Where Do I Go with...Music?

By Richie Chevat

• Do you hear music in your future? These four successful people did, too.

Some people cry at the opera. Others never feel more alive than when they’re listening to their favorite band and playing air guitar. Then there are people who walk around all day singing or whistling to themselves, just because they like to.

Do you love music, either listening to it or making it yourself? Then maybe a career in the music industry is the right choice for you. People don’t have to play instruments or be great singers to get jobs in the music industry. What’s most important is a love of music and some imagination.

Broadway Singer

Tracee Beazer had stars in her eyes from an early age.

"Dancing was my first love," she says. "From age 3, even before I knew what Broadway was, I knew that [was] where the good dancers went, and if you’re going to be on Broadway, you’re going to have to sing."

Today, at the age of 23, Beazer has already accomplished her goal. She’s in the Broadway cast of Hairspray. Eight times a week, she sings and dances in a hit show, “I play one of the Dynamites,” she says. "They’re kind of like the Supremes."

(See picture, "Beazer, Tracee: Performing in a Broadway Musical")

It took a lot of hard work to get there. Beazer began taking voice lessons at age 12. She tried out for parts in her local community theater. Add to that acting and dance classes, auditions in New York City, and endless hours of practicing—even though she’s still very young, Beazer has years of experience behind her:

Her first real break came when she was 18 and got a part in a production with Theaterworks-USA, a touring children’s theater company. "I thought I was set," she says. "But it only lasted a month and a half. After that, it was back to auditioning."

Auditions can be unnerving. "Sometimes you go in and you’re on and really hit it. Then sometimes you go in and you crash and burn. But a lot of times, that’s when they call you back, so you never know."

Even though she’s made it to Broadway, Beazer plans to keep taking lessons. "Singers who are at the top of their field are still going to coaches," she explains. "You can always learn something new. It’s like athletes who have trainers."

After a year playing the same part, it’s not always easy to keep up your enthusiasm, she says. Still, she never takes it for granted.

"When you’re on the stage, just the curtain raising up, just seeing that audience gives you a thrill," says Beazer. "Sometimes I turn to the other actress in my dressing room before we go on and I say, ‘We’re on Broadway! It’s really unbelievable sometimes.’"

Record Company Executive

How would you like a job going to clubs to hear music almost every night of the week? That’s what Jason Olaine did as an executive for Verve Records. Part of his job was to look for new bands for the label. That’s where the nightlife hopping came in.

(See picture, "Olaine, Jason: Record Producer")

"Going out five or six nights a week is fun at first, but it gets awfully tiring," Olaine says. At the same time, he was learning about producing albums. In addition to finding new talent, a producer works with musicians, sound engineers, and a marketing department to plan, record, and sell new albums.

At Verve, Olaine worked with jazz musicians. A jazz CD that Olaine worked on, Directions in Music, Live at Massey Hall, won a Grammy award in 2003.

In college, Olaine played the trumpet in a jazz combo, but he really didn’t plan to go into music as a career.

"I was thinking of going to business school," he remembers. "But I realized that every time I got a paycheck, I went down to the record store and spent it on records. I thought, ‘I have a problem here. How do I do something with music for a living?’"

Olaine got not just one but four internships in the music industry—all at the same time! He worked for a music industry magazine, the San Francisco Jazz Festival, a radio station, and a jazz club. Only the magazine paid him. Still, he was confident that one of these internships would turn into a job.

Olaine was right. He became artistic director at the jazz club, booking their performers. From there, he took the job at Verve Records in New York City. Today, Olaine is an independent record producer. He works with new bands to record demo CDs, hires musicians and engineers for studio recordings, or puts together musicians he thinks would work well together. He has cut back on his overbooked nightlife while still doing the thing he loves most—helping others make music.

Audio Technician

Like a lot of kids, Jonathan Gold was a drummer and guitarist in a rock band in high school. But he always found himself hanging out at the soundboard. If there was a problem with the sound equipment, he was the one who wound up fixing it. That’s when he began to think about becoming an audio technician.

(See picture, "Gold, Jonathan: Preserving Historic Recordings")
"I had what they call an engineer's attitude," Gold says. "It's sort of laid back. When everyone is running on high emotions in a crisis, the engineer remains levelheaded." After high school, he enrolled in a nine-month recording engineering and studio technology course at the Omega School for Applied Recording Arts and Sciences in Rockville, Md.

That early experience led to his job today at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Gold, now 26, works as audio technician in the American Folklife Center, preserving old recordings. The center has thousands of recordings, including some on wax cylinders that are almost 100 years old. Many are not of music. For example, there are several cylinders of Native American storytellers.

One set of cylinders, made in the 1920s, is of Pueblo Native American speakers. Recently, when members of that tribe were worried their language was dying out, they were able to use digitized files of those cylinders to create a language education program.

"The big push in the library is to get everything digitized," Gold explains. "Every time you play an old cylinder, record or tape, you wear it out a little. Once you get it in a digital file, you don't have to play the original anymore. Plus, you can make it accessible to everyone, even over the Internet... One woman had never heard her father's voice, and we had a recording of it from 1925."

