

How to Make Money Playing Gigs

For Classical Musicians

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Playing gigs is one of the best ways to start making money as a musician. If you're new to the area, just finished school, or if you're just starting to look into gigging, here are a few simple steps to start getting called.

1) Contact other musicians you know

Contact any musician you know who lives/has lived in your area and ask them:

- Who the contractors are (think weddings, church gigs, musical theatre, opera, ballet, recording sessions, touring, tv gigs)
- Which ensembles they played with, and who you should contact about playing there
- Any other advice they have.

2) Get your "stuff" together

While you're waiting to hear back from them:

- Spruce up your resume. Put a picture of yourself at the top.
- Find some recorded clips of yourself or make some.
- Consider setting up a more professional email than the one you had in highschool. (firstname.lastname@gmail.com is a little more professional than "wildangel1992@hotmail.com" (however if you have a difficult name to spell, something simple is better)

3) Put together a simple personal website.

- There are many free website builders from Blogger.com, or wordpress.com, or wix.com
- You could even purchase a personal domain (yourname.com), and redirect it to your free site.
- Your website can be very simple: a photo, a bio or resume, a few recorded clips or links to YouTube videos.

4) Send emails to the contractors.

These don't have to be very complicated. In your email you want to:

a) **Establish a connection:**

"Hi, [Phil], my name is [Your Name], I got your contact info from [Susan Fluter]"

b) **Express briefly why you're writing:**

"I'm new to the area, and interested in learning more about performing with the [Sleepy River Philharmonic]"

c) **Add a BRIEF bio** (one or two sentence) to give yourself some credibility/possibly more connection:

"I recently graduated from [the University of Somewhere] and also was performing with the [Somewheresville Symphony], which is where I met [Susan Fluter]"

d) **Offer to jump through the hoops if needed.**

"If there is a formal audition, could you please send me some information about it, or I'd be happy to audition for you, or [the concertmaster/principal] anytime that is convenient."

e) **Offer the easier alternative.**

"I've attached my resume with more information about myself, or you can visit [<http://www.firstname.lastname.com>] which has some recordings as well if you are interested.

**Attaching as resume is usually ok, but don't attach recordings. That is a bit like barging into someone's house and performing uninvited.

f) **Close with some nice things** and your offer to be of service to them. And don't forget your contact info.

"Thank you for taking the time, and for your help. I hope I can be of service to you and the [Sleepy River Philharmonic].
Sincerely,

[Yourname]
[yourname@gmail.com]
[www.yourname.com]
[(123) 456-7890]

Many times that is sufficient enough contact to start subbing with an ensemble.

But if not...

5) Find some free/almost free gigs to play.

Some options are:

- Churches are usually looking for musicians
- Craigslist sometimes has legit, non/creeper musicians that are looking for other musicians
- Community orchestras/ensembles that pay terribly.
- Music schools with small orchestras sometimes need ringers.

6) Network and rise up!

The point of playing free/crappy gigs is not to stay there forever, but to meet people who can:

- a) Plug you into the better gigs
- b) Tell you who you need to contact (then repeat step #4)
- c) Meet other musicians and start your own ensemble/project

7) When you finally get a great gig

- a) **Be a warm, and positive person** (I'm not saying, be fake and super happy), but look up and introduce yourself to those around you. They probably all know that you're the new person and want to meet you as well. Just say "Hi, I'm [Your Name]....it's nice to meet you"
- b) **Don't be super schmoozy.** Don't hand out your resume or your Demo, but if people ask for your contact info, be ready to tell them, or hand them a business card with your contact info.
- c) **Play good enough.** You don't have to be the best, and don't try to prove it (even if you are) by showing off.
- d) **On your way out,** find the contractor or personnel manager and say "Thank You" to them for inviting you.

8) Be mindful of your avatars

Your online persona can work for or against you. So be careful about what you post online.

- Avoid posting extreme political comments and articles
- Avoid cryptic posts that could be misinterpreted:

["I'm out on tour! See ya ! "]

Does that mean you've left town for 3 days, 3 months, or forever?

- Avoid venting or complaining about a gig online, even if you're not "friends" with anyone at the gig. Other contractors or colleagues might not want to work with you if they think you'll do the same thing after one of their gigs.

8) Put yourself out there:

All the points so far have all been about “waiting for the phone to ring,” or waiting to be picked. But this is not the only way to make it as a musician.

There is no map, or “how to” guide for where your talents could take you. There is also no limit to the possibilities of ways to make money as a musician.

Some non-traditional options to consider are:

- Start a YouTube Channel of your performances
- Find bands/singer-songwriters and offer to be of service
- Start a website or offer a service that combines other interests: (cooking for oboists, hiking for bassoonists).
- Start performing in unusual locations (bars, parks, hotels)
- Start a wedding musician contracting service
- Start a new music ensemble, or your own band.
- Start a webinar or online masterclass series
- Start recording yourself and make a demo, or EP

Basically: START

Something

Anything

And start again

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