as well as screenwriting and development.



Molly Wheeler

Molly is active as a performer, accompanist, adjudicator and teacher in the Portland area. As a specialist in the duet repertoire, Molly has collaborated with several fine pianists, most notably with Molly Nichols in the duo *The Mollys* and Rhonda Ringering in the *Ringering/Wheeler Piano Duo*. Together Bob and Molly have created 20 videos for www.about.com.

The term **entrepreneur** was first defined by the Irish-French economist Richard Cantillon as the person who pays a certain price for a product to resell it at an uncertain price, thereby making decisions about obtaining and using the resources while consequently admitting the risk of enterprise. All of us, whether we know it or not, are entrepreneurial in our careers, varying only by degree. We start down a path, perhaps as children or young adults, and along the way, pay certain prices for each of the choices we make, hoping each is an investment in future happiness or success. We decide to participate (or not) in activities in high

school, building skills and experience; we decide what to study (or not) in our secondary education, honing knowledge and deciding what field to spend our time and energy in. Like any entrepreneur, we cannot know what the resale price of our various decisions and investments will be. A hard earned PhD may lead to a life of economic uncertainty and career misery, while dropping out of high school to pursue a passion may result in a direction that provides wealth, success and happiness. There are predictors, data, and averages about what each of these paths might lead to, but nobody wants to consider themselves average! What is important to know, if one visualizes their career as a path, with all the choices and skills one has learned up to now as the road behind them, is they can change lanes, or even get off the road entirely. This is entrepreneurship of yourself, and being a musician teaches some of the most valuable skills you can pick up along the way.

Molly: as a classical pianist, I relish the repetitive nature of practicing, rehearsing a scalar passage over and over at different tempos until it flows just right under my fingers,

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or listening to the shape of the phrase repeatedly until I get the sound I want. While playing the piano does require creativity and spontaneity it also demands discipline and long hours of drilling technique. I often hear my husband from the other room yelling “haven’t you gone over that part enough!!” As a creative person, he can’t stand to hear me do the same thing over and over again the same way. Unfortunately our musical careers can easily fall into the same habit of doing the same thing over and over again . . . the same way. But we have a distinct advantage as pianists to explore many avenues to form our careers: teaching, adjudicating, accompanying choirs, singers, instrumentalists, performing in various ensembles or as solo artists. Shifting our focus among these avenues can do us good to keep our playing and teaching fresh and our musical souls invigorated.

I was fortunate to meet and marry a fellow musician and creative type who understands not only the musician’s life but the life of creating your own career as a freelancer. In the 8 years we’ve been married Bob has been a jazz musician, symphony musician, IT consultant, writer, editor, videographer, video producer, and multimedia editor. While we spend many nights worrying about when and what the next project will be, we have enjoyed the ever changing landscape of our working lives. Bob made the shift 3 years ago to video work. With a background in film and music, it was a natural fit for his strong storytelling abilities and his creative eye and ear. His background doing IT consulting for land-use planning companies led him into creating documentary shorts for various public and commercial planning projects.

A few years back a friend of his mentioned that he was making short how-to videos for about.com. It was a quick and easy way to make some cash whenever he had a few hours to spare. But of course it takes a partner to host, so I was volunteered. The subjects in their list are vast but we chose to focus on the hobbies we enjoyed most — cooking and traveling. We spent the first summer with our new baby making cooking videos during naptimes. The next year we took the equipment along on vacations to Kauai and Vancouver, BC, to make travel videos. This past summer a series of piano videos showed up in the queue so we produced videos on such topics as “What are the parts of the piano,” “What are the basic notes of the piano,” and “How to warmup before a piano recital.” Figuring out how to distill these topics down to a 3 minute video appropriate for the About.com audience proved to be a challenge. I couldn’t explain things the way I would in a one on one lessons or assume that the viewer had any previous knowledge of piano. It was an unconventional and unexpected way of being entrepreneurial and proved to be a rich experience for both Bob and me.

