My Score & Alex Shapiro
Business of Composing
Web Meeting Recording Transcript

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Liam Thomas
All righty. Hello, everybody. Welcome to the webinar. Welcome and thank you for being here. I am Liam Thomas, and I am the My Score lead here at J.W. Pepper. I'm a composer myself.

You know, I've been around here to help independent composers to get their music online and start to sell through through J.W. Pepper, and get their music out there, and kind of working in the music publishing world. And I am very excited to announce today that we have with us in our meeting today our guest Alex Shapiro.

Alex is a renowned composer of acoustic and electroacoustic works, and a widely published advocate on topics ranging from technology, copyright, diversity and the music business. Alex is the Symphonic and concert writer member of the Board of Directors of ASCAP and serves on the Board of Directors of the ASCAP Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and the Music Publishers Association of the United States, representing her company, Activist Music LLC. Did I get all that right, Alex?

Alex Shapiro
You did. You're doing great, Liam. Thank you.

Liam Thomas
Thank you. Is there anything else you want to add there? I mean, the floor is is yours. Everybody's so excited to have you here and hear you talk. We're going to have a fun conversation.

Alex Shapiro
I'm just going to launch right into it, Liam. Liam and the Pepper people have been fabulous in wanting to set up this conversation between all of us. I have a few broad concepts before we launch into this wonderful conversation about our lives and business.

As as composers—and some of us as publishers—I have to reiterate, there is absolutely no one way or a particularly right way to create a career in the arts, right? There's no one path. You have to be honest with yourself. When you want to make a life in music, the key thing is who are you as an individual. That's what you want to ask yourself. And what are you comfortable with? So the career path for one composer isn't necessarily going to work for the next.

But that being said, we share lots of information, lots of ideas, and certainly a lot of business acumen, because the more informed all of us are, the better for each one of us and the better for the arts in general. And just always remember that, everybody. So we're starting from there.

I also want to reiterate, just to make everybody feel like we're all on the same page here: we're all equal. No one is any less of a composer if a they're not making money doing it, or if they decide that they don't even want to try to make money doing it and just want to do it for the love of doing it. Composing is composing is composing, and it's from our heart. I just want to really stress that with everybody.

And that kind of leads into another thought of, don't buy into thinking of your art-making as a competitive business. It isn't. You know if you're an artist, you have your own unique voice, and the more we all support each other, the better for everybody. So we're not in competition with each other.

And finally, you know, you may think you're in the music making business, but I always say this: we're in the relationship building business. So much of what we're going to be talking about next has to do with relationships, when we talk about how to establish ourselves, or how to get our work out there. So if you guys can see the chat, Liam is going to put an article that you can you can just you know click on and read for later that will have a bunch of information called *"Let's Make a List."* I think it's the link I sent you, Liam. It's an article I did a number of years ago for New Music Box. But as we have this conversation, this article is still valid, even though it's old, and it might be a good resource after we're done talking. But anyway, so here we go. I'm going to give it back to Liam and see where he wants to take the conversation.

Liam Thomas
Sure, absolutely. So I'm just posting that link in the chat now. If you guys want to take a look, we've got a few resources that we can hand out to you guys so you can check out. But I kind of want to lead into a little bit of, you know, you talk about the music business and how you know we're all in this together and everything. And what I really want to kind of start with is your career, a little bit in general. Like how did your compositional journey begin? And you know, when did you become a composer? I know that lots of composers like to think, for example, am I really a composer? Am I an arranger? Like, where the fine line is, I think—and then how did that journey develop, and where has that taken you? What are maybe some turning points that said, I want to be *this* kind of composer. I mean, we kind of broadly described you as a composer of acoustic and electroacoustic works, and maybe you can elaborate on that a little bit.

Alex Shapiro
Sure. And I'll be brief because, you know, it's just an overview, right? And we have so much stuff I want to talk about other than me! But just to give you guys a background: I was lucky; I grew up in New York City, in Manhattan. And I was a kid who loved the arts, you know, from the get-go. And so I was just amazingly lucky to surround myself with all kinds of performances and events and three really top conservatories in the city that I went to the pre-college and then college at, and was just, you know, really fortunate to avail myself of everything in the city starting out.

