



...dedicated to the promotion, composition, performance, understanding and dissemination of new and contemporary music...

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Some Thoughts on the State of the Academic Job Market for Composers

By James Paul Sain, SCI President



There are only two reasons for getting your doctorate, for the love of education or to become a professor. It certainly isn't to become a composer, though that can be a tangential outcome. What follows are some thoughts about maximizing your potential for success among the Ivory Towers.

During my time at a public, four-year university I've observed colleagues and graduates with a variety of successes in the job market. Most have not had the same one-location experience as I have had, and there is no one answer to how one can be a success in an admittedly over saturated market. I try to encourage all composers that are set on a career in the academy to gain teaching experience, to have a diverse background and a strong web presence, to invest time and energy in developing relationships with mentors, to be an active member of a professional organization, and to stick with it.

Get as much teaching experience as you can in as many disciplines for which you are qualified (or can become so). In composition, that is most often in the area of music theory pedagogy. But, there are other cognate studies that could be of benefit such as conducting, musicology, or ethnomusicology. At the University of Florida we require our students to have a cognate



About the Newsletter

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Upcoming SCI Events

2016 SCI Student National Conference
November 17-19, 2016
 Ball State University
 Muncie, Indiana
 Carter Rice, Co-host
 Chad Powers, Co-host

2017 SCI Region VIII Conference
March 1-14, 2017
 Washington State University
 Pullman, Washington
 Ryan M. Hare, Host

2017 SCI National Conference
March 30-April 1, 2017
 Western Michigan University
 Kalamazoo, Michigan
 Christopher Biggs, Co-host
 Lisa Coons, Co-host
 Richard Johnson, Co-host



Internet & Email

www.societyofcomposers.org

- Conference dates and submission guidelines
- Contact information and links to member web-pages
- Student chapters and opportunities
- CDs and journals produced by SCI
- Details on SCI such as membership, contacts for officers, regional structure, by-laws, newsletter archives and more...

SCION

SCION is a listing of opportunities on our website exclusively for members. It is updated on a continual basis so that it may be checked at any time for the most current notices. In addition, members are emailed on the first Monday of each month to remind them to visit the site for new or recent postings. The large number of listings is easily managed by a table of contents with links to the individual notices. In-depth coverage; contest listings in full; all items listed until expiration; this is a valuable resource that you may print in its entirety or in part at any time.

John Bilotta, SCION Editor
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scimembers

scimembers is a member-driven e-mail mailing list that is intended to facilitate communication between members of the Society on topics of concern to composers of contemporary concert music. It conveys whatever notices or messages are sent by its members, including announcements of performances and professional opportunities, as well as discussions on a wide variety of topics. For more information, including how to join and participate in the listserv:

<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/listserv.html>

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Membership Information

For complete details, please visit
<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/join/membership.html>

Full Membership (\$75/year): Eligible to submit scores to the National Conferences, regional conferences, SCI Recording Series, SCI Journal of Music Scores. Access to the SCI Newsletter in electronic form. Optional subscription to [scimembers], the SCI listserv and all other SCI publications. Eligible to vote on Society Matters and in elections for the National Council.

Joint Membership (\$100/year): Same benefits as full members

Senior Membership (\$35/year): Open to those 65 years of age or older, or retired. Same benefits as full members.

Associate Membership (\$40/year): Open to performers and other interested professionals. Receives the SCI Newsletter in electronic form and can participate in national and regional conferences.

Student Membership (\$35/year): Eligible to submit to national and regional conferences and to vote in society matters. Access to all SCI publications.

Student Chapter Membership (\$25/year): Same benefits as student members, but only available on campuses having Student Chapters.

Institutional Membership (\$40/year): Organizations receive hard copy of the SCI Newsletter and other mailings.

Lifetime Membership (\$1400 or \$150/year for 10 years): Benefits the same as full members, for life.

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area of study at the doctoral level. It can be within music or outside with areas possible such as neuroscience, mathematics, engineering, computer science, etc.

Gone are the days when having “electronic music” on your resume makes you special. Now nearly everyone has experience in one or more electroacoustic music areas. In the 60s through the 90s, being a composer that did “electronic” music – or a permutation such as acousmatic music, electroacoustic music, computer, etc. – was something unique, an additional or special qualification. In my own career I’ve gone from making “tape music” on Ampex tape recorders and using sounds generated by Moog, Buchla and other types of analog synthesizers, to computer music languages such as MUSIC4BF and Csound, to constructing interactive works using Max managed by a myriad of alternative controllers – both handmade and store bought. Today, nearly every program in music composition worth its salt has at least one composer working in the electroacoustic medium, some even as mixed media artists. Most programs have several practitioners of the aural electronic arts.

How do you make yourself special within this saturated job market? In days gone by, the composer was the teacher of music theory. The practice of pushing black dots around made us somewhat uniquely qualified for this calling. As the market has changed and degrees in music theory have become more and more a possibility for the terminal degree, the norm of composers teaching theory has transformed into one of institutional choice rather than universal need. We now have degrees in composition (Ph.D., D.M.A., D.A., etc.), music theory (Ph.D.) and the hybrid doctorates in “composition and theory” (or flip that around – as if adding the word theory to a degree title will ensure greater employment opportunities for the graduates of said programs).