I always knew my musical life would be varied and that I would have to recreate myself every few years to remain fresh and vibrant, but I never quite imagined myself as on-air video host or video producer. At my core I am a teacher and one of the most important lessons I have learned from Bob is that you never know the impact of your teaching. Our students may not be directly involved in music in their future but their musical education will shape their lives in more ways than we can even imagine.

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Bob: As Molly alluded to, my own career is a bit checkered, and I know that from many peoples' perspectives, it's been anything but consistent ("scary" one person told me). Besides all the things she listed, before she met me I was a legal editor, a film production assistant, a lobbyist, a Teamster working on feature films, a legislative assistant and even the executive assistant to the Mayor of Portland's Chief of Staff. When I show people my full resume, sometimes there is an understandable response from people who have had more linear career paths that I'm "a drifter." Regardless of if there is any truth to that, it's important to visualize the arc in one's career as a line that all makes sense when one steps back a bit, all along the way, picking up skills that are useful in every aspect of our lives, work or not. While I have to admit to having a few sleepless nights about career issues, things have always worked out, and I attribute that to having an outlook that all the choices and investments I've made in the past shape the present in a positive manner. Bear with me a moment while I explain my musical past.

I started playing the bass when I was 8 years old, first electric bass, then the double-bass. I took piano lessons starting very young and took on violin a few years later, never liking either that much. My older brother played in the junior high jazz band, and I went to his first concert and saw the whole band, but nestled in the back was the electric bassist (a girl!) surrounded by the rest of the band. She seemed to be not only the heart of the ensemble, but cocooned in it. And under everything else — the blaring horns, the tinkling piano, the chaotic drums — was her sound, holding everything together. I was in love. It wasn't until a decade later that I heard Jazz bassist Rufus Reid sum up what I was hearing: "We don't *need* the keyboard to clarify the chord. We don't *need* the drums to clarify the rhythm. You should be able to swing and radiate energy all on your own." I realized that the bass, played well, was an instrument that had an essential function, indispensable in many kinds and genres of music ensembles, but to perform that function, had to be complete on its own without help. We have to support the others we play with while having our own strong sense of style. We have to have a strong feel for our own sound, regardless of what type of music we are playing. So it is with our own careers and work, musical or not.

One of the careers I've had is something many people think of as very *un-artistic*: IT consulting — computer work. I see it as the perfect work for somebody used to playing in large and small musical ensembles. First, you have to understand your role. Second, you have to support, sometimes silently, sometimes very visibly (or audibly) the people around you. Third, you have to listen very closely to everything happening (and being told to you) around you and communicate clearly with everybody involved. If you've played in a group before, does this sound familiar? Exactly: big ears, understanding your instrument's role, and being musically supportive and communicative of other players goes a long way. I would say the skill sets are similar to both. The pay might differ a bit.

My current career is as a documentary film-maker. I fell into it after getting tired of the constant stress of computer work. It seems more closely tied to musical work because

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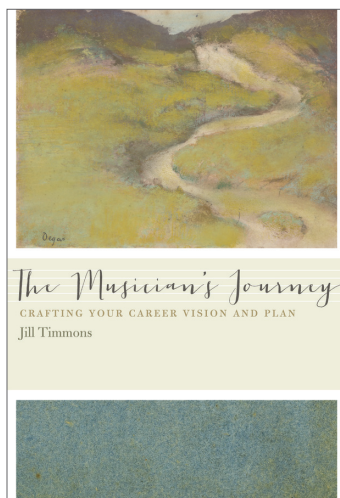
it is classified as an art, but it is no more, or less than many other professions. But it does have some similar considerations. As a film maker, the story is all-important. But to be able to tell the story well, you have to get through many technical and logistical issues. Sure, anybody can pick up a camera and shoot, but doing it badly (and believe me, there are *so* many ways to do it badly) *distracts* from the story and your voice as a visual artist. Cheap microphones will work, but an annoying hum or room noise will distract the viewer from what is being said. Immature or clumsy editing may still get the job done, but it will dilute the essence of the storytelling and pulls the viewer out of the experience. This is the same as with music — the sophisticated musician doesn't practice and become proficient with their instruments so that they can "show off" or play increasingly technical music. They do it so that the technical stuff — playing the instrument — *gets out of the way* so that the musical ideas can come out, unfettered by bad technique.

