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The Horn Call

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Freelancing 101

by Shelagh Abate

Freelancing Defined

A freelancer (or freelance worker) is a self-employed person working in a profession or trade in which full time employment is also common. He or she is not committed to one employer over the long term. Instead, it's usually several employers over the short term. In some cases, workers are represented by a company or agency that resells their labor. In other instances, workers are what is known as independent contractors, and represent themselves.

Categories of musical freelance gigs

- **Symphonic.** Orchestral, ballet, opera
- **Commercial.** Broadway shows, rock/pop/jazz live-shows, studio recording sessions, TV, movies, commercial jingles, record dates
- **Chamber Music.** Chamber recitals, religious jobs (church & temple services, weddings, funerals), ceremonies, functions, (graduation, background music, cocktail hours)
- **Teaching.** Private lessons, orchestral coaching (youth orchestras), chamber music coaching (youth organizations, associates), seminars, clinics, master classes

Pros and Cons of freelancing

Pros

1. You are your own boss.
2. Travel.
3. No matter how lousy one gig is, chances are, it will be over soon.
4. Variety, with the endless benefits of variety.
5. Meeting people. By working many short-term gigs, you meet more people (meeting people leads to more gigs...unless you blow it. If you blow it, see #3).
6. Stories. You will have endless stories to share with your friends and family. Some seriously crazy stuff happens on gigs. With crazy people. In crazy places.

Cons

1. Cash flow.
2. Travel.
3. Multitasking and organizational skills are required for success. In other words, you have to have your poop in a group.
4. Unpredictable scenarios: people, logistics, performance conditions, etc.
5. Being your own boss means you have to get your own gigs a lot of the time (cold calls, hustling, etc.).
6. Freelance musicians live like Vampires. Working weekends, late at night, and almost every holiday. Difficult on relationships and family, and it is literally impossible to plan a vacation. The second you book your flight to Hawaii is the second "that call" comes in that you've been making weekly sacrifices to the Gods in order to receive. Oh, well.
7. Tax Day.
8. DIY health benefits. This is quite possibly the single biggest drawback of freelancing in this country.

Early Steps to Getting Started

Résumé. Put together a résumé, or update your existing résumé. Make it a habit to update this every six to eight months. You will thank yourself for it, and you will get more gigs out of it. I promise. Before you print and send your résumé to anyone, edit it 100 million times. And then ask a (smart) friend to edit it for you again.

Business card. Create a business card. Keep the design professional, simple & clean. Spend the \$20 it costs for a nice one. Vistaprint (and others) do them for free, but they tend to look like they were free. Also, clean up your email address, if necessary. For example, if at one point it was funny to have: Beerpong_kegstand@hotmail.com, now might be a good time to establish a new one like johnsmith@gmail.com. Just saying.

Chamber group. Form a chamber group. Start hustling up some gigs.

Library. Begin amassing your library. Invest in music, utilize the resources of your school's library while you can, and start building a Gig Book. Quite a bit of free downloadable music can be found on the internet. The sooner you have a Gig Book, the easier your gigs will be to play. Bear in mind copyright laws, and don't become a total mooch off of your teachers/faculty. Remember that any money you spend on your library will pay itself back quickly. And then some.

Network. Contact your school's Gig Office/Career Center, or just scour Google for your area/region's orchestras, churches, schools. This can be time-consuming, but essential, and well worth your time. Then start mailing out cover letters, résumés, and emails. Address your letters and résumés and emails to the Personnel Manager. Do not discount snail mail to transport your cover letters and résumés. Lots of old school folks are in this business.

Union. Investigate your area's local AFM union. Would it be worth it to join? Ask around.

Local news. In a new city? Start reading the paper and showing up to concerts. It's amazing what you'll learn, and whom you'll meet, let alone what you'll hear.

Gigalicious: The Commandments

Great, you got called for a gig! Go you. Here are some guidelines to help you keep the gig and get called again. And again.

Be early.

Warm up before you arrive at the gig. If at all possible, try not to do your entire routine sitting there while everyone else warms up. This is not always doable, but is a good way to go especially in cities that are über-crowded, where space is limited. If you have no opportunity to play before the gig, bring a practice mute.

Come prepared. If possible, *know* the piece before you get there. This is not always possible, especially with new music. But if it is, listen to a recording. If you can, do this with a score. If you want to really be awesome, play/practice along with that recording.



Check with your principal before asking your conductor anything. If you have a question for the conductor and you are playing third trumpet (aka not principal anything), ask your principal first. Addressing the conductor directly from the section can be a serious no-no, depending upon whom you are dealing with.

