



Musician's Bio Handbook

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What is a bio?

A biography (or bio for short) is an overview of who you are and what you do, written in paragraph form. It describes your experience, achievements, education, goals, and/or some personal interests. For musicians, bios are commonly used for concert programs, websites, marketing materials, publications, CD cases, festival applications, grants, and more.

What is the purpose of a bio?

The focus, audience, and length may vary, but the core purpose of a bio is to tell YOUR story. A bio introduces you to the reader in the hopes of making a personal and/or professional connection with them. Unlike a resume, a bio can show your personality through the tone of your writing, how you describe your experiences, and your life objectives. The ultimate goal is to make a lasting impression.

"A good bio is one that provides only as much information as is necessary to capture the attention of the reader and keep them engrossed until the end. It should come across as professional, be well written and well organized. It should find a good balance between sharing important factual information and also giving the reader a glimpse of what is special about the person. It should whet the appetite of the reader to experience the subject's artistry and to get to know them better."

– Edna Landau, Musical America

Steps to Writing a Bio

Step 1: Read sample Bios

Review bios of other musicians and non-musicians. Consider the way these individuals identify who they are, share relevant experiences, and construct their bios. At the end of reading these bios, ask yourself the following questions:

- What did you learn about this person?
- Was this bio memorable? Why or why not?
- Is there anything from the bio you would like to learn more about? Why?
- Is there anything from the bio that you skimmed over? Why?



Step 2: Brainstorm Your Content

Create a list of items that describe YOUR story. This could include, but is not limited to, experiences, purpose, goals, and personal information. In some ways, this may resemble your resume, but a bio should include more facets of your life than just jobs or performances.

<i>Potential Topics for Your Bio (Aim for at least 4)</i>		
Purpose, Mission, or Vision Goals & Ambitions Debuts, Premiers & Tours Recent Recordings/Publications Commissioned Works or Features Collaborations & Collaborators Professional/Personal Projects	Upcoming or Recent Events Special Venues/Premiers Competitions, Honors, & Awards Significant Ensembles or Festivals Positions Held Community or Volunteer Work Grants	Research Interests Quotes About You (written by others) Schools & Degrees Important Teachers Personal Interests or Fun Facts

Step 3: Identify your Audience and Modality

Next, consider *who* will be reading the bio. The accomplishments you highlight, your tone, and the personal touches you add should be different when applying for a Young Artist Program versus connecting with a parent about teaching their child. Select the appropriate topics (see above) based on the target audience and determine the level of detail based on length requirements and/or modality (website, concert program, application, etc.).

Step 4: Lead with Your Brand

Once you've finished brainstorming and collecting topics, it's time to start writing your bio. Start your bio describing your professional identities. Are you an oboist and advocate? Perhaps you're a cellist, educator, and conductor? Use these brand identities as map for the text that follows. For longer bios, each identity can have its own paragraph using multiple examples and for shorter bios, each identity can be supported by a sentence or two that highlight the most important experiences.

Step 5: Determine Relevant and Recent Content

Before making your bio public, ask yourself – who is going to be reading this? Depending on your audience, the ordering of your identities and the types of experiences you highlight might shift around. For instance, if the bio is for your website where you sell your compositions, you shouldn't start by referencing conducting gigs. It can be tempting to start off with the most impressive feature of your career, but if it's not relevant to your audience or it's very old, it will feel out of place. Instead, focus on the more relevant topics *first* and then add the other interesting things you do if you have space.



Step 6: Conclude with your Education and Personal Life

Although the order of your bio is up to you, one consistent facet with a professional's musician bios is how it ends. In the last few sentences, you will usually find an individual's education (degrees & certificates), private instructors, and casual personal information such as hobbies and interests.

Step 7: Revisit and Revise

Your career, life, and story will continue to evolve over time, meaning you will need to update your bio to match. Review this document regularly and make any necessary changes or adjustments as your mission, goals and experiences change and grow.

Final Tips

- ✓ Don't forget to use your full name, job title, and/or instrument in your bio! I
- ✓ Do not provide a full historic background, focus more on recent information
- ✓ Have multiple versions and lengths of your bio on hand (500 words vs 150 words)
- ✓ Always spell out an organization's name before using an abbreviation
- ✓ If you mention a location, use the state or country in addition to the city name
- ✓ When making a list, use a maximum of 3 items in a row (i.e. a list of 3 competitions you performed in, not all of them.)