In one of the few profound moments of my life, when I was in my twenties, I realized that at a certain level, nearly all professions start being concerned with similar concepts, regardless of field. Reaching that level is almost always marked with less consideration with technical details and more about ideas. Those ideas usually revolve around communication. But it's not enough to communicate: we must connect. As musicians we strive to connect to our audience; computer technicians connect to the people who use the computers (often, knowing a user and their personality well went much further for me in solving their problems than any technical knowledge) and filmmakers seek to move their viewer via making a personal connection with the material shown. Having worked with many actors, artists, politicians and business people, I can say firmly that the line between good and great is the ability to *connect*. There are a thousand more examples in professions of every type. Finding and striving for that personal connection in whatever we do helps to solidify our relationships and make our work more meaningful. Coming to understand the core skills that we have, and how we can use them in a variety of ways and in various fields allows us to connect to the only employer we'll *always* have: ourselves.



Preface: The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Career Vision and Plan

by Dr. Jill Timmons



The Musician's Journey: Crafting your Career Vision and Plan will be released in February 2013. Copies of the book may be purchased in advance through Oxford University Press, <http://www.oup.com/us/> or through www.amazon.com. Jill invites all OMTA members to join her for a book signing on March 21, 7:30 pm at Powell's Bookstore (Hawthorne branch) 3723 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Portland, Oregon.

A number of years ago I began a search for the ideal resource for postgraduate musicians looking to put their careers on the fast track. I was looking for an all-encompassing book for my clients, those professionals who were typically midcareer musicians seeking artistic renewal and career development. Many of these clients found themselves at a crossroads professionally, often a moment that required a paradigm shift and a call to re-envision what it means to work as a musician. Although there are countless books that explore the spiritual side of making music as well as an equally large number of "how to" manuals that offer guidance for all the practical considerations of career management and success, I found nothing that actually joined these two worlds in a way that was both inspiring and practical. In short, I was looking for a book that could guide musicians in their process of creating their career vision and that would also provide concrete strategies for making that career a reality. This book is the result of that search for a comprehensive career guide, one that could be an essential tool for musicians looking to thrive in the most beautiful of professions.

The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Career Vision and Plan addresses the process of developing an artistic vision, designing a plan for that vision, becoming an entrepreneur within the global market place, and understanding how we change and adapt through the innate resources of the human brain. The genesis for this book came from my personal experiences as a practicing concert pianist and educator for the past thirty years. Over the course of that time, I expanded my work to include mentoring other musicians. These clients are primarily professional musicians who are seeking change, renewal, support, validation, or simply a witness to their growth and development. Essentially, these are artists who want a more authentic connection to their personal career goals and dreams along with a practical

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plan of action, one that will allow them to thrive in the music industry. Most of these clients are midcareer professionals and often their work involves changing career direction, sculpting new career activities, or realizing long held dreams. It has been my honor and privilege to work with these inspiring musicians and to share their wisdom with others.

Along with examples from the work of clients, colleagues, and myself, I have also included in this book much of what other authors have to say about the music profession and in the larger context, the life of an artist. I have drawn on the wisdom of poets and pundits, scholars and scientists, visionaries, philosophers, and especially those authors who give credence to living with vitality and creativity. My hope is that from these abundant sources, any musician can find support and guidance in creating that thriving career in music.

