

How 10 Musicians Make Good Livings In Today's Music Industry

(December 2013 by Ari Herstand)

We hear so much doom and gloom today from people screaming that the music industry is dying and there's no money in music. I asked a few friends (and a some Twitter acquaintances) who make good (sure, subjective) livings with their music and how they do it. I specifically did not ask those currently on a label to showcase how DIYers can do it. These guys (and gals) are making it work! The biggest takeaway is that there is no one way to succeed. All of these musicians figured out what worked (and what didn't). They adapted and figured out how they could use their talents to make a living. It's not all a straight line trajectory from A to B. If you take one thing from this, it should be that it IS possible to make a living as a musician: you just have to get crafty, be smart, and above all, work your ass off!

(Some of their "words of wisdom" are long, but I left them that way because I felt they are the most important parts of this piece. Read them. You'll learn something new from every one of these incredible musicians.)

Ron Pope

I had the pleasure to support Ron on a 9 week 60 date US tour in the Spring of 2011. What a ride! He is an insanely talented singer/songwriter/guitarist. His fans are **HARDCORE**. At the time, he had recently left his label and wanted to tour and we had been friends for a couple years so I offered to book the tour. Since then he has been conquering the world and touring all the time. He's one of the artists that blew up during the Myspace era. He was always in the top 3 "unsigned acts" on those Myspace charts. Remember those? No tricks. No fake numbers. Just true, honest music that resonates with a lot of people.

****To all the Spotify haters out there – note that as a DIY artist making over \$100K a year, Ron's 2nd biggest income source is from Spotify.**

Where do you currently reside?

Brooklyn, NY

Hometown?

Marietta, GA

Age?

30

How long has music been your primary source of income?

About six years

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years) \$20,000-35,000, \$35,000-50,000, \$50,000-75,000, \$100,000+?

\$100,000+

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music:

From most to least, my top five:

iTunes
Spotify
Sound Exchange royalties
Show income (when I'm touring)
and syncs.

BMI royalties pop in there some quarters, depending on what kind of licenses I've had come up. I also sell t-shirts, CDs, vinyl, sweatshirts, handwritten lyrics, posters, bracelets, and other things on my website (and at shows). There is some of my sheet music on Musicnotes.com so they pay quarterly. Finally, I get some songwriting royalties for my work with other artists.

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?

I do not currently have a record deal or a pub deal. I did have a record deal with Universal Republic; they released two singles for me in 2009 and I got out of my deal in early 2010.

What is your "main project?"

My main project is my solo project. I also have a band called The District with my best friends from college, but that, I do for fun.

What other avenues do you pursue musically that bring in income? Anything and everything.

I make it a point to do everything that's readily available. Register all the songs with BMI, make sure Sound Exchange knows you're there, check that the music is available for sale and streaming on all the sites that people use...all of that.

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career?

I use the internet to interact directly with my fans; that's obviously a big difference between what you could do before social networking. I built my career by interacting with my fans online; my online followers turned into a real show-going, honest to goodness worldwide following.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?

Nothing else; just music.

Here's your sounding board! Tell people how someone can make a living in music. You've made it work! Please explain how. Tell as much (or as little) of your story as you'd like or just give some wise words to live by.

Your best bet early in your career is to learn how to be self sufficient. Produce your own records, write your own songs, have a clear cut vision of who you are and what you want to become. Also, run your business. Don't be afraid to step out and represent yourself. Be willing to work hard and grow your project; some people get lucky and find talented, hard working advocates who want to assist them. That doesn't happen for everyone, so often, it'll be up to you to handle what needs to be handled.

<http://www.RonPopeMusic.com>

Gabriel Douglas (The 4onthefloor)

Gabe and I lived together for 3 years in a musicians house of 6 dudes in Minneapolis. We had a rehearsal space in the basement where we all traded off nights to rehearse (priority based on whose show was coming up the quickest of course). I remember when Gabe quit his day job at Apple to concentrate on building his music career full-time. He is one of the hardest (and smartest) working musicians I know. His band The 4onthefloor, in a very short time, has risen to be THE BIGGEST band in Minnesota. I'm not exaggerating. They sell out the legendary 1600 capacity First Avenue (of Purple Rain fame) multiple times a year. Call up your cousin in Minnesota and ask her if she knows The 4onthefloor. She will.