I think we all know we're composers the minute we internalize how much we love music, and that we can't imagine doing anything else. And so from there, you know, after after doing a bunch of work in the city when I was young, I ended up moving out to L.A. when I was 21, because I got a gig scoring a low budget documentary. And for the first 15 years I was doing film and TV music — low budget stuff —for a long time. I was coming up in New York in the early and late 70s, early 80s,—I'm 63 now, and so I was at Manhattan School of Music from ’80 to ’83. And at that time there was still a very uptown/ downtown scene in New York, and there wasn't a place for all kinds of concert music. It was much more limited than it is now, for any variety of reasons.

And so I realized that I'd have my best bet making a living in music by going into commercial music, which I also loved. I've always loved every kind of music. So I went out to L.A., and did that for a long time. And then in those 15 years, the world changed. And all of a sudden, as we all know, the world of composing and what we hear on stages became far more diverse, far broader stylistically than what it had been when I was growing up. So I took advantage of that. I changed my career in my late 30s and I decided I wanted to become a concert music composer—that that's really what I wanted to do—and that's what I've been doing ever since.

To Liam's question about what are key moments, you know, what are pivot points that help us all make these decisions about what we're supposed to be doing? It’s really striking to me that it's individuals— back to relationships, right? It's individuals that we cross paths with: either teachers or friends or whoever they are, they might say something positive to you, maybe something even in passing, that makes a huge impact on you and gives you the sense that you're worth something, and that you should keep going. And in my case, that happened a handful of times, always at pivotal moments that gave me the inner strength to say, you know what, I want to keep doing this, I'm getting a little bit of validation.

But most of all, the validation from ourselves is what's important. You have to be brutally honest with yourself and make sure that you know that you're

doing what you really, really love to do. Because if you love to do it, folks, you're going to be pretty damn good at it because you can't wait to get up every day and get back at it and keep doing it again. It's hard work. So, that's just sort of a quick overview. And then 18 years ago, after establishing myself in L.A. for 24 years, I realized I was on the web enough to the point that I could live anywhere. Because unlike many of you in the audience, I'm sure, I do not perform and I do not conduct, so nobody needs me! So I can be anywhere and just write the notes. I do happen to travel an awful lot for other things, and we'll get into that—for advocacy issues, et cetera. But anyway, there's a little overview for you guys.

Liam Thomas
Alex, that's awesome. That's a great overview, and and really inspiring too. I think this is, you know, a great way to look at it. I think because all of us composers, I'm sure we get writer's block and we get wondering how we're gonna make a career out of this thing or make even a side gig out of this thing. So I think that's a good segue into professionalism and when and how this field can become a career. And I want that to even lead into maybe opportunities to find as a composer.

You talk about a great example and an interesting one where you say you don't conduct and you don't perform, and it's all about the composition. Composers usually learn or develop in their career that they have to do lots of different things to get their career started. Even if they only wanna focus on composition, putting the notes on the page, you know they have to do a lot of different things to get there first. So yeah, where do you think in a broad sense maybe, where do people find opportunities as a composer? Maybe touch on composition competitions and places to submit your music. I think I'll start with that and leave it there.

Alex Shapiro
Great. OK, folks, listen, let me tell you, you, each one of you individually, you are your very best resource for getting your your careers going. Going back to what I said about relationships being the key to everything: it's a human business that we're in. So interacting in person and online in a really friendly, positive, encouraging way with other people is what's often going to lead to writing opportunities.

And so let me tell you, go to conferences of the kinds of music that you want to write, and where you're going to meet like-minded people who either play those instruments or conduct those ensembles or whatever. Go to concerts and go backstage to talk to the musicians, and if you genuinely enjoyed what they were doing, you know, tell them that! Say hello, maybe they'll invite you for a beer across the street after the concert, right?

And you know, don't just shove music in their hand right away. Just get to know them. Be friends with people, right? And there's the socials, obviously. But hey, avoid the snark because everybody sees what you post, whether you think they do or don't. And you want to be a positive force out there, not an asshole.

So showing up and and doing things, and getting involved in activities with advocacy organizations, are a great way to become known within your music community and get to meet a lot of people.

I'm going to give you one very strong opinion here, folks. In my opinion, one of the worst ways to try to launch a career is through competitions, particularly competitions that charge an application fee. It is so much more effective for you to save up money that you might have spent on entry fees, and use that money to attend a conference of the kind of musicians that you actually want to write for, where you're going to get to build actual, real relationships, meet people, and engage with people. Competitions are, by and large, very, very anonymous. Even if they're not anonymous, you don't make an impact in the same way.