Perhaps the information presented in the following chapters will also offer what Ralph Waldo Emerson so valued: "A chief event of life is the day in which we have encountered a mind that startled us." You may want to use *The Musician's Journey* as a source for a new career paradigm; a paradigm that is not fixed in time but functions eternally. Each chapter begins with an inspiring literary quote to set the stage so to speak. Although the book project began in 2000 (an abundant economy, riding the dotcom wave, good times), I have found the research to be timeless, apart from any specific economy. At this point, we are having the worst recession since the Great Depression. We know, however, that musicians are needed at all times, that young people can have expanded brain function through making music, that music therapy is now effectively aiding those who suffer from dementia, that we can stave off the effects of aging with musical activities, and that we can turn to the beauty of music to nurture our souls.

A thriving musical career can often be fueled in effective ways from a number of sources including the guidance of experienced mentors, what is effective for others in the field, and insights from seemingly disparate disciplines. Finding that outside information can often shorten the timeline for launching a dynamic career. For that reason, I have included many divergent sources from my research and have chosen those authors that present a provocative and stimulating discourse that may serve to inspire you with new ways of envisioning and creating a dynamic career path.

As I developed *The Musician's Journey*, I chose a conversational voice, much as I would use in relating to a client. I imagine you, the reader, joining me in conversation about ways that we can create new career paths and possibilities. Although there is considerable research presented in the book, I have purposefully avoided the more formal tone of academic prose. You will find humor as well as pathos. My narrative it is not comprehensive to be sure, but rather strives to ignite the transformative process within a musician.

Whether we are responding to the vagaries of our external world or that richly textured inner artistic life, we are referenced from our personal intentions, those tightly held passionate hopes and inspirations that we have in mind. Career development truly begins with how we envision ourselves amidst the world around us. To be consciously aware of what drives us as artists is critical to finding a rewarding career path.

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The people who will best benefit from this book are those musicians who have completed the bulk of their formal training. As we develop our skills and talents during our apprentice years, there are many time-consuming and pressing issues to consider such as building proficiency on an instrument, acquiring a broad foundation in music, and exploring those first professional opportunities. Toward the end of our professional training we are then ready to consider more fully those emerging career issues. We need proficiency as artists before we are capable of envisioning who and what we can be.

Ideally, the reader is one who has been in the music business for a while, and thus is able to draw upon a body of rich professional experiences. This type of musician is often seeking to thrive in imaginative and diverse ways, independent of such mega artist managers as Columbia Artists, ICM (International Creative Management) and the like. This book is not for the handful of "superstars" in the music industry but instead offers those musicians who don't fit this mold a way of living their career dreams. In Chapter 9, "True-Life Stories," you will find examples of widely diverse careers: from jazz to classical artists, composers, and interdisciplinary professionals, all with their own unique career journey.

The Musician's Journey presents topics directly related to individuals and their collaborative colleagues. I have chosen to avoid the topic of the collective and group matters such as the sociological functions of reference groups or how systems theory might be applied to musical organizations and populations. I am, however, interested in the view of anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

In this book you will find suggestions for how to address the process of envisioning your career as well as strategies for creating a concrete plan of action. From exploring the science behind the adaptability of the brain to the nuts and bolts of a successful business strategy, I offer many resources that may also inspire you to continue your research and inquiry far beyond the narrative in this book. I hope *The Musician's Journey* will ignite a transformation in your thinking about what it means to be a musician and how to thrive in that career, ultimately sharing your knowledge and acumen with others.

In beginning our conversation about a music career, we can draw upon much wisdom available outside our industry. In his inspiring book *Journey of the Heart: The Path of Conscious Love*, John Welwood imagines life in a twofold structure. He also speaks to how we live as artists.

