

# All That Music

## Composing Music: Craft, Skill or Something Else?

When thinking about the creative professions, you can often come to the conclusion that true creativity, like religion, can't be explained, it can only be believed in. There are plenty of teaching methods that describe sets of rules and postulates with which you can make yourself a sort-of genius-artist. This concerns not only music, but also painting, poetry, etc. For example, what can we read about composition in music dictionaries? "Composition is a complex craft that demands great knowledge. It requires knowledge of harmony, polyphony, and orchestration."

To my mind, to compose, a musician should be aware of many more things, for example, he should play an instrument, preferably the piano. The piano develops textured hearing, so necessary for a composer, and is very helpful in his work. The wide compass of this instrument allows the composer to perform the most sophisticated scores. Improvisational skills also add to the creative process. In addition, experience allows a composer to acquire techniques which help him write music in various genres.

But, still, why do so many modern composers, having graduated from universities and music colleges after receiving excellent educations – similar to and sometimes even better than some great musicians of their days – often fall into creative oblivion? The answer is obvious: the main thing in art is that it is not only a craft. Many people have forgotten the essence of the word "music". It's an experience of the creative muses, and a muse can't be restricted by ties and boundaries of thought. Therefore, the academic skills needed to know how to practice correctly should not restrict the creative process, but rather serve as a foundation for the flight of feelings and ideas.

Creativity is a discovery of divine origin, and though every person strives to reach it, not everybody can achieve it. Thus, composers, painters, poets, and architects, are indispensable. Their creative processes allow the audience to find itself in the centre of this creativity, purifying its soul and reaching the divine origin.

I want to convey the idea that creativity is a great miracle which exists on earth, rather than a complex craft. And I hope there never comes a time when creative people are not required. As long as there is the Necessity to Create, there will always be a never-ending process of contemplating art. When people ask me how I compose music, I always remember Gustav Mahler's words, "When I write music, I feel like I am a musical instrument which is played by the Universe."

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## Jazz Music and Drugs

I'd like to write about a tragic problem in jazz music – drugs in musicians' lives. History has seen many examples of great jazz performers whose drug-addiction cut their lives short. I mean the American jazz saxophonist and composer Charlie Parker (1920–1955), a pioneer of the bebop style, famously called "Bird", who was found dead of an overdose when he was 35. I mean Chet Baker (1929–1988), renowned for his blue and romantic trumpet playing, who took drugs and one day jumped out of a hotel window in Amsterdam. I mean Kenny Kirkland (1955–1998), a very expressive jazz pianist who ran contrary to jazz orthodoxy, performing on electric keyboards.

Nobody can explain exactly why those musicians took drugs. There could be many reasons related to specific features of their profession. It might have been because they had night jobs, because their free-time didn't coincide with that of people who mattered to them and who they wished to communicate with. Or it might have been because of their wild desire to run away from troubles to practice creatively, thinking that they would improvise better if they took drugs.

I think that these are only excuses for their weak wills. Having understood this simple idea, some drug-addicted musicians, (with John Coltrane (1926–1967), Miles Davis (1926–1991), Elvin Jones (1927–2004) among them) stopped taking drugs. Once they overcame addiction, they performed and recorded successfully.

The pianist and composer Herbie Hancock (1940), the saxophonists and composers Wayne Shorter (1933) and Branford Marsalis (1960) are not so young today, but they are still popular performers, and still retain their leading positions on the jazz world stage.

So I ask you to please remember that drugs are not the only way to make music or solve your problems. But it is the fastest road to defeat.

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