

Where

by Linda Holzer

the

Sidewalk Ends

Helping Music Majors Connect with the Musical Community After Graduation

*"There is a place where the sidewalk ends
And before the street begins..."*

—Shel Silverstein

The fanciful "place where the sidewalk ends" is a good metaphor for music majors as they approach graduation, wondering, "Where do I go from here?" The safe sidewalk of the degree program featured an accredited range of courses in performance studies, music history, theory and pedagogy. It has stimulated their imaginations through encounters with great music. But building a career after graduation looks like a trip into uncharted territory for many young musicians. Is that inevitable?

Too often, a college or conservatory piano major is *not* aware of how to get from the end of the sidewalk into the busy street of

professional life. Stewart Gordon pointed out in his 1995 book *Etudes for Piano Teachers*, "Most traditional pianists are trained from their early student years to play—and be prepared to play—but once or twice a year. Like a plant or tree, they bloom for a short time, then lapse into months of silence except for practicing and lessons."

Surely this describes the majority of freshmen. Enrolling in college is, for many, their first encounter with the musical world beyond their neighborhood teacher's studio. Career guidance and interaction with professional musicians on and off campus are essential to broaden their horizons. By graduation, the college teacher's studio should not have become an island that a student is afraid to leave.

Beginning with the 1999–2000 handbook, the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) added the following statement to section VIII. Competencies, Standards: "Other goals for the Bachelor of Music Degree are strongly recommended.... Students should be especially encouraged to acquire the entrepreneurial skills necessary to assist in the development and advancement of their careers."

To that end, major revisions in undergraduate curricula are in progress at schools such as Eastman. The goal is to move beyond the nineteenth-century conservatory

model and include courses that are responsive to the conditions of the twenty-first-century musical marketplace. Like any other small business owner, a young soloist and chamber musician, a beginning piano teacher, freelance performer or church musician must know the facts about the market to have a chance to succeed in it.

Career Guidance

Some career guidance is provided by the teachers who oversee performance studies when they give lessons and vote on student auditions, juries and recitals. But in a more meaningful sense, career guidance comes from such things as a referral service for local freelance gigs; a service for handling letters of recommendation and vacancy listings for salaried positions (public school music K–12, college/university, church music and allied professions); posting information about competitions and internships; organizing workshops and courses on professional employment; and locating assistance with concert bookings. Providing these services requires staff, equipment and office space.

One leader in the field of on-campus musical career guidance is Angela Beeching, who, since 1993, has been the director of the Career Services Center at the New England Conservatory of Music (NEC) in Boston. In the mid-1990s, she was one of

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two authors to contribute thoughtful articles on this topic to *Chamber Music America*.

What makes an effective career guidance program? Office set-ups vary. Beeching explains, "We'd always like to have more money. We're moving to a larger space soon." Currently, at the NEC, the Music Referral Service is separate from the Career Services Center. Music Referral Service has one full-time staffer to field requests from the community. Career Services has two full-time staffers to address the needs of student and alumni clients. Both offices also have full-time coverage of student assistants. Career Services publishes a job bulletin twice a month. The Center organizes approximately nine career workshops a year, as well as stocking a reading room with advisory handouts on writing a resume, cover letter and bio, a press packet and interview essentials, summer festival audition information, competition listings, scholarship and grant information, and graduate school catalogs. In addition, Beeching teaches the two-semester *Career Skills* course for undergraduates.

What does Beeching find most encouraging about the students in her courses? "I've taught *Career Skills* for several years now," she says. "Students no longer complain that the course scares them. After all, these are very creative people. When they're encouraged to think about ways to connect their music with the community, I'm amazed. Technology! Dot-coms! Entrepreneurial spirit! They are eager to carve their own niche. That's part of what's needed in the arts. There are so few established structures left for funding, so few ready-made platforms to build a career on."