In larger cosmic terms, human life unfolds on the edge where heaven and earth meet. Our very posture—feet firmly planted on the ground and head raised toward the open sky—perfectly depicts our twofold nature. At the same time our upright head and shoulders enable us to see far-off things—horizons, stars, suns, planets and the infinite reaches of space all around. Half of our life is about taking our seat on this earth and creating structures (such as home, family, work) that further our unfolding. No matter how grand our

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hopes, dreams, or visions, putting them into practice always involves grappling with the limitations of our culture, our body and personal history, and our emotional temperament. The other half of life involves surrendering to what is beyond us, letting go of the structures we have created, and continually moving forward into new, unknown areas. The heaven principle working in us calls on us to expand, develop larger vision, and explore greater possibilities, beyond what we already know or see right in front of us. It indicates the way in which the human spirit is vast and open like the sky, never entirely encompassed by personality, the limitations of conditioning, or the constraints of form and matter.¹

Welwood's vision can direct us to think in new ways regarding what it means to have a career in music. Our artistic vision and plan will be both spiritual and concrete, truly joining heaven and earth.

Whether you find yourself at the beginning of an envisioning process, whether you are unearthing long-held dreams, or discovering that your vision is in place and that now you need guidance in crafting an effective plan, you will find an abundance of resources in this book. From vision to plan is a vast continuum requiring different strategies at various junctures. Most of all, this process requires imagination and desire. As artists we eventually come to discover that this vision-plan continuum is repeated many times throughout one's lifetime. Through this continuing spiral of renewing our artistic vision and plan, we have the opportunity to delve deeper into our work as artists, finding a richly textured life of service and beauty. I hope this book will inspire you to create an artistic vision and craft a plan to realize your own thriving career in music. This is the musician's journey.

¹ John Welwood, *Journey of the Heart: Intimate Relationship and the Path of Love* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), 34, 35.



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Work Less, Play More: In Interview with Dr. Harold Gray

by Rhonda Ringering, NCTM



Dr. Harold Gray

So what do you do after retiring from a successful career as an academic, a collaborative artist, and as the founder of a successful international music festival?

Take up jazz piano lessons, of course.

"I am looking forward to retirement," Harold Gray says over coffee at the Reedville Café. I've started jazz piano lessons with Dennis Plies. I left my early adult life knowing none of the jazz or popular music of my day. I called [local jazz musician] Glenn Moore a few months ago and told him I was going to be taking jazz lessons and that I would be calling in a few years to set up a gig. His response was silence. I had to tell him I was just joking."

Since retiring from Portland State University as Professor of Music in 2005, Gray continued to be Artistic Director for Portland Piano International (PPI), the festival he founded in 1978. Now, as he prepares to retire from PPI, he credits his years as a collaborative artist and festival founder with his broader musical palate.

"I had a very judgmental teacher in college," he says. "I remember being judgmental about teaching and playing. Over the years I've learned how to listen differently. That's one of the things about bringing so many different pianists to Portland. There are so many different people, and different ways to play. It may not be my preferred way, but there are other ways to play. PPI has expanded my ability to listen."

Over a lifetime of music making, Gray has performed throughout the United States, and in Europe and Asia, appearing in musical festivals in New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Arkansas, California, and Oregon, and in France and Spain. In France, he brought musicians together from the United States and France for chamber music performances in the villages of the Lot Valley for five summers. He has been heard on National Public Radio and Television, and has recorded for Orion, Desmar, Genesis, and Advent-Europe. Performances with orchestra include the Oregon Symphony on several occasions, the Peter Britt Festival Orchestra in Jacksonville, Oregon, and numerous community orchestras in several states. Harold has also performed with the Takacs Quartet and in recital with William Warfield, Barry Tuckwell, and Richard Stolzman, and on the Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts series on two occasions.

Work Less, Play More: An Interview with Dr. Harold Gray

"I am playing a lot of new music," Gray says, speaking of what he is currently performing. "There are so many kinds of music. It is what nourishes everyone, whether they know it or not. Popular music is also great. My students opened me up to this. I grew up having nothing to do with popular music. Whether for recreation or to add to our spiritual life, music is still music and needs to be acknowledged as such. It needs to be a part of everyone's life."

Gray's spiritual connection to music is reflected in his belief that rhythm and movement are two things that are important to all of us. He teaches movement and uses body mapping as he shares his belief that all musicians need to learn how move, and says that music and movement is the essence of what we need to live well, age well, and enjoy life.