Samples

-- Sample 1 --

School Website, Short Bio (up to 250 words)

Brianna Garcon (She/Her) is a senior at Eastman studying French Horn Performance and Arts Leadership. In addition, she is Take Five scholar, which is a tuition-free fifth year program of study on the self-selected topic "Exploring My Intersectional Identities Through the Languages and Histories of Black Haitian Women." Throughout her time at Eastman, she has devoted her life to creating an inclusive and equitable community. She was a member of the Eastman Action commission for Racial Justice, which created over 200 recommendations for the Dean to move Eastman towards an anti-racist institution. She is the current President of the Black Students Union at Eastman, member of Sigma Alpha Iota, and is a current Resident Advisor. Through her work, she has been awarded the Eastman Diversity Award, which recognizes contributions to diversity efforts, and the Fannie Bigelow Prize, which recognizes a University of Rochester undergraduate women on the basis of "her individuality, her ability to form and express fearlessly, with conviction and sound judgment, her opinions on vital topics." Garcon hopes to one day create her own organization that provides opportunities for minorities to succeed within the arts.



-- Sample 2 --

Employers Website, Short Bio (up to 250 words)

A Boston, Massachusetts native, Noah Sesling is currently enjoying his second season at IMG Artists in New York City, where he was recently promoted to Senior Assistant Artist Manager. Mentored by managers Matthew Horner, Sam Snook, and Devere Burnett, Noah's currently assists in season planning, casting, contracts and logistics of notable artists such as Susan Graham, Susanna Phillips, Ying Fang, Eric Owens, Angela Meade, and David Portillo, among others. Prior to working at IMG Artists, Noah was an intern at the Metropolitan Opera where he oversaw daily logistical operations for Met Opera On-Demand. Noah currently resides in Upper Manhattan and enjoys an occasional freelance gig. Noah graduated from Eastman with a B.M. in Vocal Performance and a Catherine Filene Shouse Arts Leadership Certificate of Achievement and is enjoying the early beginnings of an administrative career in the world of opera.

-- Sample 3 --

Personal Website, Short Bio (up to 250 words)

A dynamic pianist, improviser, and composer, Naomi Nakanishi invites their listener with distinguishable melodies, sonorous harmonies and unconventional phrasing. They have performed at major festivals such as the Rochester International Jazz Festival, Panama Jazz Festival and the national Jazz Education Network Conference with both big bands and small groups. Naomi has worked with artists such as Joe Lovano, Kris Davis, Gerald Clayton, Adam Cruz, Danilo Pérez, Tia Fuller, and Linda Oh. As a queer, Asian American musician Naomi is an equal rights advocate implementing projects on social justice issues through original compositions and poetry. In 2019 Naomi was selected to participate in the Washington Women in Jazz: Young Artist Showcase as well as the Women in Jazz Organization Mentorship Program studying with Rachel Z. Hakim. They are also the recipient of the 2020 Hal Leonard Collegiate Scholarship through the Jazz Education Network and was recently selected to participate in the 2022 Betty Carter Jazz Ahead Residency at the Kennedy Center. Recent work includes their debut EP Hear Me Speak, released on Habitable Records in June 2022. Their music aims to reconstruct, experiment and interact with sounds influenced by their comprehensive background in Black American Music, indie-folk, R&B and classical piano. Naomi holds a Master's Degree from the Berklee Global Jazz Institute led by Grammy award winning pianist, Danilo Pérez. There they performed regularly with their trio and various chamber ensembles. In addition Naomi has performed in numerous classical settings both as an accompanist and soloist.

-- Sample 4 --

Musician Personal Website, Short Bio (up to 150 words)

Dr. Blaire Koerner is an accomplished chamber and freelance bassoonist, educator, and career advisor. She is a co-founder of Hats+Heels, a bassoon and harp duo that focuses on interdisciplinary storytelling and commissioning. As a freelancer she has performed with groups such as Ensemble Signal, Symphoria, and Broadway's tour of *My Fair Lady*. As an educator, Dr. Koerner is adjunct

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bassoon professor at Syracuse University and instructor at Eastman Community Music School, where she received the Jack L. Frank Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2016. As the Assistant Director of Eastman School of Music's Institute for Music Leadership, Dr. Koerner instructs and advises musicians of all levels on developing knowledge, skill sets, and connections that will help them fulfill their dreams and career goals. Dr. Koerner has a Doctorate of Musical Arts from the Eastman School of Music. An old soul, Dr. Koerner enjoys old fashioned hobbies – gardening, antiquing, crocheting.