Where do you currently reside?

LynLake of Uptown in Minneapolis, MN

Hometown?

Stephen, MN

Age?

30

How long has music been the primary source of income?

5 years

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years)?

\$50,000-75,000

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music

Touring / live shows [and merch] are definitely my primary sources. [Merch] actually is the difference on a lot of tours of being in the red or being in the black. Many times when doing a support slot, you are banking on the fans, larger audience of the headliner, picking up stuff after seeing you for the 1st time.

+Double Your Income... No Really

Publishing is becoming a larger slice of the pie (They have the new Duck Dynasty theme song), but it is inconsistent & unmanageable. I look at all of that as bonuses – and the bonuses have aggressively been bigger as of late.

Have you ever had shows where the guarantee/door was light but you made up for it in tshirts, vinyl, or general merch sales?

Many many many times.

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?

I have self-released everything I have recorded. Publishing (Licensing) we go through a company called In the Groove out of Minneapolis.

We have never signed to a record deal.

We have had a publishing deal since the 4onthefloor's first LP in 2011, "4×4".

What is your "main project?"

Flagship is the 4onthefloor.

What other avenues do you pursue musically that bring in income? Anything and everything.

Silverback Colony is an alt-country collective that is my secondary gig.

Orca Colony is a downtempo outfit that Alex Steele (from Night Phoenix) & myself started. We've actually made great leaps in sound & outreach in the past year.

I play solo a lot as well. It's nice to strip down songs, play songs I admire, & play new songs out this way.

I keep a music / lifestyle blog called ... And Unmapped Chambers of Hearts. It doesn't bring in much money yet, but I'm keeping my journalistic skills up & it helps to put music I like on the map for others to find easily.

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career? In the beginning, I used it quite extensively to find similar bands in other markets & to network.

To easily get my product & songs out and be listenable & easily bought (or just listened to.) BEING EASILY ACCESSED IS HUGE.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?

I've started a record label, Double Asterisk Group, that doubles as a creative consulting firm.

We help out with design projects, tours, & songwriting for many artists across the nation.

Words To Live By?

If you want to play music, PLAY MUSIC.

If you want to make a living out of it, MAKE A LIVING OUT OF IT.

The person who is sitting on your hands IS YOU.

Boil down your monthly spending to the very basics, know how much it takes for you to live where you live.

Find out how to make enough money to make that work.

Or move.

KEEP MOVING.

So much time is lost being stagnant.

Always be on time.

Be communicating.

Be networking. Don't have a sales pitch for every music industry person you meet.

Have a welcoming hand-shake, ears ready to listen, & be genuine.

Be warm. There's enough coldness in the world.

GO TO SHOWS.

Having a Colbie Caillat plan is not a realistic one. Indulge in your scene. Go see national acts you've never heard of.

I constantly meet people who are energetic about music, but haven't been to a musical performance in over a month. THAT IS UNACCEPTABLE if you want to keep growing as a performer & growing an audience.

Life is not to fear, life is to enjoy.
Don't sweat the small stuff, revel in it.

MAKE QUALITY MERCH. Nobody will wear a Hanes Heavy T. Nobody wants a jewel case that is easily broken. Let people be your billboards & your champions. Pay for quality. A shirt that you made money on that sits on the bottom of a closet is a waste to both you & the consumer. The profit margins are less on quality shirts but you sell more.

www.4otf.com
www.twitter.com/doubleasterisk
www.twitter.com/gabrieldouglas

Gabriel Mann (The Rescues)

I met Gabriel in the Summer of 2010 when I supported a few The Rescues shows. It was their first national tour and I joined them for the Midwest run. He remains to be one of my favorite people. He has such a great heart and an infectious, positive energy. His main gig (now) is scoring music for TV shows and is currently working on (yes, simultaneously) Modern Family – ABC, Trophy Wife – ABC, Star-Crossed – CW, Friends With Better Lives – CBS, Rectify – Sundance Channel, Twisted – ABC Family, The Exes – TVLand. He doesn't sleep.

