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Joining The Professoriate

Photo by Adrienne Merrit, 2008



Jeremy Baguyos in the Recital Hall of the Strauss Performing Arts Center, University of Nebraska at Omaha

By Jeremy C. Baguyos

As someone who made the mid-career cutover from orchestral musician to music academic, I am often asked how one goes about becoming a college professor in the music discipline. Like many questions about pursuing a career in music, there is never a simple answer. I wish it were as simple as going to graduate school, earning an advanced degree, applying for listed jobs (in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* <http://chronicle.com/section/Jobs/61/>, www.higheredjobs.com, or the College Music Society's Music Vacancy List <http://music.org/cgi-bin/showpage.pl>), sending some applications, demos and letters of recommendation, and successfully completing an audition/interview. If this were the case, I could end the article right now.

Before anyone begins the process of pursuing a career in the music academy, one must first understand his or her own career motivations. Understanding these motivations will help an aspiring artist-scholar navigate the "Why Do You Want To Go To Graduate School" admissions essays and all the variations of the "Why Do You Want To Be An Academic and Work Here" question when running the gauntlet of multiple phone, Skype, and on-campus interviews. There is no single right answer to these standard questions; it is important to be honest with oneself and with others about one's motivations. As a result, the head game becomes less cluttered and allows one to focus on the more important matters pertaining to the job training and academic job search.

First of all, it is important to understand the different types of institutions that offer careers in academe. This becomes very important when you have to address, whether directly or indirectly, your "fit" within the organizational culture of a potential employer. No matter what anyone says, "fit" is important. That is why it is important to be honest with one's own motivations to see how one may "fit in" with a potential employer. This means a potential colleague must research as much as they can about a potential employer. Fortunately, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has a very useful tool for learning about the different organizations where one could work. Go to <http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/> to execute institutional lookups on any institute of higher education as well as read about the different types of organizations in the standard listings. This is a good place to start before researching institutional web sites.

It is also important to understand the different types of faculty employment opportunities in academe. For purposes of career training and the job search, there are three types of employment: full-time tenure track (after successful completion of a probationary period usually lasting six years, a faculty member is a "permanent" or "continuous" appointment), full-time non-tenure track (sometimes referred to as "limited term" or "renewable" appointments), and part-time non-tenure track (sometimes referred to as "adjunct" faculty).

The job market is becoming so competitive in some geographical areas that resumes received for advertised adjunct faculty vacancies are becoming just as impressive and just as numerous as resumes received for tenure track positions. No matter what type of job vacancy may be announced, assume that the competition will be very high.

What is more important to understand is that each type of job has a certain set of expectations and level of involvement within and outside of the university. For full-time tenure track positions, a double bass professor will be expected to participate fully in all the various workings of the music school ranging from administrative support duties (like producing a concert and committee work) to performing chamber music with other faculty AND (with the exception of community college positions) a tenure track bass professor will be expected to be active as a performer outside of their home institution, which is central to his or her ability to win tenure.

For a full-time non-tenure track position, the focus is on being involved in the workings of the home institution. Free of the expectations to win tenure, the non-tenure track bass professor has more control on the focus of his or her outside creative time. However, in some places that offer these types of positions, it is prudent to remain active as a performer because professional creative activity is not only good for the bank account, it can be used as a stipulation for renewal. Part-time faculty members are paid to teach the classes or students that they are assigned to teach, and there is very little expectation to be involved beyond the exact teaching assignment. Musicians who already hold full-time positions or full-time freelance situations often hold these part-time positions, and they can provide a very rewarding experience as well as provide access to the vast resources of a university with minimal commitment. In some cases, these part-time positions offer important teaching experience, which allow consideration for full-time positions elsewhere or at the institution where one served part-time.

Finally, if one has spent their time training for a career in performance and has spent time as a practitioner (someone who has made their primary income as a performing musician), the academy will offer a new set of values and reward systems that will need to be internalized alongside and sometimes reconciled with the value and reward systems of a practicing performer. Recognizing what is important to the professoriate is important for the aspiring artist-scholar to internalize, because that is the best way to answer the question, "What Are They Looking For?"

Tips On Getting The Academic Job

1) Go ahead and finish the terminal degree (DMA or PhD). Even though there are many in the tenured

and tenure track ranks that do not hold doctorates, one can increase the chances of winning the job with that final credential. Avoid the situation where an application gets tossed out of the pile during the first cut because of the lack of a paper credential. One may have the most stellar performance and teaching history, but if a non-musician on the search committee or other hiring authority like the Human Resources officer is making the cut based on minimum paper qualifications, an application without a terminal degree might get tossed out, regardless. As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, the academy has its own set of criteria that may seem very different from the practitioner's world where auditions and competitions define a bassist's abilities regardless of what credentials they may or may not hold.