"Last week I heard the last three Schubert sonatas," Gray adds. "For me it was a remarkable spiritual experience. Others might enjoy going to Lady Gaga. I surprised someone the other night by saying I was a Lady Gaga fan. I like some of the things she does in terms of her philanthropy. She has imagination in her music."

As Gray looks at the future of all kinds of music in our culture, he admits that music training curriculum is deficient in how people learn to be artists and entrepreneurs. Musicians must be schooled in being performers in addition to being artists, and Gray knows several major talents who failed because they did not know how to present themselves.

"Every musician has to learn how to do things they didn't think was part of the job," he says. We have to market ourselves and we have to work at selling music to people. There are millions of ways to do this: playing, speaking, teaching public school, etc. We all just need to learn how to promote ourselves and music, and how to make it accessible to all sorts of people."

Gray knows that the audience decides how they are going to like the musician's playing from the time he appears on stage until he starts playing. The truth of this belief became clear to Gray when he went to hear an up and coming pianist whose recordings were spectacular. When the artist walked on stage, however, he looked like a walking zombie and that immediately created the feeling for the audience.

"He never had the career he should have had," Gray adds.

Gray's long tenure with PPI is a working model of the marriage of high art and down-to-earth practical entrepreneurial spirit. When he first started the series, he wanted to bring great artists to Portland for his students at PSU. In the first season he had to raise money for artists and the piano. The Hamburg Steinway he got, cost forty-thousand dollars and he had to raise half of that. It was hard work. The first season had four recitals: David Burge (Eastman), Marianne Hahn (Peabody), Santiago Rodriguez, and William Doppmann. The first concert had forty people in the audience and he thought the series wasn't going to fly. At second concert, eighty people showed up. By the third concert, they had 150 people. It grew quickly. By the fourth, they filled the hall.

"I was the staff. I went to the airport to get people. I got their lunches and arranged their rehearsals. Now that I am leaving PPI, Mary and I can go places on the weekend. There is a lot of work people don't see."

Work Less, Play More: An Interview with Dr. Harold Gray

The increased success of PPI meant dealing with big money figures and big money figures translates into working harder to raise more money.

"The first time we had [one major artist] we paid him three thousand dollars. The next time, he earned ten thousand and that was in the 1980s after he had hit it big. Now he's at forty-thousand dollars. You have to have some big money to bring in that kind of artist."

In launching an entrepreneurial project, Gray suggests finding people with whom you can collaborate because no matter how good an idea may be, you have to be able to make it happen and that usually involves other people. He credits the PPI Executive Directors as some of the most important people behind the success of the organization.

"You can't do it all yourself," he says. "Everyone has to have supporting people. Sometimes you have to let go of the details. It is the Steve Jobs model: be aware but not try to control everything."

Gray's dream of bringing great pianists to Portland has resulted in over 150 artists in recitals and outreach activities. Some of the greatest pianists in the world have appeared in Portland due to PPI's efforts, and over the years PPI has become an internationally recognized festival. Recordings of the recitals are heard regularly on American Public Radio's "Performance Today." World class artists continue to come to Portland to be part of the recital series and the summer festival. It is, in the words of *The Oregonian*, "one of this city's musical treasures."

The series has also enriched the musical lives of young local pianists through master classes and the "In Good Hands" program the festival launched three years ago in collaboration with Cascadia Composers and OMTA teachers. Through these experiences, teachers and their students have been given musical windows into a world beyond the Pacific Northwest, and have had the chance to learn from some of the best pianists in the world.

As Gray makes his transition into another phase of his musical life, he anticipates learning and playing more music — even jazz! — and working with aspiring artists in master classes and workshops. He wants to encourage teachers to play more at the piano and to remember that music teaches so much more than learning to play a few pieces or press correct notes and the right time.

