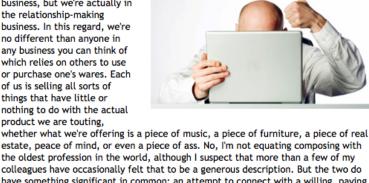
Blogger Book Club III: Selling Everything, 2.0--The Jig Goes Public This week at the suggestion of composer Alex Shapiro, the Blogger Book Club takes

Tara Hunt. Thanks, Alex! I hope it will really open up the chance to think and talk about how music and the related industries we each have contact with are embracing technology and social networking for better and worse. Every time Hunt wrote "business" I mentally substituted "cultural institution" and, whether I agreed with her or not, the ideas popped off the page. Now, here's Alex to get us started... By Alex Shapiro Those of us who are musicians

on The Whuffie Factor: Using the Power of Social Networks to Build Your Business by

and composers might think that we're in the music-making business, but we're actually in the relationship-making business. In this regard, we're no different than anyone in any business you can think of which relies on others to use or purchase one's wares. Each of us is selling all sorts of things that have little or nothing to do with the actual product we are touting,



have something significant in common: an attempt to connect with a willing, paying audience. As artists, we may think that we are selling the product that we create. But in this day and age of what I term "the published life," in which many of us have a ubiquitous online presence that shares information about everything from our latest opus on our website to our latest ham sandwich on Facebook or Twitter, the truth is this: we are the product as much as our art is the product. The creator and the public perception of him or her, have become an undeniable part of what's being

sold. Even those artists who spurn the enpixelated self-promo world remain subject to its effects, since potential fans interested in their work immediately head to Google to embark on a little due diligence. The jig is up: in the 21st century, whether we choose to don our pajamas, hide in our garrets, and ignore it all, or don our pajamas, hide in our garrets, and participate, the perception of who we are--or at least who we appear to be--is as important as the essence of what we create. Sometimes, even more important. Enter "whuffie." Thanks to Cory Doctorow, a number of e-geeks have begun to use the word, which refers to the currency of one's professional reputation. Author Tara Hunt took it upon herself to delve right in and explore the phenomenon in her thorough book, The Whuffie Factor. In many ways, whuffie is nothing new at all:

since the beginning of time, relationships, the perception of people, and their reputations have been what have driven human interaction. There are now two new components: the technology at hand that we use to accomplish this, and the global reach of that technology. Instead of one little village in a cozy Kyrgyzstanian corner knowing about Alex's Fabulous New Piece due to word of mouth, now Alex and her nifty piece have the potential to be known to millions with one click of a cheap plastic button on a computer keyboard. I'd call that progress, for any artist looking for a fan base, and hoping to get paid in more than just a barter of one donkey and a bushel of potatoes. I speak publicly about this new way for artists to get their work out into the world to anyone who will listen. My cats know the spiel well. I'm fortunate to have platforms, live and in print, on which to throw down my soap box and shout about the joys of a happy, moat-less castle of art-making that is less dependent on surly gatekeepers than ever before. Living on a remote island that few have even heard of, I've become

an odd, if functional, poster child for all this newfound e-joy. And yet, I am deeply aware that it takes a significant perception shift for some artists to embrace these Adherence to tradition has much to do with some creators' resistance to change, as emerging artists coming from academic institutions often have professors who tout degrees and grants as the foremost approach to creating a music career, and are taught virtually nothing about publishing, copyright, web presence management, and other staples related to an ability to generate income from their art. Nothing is wrong with this if the artist is not intending to support themselves to a notable degree from their music. But if they would like to make music their professional career, a sense of entitlement will probably be less useful than an understanding of enterprise. Obtaining degrees and grant funding hinges on external efforts and requests. Building whuffie is generated from within, and becomes the currency of a self-administered "grant" program that pays us back throughout our lives.