Where do you currently reside?
Los Angeles.

Hometown?
San Antonio, Texas.

Age?
40.

How long has music been your primary source of income?
Since I graduated from college in 1995.

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years)?
100K+

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music:
Scoring. My main gig at this point is writing music for television shows. This particular year it's gotten very busy, I'm working on many shows at the same time. I get an occasional sync here and there with The Rescues, I do an occasional vocal session here and there, but the lion's share of my income comes from writing music for hire.

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?
I have an admin deal as a solo artist, The Rescues have their own admin deal, and we (The Rescues) had a major label record deal for a couple years as well. No longer.

What is your “main project?”

I don't really have a main show that I work on, though my most high profile show is Modern Family.

What other avenues do you pursue musically that bring in income? Anything and everything.

I write songs and score for Mattel (Barbie, Hot Wheels), theme songs and score for every major network and lots of not as major ones. I sing on commercials, tv shows and movies. I play live shows as a solo artist (veeery occasionally) and with The Rescues. I am in a yoga/massage/chillout band with a friend from college, Vive – we have a couple records and amazingly people buy them. I engineer, produce, mix, edit, all things involved with making music, though usually I'm working on my own stuff for whatever project it may be. For a long time we rented out the studio I work in and I earned a little that way, but at this point I'm here all the time so it's not really for rent anymore.

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career? Externally I mainly use it as a place to have a website, and as a place to send out notes to the universe about whatever I happen to be working on or whatever live event I'd like to invite people to. Internally I am currently uploading 33 minutes of score to a dropbox where the music editor will retrieve it, assemble it into a protools file and prep it for the mix stage (where they mix the dialogue, sfx, and music together). It's most useful for me as a means of communication and delivery of files. Don't know how we all survived before. Spent a lot of money on messengers.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?

All of my income is from music, and it always has been.

What's Your Story? How Have you Made It Work? Words To Live By?

I wanted to be a rock star, which of course is what all young burgeoning musicians want. But I was a very practical person, probably inherited from my parents (both doctors). I didn't want to starve, and, probably to the detriment of my solo career and the careers of bands I've been in, I was unwilling to get in a bus for a year and play coffee houses, come what may. I just wanted to make music and make a living doing it, and I always thought it was too big of a risk to pursue music in only one way (like the rock star way). So I started working for TV composers. The third one I worked for, as an assistant, was David Schwartz, and he became a mentor to me. But I bailed, cuz I decided TV composing was lame and working for somebody was lame and I needed to be a rock star. Worked as an engineer/producer/mixer, made my own albums, toured, got married, had a baby, came back and wanted to earn a better living than I had before. David called and wanted me to help write some songs for Arrested Development (the show, not the band). I was all in, we worked late and long and it was a great time and led to more work with him on other shows and eventually a show of my own. Around the same time I got my own first show under my own name, The Rescues got a record deal.

The reason I bring all that up is just to say that I wanted to do everything (engineer, mix, produce, write, record, sing, play live, tour, song, score, video games, tv, movies, etc). I still want to do everything, and I am still pursuing most things, though I've

become more focused on writing music for media. By wanting to do everything, and by being reasonably capable in many genres of music, and by knowing how to engineer and mix and produce and sing and play and basically do lots of stuff, I was able to make myself useful to lots of different people in lots of different ways. And when you are useful, you can make a living. I did studio wiring (this is one area in which I am useless), organized cables behind racks, removed wires from troughs, disassembled a 24 track machine, produced dozens of a cappella albums, produced dozens of bands, mixed a ton of records, sang on all kinds of sessions, played keys at tons of shows, toured the world as a sideman, solo act, and with a band. And somewhere in there figured out how to write songs and score in virtually every style of music. I'm no good at jazz. But I can pretty much do anything else people need, and I thrive on variety. I love going from one project to another, it turns on my brain, keeps me fresh, keeps the music fresh. I also met a ton of wonderful people. All kinds of musicians, many of whom I work with today.

