

Welcome to the Music Industry

If someone were to ask you ... “would you rather have a career in the music industry or a career as a drummer?”, what would you answer? Most young musicians might say something like ... “I don’t want to work in the music industry, I want to play music”. That answer might have been appropriate thirty or forty years ago, when things were very different. But today, all of us - performers, garage bands, teachers, arrangers, programmers, songwriters, product reps, magazine publishers, record producers, and managers - are all part of the “music industry” whether we like it or not, whether we want to be or not. If you are now, or you plan on making any money in music as a professional, amateur, or hobbyist, you are already *in* the music business.

Here are some examples of how we are all in ‘the business’: a jazz drummer must know if he owns the copyright to his improvisations or to the transcriptions of his 4’s; the show drummer should understand every word of the labor agreement she, or her contractor, signs with the theater management; the high school band director needs to know under what conditions and within what limitations he may write a new arrangement of a pop/rock standard for his ensemble; the drum programmer should know if it is illegal to sample Phil Collins’ recorded snare drum sound; and the young emerging band that writes and plays their own music better understand what rights they are giving away as they contemplate signing a contract with a music publisher or a record company, and their drummer needs to know if he has any rights to the songs that the guitarist and lead singer write during band rehearsals. Drummers of all ages who spend, or who dream of spending their life in a career as a drummer, owe it to themselves, their hopes, and their wallet to learn what the “music industry” is and how it works. In addition, there are a whole range of ethical, moral, procedural, and practical issues that successful professionals must deal with almost every day. It’s not just about protecting your rights and respecting the rights of others, but about creatively and personally combining all of these elements in a way that will ensure a more successful and fulfilling career with countless exciting opportunities.

Musicians are all, and forever will be, deeply and inextricably linked in a vast network with many different professionals in many different fields in a very complex business. Our careers are dependent on effective interaction with these individuals, a knowledge of what they do, and an ability to identify and take advantage of real opportunities where and when they exist. Every successful musician I know of is not one-dimensional but multi-faceted, and finds different satisfaction and rewards in doing many things in many areas of music. For example, I know a drummer who teaches music classes at a college, plays with a local wedding band, writes music for intermediate-level percussion ensembles and sells it on the internet, teaches private students using materials and books that he created and self-published, and writes articles once a year for a national percussion journal. He describes himself as successful and happy.

A full-time and diversified music career is easily within all of our reach and requires the same recipe for success as any other field – creative thinking, hard work, and smart work (preparation and planning).

Let’s look at each of these –

First – “creative thinking” As musicians and artists, we all possess it, although sometimes it may need to be encouraged and nurtured. A popular phrase to describe this is “thinking outside of the box.” This means to not just look at things the way they are and accept them, but to challenge assumptions, re-invent ‘tradition’, and take rational, yet imaginative, career risks. This can also be called “critical thinking”, which includes reasoning and analysis. In other words, more analysis and understanding, and less ‘judging’.

Second – “work hard: sweat” You’re on your own here. To my way of thinking this is the most important ingredient and is irreplaceable; you can’t get there without it! But since you have already demonstrated dedication and a good work ethic in practicing to develop your drumming and music skills, and are furthering your knowledge by reading Modern Drummer, and have a keen interest in a music career because you are reading this article – then it is highly likely that you possess a good deal of the passion and commitment required.

Third – “work smart: preparation and planning” Here I will give you some help. Education, information, and resources are the building blocks of knowledge. Most colleges now have courses in music business or careers in music. In addition to offering these classes to their full and part-time students, many schools offer them during the evenings or weekends to anyone at any age. I advise you to take one of these classes. They can be extremely beneficial because, in a very real-world practical way, they uncover many of the inner workings and myths of the music industry, clearly explain the often-confusing world of your rights in copyright and contracts, and highlight many additional career opportunities for musicians. In addition to classes, there are dozens of workshops and seminars presented by hundreds of local and national organizations on industry-related topics. These groups also distribute information about the industry and careers. Most notable among them is NARAS, the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. Although the Recording Academy is widely recognized for its annual television production and presentation of the Grammy Awards, these folks are also advocates of music, music education, and issues that affect intellectual property and the welfare of creative artists. You can contact them on-line and locate the names and numbers of people at the branch or chapter nearest you, who can then send you information and schedules of educational programs and networking opportunities. Also ask them to send you their very informative publication titled, “The Recording Industry Career Handbook.” The final direction that I can point you in is your nearest bookstore and the internet. There are many books and web sites on these subjects that contain a wealth of information about every conceivable aspect of the music industry - the business, legal, and financial, as well as the creative components.

And although it should go without saying, I’ll say it anyway - in addition to learning to play the drums to the best of your ability and constantly studying and practicing to improve your playing, take the time to learn about the “business of drums and drumming”. This includes everything from learning about available products, tuning, set-up, ‘sitting-in’ etiquette, drum construction, sound production, cymbals, heads, sticks, etc. All of this knowledge will do nothing but help to ‘inform’ your playing and make you a better drummer and musician.

And, while we’re on the subject of drums, let me mention one other thing. Since we’re talking about being the ‘complete drummer’, please remember to read about, and listen to every drummer and every kind of drumming. In order to absorb and learn, you need to keep an open mind, and

know that we are part of something that existed long before us and will continue long after us. The saying goes ... “remember the past, embrace the present, and look to, plan for, and be part of the future.”

So, whether you are interested in touring with Shania Twain, getting an endorsement deal from Sabian, producing records, booking your own acid-jazz quartet, writing tunes with your ska band, programming drums for film scores, engineering your group’s demo sessions, becoming an internationally renowned recording artist and clinician, writing drum instructional books, teaching general music in elementary school, or playing drums at the local club, your success is interwoven into a large, elaborate, and interdependent tapestry of people who want the same thing as you. Understanding what each of these individuals does, and working together towards your mutual goals will help to ensure that you will spend your life involved in what you love – drums and music.

Feel free to e-mail your questions or comments to me at mdicciani@uarts.edu

Marc Dicciani

Marc is the Director of the School of Music at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia where he teaches drumset and courses in the music business; he records and tours with Concord Records’ Jazz Guitarist Jimmy Bruno, and has performed with Diane Schuur, Clark Terry, Joe Beck, Stanley Clarke, Doc Severinsen, Snooky Young, James Moody, Ray Parker, Jr., and Lee Ritenour; and is an artist/clinician for Sabian Cymbals, Regal Tip Drum Sticks, and Remo Drum Heads.