Beeching elaborates, "When I first came to NEC, my focus was 'Do I have enough databases? Handouts? Books?' Now, my concern is 'How do I create the teachable moment, presenting the right information at the right time?'" She is sensitive to the fact that, to a greater extent than most of the rest of the curriculum, the *Career Skills* course makes students feel vulnerable. It requires imagination and emotional energy to engage in this kind of self-assessment. It is one thing to dream your dreams in the privacy of the practice room. There, everyone can fantasize

about becoming a musical celebrity: "The next _____!" (Joshua Bell, Sarah Chang, Cecilia Bartoli, Van Cliburn and so forth). It is quite another thing to outline the dreams on paper and craft an action plan, filling in the blanks about household income, project costs and timelines—then implement it. That is where fantasy meets reality.

The NEC *Career Skills* course is required for juniors and enrolls approximately ninety students each year in three sections. There is no single textbook commonly used for this type of course. Instead, students purchase a 165-page folder of materials created by Beeching, including handouts from Career Services.

It's not all about money. At a workshop on networking, NEC tries to have several staffers on hand to facilitate introductions. Young adults need to learn how to approach a stranger and *talk*. Nearby, at the Berklee College of Music, the Career Center has seven computer terminals for student use. Two video players and a video library highlight a range of topics, including "A Day in the Life of Branford Marsalis," "Interviewing with Confidence" and "Post-Graduation Visa Options."

The Case for Curriculum Reform

There are some who argue that being a music major is incompatible with vocational training. That view implies music professors are like priests bearing the light of artistic truth from the great composers and that practical subjects like careers and employment have no place in the studio or classroom. But surely we all can agree that part of the purpose of a college education is to enlarge the mind and create a better citizen. College music study can be a powerfully inspiring endeavor. We can't calculate a tangible cost-benefit ratio on such things. However, with expenses for undergraduate degrees totaling anywhere from \$20,000–\$120,000 at the end of four years of enrollment¹ and the median household income in America at approximately \$42,100 annually,² it is imperative that discussion about making a living have *some* place in the degree program.

For the past seven years, music career

office representatives from more than twenty-five schools, including NEC, Juilliard, Eastman, Manhattan, Oberlin, Northwestern, Peabody and the University of Arizona, have been gathering in New York every January to brainstorm about career guidance. Workshop participants swap ideas and constantly are looking for ways to enhance their operations within the limitations of budget and job description. For most participants, their involvement with career guidance is only one part of their job description.

A Small-Scale Approach

The music department where I am a faculty member is small, without the financial means to staff a career center for music students. But there is a substantial musical community in Arkansas, a resource I tap into frequently.

With the aid of e-mail and a carefully compiled database of state and local Music Teachers Associations, I periodically have conducted surveys and shared the results with my colleagues and students in piano pedagogy and studio class. A formal large-scale survey of Arkansas piano teachers provided data about the current range of lesson fees, business practices, most popular music theory software and studio enrollment trends. A shorter survey of local freelance pianists provided data about the current rates for playing weddings and parties; a survey of church pianists and organists revealed the range of part-time salaries and fees for substitute gigs.

This close look at how things work "out there" sparks curiosity in the students. Scheduling field trips and inviting guest speakers also have an impact. After a semester of gathering ideas from books and lectures, students are ready to roll up their sleeves and get involved. One young woman was inspired to undertake a grant-writing project. This resulted in the establishment of a digital piano lab at the community center of the Little Rock Air Force Base, where she teaches.

Music majors have a natural tendency to want to follow in their applied teacher's footsteps. They don't realize that amounts to

Creating a Referral Service

To establish a referral service for gigs, invite qualified music students to fill out a card, listing name, address, e-mail, phone number, instrument and other proficiencies (Require a teacher's signature to verify qualifications). File the cards by instrument. "When people call seeking to hire musicians, and I give a name(s), there is the implied, if not stated, endorsement of the University," says Dorothy Wyandt, director of Career Services at Northwestern University's School of Music. "I give the names and contact data for three or four student musicians who seem to fit the bill. The client will then contact the musicians."

Prepare a brochure for the students, letting them know the expectations for professional service, behavior and appearance. What musical styles seem to be in demand? At an orientation meeting, it also is important to inform them about the typical fee range for gigs in the area. In addition to helping students earn money, the referral service can become a good public relations venture for your music program.

If possible, use a computer database instead of cards. There are several software titles on the market that would work well.

The most common requests received are for students to perform at churches (Vocal soloists, keyboardists and Easter trumpets are in high demand.), accompany at area middle and high schools for choral concerts and musical theater events, provide music for weddings and parties, and teach lessons.