I'm not saying that every competition is awful. Or that it's not valuable to some people to win them. But I can just tell you first hand, it is certainly not necessary. And if they're charging a fee, it's very suspect. I have to say many of them. So Liam is going to put something in the chat: another new Music USA article I did a few years ago, but again, it's still relevant, except for the mention of CDs. OK, you can forget about CDs, but it's called *"Dissing the Competition."* I was asked to write my opinions about this topic, and I dissected a particularly awful one using no names. You might get something out of it, and it's an encouraging article. So that's my feeling about competitions since Liam brought it up.

But there's so many other things that you can do that are going to put your best foot forward. And it starts, of course, with writing the music that is authentic to you. Don't try to be anybody else, no matter how much you might admire someone else's music. No matter how much it might move you, it's not necessarily your voice. You know, there's a saying, right? Be yourself because everybody else is taken. There's a lot of truth to that. When I first stumbled—late in life, when I was in my mid 40s—into the wind band world out of nowhere, I went to the Midwest Clinic, which for those of you who don't know, it's a huge, huge music conference every December in chilly Chicago. And well, the first year I was there, I had just one band piece, something that the US Army had commissioned. And I didn't know my ass from my elbow in that world at all. Didn't know any any of it. I was just fluttering around, just in awe.

I went to the concerts, and I was completely intimidated by everything I was hearing. And I'm thinking, oh my gosh, I don't sound like that. I don't orchestrate like that. I don't sound like this. What am I doing here? But I love wind band music. I want to keep writing for this medium. And then I got home and it dawned on me, wait a minute, I don't *have* to sound like that. All these great guys—and it was mostly guys at the time—all these great guys are doing their thing and they sound fabulous. So I have to find what *my* thing is. I have to look at myself and say, how do I sound different? What is it that I can bring to to the repertoire into the field? And that's sort of how I got started in a very weird little niche: electroacoustic music for large ensembles.

Liam Thomas
Sure, that's that's incredible. And it's really interesting to hear too, how you broke into the wind band world. I think I'd like to to put it that way. And this one is maybe a little bit personal for me too, as a composer, but in terms of opportunities and things like that, how did you take that jump into wind band music? Could you speak a little bit to that specifically? I know that that's a bit of a specific question asking about how you know you got into writing wind band music, but in particular I think that's one of the most intimidating genres or instrument groups to write for, just because of the number of staffs that you have to deal with. And it's definitely something that I personally have been intimidated by. I don't know how many instrumental composers are in the chat, but I'm sure that they're curious as well. You know, at least when you're studying in college or something like that, a lot of the music that you're writing for, like you said, you find people and network with people and you're gonna end up writing for people that will play your music. Wind bands are not something that you can just find a wind band to play your music. So could you elaborate on that a little bit?

Alex Shapiro
Sure. You remember when I was talking about relationships and I mentioned conferences, concerts, and the socials? Well, way back in the day in 2007, there was this thing called MySpace. And some of you are laughing. I know some of you out there are laughing. Just really, it was dumb luck that a composer I had never met who happens to be very well known in the wind band world, Anne McGinty, had a MySpace page as I did. Some of you know her. We had never met. She didn't know me, but she decided to list me as a "top friend." I guess she kind of liked what she heard or something, and I thought that was really nice.

Well, the Commander for the U.S. Army TRADOC band at the time, Tod Addison, had commissioned her recently to do something, they had become friends, and he was on her Myspace page. He saw me and clicked on my face —this was sort of like Facebook of, you know, 20 years ago—and apparently listened to some of the stuff in my player there. He wrote me within the

confines of the MySpace message box, asking if I'd be interested in a wind band commission from the Army, and the rest is history. I was terrified. I was completely intimidated. I didn't know my ass from my euphonium. I didn't. I don't think I knew which way the instrument would have pointed up. I had never seen one before because the New York Phil, you know, didn't have euphoniums. They should. I love euphoniums! But anyway, I told him I had no idea what I was doing, but I'd love to do it. And he gave me the best possible response, which is: that's why we want you, because we know you're going to do something different.

And I have to say to everybody who's on this call, may you be so lucky to find somebody who wants you because you don't know what you're doing! Who wants to give you a chance. That is the best. And may you also be that person for someone else. I try to do that for other people—to pay that one forward and then some.

