

Music College Whitepaper: MiniCourse — A Handy Roadmap for Music Professionalism

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US School of Commercial Music
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ABSTRACT: Professionalism in music may mean artistry, simply doing your best or making some part of your living from music. What does it mean to you? Consistency of attention and doing our best is an important aspect for which we draw inspiration wherever we can. That's one side of the equation; the other side is doing business in a competitive world.

Part 1: BACKGROUND

Making a greater part of your living from music can be a luxury, even when it may not be 'your' music or 'my' music. We often refer to it as "playing!" Yet, even during the Great American Depression of the 1930s, good musicians made a decent living playing, because people wanted to forget their troubles and be entertained or to allow artistry of musical expression to distract them from their worries.

If you are very clearly an amateur and happy with that, you can still achieve a very high level of professionalism in the quality of attention you give to your art. And you can do whatever you want. If you wish to make a living making music, you may be forced to compromise in order to keep doing it. We need not leave the business in order to compromise. One way we musicians compromise is by providing musical services, such as performing, songwriting, arranging, orchestrating, recording, etc. Usually it doesn't even feel like compromise, because making music is fun!

What does success mean for me? To some people, "professionalism" means "perfectionism;" to others, "artistic expression;" to others, it means "business survival." It's important that you define it for yourself. Just as it is for any small businessman or woman, one measure of success at being a financially compensated professional in music means being able to go out and do it repeatedly. If you can't put food on the table and a roof overhead with music alone, you will most likely have to supplement your income with work in another field. While there is nothing wrong with combining fields, if you drift too far from your musical goals, you may eventually feel frustrated or worse.

One must ask some realistic questions: is there enough work for anyone in music where I now live? Is there enough work for me to sustain the standard of living to which I aspire or require? Am I able and willing to sacrifice in order to achieve that standard? Am I able to balance artistic aspiration with making a living or should I pursue and enjoy music making as an amateur? If the latter, is there a related career for me in music? As an independent small business man or woman, you may have to ask these questions during your whole career.

Music making can be one of the most rewarding professions. It is one of the few professions where one can really make a difference in the world by bringing beauty and helping people get along with each other through emotional understanding, harmony and the ability to enter into the place of another. Music is a language of relationship and musicians are great people to know and work with.

One may look around at the success of talented individuals and suspect that they were lucky. Perhaps. It is much more likely that they were prepared for the opportunities which came their way. In many cases, they went out of their way to make their own opportunities.

"Be prepared." – Boy Scout founder Baden Powell

"I will study and prepare myself and some day my chance will come." - Abraham Lincoln



Part 2: Assignments

This MINI-COURSE may be accomplished by a musician of any level or experience in about a week. It's designed to give you a very small taste of studying with USSCM and an idea of how prepared you may be for more study and a life in music making. Let it be fun! Remember, we call it "play!"

Based on the PROFILE you have filled out at the USSCM website, we will give you a series of assignments of the general nature in the list below, which mirrors the USSCM program Modules. Each assignment should be completed in less than a day and is not meant to take a long time. After each is completed, send the recording to USSCM where faculty will listen, comment and send you your next assignment. By the end of one week, you will know a lot more about yourself and your musical future! If you haven't yet filled out your PROFILE, please do it now.

After you have submitted your PROFILE, send us an email to director@usschoolofmusic.com OR macmidi@aol.com, requesting your first assignment. Welcome!

USSCM PROGRAM MODULES

- 1 performance
- 2 improvisation
- 3 schillinger
- 4 songwriting
- 5 arranging & orchestration
- 6 mediascoring a 1 minute film
- 7 music production & engineering

MINICOURSE PROJECT ORDER

- Assignment one: modules 4, 5
Assignment two: modules 1, 2
Assignment three: modules 5, 6

Assignments are made on an individual basis for each student, by examining your USSCM Profile. After each completed assignment, we will give you a short critique and send the next assignment.

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