A referral service offers a more personalized approach for clients than simply posting gig notices on a bulletin board. Remember, however, a referral service is not a booking agency. A referral service does not guarantee one of your students will cover the gig request. Students choose whether to accept the gig, and they negotiate the details of the job and contract themselves.

development, "is that this will lay the groundwork for more advanced career development thinking when the student becomes an upperclassman." The program invites students to experience the arts beyond their own instrument, to broaden their musical horizons at concerts, plays and gallery showings. This especially is important for foreign students, who may be more inclined, due to English being their second language, to shy away from social situations and confine themselves to the practice room.

In fall 2002, Florida State University initiated two more Living-Learning Centers on campus, of five total, to maximize and personalize the learning experience for freshmen. Jane Clendinning, a faculty coordinator, spoke proudly of Cawthon Hall, the new Music Living-Learning Community, which houses 150 students—120 freshmen and thirty sophomores. The building features two fully equipped modern classrooms and a computer/group piano classroom that includes fourteen Clavinovas and twenty-four computers. "This came about because of a partnership between University Housing, the president's and provost's offices, and the School of Music," she says. "Cawthon Hall provides a peer setting for underclassmen, an environment that gives younger students the opportunity to meet and talk with distinguished professionals, and encourages younger students to speak up."

Florida State's *Colloquium* is a required course for all residents of Cawthon Hall and includes a Service Learning Activity as one component. Students are required to design a musical outreach project, complete it and write about it. One example occurred early one fall semester, when a sophomore organized a performance of several movements from the Mozart *Requiem* for a September 11 concert at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital. "Faculty assistance for this project consisted of me reserving rehearsal space for the students. That was all. Everything else was handled by the students themselves, including arranging transportation to the concert site for freshmen who did not have cars." Clendinning pointed out, "Music students participate in these sorts of outreach activities in high school. Why not give them the opportunity to do it here?" The service learning project challenges students not only to draw on their performance skills, but their research, problem-solving and people skills as well.

looking backwards and are unaware that conditions have changed too much for that to be practical. I want my students to be well-informed about the musical world we live in *now*.

Innovations

Approaches to career guidance are not "one size fits all." Rather, they are tailored to meet the needs of students and alumni, the strengths of the faculty and regional conditions.

At the University of Arizona's Camerata Center for Musical Entrepreneurship, Gwen Powell explained, "Camerata has three tenets: *Careers in Music* class (juniors, seniors and graduate students), Independent Study in Music Business and Camerata Internships. The internships provide career-starting experience in one of three areas:

- ◆ Recording industry internship
- ◆ Working for a private, public or nonprofit organization related to career goals
- ◆ Performance internship on the Camerata roster

Powell has served as the center's director for three years and recently created the impetus for students booking short tours regionally and abroad in nearby Mexico. After establishing a relationship with the double community of Guaymas and San Carlos, she discovered that Americans renting vacation properties in the area were

especially interested in increasing the number of available musical events.

Participants in Camerata touring activities mostly are graduate students in chamber music ensembles, and at least one member of the ensemble must have taken the two-semester *Careers in Music* class. For the Mexico tour, they travel from Tucson in a university-owned vehicle, but they are responsible for all the artistic and logistical planning of the tour themselves. The tour typically lasts from noon Thursday to noon Sunday. Students are guaranteed \$50 each per concert. The sponsoring agent also pays for their round-trip mileage from Tucson and arranges for students to reside in area homes. "This is about empowerment," Powell emphasizes. "It teaches students how to survive as musicians outside of the university."

In January 2003, Juilliard began piloting a mentoring program, a second-semester supplement to its popular first-semester freshman course, *Colloquium*.

Communication, time management, self-reliance and self-determination, or "how to succeed artistically, academically and personally at Juilliard," is the focus of *Colloquium*. In the second semester, the student will be paired with a cross-discipline mentor, not his or her applied teacher, to more fully explore the arts. "The hope," explains Derek Mithaug, Juilliard's director of career

Advising

The studio teacher is the first career adviser for performance majors. This can be as simple as asking the student periodically, “What are your goals? What are your plans for the long term?”