More to the point of being intimidated, here's another piece of advice for everybody: Take the risk, even if it's out of your comfort zone. And believe me, this was wildly out of my comfort zone. I had been doing only chamber music for 10 years before this opportunity showed up. I had no concept of what I was doing. I had never even been to a wind band concert. The schools I went to never had a wind band; not my high school, and and certainly not the conservatories, unfortunately. So my goodness, I just said OK, what's the worst that can happen? No one's going to die. I'm just going to write a bad piece, maybe. Fortunately it wasn't that bad; it's still played all the time. And life went on and I realized how much I loved large ensemble writing. And that was it. I was hooked. It was like a drug.

So, take chances. Surround yourself with positive people who are going to give you a chance, and be that person for other people. So that's kind of how that happened. It was pure serendipity, definitely. Yeah.

Liam Thomas
Yeah. And thank you for all that great info and encouragement. You know, it's tough out there. So yeah, I think that's another great segue maybe, into resources for a composer in terms of, you know, I said it's intimidating to write for a wind band and everything. And as you were finishing up that point, it kind of popped into my head that some of the skill you develop while you're writing for groups like that is orchestration, which almost goes hand in hand with composition I think. Do you have some resources that you'd like to talk about that you think would be good for not only orchestration specifically, but other resources that you think are great for composers to have and that are worth investing in or even just checking out online, like the links you're giving us?

Alex Shapiro
Sure. Well, listen, the best resource, of course, is everybody's own ears, right? And what you really want to do, I think the best way to learn orchestration really, is to listen, listen, listen, and listen live whenever possible, because we all know that the sound of a synth oboe has nothing to do with what an actual oboe sounds like. And we all know that just surrounding yourself and being right next to the instruments and learning as much about the instruments as we can is to learn through having players over to your house, you know, getting them a pizza and a beer and saying, hey, would you show me how the contrabassoon works? I mean, that's what I did. That's how I learned the tuba, the contrabassoon. I'd get commissions and I'd say, can I hang out with you at the organ? You know, let me let me see what this is all about? So orchestration really is such a wonderful, endless world of listening, going to concerts, hanging out with the musicians, getting demonstrations.

And then of course there is the book learning, as they say; you know, you've obviously got to know the ranges and the technical stuff about the instruments to some degree.

But I think our ears are are the most important thing. Although there are plenty of so-called rules in orchestration, ultimately the art gets pushed forward by breaking some of the rules and doing creative things that other people haven't done with the instrumentation. So the the sky's the limit. If it sounds good to you and doesn't maim anybody if they're trying to play it for you, that's that's a good thing.

And then for me, on top of that, my other big instrument is programming electronics. I use a lot of digital audio. I use a lot of sounds that I program from the ground up in my work. Not all of my work, but a lot of it, and I get great pleasure from that. For me, the electronic or audio section of a work is its own separate and equal section of the ensemble. If it's with an orchestra or a wind band, it has its own distinct sound, and I'm programming sounds that can give me textures and ideas that I'm not going to get from the actual live instruments, to complement them. So it's just like another section in the band. You've got brass, strings, woodwinds, percussion, and audio.

We talk about resources and I do want to make a plug for a book. I have no royalty position in it whatsoever, but it's a really, really wonderful book that's coming out literally next week by two of our colleagues, Brandon Elliott and Dale Trumbore, called *"Composing a Life."* Liam can put the link to it in the chat. Brandon and Dale interviewed a whole bunch of composers like me to give our perspectives on a number of things regarding just what we're talking about today, making a career in the arts and making a career as a composer. And I'm really impressed with what they pulled together. So I recommend you guys all take a look at it if you want. It's from Oxford University Press, and I

think I've got an Amazon link for it. But I just want to mention it as a resource not for orchestration, but for life-estration.

I've always said that we have to be as creative in our lives as we are in our music, and creative in our approaches to our business and our entrepreneurship, which kind of leads us into the whole publishing thing, I would imagine.

Liam Thomas
Yeah, we keep getting all of these great segues. So I actually wanna finish that point off in terms of resources and thank you for that. It's always great to have as many resources as possible or anything just to see what other composers or writers are able to put out there in terms of new experiences and new thoughts that you can have as a composer to inspire you. I think that's great. So thank you for that.

Before we go into publishing, in terms of compositional language—because you ended your point there with talking about adding electronics into wind band music or using digital recordings—so especially for people that are signed up for My Score and are publishing independently that way and go through the the channels for J.W. Pepper, the focus does seem to be educational music that's suitable for those K through 12 groups, or even college groups to some extent. It seems to be where the money is. But for sheet music publishing, how can a composer continue to create new and unique and experimental music, maybe while still making a name for themselves and maybe even making a living? I think that's something that we had talked about before as well, in terms of language in a piece of music that I was writing. You're hoping for composers to do new things, and you always want to see that. So can you talk about that a little bit?