The other aspect of wanting to do everything is never saying no. I pretty much never said no, until about 5 years ago, when suddenly both of my paths (the logical one that wanted to make a living, and the one that wanted a big fancy record deal) started to bear fruit at the same time. Not saying no, not pigeon-holing myself as one or the other thing within the world of music, I believe has served me very well. I work on dramas and comedies, I write rock music and orchestral music and everything in between, I write songs and score and TV themes and I play live shows and sing on sessions and it's all great. I love it all, and I feel very lucky that I kinda figured out the not-saying-no thing intuitively. If someone had told me to say yes to every gig and every possibility, I'd've probably run the other way, thinking that I had to focus on one thing in order to get anywhere. But I've found the exact opposite to be true. Focusing on everything means you learn how to do everything. The challenge, I suppose, is to be as good as you can be at all of those things, and to not let the quality of your work slip in any realm.

+Just Say YES

And the other challenge is raising a family and having kids and a normal life and finding time to read and participate in the community as a citizen of the world. Which I also do. I am working late tonight, but 6 nights out of 7 I am home for dinner, and 3 weekends out of 4 I am there the whole time, reffing soccer games and doing other weekendy stuff. I have found that preserving this time with family, and for myself, is critical to keeping my brain alive.

www.gabrielmann.com

www.therescues.com

Dane Schmidt (Jamestown Story)

I don't know Dane personally, but I've known of Jamestown Story for years. Also hailing from Minneapolis, we were working the scene around the same time – however from completely different angles. I was building the live scene and Dane was building the internet scene. I don't think we've actually ever met in person (have we Dane?), but have connected thanks to Twitter. . . ohhh the internet.

Where do you currently reside?

Nashville, TN

Hometown?

Duluth/Minneapolis, MN

Age?

28

How long has music been the primary source of income?

7 years

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years)?

My income varies from year to year but it typically stays in the \$50k-\$75k range.

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music

iTunes and TV/Film syncs & royalties.

I used to tour quite a bit but got burnt out on it so now I rarely play shows – iTunes sales and TV syncs have been my main source of income for the past 4-5 years.

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal?

Nope – I was in a band called Sing It Loud in 2007 that had a deal with Epitaph, but I left the band shortly after we signed to continue doing my own thing.

What is your “main project?”

It has been Jamestown Story for the last 7 years but I’ve recently started a publishing & licensing company called WEVOLVE that I’m concentrating on full time, as well as pitching songs to artists and running our recording studio.

What other avenues do you pursue musically that bring in income? Anything and everything.

I license other artists music to TV & Film, manage our recording studio as well as my brother who’s a producer/engineer, and setup work-for-hire projects for other writers. I’m also in the process of developing a program for artists that calculates song royalties owed to co-writers, which I’m really excited about. Being an artist who pays royalties to co-writers every month, this program will make the process 100x easier for them to calculate what they owe and automatically pay

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career?

The internet is what’s made it possible for me to have a career haha.

Back in 2004, I put my first album up on Purevolume.com at a time when the site was extremely popular. I was lucky enough to have quite a few people take a liking to my music and within a couple years I had millions of plays on both Purevolume & Myspace, which gave me the opportunity to tour full-time. Myspace was also the reason I met many of my licensing contacts, as well as other folks who have helped & supported me along the way. To sum up, I wouldn’t be doing what I do if it wasn’t for the internet.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?