"When I think of my life in music," Gray says, "sometimes I can't believe I have chosen a career where I play all the time. I mean that in a play kind of way. Most of the time, I am playing. I think this is the duty to our students: they should be playing at this. Playing the piano teaches us things we need in life: discipline, patience, creativity. It isn't just for the 30 minutes spent practicing; it is what you do with the rest of your life. Learn how to create. Be spontaneous; promote yourself."

A pause. "In other words, work less, play more."



New Voices

A Pirate's Life for Me

by Jennifer Wright



Jennifer Wright holds two degrees in classical piano performance (M.M., Trinity College of Music, London, England; B.M., Hartt School of Music, Connecticut) and studied for two years at the Stuttgart Music Conservatory in Germany. She champions the artistic life through her adventurous approach to piano teaching, performing, and composing. She finds further outlets for her coffee-fueled energy as a member of the Board of Directors of Cascadia Composers and through OMTA.

Some years ago I spent a particularly memorable cocktail hour on a tiny, weather-beaten boat moored off the coast of Antigua. This vessel was captained by a grizzled old salt who styled himself 'Sinbad' and possessed an endless supply of tall tales. "This is the life!" Sinbad roared, waving his drink at the tropical sunset. "And what else is there in life, after all? Only three things, I tell you — good food, good wine, and good sex."

Now here's a man, I thought, who understands piano teaching. You see, this rough-edged rogue of the sea and I are both in the same business: *epic adventures*.

It started about ten years ago. One day I realized that I was sick to death of all the identical, bloodless, predictable concerts that I had heard (and played!) over the years. Worse, I noticed that when events weren't memorable, the learning that was supposed to accompany them often flew right out of students' heads. Somehow, in the quest for technical perfection, the magical experience of live classical music had been bled dry of color, context, excitement, and meaning. Ridiculous! I wanted — *we all deserved* — a musical life that was fabulous on a seismic scale.

However, I quickly learned that a taste for adventure made it difficult to teach in someone else's employ: it was always "insurance liability" this and "outside established structure" that. It seemed that, like Sinbad, I needed my own boat to rock. On my own, I set out on a mission to put the bang back into the music I loved.

I started small, testing the waters. My adult students soon developed a preference for sophisticated wine-and-cheese soirées; my young students performed in crazy hats and told April Fools jokes. I became bolder: we dressed in

national costumes to present world music, played duets with bejeweled belly dancers, programmed Milhaud with Monty Python. Uninterested in spectacle for spectacle's sake, I searched instead for interactive, surprising settings that would bring the music alive. We honed our skills with hilarious trivia game show concerts, Cinco de Mayo Sombrero Socials, and over-the-top Halloween Pageants at senior centers. We played benefit concerts for Heifer International by the light of our own handmade candle luminaries. We turned an old upright into a glorious piece of art by painting and glitter-gluing every last inch of it before donating it to a children's organization, creating a venue for future workshops.

To say that my students love doing these things is a vast understatement: they have blossomed into natural entertainers who really know how to fly their own fabulous flag. Best of all, the learning *sticks*. Now we're all addicted to adventure. We've impersonated famous 19th-century pianists in period costumes and synced seamless live accompaniment to full-length silent films. On Piano Movie Nights, we wear our pajamas and crash in my living room with sleeping bags, stuffed animals and mountains of popcorn. We placed my harpsichord in a botanical garden to present an open-air Baroque Costume Concert, powdered wigs and all. This spring, we're performing a multimedia contemporary music concert in a warehouse art gallery decorated with our own hand-built sound sculptures made from parts of an upright piano that we're dismantling together in a Piano Demolition Group Class. We raid history for ideas, we chase dreams, we battle the status quo. By God, I've created a band of pirates.

