

James Banner - CV of 'failures'

During a lecture I delivered to graduating students at Leeds College of Music in early 2019 we discussed the idea of finding and creating opportunities as a professional musician, amongst many other things. The overarching theme was that work opportunities (commissions, finding gigs, recording opportunities, teaching positions etc.) are in general very hard to come by, and succeeding in those areas, whilst of course necessary for most freelance musicians, is difficult and can sometimes seem insurmountable as a student entering the professional world - something I also felt myself as an undergraduate. Even more important to realise and fight against are the systemic barriers such as sexism, ageism, ableism, classism and racism facing those coming from marginalised groups which make this process even more difficult.

To illustrate the point in numbers from my own experience only, I decided to tally up how many opportunities I had applied for in the previous two years and how many of those had succeeded, the result being 6 out of around 30-35 at the time (beginning of 2019, some were pending) - around 20%. I had personally never considered this 'success' rate to be low since the 'failures' I had incurred during the process (learning how to write applications, updating my CV, making new contacts etc.) had been so valuable to me as a tool for my own development, even though 20% in most other contexts would be considered a fail.

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic 2020-21 I placed much less importance on applying for opportunities that I had previously I applied for. I realised that these types of programmes were not necessarily the only route, that a better way forward for me personally was to use the time, equipment and privilege I have to widen my network, actively engage with more composers and performers, essentially to 'DIY' some of these opportunities myself rather than take up space in applications. I realised my own work does not fit and will never fit into certain scenes that many of these opportunities belong, and that it was not healthy or honest to try to adjust my work accordingly. As a start, I began to organise free double bass workshops for composers to learn more about writing for the instrument and started to record new/unperformed pieces for their portfolios. This was just the beginning of a new approach which I have personally found more inspiring and rewarding, and which has lead to increased creative contact and development with others on my own terms, rather than 'failing' to fit into the boxes of others.

This 'CV' may hopefully show someone that the 'failures' are inevitable, normal and worthwhile, and to go some way in normalising how widespread rejection is generally in the arts. Not that normalising this makes it ok, but engaging in conversation about this publicly, especially in the perceived perfect world of social media, may go some way in recognising mental health and artistic/financial survival in the freelance art world.

Credit goes to Lecturer Melanie Stefan for this idea, and to Composer Jenni Pinnock for passing it on to me. I decided to do this myself because of an interest in Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset (a concept introduced to me by musician Megan Jowett), and my recent introduction to an academic world where I am lucky to be able to discover new viewpoints on successes and failures from my own students.

n.b. for clarity, I don't include any 'non-failures' except where they are directly related to a 'failure'. In terms of performances, this list also only includes applications made for festivals, not venues, since there are too many 'failures' to list in this area (approx. contact of 100+ venues per year).

2014

Deutsche Bank Award For Creative Enterprise - shortlisted and delivered presentation
Peter Whittingham Award - got to audition stage

2015

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2016

Elsa-Neumann Artist Stipendium - delivered presentation but was rejected (however was awarded this in 2018)

Berlin State - Project Funding - for creation of new ensemble

Jazz Institut Berlin - Carl Hoffer Gesellschaft - soloist prize application

2017

12 Points Festival - Jazz festival application

Manchester Jazz Festival - Jazz festival application

100 Masters - Application to take part in a multidisciplinary arts festival as musician/composer

for-Wards - Call for composer

Francis Chagrin Award - Open fund, applied to help cover costs of a recording

Jazzlines Commission - Call for composer to create collaborative work with young musicians

Lots Of Odds - Call for composer for new theatre piece (lack of time to complete process)

Berlin State - Project Funding - for creation of new ensemble

Private call for typesetting/engraving work

OPUS - Call for composer to workshop a sketch with Britten Sinfonia members

Berlin British School - application for teaching position

2018

Terrestrial - Application for collaborative residency

12 Points Festival - Jazz festival application

Manchester Jazz Festival - Jazz festival application

Women of Longbridge - Call for composer to create collaborative piece - got to interview stage

Theatre Royal Plymouth - Call for composer for a new theatre piece

Hammersmith Apollo - Call for composer for a new theatre piece

Basel Composition Competition (did not enter despite registering)

CoDa/REwired - Call for composer for new dance project

Berry Theatre - Call for composer for new theatre piece

Help Musicians UK 'Do It Differently Fund' - Open fund

Leeds Creative Labs - Call to work collaboratively with Biological Researcher

London College of Music - Pieces rejected for inclusion in new piano syllabus

ORA Singers - Call for pieces to be workshopped and performed

Paperfinch Theatre - Call for collaborators to work on new theatre pieces

People Express - Commission to deliver workshops in schools

Imaginosity - Commission to deliver workshops in schools

Berlin State - Tour funding

Streetwise Opera - Call for composer in residence

Live Music Now - Call for new ensembles

Sound and Music - Call for playlists

Two part-time academic positions at Leeds College of Music - accepted for one other