Will search committees and administrators make exceptions? Yes! In some institutions, like my institution at the University of Nebraska Omaha, it is written specifically in the hiring guidelines that creative artists who have demonstrated accomplishment as practitioners should be granted exceptions to the terminal degree requirement. Usually these job qualifications ask for "DMA or professional equivalent." This allows search committees, administrators, and institutions more hiring flexibility, but there is still an advantage to holding a DMA/PhD over having "equivalent professional experience." A DMA is a concrete and objective credential easily recognized by everyone in academe including the most non-musical faculty and administrators that have never set foot in the campus performing arts center. "Equivalent professional experience" is subject to interpretation and not easily recognized by the entire professoriate and as a result, leaves very good and qualified artist-teachers vulnerable.

One can cast a wider net and apply for more opportunities if the DMA program is finished or almost finished, and the journey through the tenure process becomes less arbitrary. Anyone that knows me personally might find this advice surprising, but even though many of us successfully landed a tenure track job without a doctorate, it is not a path that I recommend for everyone. One can always count on a DMA or PhD to meet a minimum paper credential requirement, but "equivalent professional experience" will always require additional explanations to the administrators in the hiring hierarchy and multiple advocates who are willing to take the time to make a pitch on a candidate's behalf. Make it easy for search committees to hire you and get the DMA!

2) Get extensive formalized training, teaching experience, and professional or peer-reviewed academic credentials in another academic area in music. Most entry-level full-time jobs will ask you to do more than teach bass. This reflects the simple reality that most music schools cannot afford to hire all the personnel that they need, and they often have to make the compromise of hiring one person that can be asked to perform two jobs at once within the limits of the standard workload for the school or department. These multi-disciplinary artist-scholars are very valuable to music schools and are highly sought after. Recent job postings in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* have asked for applicants who can teach the following disciplinary combinations: bass + jazz studies, bass + music history, bass + music

education, bass + theory/composition, bass + music technology, bass + early music, and bass + music administration and business.

The training comes in graduate school. If there is a particular academic cognate that is very interesting in the long-term as well as short-term, consider taking at least eighteen graduate credit hours in that academic area. If the program allows it, declare that area of interest as a cognate area and fulfill the requirements for that academic cognate area.

It is very important that one can demonstrate concrete teaching experience in the secondary area. Obtaining a teaching assistantship in graduate school in the academic area of choice would be the perfect situation. Or look to nearby secondary schools or nearby colleges who need part-time teachers in the secondary area of interest. Even a tutoring job is relevant. Just make sure there is documented teaching experience in the cognate area. Volunteer if you have to.

Finally, publish papers and give conference presentations in the academic secondary area. Every academic music discipline has at least one or two academic/professional societies that provide conference presentation opportunities and publication opportunities for its members. Every academic music discipline has its own version of the ISB!

3) Demonstrate that you are an excellent teacher who can build and maintain a large, high-quality studio through recruitment and retention.

It is not enough to have teaching experience. The size of a bass teacher's current studio and the accomplishments of the students in that studio weigh heavily in the evaluation of a potential faculty member. It is important for anyone who wants to win a studio teaching job to be able to demonstrate an ability to recruit and retain top-performing students who can then be developed under the guidance of the teacher and go on to become accomplished musicians. This can be demonstrated with the development of students in a private studio or with an institution-affiliated studio, although I think there is a bias towards institution-affiliated studios.

Starting a new bass studio and recruiting and then continually developing all the students in that studio through inspiring and expert teaching so that their future accomplishments begin to reflect on your abilities as a teacher, is a long and complicated process that is beyond the scope of this article. The great bass pedagogues could probably write multiple volumes on this topic. However, there are a few pointers that can be highlighted, if the ultimate goal is a job in higher education. One must be able to articulate a recruiting strategy. Plan on answering this question in an interview: "How do you plan to recruit and retain students?" Answer the question succinctly and be prepared to give personal examples of how the recruiting/retention strategy worked.

The best concrete answer to the question is actually having a large studio of students of remarkable ability to back up the articulated recruiting strategy. Also, make and maintain an extensive list of contacts of private teachers and school orchestra directors. Network at conferences and make school visits. Teach and coach at summer camps, festivals like all-state orchestras, string workshops, youth symphony rehearsals, and orchestra outreach activities. Publish articles in local newsletters and national journals. Be involved in the local and regional chapters of the national teaching organizations like ASTA, MENC, CMS, and MTNA. Be active in the ISB. Start a blog. Be anywhere and everywhere as a teacher and always at the front of everyone's mind, so when the time does come to find a teacher, your name just naturally pops out because you are ubiquitous.

This oversimplified view marginalizes the studio teaching profession. However, it does distill what is

important to the job search process. When you apply for a higher-education applied teaching job, search committees are not looking to hire just an artist-teacher. They are looking to hire an artist-teacher that comes with an empire consisting of recruiting contacts, former and current students, national and international reputations that raise the profile of the university and attract attention locally, and the demonstrated ability to attract students to the program.