Artists have every right to be skeptical as they view the the tricky balance between

the quality of their creation and its perceived worth. The latter can be judged on

aesthetics and content, or solely on a rumor. The arbitrary and sometimes unfair

nature of these judgments can make us cringe, because we've worked hard to develop our talents to a point where we believe they should be appreciated on their own terms for their intrinsic worth. Yet in a world where people are far more likely to glean the buzz about someone's work before they actually, or ever, hear the work itself, it may be naïve for an artist seeking paying fans to compartmentalize the ion of the art from the hype about it. In a fully interconnected world, it is nearly impossible to separate the two parts of the process. And this is where Tara Hunt's The Whuffie Factor kicks in. One of the limitations of the new music world is its self-referential nature, whereby accepted norms are...accepted norms, and fewer participants think outside of the taco shell. I find myself most stimulated and inspired by the observations of those who are not part of the arts scene, who see the larger trends in society and in the way people communicate. Right now, a working knowledge of the gestalt of the internet and a sense of abundance and global scope when thinking of who might

listen to our Nifty New Pieces, may be the best antidote to the scarcity and

the huge concept of what it is in this moment, with the tools we have, to build

tribulations of grant monies. Tara Hunt offers what I think is a very solid overview of

relationships that will build a career. That she is not specifically discussing the small

want to understand who our listeners are and how we might reach them. Our paying

audience is not only each other: it is people from everywhere in the world, many of

whom until now would never have been able to find out about us and all our musical

niche of new music but rather the broad world of business, is a boon to artists who

July 27, 2009 8:49 AM | Permalink | Comments (12) Categories: bookclubiii 12 Comments By Marc Weidenbaum on July 27, 2009 12:58 PM First off, thanks for having selected this book -- and, more broadly, this subject. (And thanks for the invite to participate in the discussion.) Like our gracious host, Molly, I found it pretty easy to substitute "arts organization" whenever I saw "business." And living, as I do, in San Francisco, I kept thinking of how local arts organizations, especially musical ones, handle their web presences -- that is, not just their web sites, but their

I focus in particular on the San Francisco Symphony, because while its

trying to bring in a broader, newer (yeah, read: younger) audience, its

promotional efforts (starting with its website, but extending to its

the Bay Area, or have strong associations with the Bay Area.

programming does a pretty good job of telegraphing that the organization is

subscription mailers and so on) sends a much different signal. The signal it

tends to send is: We're a monolith; please come visit. Which is unnecessary

and unfortunate, since its musicians are individuals who live in the Bay Area,

and many of the composers and guest musicians it works with either live in

Just to start off with a cultural organization that does a pretty good job of

breaking down the arts-organization equivalent of the 4th wall in drama is MOMA (at moma.org), which has, in its relatively recent web redesign launch,

Alex, I wholeheartedly agree with much of what you've written here. I think (self-)promotion is extremely important, and that it's not taught well, if at

However, I do struggle with the dichotomy of stylishness and substance. It seems unavoidable, and I don't know how, if at all, to address it. From my own experience, it seems people are always looking for reasons to say "no" rather than "yes." If I promote my work using imagery and style, the classical music folks deride my shallowness; but if I promote my work focusing on the

brought users into the art-annotation process. By Corey Dargel on July 27, 2009 6:41 PM

all, in music schools.

broader existence on the web.

niftiness. Whuffie rules.

By Molly Sheridan on July 27, 2009 7:40 PM

Hey Corey,

intricacies and substance of the work itself, the commercial music folks say I'm snobbish and "too artsy." That is, of course, a reductive generalization. but you get my point. How do you go about addressing this issue, or do you feel it's a non-issue?

what is actually at risk. Can you really be true to yourself, even in a marketplace that seems to claim such transparency is the only successful path to take? I guess I'm curious what would feel most true to you, and if you feel you can really take that course. Or are there multiple versions you would feel comfortable presenting, just as different facets of the same object? Can you shift your message depending on the audience for it? By Alex Shapiro on July 27, 2009 7:56 PM