His work at the center has taught him a new appreciation of folk music and the blues. He now listens to blues records even when he's not on the job. Mainly, Jonathan gets a lot of satisfaction knowing he is helping to save a priceless part of American history. He has his "engineer's attitude" to thank for it.

Music Therapist

Jennifer Worthen has found a way to use her love of music to help people. She works as a music therapist in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Music therapists work with people who have disabilities. The therapists use music as a way to communicate with their patients and to help them deal with whatever problems they are facing in their lives.

Some of Worthen's patients are elderly people in nursing homes. "We try to get them to sing familiar songs," she says. "Although a lot of them can't speak or don't have strong verbal skills anymore, when they hear a song they recognize, it kind of brings them back to life, and they can hum along or sing. The music engages them and stimulates their minds."

The 31-year-old therapist has loved music from the time she went to see a production of the musical Annie when she was a child. Worthen got a record of the show and learned every line. In high school, she played the clarinet in the school marching band.

In college, Worthen majored in music and psychology. "I didn't know that music therapy existed," she says. "I just knew that I loved music and I loved people." Then one of her professors told her about a career that combined both.

Music therapists use music in all sorts of ways. They might play instruments with their patients or make up songs to address specific problems. Worthen works with autistic children, who have difficulty knowing how to react in social situations. She uses a song about shaking hands to help autistic kids learn that simple but important social skill.

"Music is very structured," Worthen explains. "Structure is something a lot of our clients need, especially autistic kids."

For people who love music and helping other people, music therapy may be a rewarding career path. It certainly has been for Worthen, who tells Career World, "I think the thing I love most about my job is witnessing the little miracles that happen every day, when our patients respond to the music."

Making Music a Career

There are lots of ways to make it in the music industry. Some people break into the music industry by taking lessons or studying music in school. Others, as Jason Olaine did, do it by learning the business in internships or entry-level jobs.

As Olaine explains it, "This is not something you do for the money. It really is a passion for me. I've had quite a few jobs, but as long as I'm doing something with great new music, I can wake up each day and [say] 'I love my job.'"

Where You Can Go with Music

Here are some other career paths you can take with music.

Who: Arranger/Composer
What: Write music for performers, theater, commercials, films, video games, and more.
How: Know music theory and instrumentation inside and out, and earn a minimum of a bachelor's degree or equivalent experience in music composition. Advanced education and training is an advantage in this competitive field.

Who: Instrument Repairperson
What: Fix (and sometimes build or sell) musical instruments.
How: Know the construction of the instrument as well as how to play it. Repair people can enroll in music instrument technology programs and specialize in such areas as woodwind, brass, percussion, piano, or strings.

Who: Music Critic
What: Write reviews of musicians and recording for newspapers, magazines, or the Web.
How: You'll need excellent writing skills, knowledge of music theory and history, and a bachelor's degree in music or journalism. About half the music critics working today have master's degrees.

Who: Music Publisher
What: Music publishing ranges from publication of sheet music to copyrighting and licensing existing music.
How: Business savvy and a knowledge of music composition and theory are necessary. Undergraduate degree in music for some positions; business degree or master's degree helpful.

Who: Music Teacher
What: Teach instrumental and/or vocal music at the elementary, secondary, or college level or teach individual students.
How: You'll need a strong knowledge of music theory, and in most cases, instrumentation. A bachelor's degree and teaching certification is the minimum.
requirement for elementary and secondary teaching; an advanced degree may be needed for college-level teaching. Mastery of instrumental or vocal technique is required to take on private students.

For More Information:

The National Association for Music Education has great information for people interested in music careers.

- Print a brochure with job descriptions, salary information, and education requirements at [www.menc.org/industry/job/careers/careers.html](http://www.menc.org/industry/job/careers/careers.html)
- The Berklee School of Music’s Web site offers a complete overview of careers in music. [www.berklee.edu/careers](http://www.berklee.edu/careers)

Discuss

Ask students:

- How did each person in the article achieve career success? What decisions did they make along the way that ensured their success?
- What does Jonathan Gold mean by “an engineer’s attitude”? Do you think that attitude helps only in an audio engineer’s role?

Write

Interview a Music Professional

Arrange for one-on-one interviews between students and people in a variety of music-related professions to discuss their careers.

- Have students write their interview questions beforehand, and then write a summary of their interviews to share with other students.
- You might compile their interviews in a class-produced resource book on music careers.

More Resources

*Career Opportunities in the Music Industry*, by Shelley Field, describes 86 different careers for people who love music. Descriptions include jobs in the recording industry, radio and television, music retailing, instrument repair and restoration, and education. (Fourth Edition: Facts on File, 2000)

*Working Musicians: Defining Moments from the Road, the Studio, and the Stage*, by Bruce Pollock, explores what it's really like to have a career as a professional, performing musician. Pollock interviewed artists such as Bruce Springsteen, Gene Simmons, Keith Richards, Paul Simon, and Kool Mo Dee. (Perennial Currents, 2002)

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