4) Establish your track record as a soloist and chamber musician in addition to being an ensemble performer.

Schools of Music are one of the most visible components of an institution of higher learning, and they want visible faculty who perform as marquis players on any level. This might seem obvious, but the multiple pathways to achieving this goal are not as obvious. It is important to note that just because one is not an IMG roster bass soloist does not mean one cannot have a visible solo/chamber career of some sort. However, it will take some extra work to become a self-managed artist, especially at the outset of a career. Find every opportunity to perform visible solo recitals and document each proud occasion with video. Performance opportunities exist with local-level and regional-level concert series, performing arts venues who are also concert promoters, churches, arts collectives, academic and professional music societies (like the ISB, ASTA, SCI, & CMS), local bass clubs, faculty and guest recitals associated with teaching institutions, pedagogy-based teaching events like string camps and workshops, and chamber music series that are part of a larger ensemble's concert series. None of these opportunities should be discounted or overlooked. This will take some marketing, networking, and cold calling, but as a top IMG manager said at a master class full of pianists at Peabody, "When your butt is on that piano bench, your mind must be focused 100% on the art of the piano. The minute your butt leaves the piano bench, it's all business." Make sure your solo engagements are well publicized through various media ranging from traditional press releases/press kits, posters in targeted high-traffic areas, and radio spots, to events web sites, mailing lists, and social media to assure that you add to your permanent web presence.

Bassists who have spent a good deal of their career preparation isolated in a practice room and the conservatory environment honing the details of orchestra excerpts for auditions may be a bit squeamish about the business end of a self-managed career, but remember that higher education values visibility and reputation among its music faculty. If you want to have a shot at higher education, you have to align your performance history with its focus on solo/chamber music performance credentials. Does this mean orchestral experience is unimportant? NO! Orchestral performance is central to a CV because that is where the majority of the classical bass professional peer group makes their living. In short, schools want to see that you can do it all and represent their school as a highly-regarded colleague in the professional world in all of the various places that a classical bassist can practice their craft from orchestral to chamber to solo to niche.

5) Be digitally transparent. Is the digital representation of your accomplishments a clear, accurate, and flattering depiction? It starts with a professionally produced CD and DVD, which will be requested by search committees. It is best to have these ready in advance of any job announcement, so you can just send them the minute materials are requested. There is no time to make professional CDs and DVDs on demand as job prospects open up. It is a good idea for any aspiring artist to have a CD. A CD or DVD is like a business card at the very least, but if manufactured in large quantities and sold through digital aggregators and distributors like CD Baby, they can also help

market you as an aspiring academic. CD sales and music downloads can also be good for the pocket-book.

Your online artistic presence is very important. Count on getting Googled when you apply for a job, especially by those that will have interest and input in the search, but may not be on the core search committee. What results are returned when your name + "bass" is typed and entered into Google? Some call this your "Google resume." You should have a Youtube channel with complimentary videos of your playing. Videos of live performances are especially important. You should have a public Facebook musician/band page that is separate from your personal page. Also, a Myspace music musician page is an excellent way to upload your audio and video documents and press documents for the public. Soundcloud is emerging as a public repository of audio work. Finally, your formal 1-2 page resume (brief version that highlights your accomplishments) and CV (everything you have done) should be posted somewhere. LinkedIn or Academia.edu works perfectly for this purpose. I'm currently experimenting with ADAMS (Academic Digital Audio Music Service), a new service of the College Music Society. There are many free artist services that will allow you to get your name ubiquitously associated with "bass."

6) Be one of their colleagues already. This refers to "fit" and understanding not only the specific organization to which you are applying, but also understanding the overall profession of higher education. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is a great place to spot job openings, but it is also a great publication for learning about the higher education profession. You have to highlight in both application materials like your CV and in interviews that you understand the challenges that face a professor, a school of music, and the larger university. Search committees want to know that you sincerely share their concerns and aspirations, and that if you were to be offered the job, you will fit in with them as if you have been collegially working beside them for years. It is a complete disconnect for a search committee when an institution is currently focused on one item like educational assessment, recruiting, or organizational infrastructure and a candidate is focused completely on something else. It is not that you have to be a chameleon. You have to direct your attention to the focus of the specific institution.

There is a whole other side of the music academy, jazz bass. I have not addressed it because that is not the primary path that I followed, and I do not want to feign any kind of advanced expertise in that arena.

It should go without saying, that one has to be at the top of their game to be competitive in this business, so don't ever allow the business to supplant the art. This seems like a lot of work to get an academic job. For many of us, it does not seem like work, and that's why we do it. If you love what you are doing, you will find that things just work out naturally. Going back to my introductory remarks about being honest with yourself, if you really like what you are doing, this advice will never seem like drudgery and it will be a lot easier to be at the top of your game whether it's being an orchestral player or being an academic bassist. Good luck!