Alex Shapiro
You bet. OK, let's start with the language, as you say, because I've observed this: that if people think that they are writing "educational music"—I'm putting educational in air quotes—if they're writing educational music, somehow that suddenly means that it doesn't have to be as artistically excellent. It just has to be utilitarian: well done catchy tunes or whatever, but on the whole, not necessarily as artistic. And I don't buy into that at all.

I'd say for everybody, if you're going to write, even if it's a grade 1 piece (and I've written a couple of those; I love writing for beginning students; I think it's fun as heck), write for those students with the same intent and seriousness that you would write for the New York Philharmonic. I kid you not. There is no reason that just because somebody only has, let's say, 4 1/2 good notes, maybe five if they're lucky, it doesn't mean that you can't write really creative

and interesting and compelling stuff for them. You just have to be thoughtful about it, and put your artistic self high up there in your standard of excellence.

Don’t call it “educational music,” just call it “music for people who only have five good notes and maybe next year they'll have seven good notes,” you know? So I think that's part of what holds people back.

One thing I noticed in, let's be frank, the wind band world is, that even today in 2025, a lot of the stuff I hear from composers sounds like it was written 60 years ago, and I'm not sure why that is now. Everybody is welcome to have their own voice. I'm not dissing any composers, but I'm just saying I feel that too many composers don't take enough risks or don't use the full palette of what they can do as artists, whether it's chromaticism or dissonance or mixed meters or, you know, all kinds of found sounds, all kinds of stuff that is sort of the norm in concert music that they tend to shy away from in band music. And yet I can tell you firsthand that several of my beginning grade 0.5 and grade 1 and 2 pieces use all of that stuff and more extended techniques, all kinds of things. There's nothing that a beginner player can't do as long as you're not asking them to play out of range, use muscles they haven’t yet developed, or do something that their embouchure isn't isn't capable of, right?

So speak your own authenticity, make your compositions for whomever you're writing them—whether it's one of the great symphony orchestras, or the elementary school around the corner from you—make that music mean something artistically to you, first and foremost. Don’t shy away from being true to yourself as an artist, and then everything else will fall in place. Maybe it's just dumb luck, but I wrote some pretty weird pieces early on that somehow people wanted to hear, and they sold. In one of them, everybody’s playing paper as a percussion instrument, and it has an electronic track. There’s all kinds of weird stuff, but I know that there is a market for that. There are band directors and instrumental teachers looking for less “inside the box” kinds of things. And I just want to encourage everybody to take a look at that. You know, dive a little deeper artistically if you want, because I bet you'll have so much fun doing it.

What I find in 2025 is there are no limitations at all on our voices. And especially if you're self-publishing, nobody is patting on you on the head and giving you approval. It's up to you to just say “this is the music that means something to me, and I'm going to put it out there, and I bet somebody else out there is going to like it too.” And I guarantee you, if that's going to be the case, if you believe, if you're putting out your most real, personal, authentic work, you will find people who resonate with that. It happens all the time.

Liam Thomas
Sure. Yeah, that's that's great. And in an interesting way too, I feel like limiting yourself is another way to navigate composition. I think of limiting in terms of that ensemble that only has 4 1/2 notes. Like you said, it gives you a unique way to solve problems, I think. So thank you. That's wonderful.

So I'm gonna make another segue into maybe a different point because I do want to leave some time for questions. You have involvement in ASCAP and MPA. You're a board member of both. So I did want to save some time for you to talk about how composers can use a PRO, if they're not already signed up why they should sign up, and what PROs can do for them and why they are useful. And what composers can they do today with their PRO to help them with their careers. And then maybe since this is all in terms of organizations in that regard, maybe talk about MPA a little bit too, and what independent composers can do with a membership in the MPA.

Alex Shapiro
You bet. OK, so let's start with the most important thing, because it will directly make everybody here money. Let's talk about performing rights organizations in the United States. We have now a handful of them, but the two big ones are ASCAP and BMI. And as Liam kindly said, I'm on the board for many years now of ASCAP. I'm the sole symphonic and concert music writer representative. So for those of you who are ASCAP members, I'm your gal, okay?—I'm your representative. You can bug me with questions, and I'm very happy to help everybody. Basically with ASCAP and BMI, it's true for both of them that with a PRO, what you want to do is to join as a publisher as well as a composer.