I play poker part-time which brings in some extra income but that’s just for fun.

www.jamestownstory.com
www.twitter.com/jamestownstory
www.soundcloud.com/jamestownstory
www.wevolveinc.com (Music production, publishing, & licensing)
www.fantasylandnashville.com (Our recording studio in Nashville)

Yael Meyer

I know Yael from the LA singer/songwriter scene. We did a quirky little YouTube cover video together (when she was very pregnant) and have done various events around town together. She is also an incredibly hard worker – I’ve seen this first hand. She (and her husband) have built her career to support a family of 4!

Where do you currently reside?

Between LA and Chile. Currently touring so for the time being we are traveling.

Hometown?

Chile and LA.

Age?

32

How long has music been the primary source of income?

About 7 years.

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music

Sync, Publishing/Royalties, Gigs/Touring, Sales (CDs, Digital), Private Events/Sponsorships

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?

I have my own independent record label established in the USA and Chile, and 2 publishing companies both in the USA. All of it is run by my husband/manager/partner and I with the help of a strong and solid team we have been building over many years who handle some areas of sync and licensing, radio promo, PR and other strategic alliances with brands and booking in different parts of the world.

I have never been signed to a label as it has never been the avenue we strongly pursued. We are open to the idea of partnering with a bigger label, but we never believed that a record deal was the only way. I have sub-publishing/publishing admin agreements with companies in Europe and South America to cover these territories and make sure royalties are collected, cue sheets turned in and songs registered, though ASCAP does an excellent job at all of this regardless.

What is your “main project?”

My solo career as a recording and touring artist, singer and songwriter and the label we are developing and growing.

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career?

I use it for: Reaching out to blogs and internet radio stations. Using social media to stay connected with fans. Sending out a monthly newsletter to fans and subscribers. Sharing video clips and other content on youtube and vimeo. Distributing music digitally all over the world and on all major platforms (iTunes, Spotify, Grooveshark, Shazam etc). Making sure it is available to people all over the world. To learn/study/discover new trends and stay current in the industry/market and to connect with industry and other artists around the globe. Creating new business opportunities and new partnerships and relationships.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?
Nothing. This is pretty much it for me :)

<http://yaelmeyermusic.com>
<http://facebook.com/yaelmeyermusic>
<http://twitter.com/yaelmusic>

Nicholas Jacobson-Larson

I've known Nick for many many years. We met as freshman at the University of Minnesota. He transferred to Berklee and I transferred to the music school of life. Nick used to play guitar for my full band shows. He's a badmothafucka on the guitar. We reconnected when he moved to LA a couple years ago. He is an incredibly talented composer and musician and has worked alongside HUGE composers (like Michael Giacchino). Similar to Gabriel Mann, Nick showcases a completely different side of the industry for musicians to make a living with their talents.

Where do you currently reside?
LA

Hometown?
Anoka, Minnesota

Age?
28

How long has music been your primary source of income?
10 years

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years)?
\$35,000-50,000

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music?
My main income sources are creative fees from film scores and concert commissions. Next is orchestrating, score preparation and conducting, followed by royalties and secondary markets payments from the Film Musicians Secondary Markets Fund.

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?
Nope/nope.

What is your “main project?”
Writing film scores and concert music.

What other avenues do you pursue musically that bring in income? Anything and everything.
In the past couple of years I’ve started producing/arranging rock/pop records for a few artists. I also write music for commercials.

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career?
I’ve used Kickstarter to raise money for projects I’m working on, and Facebook and my website to keep clients apprised of what I’m up to.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?
All of my income is music-based.

Words to live by?

1. Seek out mentors to learn from. I’ve gained so much valuable insight about music and the business from accomplished composers whose work I respect enormously.
2. Work harder than everyone else. I know it’s such a cliché to say this, but it’s just true. There’s no substitute for hard work.
3. But I think the single most important thing to do is to just try to be a nice person. It sounds cheesy, but if you treat people well, you’re going to be rewarded with a lot more opportunities than if you treat people like crap, and more importantly, you’re going to be happy with yourself as a person.