Do not overblow your principal. Ever. Easy, killer. Even if your principal is 103 years old and can barely hold the trombone. You really need to be careful. Common sense (and musical training) tells us that this is sound reasoning, if difficult to remember in the middle of Mahler 1. Try. Also, try not to let yourself get cocky. Grandpa might have some lessons to teach you after all. Keep your eyes and ears open, and don't piss him off.

When you are the principal player, keep your ego in check. You're finally in charge! Sweet. Learn how to comment to your section tactfully and respectfully. You will occasionally need to tell others what to do, and how to play together if you are a section leader. Pick your moments and your words with discretion. You can be a leader without being an ass. If you are an ass, you will alienate people.

Do not practice excerpts on a gig. Ever. Save the Short Call, *Petrushka*, Mahler 3, and *Bydlo* for the audition. If you break this commandment, you will make enemies instantly. Playing excerpts on a gig is lethal. Especially if you play them well. It *should* go without saying that practicing someone else's part in your section on a gig (during a break or before rehearsal) is grounds for execution... but I am going to say it anyway because I've witnessed it.

Agree with everything the conductor says. If El Maestro asks you to do something, smile, nod, and say "Absolutely!" Even if you are lying. Extra points for a wink and a thumbs-up.

Pay it forward. Karma is real. If you get a ride from someone, give them *ga\$ m\$ney*. Even if they say "No, it's ok, thanks, don't worry about it!!" (which they *won't* say – have you *seen* gas prices these days!?!), they will remember that you were thoughtful. And recommend you for more gigs. And let's be honest, it's just the right thing to do.

Be grateful. Always thank the person who hired you. Even if it was the worst gig you've ever played. Just do it. Want to poke your own eyes out and run screaming from rehearsal? Yes, thank them anyway. For example: "Oh, wow! Thanks! I had *such* a great time!!!!" (then smile, wink, go to your car, shut the door, scream at the top of your lungs and blast Korn on the radio all the way home). What you do on your own time is *your* business, but being gracious and grateful is *good* business.

Show up and shut up. Nobody likes a whiner. Complain to your boyfriend-girlfriend-cat-shrink-mom-spiritual guide later.

Don't act like a jerk. I'm not being sarcastic. Sure, you may laugh, but you wouldn't believe some of the things/people/general BS you will see/hear/have to deal with over time. Not always easy. Dues are a part of the deal. All gigs lead to more gigs, though, and usually better ones. Dues, baby, dues. I don't care how great you are. We all pay them.

Hygiene. Do you smell? Yeah, go ahead and fix that. Shower daily. Dress appropriately. It matters. On the other hand, go light on the cologne. Save your Coco Chanel for the disco. I have witnessed firsthand (and more than once) the ejection of players from a gig because their perfume was distract-

ing. For real. Guys: has your tux been rolled up into a ball in the trunk of your car for five weeks? Hm. Might be time to spend the \$8 on dry cleaning. If you can smell yourself, the peeps next to you can smell you too. I promise. In a pinch, try some Febreze.

Girl Talk. Ladies: the gig is not Prom. Learn the difference between looking good/hot/dressed-up/pretty/trendy and looking professional. There is a fine line. This is important. Start your professional life with good habits and lasting good impressions – dress the part. Do you look like a baby calf walking in those heels? Then don't wear them to a gig. If people are going to worry about you falling between the door and your chair as you walk into your recital before playing a note, it's just not worth it. Please trust me on this one, I like shoes more than most. I've learned this rule the hard way.

Here's another one: Do you sit when you play? Great! Wear pants. The end. Skirts are only a good idea if they go to your ankles. If you have to give a *single* thought to the arrangement of your skirt while sitting in orchestra or the quintet, you have selected a skirt that is *too short*. And if you think that others have not noticed, you're wrong. Don't be fooled into thinking that this is a good thing. Attract attention because you are a *badass*, not because you're leggy.

Invest in a decent GPS. Do not rely on your phone. Google Maps is incredibly flawed and you are at the mercy of a decent signal. Just get a GPS, and don't get a crappy one. Get a good one. With the amazing technological resources at our disposal these days, age old excuses like "flat tire" and "I didn't get that email" will not cut it.

Make like an Eagle Scout: The 911 Gig Rig. Mouthpiece. Mute. Music stand. Bow tie. A few pencils. A decent eraser. Metronome. Valve oil. String and screwdrivers. Always. Always. If you don't drive, you'll have a heavier gig bag. Oh well, at least you'll be prepared, and when your valve string breaks, you won't have a heart attack. Or better yet, you'll save someone else.

