

Blogging

How to build an audience without leaving home

Easy and free to start, blogs— online personal diaries— are a revolutionary means of connecting with like-minded thinkers and building a fan base outside the concert hall. An active, interestingly written blog can attract daily readers who in turn can offer comments and feedback around your postings. In this session, a panel of music bloggers discusses what makes for interesting posts, how to effectively promote a blog, and how to make best use of the new medium.

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1. Panelists

Jerry Bowles

Jerry Bowles is founder and editor of Sequenza21¹, the contemporary classical music portal, which was the recipient of the 2005 ASCAP Deems Taylor Internet Award. He is also a veteran writer, editor, publisher and blogger who has written about the arts, business, innovation and technology issues for such magazines as *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Esquire* and *Newsweek* for more than 30 years.

Bowles is the author of two books on television history, *Forever Hold Your Banner High* and *A Thousand Sundays*. In addition to Sequenza21, he has designed, built and maintains three other web sites: *The One-Minute Web Guide*², and *Best of the Blogs*³. He was born and grew up in southern West Virginia and is a graduate of Marshall University and West Virginia University. He lives in New York with his wife, Suzanne, and his cat, Howard.

Sequenza21.com is a web-based music portal dedicated to contemporary classical music, especially the music of living composers and performers. Organized as a series of web logs (or blogs), Sequenza21 provides coverage of new music news, reviews of live performances, CD and DVD reviews, a calendar of coming performances and a Composers Forum web log page where music creators gather to share ideas on composition as well as issues that affect the lives of working musicians. The forum is open to any professional or student composer who wants to participate.

Sequenza21 is also home to about 20 individual blogs maintained by composers, performers, and conductors as well as a self-service Wiki where anyone involved in contemporary classical music may post information about themselves and their work and even upload samples of their music for visitors to explore. The essence of Sequenza21 is community and the website has attracted a dedicated cadre of contributors and readers since switching to the web log format about a year ago.

Alex Shapiro

Alex Shapiro composes acoustic and electroacoustic chamber music that is heard weekly in concerts and broadcasts around the world. Her works appear on many artists' CDs, including those for the Cambria Master Recordings, Innova Recordings, Capstone, Crystal, Centaur, DC Records, and Oehms Classics labels. Educated at The Juilliard School and Manhattan School of Music as a student of Ursula Mamlok and John Corigliano, Ms. Shapiro's honors include those from American Music Center, ASCAP,



¹ www.sequenza21.com

² www.ancientthespians.com

³ www.bestoftheblogs.com

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American Composers Forum, California Arts Council and the MacDowell Colony. Alex serves as President of the American Composers Forum of Los Angeles and is a familiar event moderator in the new music community, including her interviews of over 70 colleagues as the host of ACF-LA's Composer Salon series, now in its fifth year. When she's not composing she can be found sailing, sea-kayaking or enjoying the tide pools by her home in Malibu, and was recently inspired by all this saltwater joy to create a personal photo-sonic blog titled Notes from the Kelp¹. After she dries off, Alex procrastinates on her next piece by blogging and by updating her engaging website².

Drew McManus

Musician, manager, and cultural entrepreneur Drew McManus has been involved with every aspect of the nonprofit performing arts world. He has become one of the most unique individuals in this business that is equally respected by administrators, academics, board members, music directors, musicians, and union officials.



Additionally, Mr. McManus is the author of the highly successful daily column [Adaptistration](#)³; the first and only weblog dedicated to issues impacting the business of orchestras. His articles have been quietly addressing taboo issues responsible for slowly strangling the business while simultaneously providing answers that are moving the industry toward positive change. Mr. McManus is a conservatory trained musician from the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, MD. He holds degrees in tuba performance as well as performing on piano and conducting. In addition to a regular performance schedule, Mr. McManus is an avid arranger.

Mr. McManus is regularly quoted as an industry expert in international publications such as the New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, La Scena Musicale, and the Melbourne Age. Mr. McManus has also been a featured guest on national radio programs such as NPR's *All Things Considered* and WNYC's *Soundcheck*.

