

## 10 Misconceptions about Music composing

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I would argue that these misconceptions more apply to composing in the sense of classical music composing. They might apply to electronic music “production” or even art in general as well, but maybe to a lesser extent.

### 1. YOU HAVE TO START AT A YOUNG AGE TO BECOME A COMPOSER

Wrong. Child prodigy’s, miraculous and fascinating as they may be, have unwillingly created the belief that every composer who created meaningful music were “geniuses” from the moment they’re born... This translated into people’s common thought that every composer should start doing music at a young age. Don’t get me wrong, there are huge advantages at starting early with music, but this is no absolute law/necessity. There are enough examples in history that disprove this.

*To quote a story of my own: I started with music roughly 4 years ago (age 20). Before that I hadn’t any interest in classical music, but was more into electronic music. Gradually I started taking interest in animation scores of classical music (take a look at YouTube channel: Smalin). Before I knew I was obsessed with it. Then, I dug into music theory, a whole new fascinating world opened for me in which I was able to finally get how music really works at a fundamental level. I can safely say that if you are really interested in something (for example music), and you truly love it and want to understand it, you are likely to get to a point where you WILL understand it.*

### 2. YOU NEED TO HAVE ABSOLUTE- (PERFECT-)/ RELATIVE PITCH TO COMPOSE

Absolutely not, absolute pitch is not a necessity to compose, but it might help very well. Relative pitch is extremely practical and more important than absolute pitch. Many teachers will say that relative pitch is really a skill you have to master to compose at a high level. They are right to some extent, I guess. Still, it is arguable if one really needs it, because everyone composes differently. I don’t have fully developed relative pitch, but it doesn’t hinder my composing process that much. True, maybe I compose at a slower rate than most professional composers... Anyway, I know it’s a very useful to have this, so I try to master it.

### 3. MUSIC = MATH, AND IF YOU’RE GOOD IN MATH, YOU’RE GOOD IN MUSIC & VICE VERSA

This one is a cliché, but I had to include it. And no, music is not math. The reason for this confusion comes from parallels between math and music. They both embrace structure, patterns, creativity/fantasy, a feeling with numbers/ratio’s and so on. When 2 different things have a lot in common, people often tend to think they are the same. Which is in fact a good characteristic of human beings in some cases, because this enables us to connect things. But over-connecting, as in this case, leads to biased conclusions. There are a lot of mathematical structures and concepts involved in music theory and the composing process, just because mathematics forms a great deal of how humans think. It’s easier to understand music via mathematical thinking and it’s easier to create music when applying basic mathematical idea’s to it, but music is much more than just that.

### 4. COMPOSING WITHOUT INSTRUMENTS OR NOTATION SOFTWARE IS THE ONLY TRUE WAY TO COMPOSE

Composing directly from the brain and notating notes on paper is a very good way to compose. Some teachers will tell you that this is the only good way to compose, which is of course not true. It is,

however, a great way to learn how to form music in your head and notate it directly. But an instrument or notation software can help you very well in the process. These are in fact just tools to achieve the same goal. Make no mistake, composers of the past all used instruments to some extent in their composing process.

#### 5. MUSIC COMPOSING ALL DEPENDS ON NEW EXPERIENCES AND BEING IN THAT MAGICAL MOMENT, IT'S EFFORTLESS

Nothing could be further from the truth. To work hard and to perfect your craftsmanship is the real deal. A "masterpiece" is not written on a single day, it requires years of dedication and learning routine. Some composers make a lot of sketches of which they eventually have to throw away a lot, only to be left with a few really good ideas. Don't get convinced by mind mischief like: this one trick will learn you to understand all music and more of that bullshit. If don't want to work hard and to do some effort to understand music, don't even think on starting with it.

There is quote in a famous music theory book called the "Gradus ad Parnassum" by Joseph Fux: "not Plutus but Apollo rules Parnassus". If you want to be a great composer just for the sake of being a great composer, you'd better stop. Is Bach's music remembered because he is a great composer? No, Bach wanted to create profound music, he didn't want to be a great composer.

I always wanted to be a great composer, there is nothing wrong with ego, in fact it kept me going for quite some time. But anyhow, you come to a point where you start thinking more mature about this idea and whether it truly represents yourself, only to come to the conclusion that the true goal cannot be but music by itself.

#### 6. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, COMPUTER ALGORITHMS WILL CREATE THE MUSIC OF THE FUTURE

I get a bit tired by all the AI-hyping and -madness on the internet. It's not only omnipresent in music, but other fields as well. Don't get me wrong, it's all really interesting from a mathematical point of view. However, always keep in mind that these algorithms are all products of our versatile brain. The only reason why computers are not even close in mimicking "how the brain works", is because we, ourselves, don't understand it yet.

If you have been in the composing process for some time and you know how many ideas and knowledge are combined to form a single attractive melodic line that stands out, then you can grasp an idea of how hard it would actually be for an algorithm to achieve the same thing. Moreover, there might be so many subconscious processes at play that guide your thinking in a very personal way. I'm not ruling out that algorithms can create music, but you have this music and you then have that music.

#### 7. TAKE DRUGS, NARCOTICS OR OTHER SUBSTANCES THAT MAKE YOU TRIP WILL IMPROVE YOUR MUSIC

Unfortunately I can't fully disprove this, since I never did this while composing. Some people claim the benefit of these on music and music experiencing... "The music sounds better when you take this or that". However, you all hopefully know that the "nice effects" of most of these substances are temporarily and can be very harmful for your brain and behavior in the long run. Maybe they can give you a good idea once, on which you can built further some other time. But being on trip continuously or too much can make you alienate from society and reality.

## 8. MUSIC COMPOSING IS ALL FUN

This one is a bit like 5). You probably know my idea on this by now. A composer's struggle is real, for me at least. Not physically, but psychologically, at least for me, sometimes. You work at a high level, when there are very few people who truly support you and your ideas. To work hard is, however, the only path you can and should take in my opinion. Think of Beethoven, plagued by depressions and deafness, yet he kept going for the sake of music and humanity.

## 9. YOU ARE BORN WITH OR WITHOUT MUSICAL TALENT

The word "talent" is a seed for so much confusion. What is talent? Well, I think no one can safely say you what it really means. Does it even have a meaning? We are all born musical, it's not in your DNA or something. A lot of people think that it is something you inherit... Some people are indeed born lucky if for example their environment stimulates them to practice music, but in the end they'll have to work hard for it. Their "talent" will not do the work for them. Interest and discipline are far more important than "talent". And fortunately, you can train discipline ;)

## 10. ALL MUSIC IS WRITTEN, THERE IS NO ROOM FOR TRULY NEW MUSIC

We've all been there... This is perhaps the most frustrating misconception of them all. It's not only said about music, but art in general. However, in music it seems to pop up very often. It actually states that composing (or making art!) is useless, that everything has been said already. The irony is that, so many important ideas have been said, but a lot of people don't seem to get them or want to get them. That's why artists have to tell them over and over again. I think the reason why some say that all music is written is because there is a lot of repetition in music and it uses a lot of same fundamental chord progressions. It is indeed a time related art. Intelligibility in music seems to be impossible without repetition ("Fundamentals of Musical Composition" – Arnold Schoenberg), it keeps things together. In fact, I find it very comforting that music theory tells you that basic structures and rhythms are often preserved.

On the other hand, just think of how many possible attractive melodies could be created with just a few notes? I hope there will always be room for music and art, regardless of what the future might bring us.