You can be a publisher member, and that doesn't mean you can't publish your work with other publishers if you want, but it means that for the works that you are publishing or haven't set with a publisher yet if you intend to, you'll be able to get the full pie of all the money, because royalty money comes to you as a writer and as a publisher. So join as both if you haven't already.

And then once you're a member of a PRO, you need to register every single work in your catalog in order for the PRO to know about it to pay you for the performances of it. So that's pretty simple. And it's a really simple online process. It won't take you that long. Even if you've got, you know, 300 pieces, you can do it. Then the next step, now that you have what are called Work IDs for all of your works, is that you want to make sure that every performance that you know about, you let the PRO know about. That means, especially if it happened at a university or at a commercial venue, send in programs and just keep track of all your performances, and that will help get you paid.

The way performance rights organizations work essentially is they license every venue that makes some money from the performances of our works and, under law, we get paid. Yay, the copyright law, which really protects us very nicely. And so venues have to pay what's called a blanket license fee in order to have the rights to perform everything, let's say, in the ASCAP catalog. If it's a university, they're going to pay a lower rate. If it's Carnegie Hall, they're going to pay a higher rate. In the case of ASCAP, 90% of that money goes right back out to the creators and copyright holders. ASCAP's operating expenses are incredibly low. They're about 10%. It's remarkable. And so these PROs are essentially collection agencies for us, because there's no way for us to collect the money for this many performances and for everything that's out there.

The other thing that PROs do, and I can speak to ASCAP in particular, is they have all kinds of events and workshops and gatherings throughout the year that connect you to a network of your peers. And that's a good thing for all the obvious reasons. Back to relationship building!

One thing I want to add, by the way, while we're talking about business of registering things, please, all of you, make sure that you embed metadata in every audio file that you ever share. Even if you're going to send it to your grandma, please put metadata in it because files are flying around everywhere and it needs to be tagged with your information. Also, be sure to include your name in the visible file name of every score, PDF, and audio file that's yours. You'd be amazed at how many people don't do that, and something will be sitting on someone's desktop and they'll have no idea who it came from, or what it is. So I just wanted to put in that little composer hygiene plug for you guys: make sure to do that.

Now moving on to the Music Publishers Association of the United States. That's a wonderful group. It's sort of a subset of the National Music Publishers Association in that it's the classical, or for lack of a better word, the concert music based publishers. And very recently they've made a real push to include independent composers. I was the first composer/publisher invited to be on the MPA board who publishes only her own music. So I'm not only an indie publisher, but it's just me. And I think that we all realize as much as we learn, it's a symbiotic relationship: we, the smaller publishers learn so much from the majors, and the majors actually learn from us because we tend to be the ones at the forefront of technology and other things. We were the first ones to do digital sales, PDF sales, all that, and then Schirmer and Boosey and everybody did it.

MPA offers a bunch of things for members, including, for instance, they just started something called Blueprint, which is a day-long workshop discussing all kinds of publishing information. Members also get a substantial discount to an amazing piracy tracking service called MUSO, which will take care of

handling takedowns on the dark web and the less dark web for your work when it's up there unauthorized.

That's just two of many services, but it's a really nice community and I really recommend that everybody join. It's not expensive and it's a great group. Anybody's welcome at board meetings or to zoom in or whatever. So, that's ASCAP and MPA.

And in general, because I mentioned it earlier, folks, get involved with any advocacy organizations or local organizations because it's such a terrific way to build your community and your sense of belonging in the texture of a very large community because ultimately, we all know each other, and that's wonderful. Between going to conferences, getting involved in organizations, it's really, really effective. We're a very social and tribal group.

Liam Thomas
Yeah, definitely. Well, thank you so much. Especially too, there's a lot that many composers don't know about PROs and the MPA in particular. I think too, composers at the beginning, at least as they're coming up, really just focus on writing the music and they don't get a lot of information about the business side of things. So it's really great to hear about that. So thank you.

So a last bullet point before I move on, seeing some questions from people. With all of this information that we've gotten, and it's a lot: can you give maybe one tip or one sentence to kind of say how all of this can benefit independent composers, especially considering that, as you know, I'm working on a platform that is for independent composers and about distributing independent composers' music? I think a lot of the people in our meeting today are My Score composers. What can they do moving forward now with the music that they're already going to be uploading and putting out there?

Alex Shapiro
OK, so the first thing is take yourself seriously as publishers. To publish means to make public, right? And so your music is going to be in the hands of a lot of people, I hope, all over the world, many of whom are never gonna talk to you. You're not gonna know who they are. And so let me just do a quick rundown, because it's important.