Hi Corey (Molly, your comment just came in and I want to respond in the next

You are the perfect artist to ask this question because your great work (I'm a fan!) is such a pointed example of falling between the two self-ghettoized worlds of classical and commercial. You know what an odd fit it can be to feel as though you need approval from one "camp" or the other. My work also tends to wander from one edge to the other stylistically, depending on my mood. I can relate. And like you, I persist in writing the music I hear. And so my answer has always been: don't worry about other people's approval. Don't worry about fitting in. It's only an issue to us if we give that issue power, and it's not an issue to us if we simply ignore it, create our own artistic path, and just keep doing our best work in our most authentic voicewhatever style that may be, measure to measure. This independence is what's so stunning to me about the tools we all have in the self-publishing

I thought about this a lot as I read Hunt's book. Risk changes depending on

You didn't address this question to me, but I've been lightly criticized along these same lines--I was going for amateur, inviting, cable access-style fun, and an audience member wanted something a bit more sophisticated. In the end I weighed the comment, considered the advice, and decided it was not for me. However, I wonder how I would have been hit if this effort was my sole source of income, let's say. It's easy to stand by a vision when the rent is

world: until only a few years ago, it did matter, a lot, how the "gatekeepers" in publishing and recording slotted and categorized our music. But now that we each have the ability to find our own fans (or to make ourselves findable to them), to decide what we would like our careers to look like, and to create that vision, the entire psychology of our business has changed. Rather than being passive (please, Mr. Publisher, please, Ms. Record

getting our music out into the world.

to be willing to pay for it.

By Alex Shapiro on July 27, 2009 8:28 PM

that love and approval... to ourselves.

Exec, accept my work... please!), now we can be extremely proactive about

It doesn't take too many paying fans to build a viable career. Here's an article

the link in Corey's name above his comment to hear what I mean). Your music is proof that there are people who very much want music that is outside of any convenient category. Next of course is the trick of getting those people

I've always liked a quote by an author named Wayne Dyer (used by and attributed to many others as well): "what other people think of me is none of my business." It's so true! Once we unleash ourselves from trying to get love and approval from the perceived powers that be, we're joyfully free to give

So here we go: Rule #1: not everyone will love, or even like, what we do. And that's fine! Because this rule is immediately joined by Rule #2: there are always people somewhere in the world who will love what we do once they know about it. Now we have the ability to let them know about it.

I love passing around, by another thought-provoking blogger named Kevin Kelly. It's called "1000 True Fans": As a composer and performer, you happen to have a unique style, Corey, that could never be pigeonholed into a compartment (I invite readers to click on

Heya Molly, Your worth as a writer lies in your individual "cable-access," breezy, funny and oh-so-intelligent style. There are plenty of other people who will deliver the stuffier intellectual tone that your one reader sought. Fine. Let him or her go elsewhere for what they prefer. This is the beauty of it all. As far as I'm concerned, this attitude remains true for those of us relying on our work as our primary source of income. I am not the go-to gal for "nails on a chalkboard" or "bleeding edge for the sake of the blood" music. Am I

capable of composing it? Absolutely. Will it be authentic to my heart and voice? Doubtful. There are plenty of other terrific composers who can fill those, and many other slots. I am happy to cede to them. The people I work with find me because they already like the array of what I've created so far and want to see me experiment some more with the way I do what I do. But I certainly don't think that I'm a perfect fit for every ensemble. Having an honest awareness of my "market" makes it easier, actually, for me to do business because I have a more specific focus of where to "sell" my music. As a business person I'm collaborative in my nature, and am happy to make some adjustments here and there to a piece if necessary. But only to the point that the new piece continues to be honest to the way I hear and feel. don't get asked for noticeable changes much, but when I have on a couple of occasions I felt comfortable drawing the line and maintaining my voice as I made the edits. So far, no one rejected the work or withheld payment

simple choice about how we want to do business, and the answer is different for everyone. I happen to be comfortable taking my audience into account if I know ahead of time what they tend to like, and I do not have to compromise the integrity of my musical message in order to compose something with softer or harder edges. Both approaches are authentic to different parts of me, emotionally, so I'm being truthful as an artist regardless. But again, this is where artists are best served by being honest

This is when it comes to "art"-- we're all able to do something that leans more toward "craft" if we're inspired by the money, and I see absolutely nothing wrong with this. The craft-generated funds subsidize the future "art"

I fully believe that we can be true to ourselves as artists and also sell that truth. This is the whole point: WE find the fans who will WANT us, for what we do. Why try to be a member of a club that doesn't want you as a member?