Students need to understand that in the real world, concertizing is not about playing for your relatives and classmates in a degree recital. They need to be exposed to the concepts of audience-building, marketing, innovative programming, commercial recording and more. In the real world, status as a successful teacher with a full studio does not happen overnight. It takes time to establish a reputation and recruit enough clients to become a full-time independent music teacher. In music, especially for those who are self-employed, career development takes years. There is no “instant career” upon receiving a diploma. Salaried positions have their own unique criteria and challenges. If no one ever asks them about their goals, students learn about these realities the hard way, after graduation.

“The five- to ten-year period following graduation is a crucial time,” Beeching says. Between ages 22 and 32 alumni either find their niche in the field or leave it. Beeching is working in partnership with her colleagues at Juilliard and Manhattan School of Music to secure funding to create an alumni career needs survey. The hope is that the survey can be adapted for use nationally with music alumni tracking, examining transition issues for recent graduates.

Hope for the Future

How does America feel about the need for music making and music education? A Gallup poll was conducted in February 2000, “American Attitudes Toward Music” for NAMM, the International Music Products Association.³ Comparisons were made to an identical poll that had been conducted in 1997. The conclusions were emphatically positive. Among more than 1,500 people surveyed, 95 percent said they believe music is part of a well-rounded education—up from 90 percent in 1997, and 93 percent think schools should offer musical instruction as part of the regular curriculum—up from 88 percent.

It is significant that the 1997 survey took place just as articles about scientific research on the benefits of music lessons began appearing in publications such as *Newsweek*. Since that time, the general public has obviously taken to heart studies validating musical training—not only for its own sake, but

as a key to intellectual development and physical well-being. Have conditions ever been more favorable to be an American musician?

Music majors generally don't enter the degree program because they expect to become wealthy. They become majors because of their love of the art and their ability. Career guidance offers students a map of the profession, helping them make informed choices about how to invest their time and talent. It is possible to go from the sidewalk to the street, from studies to employment, ready to enjoy a life in music.

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NOTES

1. *Peterson's Four-Year Colleges 2002*, Peterson's Guides, (2001).

2. *Money and Income in the United States: 2000*, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., (2001): 60–213.

3. “American Attitudes Toward Music,” Gallup Poll, in *Music USA*, NAMM, the International Music Products Association, Princeton, (March 2000).
www.namm.com/education/research/gallup/images/GallupFindings.pdf.

Bonus Bytes

For a list of selected resources, go to www.mtna.org, click on *American Music Teacher*, then click on “Tell me more about Bonus Bytes.”

Innovative Courses

At the University of Colorado-Boulder, Catherine Fitterman, formerly founding director of the Entrepreneurship Center for Music at Colorado and now associate director of the music business program at New York University, developed a series of five courses. Some of the courses are open to students from all majors, including music, theater, dance and journalism, while others are restricted to only music majors. Four of the courses are for undergraduates; the fifth is designed for graduate students.

Prepared for the Soundcheck (Fall Semester)

MUSC 2081-2

Provides an overview of the recording process from the performer's perspective, from soundcheck through final mastering. Uses recorded material from in-class sessions. Examines differing approaches to recording as well as current technologies. Open to all majors.

Your Music Career (Spring Semester)

MUSC 4918-2

Students will explore the many possible paths to a career in music. Topics include self-promotion, recording and production, songwriting, operating a record label and the business aspects of being a performing musician. Open to all majors.

Performances in the Community (Spring Semester)

MUSC 4958-1

Learn to program music for special listeners, gain confidence speaking to audiences and share the healing gift of music. Course includes classroom theory and practical application. Open to music majors only.

Internship in Music Business (Summer Semester)

MUSC 4908-800

Gives upper division students the opportunity to work in public or private organizations on assignments relating to their career goals, and allows them to explore the relationship between theory and practice in their major. May be repeated for a total of six credit hours. Requires instructor's permission.

Arts Entrepreneurship (Fall Semester)

MUSC 5968-2

Provides an interdisciplinary introduction to the application of entrepreneurship principles in the creative arts. Topics include opportunity recognition, balancing risk and reward, market responsiveness and resource development. Case studies and development of feasibility study for music industry. Graduate students only.