On the entrepreneurial and business side of what it is that you're doing when you're putting your music out through My Score, which is a terrific service, or anywhere else: distribution is a very important thing for any independently published composer. There's a saying that opportunity favors the prepared, and it's really, really true. So you have to have a lot of ducks in a row to be able to promote your work. So it's one thing to get your score up there on My Score. Now, the subset of that, is what does the score look like? If you're

offering it, even if it's just digital, your page turns have to be really good for the parts, right? Your layout has to be good. If you're offering
It also in print as well as digital, that means you have to think about music preparation guidelines, which include paper weight and layout and binding materials, right? What's it going to look like on a retailer's shelf? So think about those things. MOLA and MLA are both useful resource resources for publishing information.

So then OK, you've got your score up there, but then there's all that other stuff. You have to have your own website. Social media presence isn't enough. You really need a website so that people can do one-stop shopping and buy your music directly through you if they want, find out a lot about it, and listen to it. So you have to make sure that your website is updated with an interactive catalog of all your works and concerts and recordings and news. And again, an ability for people to buy your work. If you're doing it yourself, not just through My Score, but additionally elsewhere, you want to make sure that you're up for the game of prompt order fulfillment and e-mail responses and social media updates. Yeah, and keeping track of performances and obtaining the concert programs and registering your works and all that with the PROs, right? Plus getting permissions if you're using copyright protected text or samples or anything like that.

You've got to keep track of your income, and it's going to come from a lot of different places, so that is just another bit of organization. Like for instance— I wrote this down so I could refer to it—here are just 12 sources of regular income that a composer is going to earn throughout the year: commission fees, score sales directly from you and through distributors or through a publisher or all of the above, performance royalties, publishing royalties, digital streaming royalties, mechanical royalties, sync licenses, residencies, arrangement licenses, online coaching. I get brought in, for instance, on Zoom all the time to work with ensembles. So all these things. It's how you're going to make your living. So getting your score up there on My Score, to circle back to Pepper: all of this is really great. And then having all the other stuff prepared and ready to go will make it more likely for you to have a lot of success doing this.

Not everybody is well suited to doing this. Just because you're a wonderful composer doesn't mean that you necessarily love doing the business, in which case having a publisher or an assistant or a manager or somebody helping you, having a team of people, is really, really great. And in another segment if we do another one, there's a lot to talk about regarding all that stuff that could be really helpful.

Liam Thomas
Yeah, definitely. Well, thank you so much for all of that. And we would absolutely love to do another segment at some point in the future. Thank you.

Alex Shapiro
Yeah, absolutely. Well, if there are any burning questions, if people can stay a minute or two longer, I'll stay on as long as you guys want. I'd love to take some questions if anybody has some.

Liam Thomas
Sure. Yeah, great. So thank you guys so much, and thanks, Alex. So our first question here is going to be, do PROs cover composers outside of the United States?

Alex Shapiro
Well, they do through reciprocal agreements. In other words, ASCAP will collect your international performances, yes. And they do that through each country's own society. So ASCAP has reciprocal relationships with all the other PROs, which are interestingly called collective management organizations in other countries because they can collect rights on even more things. So the answer is yes.

Liam Thomas
Yep. OK, great. So if you're in a different country or something, you should be looking for your specific CMO.

Alex Shapiro
That is right. Yeah, if you are international, if you're not American, you'll be a member of whatever that country's CMO is.

Liam Thomas
Yes. OK, great. That's awesome. Thank you so much. Question 2, moving on. Regarding registration with ASCAP, do you have to register the same work twice, once as a composer and once as a publisher? Considering you are registering for both, right?

Alex Shapiro
You register for both at the same time. There'll be a pull-down menu and the one on the left I think asks for the composer (or plural composers if it's a co-write), and then the one on the right pulls down and asks you who the publisher is. It's really fast.

Liam Thomas
OK, great. So another one here. Do you recommend using a publishing admin company like Songtrust to collect all performance and mechanical royalties?

Alex Shapiro
I'm not gonna make a recommendation becauseI don't know enough to give a good opinion. So I'll pass on that.

Liam Thomas
Sure. Yeah, yeah. OK. Since you talked about using digital audio, do you have a DAW (a digital audio workstation) of choice? And are there any recommendations that you can make, especially for someone who maybe doesn't have too much experience with a DAW?

