

Dr. Karlyn Vina

The Business Side of Being a Musician – An Overview

I. Ins and Outs of Freelancing:

Professionalism:

BE RELIABLE – always.

Be early – at least 1 hour is standard in order to set up

Be prepared – music, equipment, etc.

Make communication easy:

Reply to emails quickly, at least within 24 hours

Respond completely to emails

Maintain professional correspondence – never omit greeting, use the person's name and title (if appropriate), respectful closing

Be respectful, nice, and easy to work with.

Dress professionally – button-down shirt/nice top, dress pants/khakis/"dress" jeans, closed-toed shoes are all appropriate

***Your contacts and reputation, both musically and personally, are everything. Most freelance work in South Florida comes from personal recommendations from other percussionists, mentors, professors, or other musicians. (If you are asked to recommend others for a gig – that's great. Just be selective and only recommend musicians that you can count on to perform at a high level and be reliable and responsible.)

Getting Started:

- Demonstrate professionalism, preparedness, and high musical standards all the time, whether you are in school or out of school
- "Cold calls" (email) can sometimes work; Word of mouth and recommendations is far more effective
- Establish a web presence (more on this later)
- Gain experience – you have to start somewhere
 - Should you play a gig for little or no pay?
- Be yourself, and show a genuine interest in playing/working (don't appear desperate, or like you are "using" a contact to get work)

Contracts:

- When to provide
- Basic contracts should include: name and contact information for both parties (musician and contractor); dates, times, and locations of all services; compensation terms; dated signatures; any other important terms, including cancellation.

Invoices:

- When to provide: usually only when requested
- Should include: date, name and contact information of both parties, record of services rendered, amount due, method of payment
- Templates on MS Word, Pages

II. Taxes and Finances

2 categories of work:

- 1) Employee (W-2): full-time orchestras, universities, some other teaching positions
 - a. Employer shares tax burden, taxes are withheld from paycheck
 - b. Filing taxes is relatively easy – usually no need to itemize deductions
- 2) Independent Contractor (1099-MISC): most freelance performing, many teaching jobs
 - a. Contractor is solely responsible for taxes – if there is significant income, it is likely that quarterly tax payments should be made to avoid penalty
 - b. You will get a 1099-MISC form if you have earned more than \$600 in a tax year, but legally you need to report all income, including <\$600, private students, cash payments, etc.
 - c. Will need to file a Schedule C form, should deduct any business-related expenses to lower tax payments (

Common deductible expenses for musicians (MUST KEEP RECEIPTS AND TRACK MILES!):

- Mileage (must keep a log)
- Tolls
- Parking
- Meals while traveling, or entertaining colleagues, etc. (50% only)
- Instrument purchase
- Supplies – sticks, mallets, music
- Instrument insurance
- Home office (% of home costs)
- PAS membership
- Business cards
- Website – domain, hosting
- Studio rental
- Office supplies
- Music library
- Concert tickets
- Spotify

III. Self-Marketing

- Make sure that any online content is both current and high-quality!
- Market yourself for the kind of work you hope to get (or continue getting)
- Website:
 - Design and maintain yourself? Hire someone?
 - Register domain and secure hosting (can be through the same company)
 - Common content for performers: bio, photos, audio/video, contact
- Social media:
 - Personal or “Professional” account?
 - What type of content do you post?
- Business cards:
 - A bit old-fashioned, but I think nice to have
 - Should include your name, phone number, email address, website (if you have one), what you do