<http://njlmusic.com>

This spring I’ll be contributing concert orchestrations to Star Trek Into Darkness – Live in Concert at Royal Albert Hall in London

I’m in the process of producing an R&B ep for singer/songwriter Jon Aanestad

I recently wrote the score for the documentary Matt Shepard is a Friend of Mine

Rebecca De La Torre

Where do you currently reside?
Tempe, Arizona (Phoenix metro area)

Hometown?
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Age?
35

How long has music been your primary source of income?
7.5 years

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years)?

\$100k+

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music?

I make the most money from my gigs, hands down. I speak Spanish and can do Spanish music as well. I would say at this point that Spanish gigs account for 20-25% of my income, as defined here:

38%: public gigs (resorts, casinos, music venues, etc)

30%: weddings & private events/parties

18%: church services, funerals, choir rehearsals

7%: CD sales (I don't have any merchandise *yet*)

4%: Arrangements and commissioned compositions

2%: recording others' music in my studio (studio engineering)

1%: teaching & other (iTunes, Spotify, etc)

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?

NO

What is your "main project?"

Right now it's a Christian CD I'm releasing in January, with English and Spanish versions of the same songs. After that it will be my next secular CD.

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career?

I mainly use the internet and social media for building up my community of fans, promoting my gigs, and advertising for private events. I have also sold albums online but I'm still trying to figure all that out. I sell albums at my live shows all the time, though.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?

We have a rental property (a condo) that brings in a small amount each month. (i.e. around 1% but I didn't count that in my breakout above since it wasn't music income, and it's SO small; just an investment)

Tell people how someone can make a living in music. Tell as much (or as little) of your story as you'd like or just give some wise words to live by.

I left a lucrative engineering career with a large defense contractor to be a full-time musician. But I had a plan one my way out, and although I left a 6-figure salary, I still made about \$40k my first year as a musician because I set a BUDGET and had a PLAN that I stuck to.

There is SO much good information out there that has helped me to educate myself on how to build and run a business. ALL good business principles should be applied to a music business. I find it interesting that only recently have I seen a more pronounced community movement trying to convince artists that their music is a business and should be handled as such. Coming from Corporate America (specifically the military industrial complex), I had some idea about how a successful business operates. But I still had to learn the ins and

outs and every day dealings on my own, and I turned to books and online resources to supplement my knowledge.

I have made more mistakes than I care to share, even this past year. But I learn from each mistake, evaluate it (my partner and I call it a “post-mortem” discussion), and determine how to avoid making the same mistake in the future.

I have no debt besides my mortgage and I NEVER buy something I don't have cash for. This is SO crucial to being a successful business person. I DID used to have debt, but I paid it off BEFORE leaving engineering – so I've made that mistake, too.

Everyone has his own unique path that must be forged out of hard work and perseverance. Only a few get crazy lucky breaks. The rest of us have to work at it. ANY of us can look at someone else and make excuses saying “oh well she had this help” or whatever advantage. We all have advantages and disadvantages. We all have to leverage our advantages and make up for our shortcomings.

I remember in 10th grade having some music students from the local university (in this case, the University of Alabama) speak to us about having a career in music. One of the students said “if you can do anything besides music for a living and be happy, then do that. ONLY do music if that is your passion, because it is just that hard” – now I don't know if she got that from someone else or invented it herself, but that has stuck with me all these 20 years. And that very idea is why I LEFT engineering – because I was miserable in that field even though I was very good at it, and I KNEW that if I could just make about \$50k a year as a musician, I would be so much happier, and I would consider myself successful.

Some people think that you need supportive parents to develop the talents required to be a musician. I will tell yo this: my parents supported me to an extent. My mom wanted me to be a church musician but my dad told me when I was about 8 years old or so that he didn't think I could “make it” as a singer, and when I left engineering so many years later he was astonished, frustrated, confused, and definitely not supportive. Now, I do not want to bring him any shame because now he is definitely my biggest fan and has asked repeatedly for forgiveness (which I have said isn't even necessary because he was just being practical), but I want any other aspiring professional musician out there to know that parental support is NOT AT ALL required. As a matter of fact, my main instrument (besides voice) is the piano, and I have only been playing 11 years – starting well after I was “out of the house”. That means that I had only been playing 3 1/2 years when I left engineering to do it full-time. WORK HARD and BELIEVE in yourself.