Alex - awesome article and it's so great to hear a composer talking about these issues in the open like you do. I just published a new blog titled "When do we stop writing music for free?" that got re-posted on Facebook, and the responses to it are extremely interesting - the dichotomy between the younger generation saying "Hell yeah", to the older generation telling me 'You'll never make any money writing music, so step in line and keep writing for free," is interesting and scary at the same time. I think your stance is right on. I hope the classical music world is catching up - albeit slowly. Regarding self promotion on the web - I remember back in 2002, I won an ASCAP/Morton Gould young Composer Award. At the awards ceremony in Lincoln Center, they were reading all the winners biographies before they went up on stage to receive the award. Some of the young composers bios were incredible - especially the under 18 kids. Things like "Her cello sonata was performed on From the Top by Yo-Yo Ma", etc. I was like, OMG - my bio is paltry compared to these - however, I had one thing on mine that I was very proud of that no one else had. Having jumped into the promotion of my music on the internet early, I had at that time amassed 150,000 plays on the old MP3.Com. So, I felt good that I at least had this on my bio. However, when the time came, they read my academic portion, and left off all the web stuff - just decided it wasn't important enough to mention. I hope

with themselves about what speaks to them, and what doesn't.

As for shifting our voice depending on the audience, I think that's just a

You'd be shooting yourself in the Karmic foot right away. We get rejected enough of the time in our careers, there's no sense in trying even harder for that result by pretending to be what we're not. Age is great for this sort of internal discussion, too, because I think the older and more experienced we get, the more deeply we know ourselves and our preferences. Yet another great benefit to enjoying many more birthdays!

By Anthony Joseph Lanman on July 28, 2009 12:41 PM

we create.

(there's always a first time!).

Hello my dear Alex and hello to everybody on this discussion: Alex, thank you for the book recommendation and to all for all your wonderful comments. As a composer who write both for the concert world as well as classical, I sometimes struggle as well with all the issues that arise from working in both worlds. My conclusion is similar to Alex's- just be yourself. believe in what you do. As artist, we need to accept the fact that music and art, after all, is a matter of taste. Some would love out work, some would not, and some would not care, simply said. I believe that we have to be true to ourselves and honest with the music we hear and want to present to the world. It's not always easy, but it's the best way not to get a heart attack in this crazy industry:)

This must be one of the sanest articles I've read on promotion in a long time. Having spent years in and out of academic music and the (comparatively)real world of music as craft and business, Shapiro nailed the issue solidly.

What a sensational and inspiring article by one of the leading architects of How To Build A Network on the Net! And that be you, dear friend Alex. Every time I hear you speak about these isssues and/or read your salient points, I just have to say YES! You are spot on about what the business of our business is about now. Expanding our global net and making new friends through a cyber-handshake or an email or a tweet opens the possibilities to bring new people in to find our music, music that is authentic to each one of us. Finding one's own voice is the key. Then, the sooner we all learn what you have spent so much time being willing to teach us, the sooner we will have the pleasure of our work reaching those to whom our music speaks.

Not all of us are wordsmiths such as you, but hopefully, we are good listeners and learners and will have the joy of using your expertise to expand our our own musical bases. Please continue to be our Pied Piper and we can say Yes

I think it's wonderful that there are so many ways now for music lovers and music makers to find each other. And I agree that this big world is full of many kinds of ears and many different tastes. It's easier than ever before for

As some have hinted, there are a bunch of wrongheaded assumptions floating around that mislead composers about the relationship between writing music and making a living. When I was a student I thought that the better the musician, the more money s/he would make. Silly me. (Some people labor under the opposite misconception, that you can measure the worth of music by how poor its creator is. That's hogwash, too.) More recently I heard that Mozart never wrote a note that wasn't commissioned, and I got the impression that Beethoven was quite active in developing the business side of his activities. Richard Strauss was said to be a shrewd businessman. Great Masters concerned themselves with getting their work out into the world,

every kind of music to find some ears yearning in its direction.

they're starting to realize how important it is now.