Anybody can do these things. The key lies in a healthy dose of two items on my personal Life List: *good work* and *good play*. Choose the right theme at the right time; tailor it to challenge each student at their level; pick repertoire very carefully. Show students how to interact brilliantly with the audience. Choose intriguing venues; meticulously visualize every last detail of structure and flow; keep adding special touches until it feels right. Be a keen observer of what works and what doesn't, and be ready to leave your favorite ideas on the cutting room floor if necessary. Never neglect to make gorgeous programs, recordings, and pictures. And don't even consider hosting an event without cookies.

But beware: the quality of the music always comes first. Without that, the rest is only window dressing. Naturally, all this takes intense planning - sometimes years in advance — and a massive commitment to one's own continuing education. There is no easy route when you're navigating at the edge of the known world. But as every pirate knows, if you're not fighting the good fight, you're just wasting time until you feed the fishes.



Ask Artsmentor

by Dr. Jill Timmons



About the Author

Jill Timmons, professor emerita at Linfield College, performs internationally as a solo and ensemble artist and has recorded on the Laurel, Centaur, and Capstone labels. She is the author of: *The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Vision and Plan* (Oxford University Press, March 2013). You can find her in her Lake Oswego studio teaching, practicing, or writing her next book!

Can I Be an Artist and an Entrepreneur?"

Dear Artsmentor,

I went to music school, not an MBA program, because I wanted to be an artist, not an entrepreneur. Why do I have to learn about running a business?

Doubtful in Dundee,

Dear *Doubtful*,

Your question speaks to your passion for being a musician. That's essential to building a thriving career along with proficiency on your instrument, a core music education, organizational skills, networking savvy, and a myriad of performance experiences. If you want to teach, you will also need a background in pedagogy. But *how* do you put forth your skills and passion in the professional world? In other words, how do you wish to work in the music industry?

Maybe you are considering the self-employment model. If so, who are your clients, how do you connect with them, how do you organize your studio and your curriculum? Perhaps you favor "streams of income" from many different jobs. Or perchance you enjoy working for a single employer. You will then need to locate those jobs and understand what is required to attain them, keeping in mind that careers are much larger than any one job. You may not know it but if you are actively engaged in any of these professional paths, you are already

working as an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is someone who is creating a viable career. Notice the word *creating*. You are not passively waiting for things to happen to you.

Being an entrepreneur is a perspective we choose. For example, I am in touch with my personal artistic vision. I have a sense of mission in what I am doing professionally. From that career vision I craft a plan of action to realize that vision. It's what I call the vision-plan continuum and as an artist, you will revisit that continuum process many times over the span of your life.

Does this mean you have to get that MBA to function in the business end of music or to be a successful entrepreneur? That depends. When we know what we want and we set out to make that happen, we sometimes discover that we need new information or additional skills. For example, you might find it essential in your planning strategy to acquire *further* information pertaining to: marketing, grant writing, new curricular sources, opportunities to perform, additional training on your instrument, an advanced degree, a recording, a public recital, accounting skills, networking opportunities, or perhaps a publication. If you want to work for a corporate entity such as Sony Records or Columbia Artists, or in the non-profit sector such as an a music school or a local arts council, then perhaps that MBA would be useful. The point is, that as professional musicians, whatever our track, we benefit greatly when we continually acquire new skills and information. It's what keeps us current, continually growing, and credible. The *kind* of continuing education you choose is entirely dependent upon your career vision-plan.

Whatever paths my clients choose, I encourage them to include four essential proficiencies as they move forward in their career planning:

- Think critically using the whole brain.
- Enjoy problem solving with imagination and originality.
- Experience passion for something in music and make a sustained commitment to that passion.
- Be ready for change.

Incidentally, these are all indispensable skills of the thriving entrepreneur.



Coda

*Nine requisites for contented living:
Health enough to make work a pleasure.
Wealth enough to support your needs.
Strength to battle with difficulties and overcome them.
Grace enough to confess your sins and forsake them.
Patience enough to toil until some good is accomplished.
Charity enough to see some good in your neighbor.
Love enough to move you to be useful and helpful to others.
Faith enough to make real the things of God.
Hope enough to remove all anxious fears concerning the future.*

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