Currently, Mr. McManus works as a private consultant⁴ with a wide range of clients. In August of 2005, he was the *only* non union employed featured presenter at the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM) conference in San Diego, California. In January, he was appointed as Senior Editor, Special Projects for polyphonic.org⁵; a website dedicated to examining issues of North American orchestra musicians. When he isn't working 14 hour days, Mr. McManus spends time with his wife, avoids cutting off his fingers while pursuing his love for woodworking⁶, drinking way too much Starbucks coffee, and playing with his three cats; Carmen, Tosca, and Cody.

¹ www.alexshapiro.org/blog/

² www.alexshapiro.org

³ www.adaptistration.com

⁴ www.drewmcmanus.net

⁵ www.polyphonic.org - scheduled launch in early March, 2006

⁶ www.woodworkingmatters.com

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2. Getting Started: choose your weapon

By: Drew McManus

(The information in 1.1. and 1.2. is from a review of blogging software written by Vinnie Garcia¹, originally published on 11/11/05. You can find the entire review at: <http://www.sitepoint.com/print/blog-software-smackdown-review>)

The two basic types of blogging platforms to consider: hosted and self-hosted. Both options provide reasonable solutions for a wide variety of users so it won't matter if you're a technophobe or a technogeek, there's a blogging platform out there designed for you.

2.1. Hosted Services

If you would like to start publishing on the Web, but you don't have any Web hosting, you may want to look into a hosted service for your needs. These services include [TypePad](#)², [Blogger](#)³, and more.



All of these services are managed for you, so you never have to worry about technical maintenance of your Weblog: instead, you can focus on your blog's content and appearance. You can get up and running with these services within minutes of signing up for an account, which is great if you need to publish in short order. Many of these services, like Blogger, are free, but some, including TypePad, may charge a nominal monthly fee.

2.2. Self-Hosted

If you have Web hosting available (or are willing to purchase hosting) and feel that the benefits will outweigh the drawbacks of maintaining your own blog installation, you'll want to consider a self-hosted package. These include [Movable Type](#)⁴, [WordPress](#)⁵, and more.



These packages will require you to perform installation and maintenance tasks. Some hosting companies have made the installation process a little easier, allowing one-click installation from a browser-based control panel. Check with your hosting company to see if this functionality is available to you. Like hosted services, these packages may be offered free of charge, or for a fee, depending on the package you select and the reason why you're using it.

¹ <http://ibebloggin.com/>

² <http://www.typepad.com/>

³ <http://www.blogger.com/>

⁴ <http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype/>

⁵ <http://wordpress.com/>

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2.3. Learn By Example

One of the best ways to determine what you do and don't like about blogging platforms is to visit the wide variety of blogs currently available. Instead of listing the wide variety of blogs here, you'll be better served by visiting some of the blogrolls at the following blogs:

- The Rest Is Noise: http://www.therestisnoise.com/2004/11/music_blogs.html
...additional lists available under the links category in the right hand navigation column
- Sounds Like New: soundlikenow.typepad.com/sacawa/2005/02/music_sites.html
...additional lists available under the links category in the right hand navigation column
- Arts Journal blog Central: www.artsjournal.com/blogs/ (Adaptistration is a good one)
...many of the AJ bloggers have additional blogrolls available at their individual sites)
- Oboe Insight: <http://www.oboeinsight.com/>
...a multitude of blog and arts links are categorized in the right hand navigation column

Of course, these sites aren't the only place to find blogs, your best strategy is to chain your way along from one blog to the next, visiting blogs they recommend. Make note of features and design elements you like and it won't take you very long to decide which platform is best for you.

3. Maintaining A Blog: maybe you should start with a plant

By: Drew McManus

We all know fans are fickle and readers are no different. In order to maintain interest among your readers, frequently updating your blog is a necessity; it's much easier losing interest than attracting it.

A blog is like a pet; if you don't tend to it on a regular basis, it will die. - Alex Shapiro

Fortunately, smaller chamber ensembles are ideally suited to distribute the responsibility of posting entries and keeping your readers engaged. Additionally, you don't have to worry about being out of touch with your readers due to all of the unique "down time" associated with the travel most performers experience. Laptops, which began to finally see significant dips in price in 2005, allow you to compose content during those long layovers and wireless connections which allow you to connect to your blog are becoming available at an exponential rate.