Making a living as a musician is very challenging, but it is possible, and it is the BEST life if that is really where your passion lies. NEVER GIVE UP.

<http://www.rebeccadelatorre.com>

<http://www.rebeccadelatorreband.com>

<http://twitter.com/topkittykat>

<http://www.facebook.com/RebeccaDeLaTorreMusic>

Paul Matthew Moore

Hometown?
Palo Alto, CA

Age?
43

How long has music been your primary source of income?
22 years

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years)?
50-75k

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music
#1 accompanying ballet and modern dance classes

#2 Indy film scoring and residuals

#3 other composing commissions. Usually dance scores.

#4 freelance recording sessions. Usually rock/pop singer songwriters. Sometimes other stuff. For example, I played all that Piano and keyboards on Tim Hower's new release "Virgins" which is on Spin Magazine's top 50 list

#5 performance show income.

For example on November 16 I sang with the Kronos Quartet at the moore theater in a piece that called for 5 singers. I was paid \$1000 for that.

I also toured for almost 2 years with the Dayna Hanson company. She payed \$20/hour for rehearsals and about \$1000 for each run of the show. The show ran 3-5 nights in each city. During the creation of the show we rehearsed 40 hours per week.

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?
No

What is your "main project?"
Free lance composer musician.

What other avenues do you pursue musically that bring in income?
I teach a little. About 2-3 hours per week. I've made cell phone ring tones (yuk). My top 5 include everything.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?
I have not had any non music jobs since I graduated from UCSB with a music composition degree in 1993

Words To Live By

Practice and study. Know how to read and improvise. Be as versatile as possible. Stay humble and positive. Be of service to others who can pay you everyday. Don't get into the habit of working for free.

www.paulmatthewmoore.com
<http://twitter.com/composermusic>
soundcloud.com/paul-matthew-moore

Mike Vial

Where do you currently reside?
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Hometown?
I grew up in Metro Detroit. I attended WMU in Kalamazoo.

Age?
32

How long has music been the primary source of income?
About three years.

I did music part time while I was a teacher from 2003-2010. In 2010-2011 I picked up speed, and I've done 200+ gigs a year since I quit teaching.

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years)?
\$20,000-35,000. I'm close to being next bracket this year, but waiting out holiday season to finish accounting.

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music?
Show income is my bread and butter. I make most of my money doing cover gigs in bars and restaurants, and performing original shows at festivals and clubs.
The biggest show I got to do this year was Common Ground Music Festivals in Lansing, MI with BNL and Ben Folds as the headliners.

Second source is playing private parties and house concerts. When playing nicer bars and restaurants, these opportunities are offered from patrons. One year, I played at the former coach of the Red Wing's house party to celebrate his new coaching job.

Third is merchandise sales. When doing cover gigs, merch sales aren't as large as original shows (but that tip jar helps).

For original shows, merch sales are essential. Honestly, I don't move a lot of T-shirt sales, yet, and I'm working on my presentation of this more from the microphone (especially considering Ari's tips).

Fourth is iTunes and minor streaming revenue. I have experienced a dip with streaming payouts gaining traction.

Fifth is session work. Michigan isn't like Nashville or LA, but I do get work from studios occasionally.

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?

No. I did have a sync licensing deal and I was in a few music libraries, but I didn't have any successful placements, yet.

What is your "main project?"

I perform mostly solo under my name: Mike Vial

At times I perform with a band that features David Mosher (incredible Michigan multi-instrumentalist!)

What other avenues do you pursue musically that brings in income? |

I was teaching guitar lessons (7-10 students is my perfect number) before I moved to Ann Arbor. I'm considering adding that to my schedule next year.