Dealing with contractors

Keep an accurate calendar. I cannot stress enough how important this is.

Respond. Respond quickly to messages at all times – even (especially) if it is just to say, "I got your message; thank you for the call; may I take a day to try and work out the schedule?" This is much better than waiting a day to call the contractor back while you figure out if it will fit in your calendar or what other gig you need to sub out to do it. Contractors hate waiting, and it makes them not want to call again. Ninety percent of the time, contractors couldn't care less about how you play – it's the other people in your section that care about that – the contractor wants you to make their job *easier*. And that's how you keep getting called.

Canceling. You *will* have to cancel gigs because something *will* come up. A better gig. A family emergency. You might get sick. Don't lie. You also don't necessarily need to explain fully and tell them your life story, but you need to be respectful. Contractors work hard, and have dozens and dozens of people to worry about other than you. Canceling is inconvenient for everyone: you, the contractor, and the person who replaces you. If you have to cancel, ask the contractor if you should find



your own sub, and if they say yes, *find someone*. And then make sure that person has the music, directions, and everything they need as soon as possible. And finally, make sure that person is up to the challenge of the gig.

The reality of replacement. We are all replaceable. Hire the *best* player you know if you need to get out of a gig. Get over yourself. This is essential for longevity. Are you worried that they might play better than you? That you won't get called because you bailed? Join the club. That is always a risk. You can only control so much. *But*, if you send a lousy sub, you are guaranteed to bum everyone out. Everyone. If it's that stressful for you, then you should not get out of the gig in the first place.

The power of yes. Saying *yes* opens doors. Creates opportunities. Brings unexpected luck. The list goes on and on. Yes is amazing.

The power of no. Tired of getting called for the same terrible \$35 gigs? Then stop taking them. Sometimes you need to create a standard for yourself and then live up to it.

Possibly Impossible: Double-dipping. Watch out for busy days that work out on paper, but in reality are a complete disaster and logistical nightmare. The possibility of making another \$150 is *not* worth it in the end if you run the risk of being late, or not making it there. And the bridge you will burn when it all goes up in flames is very real.

Topics for future discussion

The difference between Classical and Commercial music/playing.

Cold Calls: when to make them, and when *not* to make them. How to make them. Asking players for lessons, versus "duets," versus "Hi, can I play for you?" ... hustling work, etc. This one is sticky....

The difference between *good* playing and *smart* playing. A freelance skill, to be sure. Find the sweet spot between following others and being late to the beat.

Social Media. Becoming a Facebooker and a Tweeter can be extremely helpful. Or not. For all intents and purposes, you are developing a brand. That brand is you.

Private teaching: pros and cons. Try and remain consistent, but communicate your needs for schedule changes with your student and/or their parents.

How Broadway works: no auditions in the conventional sense. How to prepare a book and be a good sub. Repetition is not for everyone. Taking off for mental hygiene and to keep others in the loop when it's your gig.

Freelancing as glorified popularity contest. Playing well in and of itself does not cut it. Sad but true.

More on karma. Be nice. Say hi to the janitor. Hold the door for the person behind you. Say *Gesundheit* when someone sneezes. This is all about habits. Start forming some great habits and your quality of life will improve dramatically. Be nice. Music is fun. Have fun.

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Original Arrangements for 6 Horns

Bizet: Carmen Suite No.1 and No.2

Berlioz: Rakoczy March

Chabrier: Espana

Dvorak: Carnival Overture

Mahler: Adagietto

Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition Suite

R-Korsakov: Flight of the Bumble-Bee

Ravel: Bolero

Rossini: William Tell Overture

Sibelius: Finlandia

Strauss: Tritsch-Tratsch Polka

Saint-Saens: The Carnival of the Animals

Weber: Freischutz Overture

Wagner: Meistersinger Prelude

Wagner: Rienzi Overture

Wagner: Flying Dutchman Overture

Brahms: Sym. No.1

Beethoven: Sym.No.3

Beethoven: Sym.No.5

Beethoven: Sym.No.6 "Pastoral"

Beethoven: Sym.No.7

Beethoven: Sym.No.9 "Choral"

Tchaikovsky: Sym. No.4

Tchaikovsky: Sym. No.6 "Pathetique"

Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker Suite

Tchaikovsky: The Sleeping Beauty Suite

Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake Suite

Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No.1

Tchaikovsky: Slavonic March

Respighi: Fountains of Rome Suite

Respighi: Pines of Rome Suite

Respighi: Roman Festivals Suite

Available from Corniworld Publications

www.corniworld.com

Hear audio clips from Kumamoto Horn Ensemble web page.