4. Finding Your Voice: who cares what I have to say?

By: Alex Shapiro

There are many different kinds of blogs, and the best thing about the medium is that there's no limit to how creative you can be with what you're interested in sharing. Some blogs serve as very public town squares, with impassioned debate on political or arts-oriented topics. Others are meeting places for those with very specific interests, like knitting or pornography (probably a lot more in the latter category). And still others are personal diaries, with insights and musings that aren't intended to inspire any pithy discussion.

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All of us have unique attributes that fill in the spaces of who we are as people, separate from our bassoons, our batons, and our press kits. As many musicians with active websites have discovered, the internet offers a powerful way to build a fan base. Events that are banal or tedious to a gigging musician are often fascinating to the people who purchase their concert tickets and CDs. You can blog about your life as a musician, or you might choose to keep that material for your professional website, and instead use a blog to communicate about other things that are meaningful to you. The more we connect as human beings to others, the greater the connection others will have with us.

Most blogs are written in a reasonably informal style, ranging the gamut from polite to expletive-ridden, depending on the content and the writer. Many bloggers write as though they were emailing a friend, and in fact sometimes emails become excellent fodder for a blog post. Whatever comes naturally to you will probably read well and sincerely to others.

5. Legal Ramifications: curb your tongue, knave

By: Drew McManus & Alex Shapiro

Meek or mild, we all have to watch what we say and where we say it and a blog is no exception. 2005 witnessed some of the initial legal action against bloggers (fortunately there weren't any music bloggers defending themselves in court) so a little knowledge about what the law considers black, white, and grey can go a long way.

To this end, The Electronic Frontier Foundation has a wealth of regularly updated information available to bloggers in their [Legal Guide for Bloggers](http://www.eff.org/bloggers/lg/)¹ they can use

to make sure they avoid becoming targets of legal action. Arts Journal's editor-in-chief, Douglas McLennan, distributes the EFF Legal guide to all AJ bloggers on a regular basis. All of the information is presented in easy-to-use language and it's worth your time to go over issues such as liability, workplace blogging (yes, a chamber ensemble is a "workplace"), and free speech issues.



Apart from potential legal woes, something equally relevant to remember is that the term "publishing" means "to make public," and that's exactly what you'll be doing each time you post, whether it's an essay or a comment in response to others. It's helpful to imagine that anything you post will be read by absolutely everyone, whether they know your utter charm and joking tone of voice, or not. You should always feel free to express dissenting opinion, but try to do so in a way that you won't regret after you hit the "send" button.