Employers Website, Medium Bio (up to 450 words)

As the Assistant Director of the Institute for Music Leadership (IML), Dr. Blaire Koerner's mission is to provide resources and opportunities for musicians to envision, create and sustain successful careers in an ever-changing field. In this role, Dr. Koerner oversees the Catherine Filene Shouse Arts Leadership Certificate Program, IML curriculum and experiential opportunities, such as internships and professional development grants. In addition, she is a Career Advisor, supporting graduate students and young alums in one-on-one meetings and group sessions to help them discover personal, professional, and artistic goals. Lastly, Dr. Koerner is faculty for the Masters of Arts in Music Leadership (MAML) degree, teaching the cumulative Capstone Project course. Through this course, she helps students navigate full-time internships at renowned national educational institutions (Interlochen, Aspen Music Festival, El Sistema USA), large ensembles (Philadelphia Orchestra, Houston Grand Opera, and Los Angeles Philharmonic), and contemporary groups (Eighth Blackbird, Fifth House Ensemble, and Bang on a Can). Having been guided by incredible mentor's through-out her life, Dr. Koerner hopes to be a life-long connection to Eastman students and alumni.

In addition to her work at Eastman, Dr. Koerner is an accomplished bassoonist and educator. She performs in a bassoon and harp duo, titled Hats+Heels, that focuses on storytelling and commissioning original works for instrument combination. She is also a freelancer in the upstate New York area, having played with Ensemble Signal, Symphoria, and Broadway's tour of *My Fair Lady*. An avid chamber musician, she co-founded the Soundweavers podcast, which interviews national and international musicians around the ins and outs of the small ensemble field. As an educator, Dr. Koerner's roles include adjunct bassoon professor at Syracuse University's Setnor School of Music and bassoon instructor of Eastman Community Music School (ECSM), where she received the Jack L. Frank Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2016.

Dr. Koerner completed her DMA at the Eastman School of Music in Bassoon Performance, with a Collegiate Teaching minor. She also holds a Masters of Music degree in Bassoon Performance from Eastman, a M.Ed in Elementary Education and B.S. in Bassoon Performance both from Hofstra University.

An old soul, Dr. Koerner can be found enjoying old fashioned hobbies – gardening, antiquing, crocheting, and cuddling with her cat Orzo. She is also known for her ever-growing collection of hats from all eras, a slight obsession of hers.

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-- Sample 5 --

IML Alumni Journey Wall, Short Bio (up to 150 words)

Known for her infectious energy, Tiffany Valvo is a clarinetist, educator, and entrepreneur on a mission to cultivate the next generation of thriving young professionals. She is the Co-Executive Director of Music360 and the Digital Clarinet Academy, a digital education platform that fills the gaps in traditional classical music training and empowers students to take their careers to the next level. Residing in San Francisco, CA, Tiffany is the Social Media & Digital Content Specialist for Cal Performances, the performing arts presenter at the University of California, Berkeley. In this role, she creates digital content and strategy to get people excited about watching and supporting the performing arts! Formerly, Tiffany was the Assistant Professor of Clarinet at Virginia Commonwealth University for five years, and has been a lecturer of music at both Nazareth College and Syracuse University. She has performed at the Sante Fe Chamber Music Festival, the Kennedy Center, as a soloist with the Richmond Symphony, and with the Rochester Philharmonic and Tallahassee Symphony Orchestras.

Faculty Position, Short Bio (up to 250 words)

Tiffany Valvo is a clarinetist, educator, and entrepreneur on a mission to cultivate the next generation of thriving music professionals. Residing in San Francisco, CA, Tiffany is the Social Media and Digital Content Specialist for Cal Performances at the University of California, Berkeley. In addition, she is the Co-Executive Director of the Digital Clarinet Academy, a platform giving clarinetists around the world access to quality clarinet instruction via the online space. A lover of chamber music, she has performed across the US and Mexico with the Alla Balena Ensemble and in multiple projects with the American Wild Ensemble. In the orchestral realm, she's performed as a soloist with the Richmond Symphony and with the Rochester Philharmonic, Virginia Symphony, and Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra.

Formerly, Tiffany was the Assistant Professor of Clarinet at Virginia Commonwealth University (2017–22) and a lecturer of music teaching music theory and aural skills at both Nazareth College and Syracuse University. She holds an MM and a DMA with a minor in pedagogy and an Arts Leadership Certificate from the Eastman School of Music and a BM from Florida State University. In 2013-14, she embarked on one of the most rewarding journeys of her life, studying chamber music with Chen Halevi at the Trossingen Hochschule für Musik, Germany. Tiffany has been described as enthusiastic by many and nothing makes her happier than empowering those around her to create the life they imagine for themselves.