I also host a weekly open mic/showcase night at the Mash Bar in Ann Arbor, MI on Wednesdays.

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career?

I love IndieontheMove.com. That site has been dream come true for booking tours.

I've used Noisetrade.com to increase my email list and offer music for free downloads. I made the front page of the top downloads list in December 2011 and March 2013.

I'm a long time user of CDBaby for online distribution. I handle all merch sales myself with Bandcamp.com.

I create and maintain my entire website with WordPress.org, and I write often on my blog.

I have used Sonicbids, and I was selected for a fun Folk Alliance showcase, but I don't use Sonicbids anymore. I was an early adopter to Concertsinyourhome.com, but I don't use that anymore, either.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?

This year, my wife (full-time writer/freelance journalist) and I were hired to give a guest lecture at my alma mater, Western Michigan University for Direct Encounter with the Arts, which was an incredible experience. I'm really interested in doing more of these types of events.

Doing workshops (songwriting, guitar, etc.) are a really great way to make money on the road, too. I've led a few songwriting workshops at Michigan festivals, and I'm considering finding more opportunities for that in 2014.

www.mikevial.com

mikevial.bandcamp.com

www.facebook.com/mikevialmusic

www.twitter.com/mikevial

Dan Collins

Where do you currently reside?

Chicago, IL

Hometown?

Waunakee (Madison), WI

Age?

23

How long has music been your primary source of income?

3 years

About how much did you make from music last year (or your best year the past 5 years)?

\$35,000-50,000

What are the top 5 income sources you make from music?

1. (50%) Teaching a private studio of 14 students
2. (25%) Church pianist
3. (15%) Jobbing/cover bands
4. (5%) Scoring/composing
5. (5%) CD sales, other misc.

Do you have a record deal or publishing deal? Have you ever?

No. No.

What is your “main project?”

My piano-driven power trio, Nonpronto

What other avenues do you pursue musically that bring in income? Anything and everything.

- Freelance recording
- Contracted marketing
- Musical gigs
- Session work

How have you used the internet/new music industry to help with your music career?

Most of the money I have earned can be linked back to connections I've made via Craigslist, or other emails-initiated relationships. There are so many pools of musicians and creators waiting to be dipped into, so I start most of that on the 'net. When I meet another musician in person, I stay in touch with them online and reach out when opportunities arise. They do the same in return, creating the mutually beneficial relationship that creative people seek.

What else do you do (non-musically) that brings in income?

Nothing.

Words of wisdom:

Become multifaceted! I think being a jack-of-all-trades and master of one or two is entirely possible and a great route today. I've prospered big time from going to school for jazz and learning how to sing on my own. Also, I've never relied on graphic designers, recording engineers, booking managers, etc. to get all of that essential work done because I've invested my time to learn each of those things. I also like to think that the road to truly doing what you want as a musician is the same road as in other professions- put the hard work in early on, do some things you don't want to do but know you should, and find more success down the road... at least that's how I imagine it playing out :)

www.nonpronto.com

www.dancollinsandapiano.com

[Ari Herstand is a Los Angeles based DIY musician and the creator of Ari's Take.](#)

Follow him on Twitter: [@aristake](#)

Article source: <http://www.digitalmusicnews.com/permalink/2013/12/23/full-time-musicians>

COMMENT FROM FarePlay Tuesday, December 24, 2013

Well, this pretty much confirms the position that working musician is a part time job. At one time, recorded music sales would have been 50% or more of a musicians income, but as a result of piracy, single downloads which have been heavily promoted in campaigns to discredit the value of digital album downloads and cd sales; you know that one. "Albums/CDs are a rip off because you are paying for one good song".

And more recently, streaming services like Spotify.

Plus, all of these musicians appear to be solo artists, not bands; yes try splitting that \$50k four ways. Actually, Ari, thanks for proving our point. Sadly, this really isn't very encouraging AT ALL. Just imagine, at one time, these guys would have been able to double their income through CD sales at \$10 each.

Will Buckley