Alex Shapiro
Sure. Well, I happen to use the latest version of Digital Performer, but its counterpart, Apple's Logic, is really, really good as well. A lot of people are using Logic. And I'll tell you, even for basic stuff, Audacity is a free cross-platform app that's open source, or it used to be open source. I don't know what it is now, but it's really good. It's free. Audacity is a lot of fun to work with digital audio in, but any DAW, basically any digital audio workstation, they all do the same thing and so you really can't go wrong. And if you can operate one, you can operate all of them because the concepts are all the same. It's just the layout and the user interface that tend to be a little bit different.

I'm a Digital Performer girl for many years. And I happen to use Sibelius. I think I saw some people talking in the chat about Dorico, which is a terrific program. And when I recommend a program these days, I usually recommend Dorico, which is designed by the same people who designed Sibelius years ago. So Dorico's terrific. I'm still using Sibelius because it's the one I've been using for 25 years. Until they go belly up like Finale, and then I'll become a Dorico person.

Liam Thomas
Yeah, yeah, I've been interested in checking out Dorico myself. So we do have a couple more here, if that's OK. Can you register works you composed decades ago on ASCAP? What year do you use?

Alex Shapiro
Yes, you can register old works, and register everything for the year you wrote it. A lot of people sometimes get confused between copyright and ASCAP registration. First of all, everything you write is copyrighted technically the minute you write it; it is yours. But if you want to register things with the Library of Congress, which is especially nice if you're an American to have your works in that beautiful building, you can do that. It's a little pricey, but it's wonderful to do that and offers additional legal protections.

However, it is not necessary to register a copyright in order to collect money in terms of performance royalties for your music. So just know that those are two separate things. But yes, you should certainly register older pieces. Absolutely. Anything that's out there that has the possibility to get performed.

Liam Thomas
Yeah, yeah. And to go a step further than that: are retrospective royalties something that you will collect?

Alex Shapiro
Not for that far back. I think ASCAP will go two, maybe three years back under certain circumstances, but usually a couple years back and that's it. So you won't be getting retroactive royalties for performances that happened 20 years ago. No, you're not gonna get paid for that. But you will get paid for everything going forward.

Liam Thomas
OK, great. Yeah. So I think we covered a lot of information and we are a few minutes overtime here, so thank you guys so much for sticking around. I was also seeing some questions about My Score. If you guys want to ask questions about My Score, I'm perfectly happy to help out if you're curious as to what it is. You can go to jwpepper.com/myscore to check out some general information. And if you would like to e-mail us, you can e-mail us at myscore@jwpepper.com. And you know you can get your music out there like we talked about with Alex here. Do you have any closing statements you'd like to make, Alex?

Alex Shapiro
Yeah, just to be encouraging, just to tell every one of you is worth a lot as a composer, and as an art maker: every single one of you. And if it matters to you, if your music matters to you, it matters. You understand? Don't feel like you're in competition. As I said before, don't feel like everybody else has to approve of you. Just care about what you're doing and know you're doing good work and striving to always do better work (because I'm always striving for more and more excellence; I'll never reach it. I'll never get to where I want to be. But I'm always striving for it and growing, I hope, as an artist). If you're just on your path and doing what you hear in your head and writing the music you want to hear, that will lead to wonderful things.

So always, always, always believe in your own vision and do not be daunted by naysayers or people who are not kind. Try your best. This is just a general life thing, right? To only surround yourself with good people. And if people are not good, positive people, and if they're making life more difficult for you rather than supporting you, you don't have to have that in your life. You really don't. The older we get, the more choices we really do have. So just keep that

in mind because everybody, it’s your vision, and what you hear in your head is worth a great deal, and it only makes this world better.

At a time that is so dark in so many ways, we as artists have a lot of power. We can message, we can raise awareness, and we can uplift and we can shine some light onto a rather dark time. So I just want to encourage everybody.

Liam Thomas
Yeah. And that's an empowering thing to think about as a composer, you know: use your, use your voice. Yeah. So thank you so much, everyone. Thank you for sticking around.

Alex Shapiro
Liam, thank you so much for a delightful conversation. And everybody at Pepper, thank you for bringing us all together. Thank you. And thanks everybody who tuned in! And by the way, if anybody really has a burning question that I didn't get to, my e-mail address is alex@alexshapiro.org and you can drop me a note. I will respond.

Liam Thomas
Alrighty. Thank you everybody. Enjoy the rest of the day and and thank you for the information, Alex. We appreciate it.

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