-- Sample 6 --

Personal Website, Medium Bio (up to 450 words)

Steve Danyew (b. 1983) is an American composer and educator based in Rochester, New York. His music has been hailed as “startlingly beautiful” and “undeniably well crafted and communicative” by the Miami Herald, and has been praised as possessing “sensitivity, skill and tremendous sophistication” by the Kansas City Independent.

Danyew is the recipient of numerous national and international awards for his work, and his compositions have been performed throughout the world in venues such as the Sydney Opera House, the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, and the steps of the US Capitol. Danyew’s recent work *Into the Silent Land* was named the winner of the 2019 Walter Beeler Memorial Composition Prize. Three of his compositions for wind band are featured in vol. 11 of *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band*.

In addition to composing, Danyew is a passionate educator who teaches composition lessons through his own private studio. He also teaches courses focused on helping young musicians craft their own creative careers at the Eastman School of Music’s Institute for Music Leadership. He is the contributing author for the 2nd edition of Ramon Ricker’s book *Lessons from a Street-Wise Professor: What You Won’t Learn at Most Music Schools* (Soundown, 2018). He is also a frequent guest composer and lecturer at schools throughout the United States.

In 2020, Danyew and his wife Ashley created *Musician & Co.*, a new resource that equips 21st-century musicians to be both artists and business owners. The mission of *Musician & Co.* is to provide an innovative model for bridging the gap between the practice room and a profitable business.

Danyew grew up in New England, playing the saxophone and improvising music on the piano. After a performance of his own work, the South Florida Sun Sentinel proclaimed him a “saxophone virtuoso par excellence, making the instrument sing as well as shout.” Danyew performed as a saxophonist in the University of Miami Wind Ensemble under the direction of Gary Green, and this formative experience led him to begin composing works for wind band.

Danyew received a B.M. in Composition from the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami where his primary composition teachers were Scott Stinson and Dennis Kam. He also holds an M.M. in Composition from the Eastman School of Music. Additionally, Danyew has served as a Composer Fellow at the Yale Summer Music School with Martin Bresnick, and as a Composer Fellow at the Composers Conference with Mario Davidovsky. Danyew self-publishes much of his music catalog, though several of his choral works are now available from Augsburg Fortress and Colla Voce. Visit the store to listen to recordings and audio samples, view perusal scores, and order music.



-- Sample 7 --

Employer's Website, Medium Bio (up to 450 words)

Violist Ryan Hardcastle maintains a varied career as a performer, pedagogue, and music historian. He is currently on faculty at Nazareth University-School of Music, where he teaches viola and music history, and is Visiting Assistant Professor of Viola at SUNY Potsdam-Crane School of Music.

In recent years, Ryan has dedicated his attention to unknown works from the former Soviet Union. These lectures and recitals have resulted in the American premiere of works by Schnittke, Weinberg, Grigori Frid, Volkonsky, and Druzhinin. As a two-time Presser Grant recipient, Ryan is currently at work on a book titled, *1985: A Year of Triumph and Trauma in the Life of Alfred Schnittke*. The book explores aspects of memory, cerebrovascular disease, and refreshing discussions of Schnittke's music including his Viola Concerto, Cello Concerto No. 1, Concerto for Mixed Chorus, String Trio, and Concerto Grosso No. 3. In addition to this project, Ryan is transcribing a late, unpublished work by Schnittke.

As a soloist and chamber musician, Ryan has appeared with WXXI-Rochester, Chamber Music Society of Rochester, and June in Buffalo. A native of Missouri, Ryan joined the American Wild Ensemble in 2021 to celebrate the bicentennial of Missouri's statehood. The Ensemble commissioned six composers to write new works inspired by the culture and history of the state.

In May 2023, Ryan had the privilege of presenting Rebecca Clarke's Viola Sonata at the George Eastman House in Rochester, NY celebrating the centennial of the composer herself performing the work in Eastman's front parlor in 1923.

Ryan completed his DMA in Performance and Literature at the Eastman School of Music, where he was Teaching Assistant to Masumi Rostad. Prior to Eastman, Ryan studied at Indiana University-Jacobs School of Music (with Rostad) and at the University of North Texas, where he was the Teaching Fellow of Dr. Susan Dubois. Ryan completed his Bachelor of Music from Missouri State University, magna cum laude, under the tutelage of Dr. Amy Muchnick. As an undergraduate, Ryan was a National Finalist in the Music Teachers National Association Young Artist competition as well as the Chamber division with the William T. White String Quartet. Ryan is especially thankful for his preparatory studies with Dr. Susie Thierbach.