So, the question remains, how to you make yourself attractive in the job market, and how can you maximize your potential in order to find the best location over the course of your career. I’ll answer that by saying there is no one answer alone. But, there are things you can do to make yourself look attractive to an employer. First, there are 150-400 qualified potential applicants for most posts listed in tomes such as the Music Vacancy List, Chronicles of Higher Education, etc. Your materials need to be clear and look terrific. Don’t pad. I can only speak personally, but I really don’t care how many

master classes you had with Pulitzer Prize winning composers. Put that stuff, if at all, at the end of our resume/c.v. If you’re fresh out of your terminal degree put your education first on your resume, it is the most important thing you’ve done to date. Second would be listing the teaching experience you’ve had during your work. Administrators want people they can put in the classroom and not have to worry. Look for doctoral programs that will give you ample teaching opportunities in a variety of settings, from theory to composition, and in person or online. Today nearly every institution wants someone that can develop and deliver online curriculum. Your first job will likely not be teaching advanced orchestration to a small cadre of graduate students. Being a doctoral fellow that only needs to compose and go to class is attractive but it will only prepare you for a career as a freelance composer. The transition from there to the classroom at a state community college is a nearly impossible one to navigate. If you want to be a composer and only a composer then don’t worry about it (and if this is the case why are you getting a doctorate anyway?).

Now that having a “specialty” in electronic music is no longer really special, what can you do to make your resume more attractive? I see a growing focus on new music ensembles as one possible area where composers can distinguish themselves. The study of conducting should be a strong part of any composer’s curriculum. We are often the first line of defense of our own work. I’ve always enjoyed listening to the recordings made with the composer at the helm. Also, for quite some time there has been a growing interest in a variety of computer music ensembles. You no longer need to be able to build your own computers like The League of Automatic Music Composers (The HUB) required in order to form all manner of electronic music ensembles. Having an “ORC” no longer requires greatly specialized knowledge. But, the composer/performer/conductor is still a valuable commodity.

How is your Internet presence managed? One of the first things a potential employer will do outside of checking your supplied references is to Google your name. If you don’t have a website, you should. If you have one, how does it augment the paper c.v. you’ve submitted with your employment application. Can a potential employer get a sense of you not only as an artist and teacher but as a person? One of the hardest things to judge by official documents is whether or not the search committee would want to live

with you for the rest of their careers. No one wants to work with a brilliant, talented jerk. Most want a colleague that will be supportive and collaborative. My most cherish moments at a musician is making music for and with my faculty colleagues.

Find a trusted mentor and use them throughout the search for your first job. In fact, find several. And, whether you intend on improving your position or settling in at that first institution as I did, keep in touch with your mentors: your teachers, successful fellow students, and your colleagues at the institution where you're currently employed. Ask questions... communicate. Also, it's easy to settle in and begin to hyper-focus on your teaching and administrative duties. Remember that the academy is built on a three-legged stool of research/creative work, service and teaching. This will be assessed along your path to tenure and promotion. A stool with only two legs falls easily. It's a LOT of work to teach and teach well. But, if you are a composer you need to continue to compose and get your work performed. This will come into play in your tenure and promotion process and will be essential if you'd like to move from that community college to a four year institution and on up to a school with a graduate program. And, it doesn't matter if that has to come out of pocket - - if you're doing enough it always will. There is no check box on job applications for "I would have if the institution had paid for it." Budget for it. It is a part of your professional growth. It is an investment in your future.

Network; get engaged with regional, national and international organizations in your field. SCI, SEAMUS, ICMA, CMS, American Composers Forum, etc., are all groups that hold events where you can meet colleagues doing interesting work and who may be on search committees. When I was in the job market I met someone who would later become a member of a committee that interviewed me for a potential position. By networking you are much more likely to go from being a name on a c.v. to a person who could become an engaging, polite, potential colleague.

And, don't give up. If you've done your work and listened to your mentors, success is very likely. But, the market is such that you'll probably need to do something to bridge the year you get your sheepskin to the next job season. The days of getting a post ABD are nearly gone. There are just too many in the pool that have the degree in hand. Can you do

some adjunct work at your doctoral institution or find a part-time post at a local community college? The rule of thumb is that you have to apply for 100 jobs before you get your first. Cast your net broadly and be willing to move. I had to explain to my family and my in-laws why my wife and I were not likely returning to San Diego upon my graduation. The position will choose where you live. It is unlikely that you can choose a place you want to be and then find a job teaching at the local university. Being a member of the academy is more akin to being in the military. The position determines where your "duty station" will be.

As a fortunate individual that has held a position at one institution for the past 25 years I'm the last to offer personal stories of the horrors of the job market. I will offer up the fact that by the time I landed a post at the University of Florida in 1991 I had already applied for 75 jobs. My post at UF was first a one-year position, one that I held for two years in a row. At the end of my second year I applied for and was awarded the tenure-track post I now hold (sort of for the second time). After thirteen years of strategic planning, personal funding, developing mentors and friendships, and professional activity, I achieved the rank of Full Professor.

This is one person's opinion and I'm sure many of you have additional or differing opinions. Please share them with our membership for the benefit of all. For those in the job market, hang in there and surround yourselves with trusted mentors and colleagues. Remain engaged within your local composers' groups and the larger community nationally and internationally. It's my experience that the more you invest in yourself and others, the greater the personal return.