By Sharon Farber on July 28, 2009 1:00 PM

Good luck to all- enjoy the music!

I think I'm ready for more Alex Shapiro.

Whoopie! Whuffie!! Whoopie Alex!

By Raymond Helble on July 28, 2009 10:42 PM I'm new here, so I'll be brief.

By Adrienne Albert on July 29, 2009 3:05 AM

By John Steinmetz on July 29, 2009 8:58 PM I like what everybody's saying--thanks, Alex and Molly, for getting this going.

We Can!! Whoopie Whuffie!

with getting paid, with developing a useful reputation. None of that work is incompatible with composing terrific music. And Alex demonstrates that both kinds of work can be done with enthusiasm and real pleasure. But the two kinds of work are quite different, and I think it might help to distinguish more clearly between the work of composing and the work of making money from music. Composing involves, among other things, connecting inwardly with your own sense of what sounds right. Making money is more outward-oriented--as Alex says, it's about relationship. There's no

requirement to do both of these tasks: you can create music, you can make money from music, or, if you like, you can do both. Neither is right or wrong, but it does cause trouble if the two get mixed up, or if inner and outer work get confused. If you lose touch with your inner guidance system, it makes it hard to compose honestly. And it's hard to do relationship if you're too

It's up to each of us to define success for ourselves and get to work on it--whether it involves wrestling notes into the right places or making contact with potential fans, or both. (I met a successful visual artist who said he spends about half his professional life painting and the other half dealing with the business side. That seems about average. Because most talk about

artists in all fields concerns their artistic work only, the illusion the illusion persists that artists spend no time on business.) I just read a wonderful small book by Steven Pressfield, "The War of Art," about how to deal with interior obstacles in creative work. It's not about how to make money, but In the final part he talks about the ancient, reassuring idea that getting down to work on what matters to you draws forth unexpected opportunities. By Alex Shapiro on July 30, 2009 7:44 PM

Thanks, everyone, for these great comments! I'm excited to see my friends

"If you lose touch with your inner guidance system, it makes it hard to compose honestly. And it's hard to do relationship if you're too self-involved." The balance is really important, and can get out of whack quite easily. I think there are two levels to this (at least). First, as John implies, is the need to write what you hear and what is YOU, regardless of outside pressures. And next is the concept of also being a whole person who interacts with others and cares about their opinions, even though those opinions don't necessarily

and colleagues so enthused. John's point here is worth noting:

have to affect your output. The second level of complication is this: professional artists have to employ both hemispheres of their brain fairly evenly, and need little tricks that can quickly flip the switch from one side right over to the other. Rarely are there more than a couple of days and nights in a row when my right brain is giddily immersed in composing a piece, that I do not need to spin around to my desk and respond to business tasks. I would imagine this is the case for many

composers reading this. More often, we ping pong back and forth between the creative and the admin throughout our day, juggling a lot of unrelated

things simultaneously. Rather than 50/50, in order for composing to be a financially viable profession, most of my self-published peers and I admit that any given week has a split more like 70/30. And it ain't the composing that gets awarded that bigger first number. This is the reality, and if we happen to love the job, it's a fun one. But it's important to note that not every composer is suited to the same degree of immersion into business and technology. If it isn't enjoyable, then the work won't get done that well because something unseen is holding you back (uh, the fact that it's not enjoyable!). So being honest with ourselves not only musically, but in terms of what we can do well in business, is part and parcel of this dance.

By Stuart Balcomb on August 2, 2009 1:19 PM Wonderful article, Alex. I'd like to include a quote from your website that I We're the same person each time we sit down to compose, but from time to time we hear and create in different idioms. Stylistic diversity shouldn't cause a composer to be taken less seriously in his or her primary field of pursuit. Rather, it points to broad interests that are positive influences on a musician's sensibilities. Even within individual pieces of music, as the

distance between countries appears to shrink with new technology, voices and inspirations from other nations filter seamlessly into one's own work. The 21st century has brought with it a global melting pot of sound, with endless choices for composers and players. Leave a comment

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