2019

Phoenix Dance Theatre - Choreographers and Composers Lab - applied as musician

Queens Hall/Alnwick Playhouse - Call for composer for a new Christmas theatre piece

Music:Leeds Launchpad - Commission for new work as part of festival

Frozen Light - Call for composer for new choral piece

The Handful - Call for composer for new choral piece

LSO Soundhub - Call for composers for mentorship programme

Listenpony - Call for composers to write new 5 minute pieces for a concert

ISCM World Music Days 2019/2020 - Call for pieces to be workshopped/performed

Two part-time academic positions at Leeds College of Music - accepted for two others

Iwona Glinka/Phsama Music - Call for scores for compilation CD
No Dice Collective - Call for composers to collaborate with writers
Leeds International Festival OFF Programme - Call for arts events
Psappha - Call for composers
Young Composers Meeting Apeldoorn - for participation in a composition workshop
59th RMA Annual Conference at Goldsmiths - call for duo scores for workshop
Leeds College of Music - teacher of bass
Musikfonds - to perform and record Voices of Berlin
Berlin Senat - to record Voices of Berlin
Take Five - opportunity to be part of a yearly jazz talent development scheme
LSO Panufnik Composers Scheme - Call for composers for mentorship programme
Riot Ensemble/PRS - Mentoring scheme

2020

Vale of Glamorgan Festival - PRCS (composers studio) - put on waiting list
Riot Ensemble - Call for scores
Composer-Curator - For funding to set up new music event in Leeds
George Butterworth Award - a cash prize for pieces created through Sound and Music programmes
Musikfonds - to perform and record Voices of Berlin
Psappha - Composing For... scheme
Cheltenham Composers Academy
Leeds Creative Labs - Call to work collaboratively with academic researcher
Chimera Ensemble - Call for scores
OAE - to write a blog post on the the impact of Coronavirus on musicians
Young Composers Meeting Apeldoorn - professional development opportunity
fivebyfive - call for scores/ideas
Rossa Crean's new podcast inclusion
Nevis Ensemble Musical Postcards
Berlin Senate Stipendium Jazz 2021 - composition commissions and open rehearsal programme

2021

Potries music fest/Rodamusic - composer workshop
CULT R&D - Composer application
Oxford Festival of the Arts - 60 second trumpet piece
Colab Opera Project Trinity Laban
CMC/MusCan Canada - Call for scores
Cheltenham Composers Academy
BROWSER 2021 - Call to collaborate with a programmer
i-Portunus - Mobility/project funding for new collaboration
ADK Initial - research/production funding
Deutsche Musikrat Stipendium 2022

2022

Phase Arts Collective - call out for composer
NMC Big Lockdown Music Survey
Deutsche Musikrat Stipendium 2023
Transient Canvas Fellowship
Streetwise Opera - call for composers
Cyborg Soloists
Washington State University FOCAM2023 - call for scores
Deutsche Musikrat Stipendium 2023
Guterstoff festival open call 2022/23
Arvore Stiftung

2023

Musikfonds FEB III
WSU/Ensemble 337 - call for scores
Shape platform open call
Time to Listen - Art Music Denmark Residency
Musikfonds - small grant 2000 EUR to support a concert
Mixtur festival Barcelona - 5 applications in different categories
Deutsche Musikrat Stipendium 2023
Moving Identities - open call
Musikfonds small grants x2
Ärvore Stiftung
Senat Arbeitsstipendium Jazz 2024
STOPover open call (center for jazz and improvised music berlin, residency)
MISE-EN Festival 2024 (applied in 4 categories)
smallforms open call

2024

HELLERAU open call
Musikfonds main grant x2
!interpenetration open call
Forecast platform
Miso Music open call
Part-time office job x2 with Landesmusikrat Berlin
Musikfonds small grant
Kulturräume Berlin rehearsal spaces
Draußenstadt Berlin call for projects
Sound/e/scapes commission to create piece for artwork at Sainsbury Centre, Norwich
bbk social media assistant job
Leipziger Jazztage Open Call
STOP-OVER 3 (center for jazz and improvised music berlin, residency)
Senat Arbeitsstipendium Jazz 2025
Jazzahead showcase application
Warmest Night of Talent Open Call - concert / showcase
Initiative Neue Musik Berlin - project funding
Camden Youth Choirs - commission to create choral work
smallforms open call

2025

48 Stunden Neukölln - open call (was awarded a slot but it was one of those unpaid)
Experimance Festival - open call
Merton College Oxford Creative Arts Research Fellowship
2Act Foundation - open call *art and violence* for pieces for harp for performance in 2025
XN-Workshop (Moers Festival) - call for musicians
Musikfonds Kleinprojekt Förderung
Ärvore Stiftung
Stiftung Levedo - Project funding
HfM Weimar - Bass professorship application 50%
Käthe Dorsch und Ages Straub Stiftung - Project funding
HfMT Hamburg - Bass professorship application
Senat Arbeitsstipendium Jazz 2026
Initiative Neue Musik Berlin - project funding
Access Residencies in Porto and Czechia

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