¹ <http://www.eff.org/bloggers/lg/>

Appendix A - Blogging Nomenclature: geek speak

- **Post:** Every time you put an update on your blog, you create a post. In typical computer jargon fashion, this noun can also be used as a verb: You can post to your blog. Posts are also sometimes called entries.
- **Comments:** Blogs are often referred to as conversations, and it's the ability of your readers to leave comments on each post you make to your blog that creates the feel of a conversation. Comments are usually time-stamped and identified by the author's name and perhaps a link to their Web site or blog. On some blogs, comments are threaded so that readers can comment on other comments, but on most blogs comments are simply displayed chronologically.
- **Comment spam:** Sad to say, spam is a problem on blogs just as it is in email. Comment spam, as you would expect, is left in the comments of a blog. It usually includes a few words and a link to a Web site. The point for the spammer is to get as many links as possible to the Web site, giving it higher search engine rankings.
- **Categories:** Categories permit a blogger to subdivide content, putting posts about politics into one basket and posts about celebrities in another. Categorization helps readers read only what they are most interested in and is a good tool for those scanning a blog's archives.
- **Trackbacks:** Trackback technology helps bloggers link back to other posts on related subjects. Functionally it's a little complicated: If you're posting about something you've seen on another blog, look for the Trackback URL. Paste that URL into the allotted spot in your own blogging software, and the two pieces of blog software will communicate, building a link from the original post to yours (without the other blogger having to lift a finger).
- **Trackback spam:** Like comment spam, but done via Trackback.
- **Pings:** There are several blogging tracking Web sites where you can search for other blogs and look for recent posts. If your blog software allows you to ping those sites when you post, that post gets included in the ping site's index, potentially increasing your traffic.
- **RSS/Atom feeds:** In the blogosphere, syndication is a big deal. With millions of blogs to read, many consumers use news aggregators, or readers, to pull in posts and read them, rather than visiting 150 blogs every day. RSS and Atom are two flavors of blog syndication.
- **Blogroll/lists:** Ever noticed those long lists of other blogs alongside the posts in a blog? That's a blogroll, a list of the blogs read by the blogger whose site you are on. Sometimes lists are also kept to recommend books and other media, as well.
- **News aggregation:** Many blog software packages allow you to pull in and display the RSS or Atom feed of another blog. This is useful if you want to create a site with constantly updated content fed by blogs. For example, a blogger who posts about politics could pull in the feeds of other political blogs.
- **Moblogging:** Moblogging is the short form of "mobile blogging." Lots of blog software lets you post by e-mail from your phone, PDA, or anything else that allows you to send e-mails.
- **Blacklist:** Blacklists are usually lists of URLs that have been identified as spam URLs, and that are therefore eliminated from comments and Trackbacks on your blog. With most blog software, the software company builds and maintains a common blacklist for all users to which individuals can contribute.
- **Captchas:** Captchas are an additional security feature for commenting and user registration. By providing an image that includes letters and numbers, and by requiring the user to type in those letters and numbers, blog software can eliminate some of the comment and Trackback spam produced by robot programs.
- **URL Redirection:** In an effort to render comment and Trackback spam ineffective, links included in comments and Trackbacks are tagged with the NOFOLLOW tag, which indicates to search engines that it shouldn't be counted when tallying search engine rankings for a Web site.
- **Skins:** Most blog software includes a set of pre-designed templates that give the blog a certain look and feel. These are called skins.
- **Post scheduling:** Some blog software allows you to write posts and schedule them to be published at some point in the future. This is handy for vacations and holidays.

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Appendix B - Blogging Software Comparison Chart

	TypePad Basic/Plus/Pro	Blogger	WordPress	Moveable Type
Publishing				
Multiple Weblogs	1/3/unlimited	unlimited	unlimited	Determined by license
Multiple authors	no/no/yes	No	Yes	Yes
Guest authors	no/no/yes	No	Yes	Yes
Photo Albums	Unlimited	No	plug-in	No
Built-in photo uploading	yes/yes/yes	Yes	plug-in	Yes
Podcasting & Video support	yes/yes/yes	No	plug-in	Yes
Mobile blogging	yes/yes/yes	Yes	plug-in	plug-in
Scheduling posts	no/yes/yes	No	Yes	No
Category and date archives	yes/yes/yes	No	Yes	Yes
Spell check	yes/yes/yes	Yes	plug-in	No
Spam Fighting Tools				
Blacklist	yes/yes/yes	No	Yes	No
Visitor registration/login	no/no/no	Yes	Yes	Yes
Moderation	no/no/no	No	Yes	No
URL NOFOLLOW	yes/yes/yes	No	Yes	Yes
IP/User/URL banning	yes/yes/yes	No	Yes	Yes
Comment Notification	yes/yes/yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Design				
Pre-designed themes	yes/yes/yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Drag-n-Drop design editor	yes/yes/yes	No	No	No
Customized weblog design	no/yes/yes	No	Yes	Yes
Full HTML editing	no/no/yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Earnings & Content Module				
Text Ads	no/no/yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TypeLists	yes/yes/yes	No	Yes	plug-in
Managing				
IP banning	yes/yes/yes		plug-in	Yes
Search within posts	yes/yes/yes	Yes	plug-in	Yes
Search and replace within posts	no/no/yes	No	plug-in	Yes
Password protection	yes/yes/yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Import/export your weblog	yes/yes/yes	Yes	Yes/No	Yes
RSS and Atom feeds	yes/yes/yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Storage and Transfer				
Disk space MB	100/500/1000	300	n/a	n/a
Bandwidth/month GB	2/5/2020	unknown	n/a	n/a
Pricing				
Cost monthly	4.95/8.95/14.95	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cost yearly	49.50/89.50/149.50	Free	Free	Free/\$149.99