

10 TIPS for composing or making music

WARNING! These tips are concepts and ideas that I find personally important, because most of them are founded on convincing arguments and evidence. However, you probably shouldn't fully agree with all of them since you might have a different look on things than I have. Nevertheless, I shared these ideas with the hope to inspire other artists and to make them aware of some crucial points that might not be familiar and that might help to see things differently.

I would argue that these TIPS 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. On the other hand, some of these tips could be applied to your everyday life as well ;)

1. TASTE & STYLE

Write music that affects you and only you (unless you're in a band of course), but be rational. With being rational I mean that you're not alone in this world. What you might like, could be totally different than most people will like, but it might work. However, if your music is so complex that nobody will grasp it... then what is the point of sharing it anyway? Music is written to be experienced and even performed by other people.

Concerning taste & style, you're likely to have preferences in making decisions when writing music. These preferences are likely to be based on structures, ideas or concepts from other music. There is no wrong in sticking to your taste, but always remain open for other music. Even music that might not appeal to you at first. Even if you don't like it, try to listen to it at least a second time (another day). Chances are that you will appreciate it more.

Taste is dynamic and can be influenced very easily. Your taste of music and thus your output, will probably be dynamic. Mozart, Beethoven, Debussy, Stravinsky, Schubert and in fact most other composers all developed music that somehow broke "their own rules" of previous compositions.

Also, be aware that writing like someone else is no crime. Beethoven wrote like Mozart and Haydn; Mozart wrote like J.C. Bach (a son of Bach), in their early careers... Yet, soon they developed different ideas that accumulated to an extraordinary extent.

2. BREAKS

When you start with a composition, don't work too long on it in one session. In fact don't work too long on one passage. Try to distance yourself from the piece from time to time. Do something else, work on another composition or relax and then come back with fresh ears to check whether you still like your musical scribbles.

3. SOLITUDE IS BLISS

If you are composer, in the "true" classical sense, you should have no problem with being alone. Composing is demanding, you concentrate yourself very deeply which needs silence.

4. TO WRITE vs. TO DELETE

To write is ONE thing, to erase is something else. I mean, don't throw away all your moderate drafts or unfinished work, they might be nice ideas that you can use later. But, you have to know when to

erase a passage or stop working on a piece if it does not work. And you have to notice this preferably fast, otherwise you will lose a lot of time and energy trying to fix something that is already broken. It's like cooking, you can't make a good meal if you start with poor ingredients.

5. ROYAL ADVICE

When you need advice, search for professional help, a private teacher, conservatory or college. Don't be stubborn to think you could figure it out all by yourself. You will learn a lot more and faster when someone can guide you and show you how music works.

6. HONESTY

Be honest as a composer. Try to find you who you are, what are your weak- are and strong points. Be open for critics and feedback, take what you need from it.

7. MODESTY, QUALITY > QUANTITY

A long composition is not always better than a short one. There are plenty of so called composers who think they're great because they can write a full scale opera or symphony or another "great" work. But sometimes there is much more in small composition which is really well worked out. For example, listen to Bach's solo violin and cello suites.

8. FAME IS LAME, CONFIRMATION

An artist doesn't have to be eccentric or weird to grab people's attention. In fact, you should oppose to attention seeking behavior. Your composition isn't great if you give it a funny title. There is nothing wrong with spreading your work, but don't spam, it's embarrassing and a shame for art. Art is not a product you'd like to sell in a market.

9. CLICHÉ

I talked earlier about being honest and to be open for well-founded feedback. It is very important, but on the other hand you have to believe in yourself. You'll have to come to a certain moment in your career when you don't need so much feedback anymore. Most composers have a great ego and a strong mind, they will just never give up. I personally belief that any person can become what they want if their environment allows it. However, don't let your ego take the overhand, I refer to TIP 6) again. It's a bit about finding a balance, I guess.

10. LIMITS

Unconsciously, you automatically limit yourself when making music. You apply certain ideas that you have applied in past music. You have preferences and workflow habits that could remain the same for years. It's a great way to be productive, but a great way to make the same mistakes over and over again. Indeed, it's about finding a balance all over again. To limit yourself can speed up your workflow, but it can harm your music as well.

Do you know the Myth of Sisyphus? If not, you should definitely look it up. It is about the joy of work vs. the joy of finishing work. When you make music just because you want to have a great display of works, you're doing it wrong. It's always nice to finish a piece, but if you find joy in the creation process

itself, that's gold. The real achievement is when you enjoy doing your work. Don't be tempted to think it's all fun all day, sometimes it is just frustrating, but that cannot become the praxis.

In my next article: "Why make music?" I'll build further on the idea of "joy of work". It's a more philosophical text that reflects more personal ideas.