

Music Careers in a Post-Crisis Time

By Miguel Kertsman – musician, composer, producer, audio engineer, recording executive, and academic program director of the Master of Arts programs “Music Management” and “Music for Applied Media” at Danube University Krems.

We all know these are times of major challenges and difficulties which also impact the Cultural World. Much had already changed in the Music Industry (including Media Music) in recent decades. Those changes, due to the expanding IT-based digital music & media economy landscapes, have been posing challenges to music makers and rights holders; but also providing a myriad of potential new opportunities.

Adding to an already fragile and volatile industry environment, the Covid-19 crisis has been layering further tough challenges onto the mix. And again, depending on how one may see it, perhaps also opening doors to potential new opportunities even if remotely so. Changes are often difficult, people usually tend to stick with the status quo, especially if things are working – so goes the old saying: “If ain’t broken don’t fix it.” Sometimes however, changes are inevitable and leave us no other alternative but to look ahead instead of turning back, and try our best to be creative and resourceful. The rules and best practices of social distancing, common sense, adopting enhanced hygiene customs, respect to one another, personal safety and that of others; are the best tools we currently have to ride the storm. Social distancing obviously also brings monumental challenges to our music industry, too numerous and complex to list in this article.

Aiming for the light at the end of the tunnel ...

... we know more new media are being produced relying substantially on computer-generated assets, animation, or/and taking advantage of recent immersive entertainment technologies. Game designers are busy at work trying to provide more content for users struggling with social isolation. Film producers have their thinking caps on delineating creative solutions to produce content beyond what’s already “in the



Miguel Kertsman

can.” Music can be performed online – not ideal by any means – but nevertheless doable, and those are all current, concrete paths one can pursue. Content creators (music, films, games, etc.) ought to reach out to one another as most are struggling and figuring out how to secure funding for their projects, or trying not to have them cancelled. Despite the total saturation of digital events nowadays, one can still creatively use newly available online platforms to engage with audiences; and can join advocacy groups in their communities to help resolve issues challenging music and the arts through a constructive and positive dialog.

Basic music business principles still apply ...

Regardless of Covid-19, while much has changed in the overall music industry, certain basic principles directly affecting the consumption of music may have not: Effective marketing & brand-building have actually not changed that much at the high-impact, most relevant levels – those that really matter. Legacy marketing, PR, and promotional models have been massively (but not totally) replaced by the IT-Music business – all things digital. However, the challenge of product differentiation remains quite the same. Then there was radio, television, artist appearances, print media, etc. Now there are formidable tools in social media and digital promotion platforms. And there is also a much higher amount of product (supply) competing for the audiences’ ever-shorter attention span (more competitive and diluted demand.) Giving your music a realistic chance of a little exposure under the sun so others can find and enjoy it – “consume it” – requires well thought-out strategies, and just as in the legacy days, a proper budget plan as well. Major IT platforms had indeed, in their beginnings, opened wonderful new doors to “free” promotion when artists or would-be influencers could “orga-

nically go viral.” That may still happen, however the shift from the so called “free” to the “pay-for-exposure” modus operandi – even if you have a substantial audience following – has changed eons since this model’s inception. Therefore, understanding the mechanics of effective marketing and music dissemination then and now is crucial. Proactive and applied research are paramount, and this is for instance a topic deeply addressed and discussed in our MA Program in Music Management at Danube University Krems, Center for Applied Music Research with local, regional and international experts and lecturers.

The Future is Now ...

Relentless conjecturing about the “future of music” or “the future of the music business...”? That future is NOW. There are no silver bullet or magical solutions. The tools to solve existing short-circuits mostly hurting music creators’ revenue streams are available, albeit all over the place and in urgent need of appropriate coordination and synchronization between pertinent institutions and stake holders (Distributors, Aggregators, PRS’s, Publishers, Labels, Media Studios, Publishing Administrators, Clearing Houses, etc.) Rather than complaining, self-victimizing, or shifting blame; music makers and rights holders must better inform and educate themselves on the entire process so they themselves, all of us who make and care about music, can engage into firm and well-informed dialog with all relevant players. Understanding is the first step to fix such short-circuits – and those are mostly and likely existing out of circumstantial reasons, and not because of ill-will by anyone else. Of course, that can always happen on isolated cases, but best not to assume the worst, wouldn’t you agree?

Understanding the difference between degrees of name recognition from actual personal or financial success: The first question you should be asking yourself is: “What is success to me?” Keep in mind careers have been launched in different ways and

for different reasons. If a product, a film or game for instance, has tens of Millions of Dollars in marketing and PR poured into it globally, that will likely become a high-exposure brand. It is only logical those who happened to have been part of the project’s team, however and for whatever reason, will benefit, as they should. Again, nothing magical there. The glitter comes with effective marketing and the rest, as they say is “show biz.” Everyone starts somewhere, and everyone’s story is usually unique and different.

Once you define what success means to you, you can delineate a sensible strategy to achieve your goals whilst avoiding anxiety-driven, meaningless comparisons. Remember... you must not use this or that other program, this or that other sound library or piece of software because everyone else does; or because “that’s what composer X may have used on project Z.” There are many fantastic tools out there: human resources (musicians!), sound libraries, software, etc. Above all, work on your skills, learn your craft in depth, because that will help you unleash your creativity and your own voice. Whether that means increasing one’s intuitive sensitivity to how music affects us, and how it affects the action or drama on a screen, sound-branding logo, or AR experience; or better understanding the sonic world around you – tools available to make you a more proficient music creator and sound artist – we examine those aspects in detail across several courses in our MA Program in Music for Applied Media at Danube University Krems, Center for Applied Music Research including theory, hands-on practice, aesthetics, and key-relevant self-management business disciplines which are of paramount importance to the 21st century music artist.

Above all, celebrate the success of your peers, cheer the art of those you admire, be open and try to remain positive – a cool person to be around. In the end, cool people want to work with other cool people.



Miguel Kertsman:

Miguel Kertsman’s compositions span music genres from Classical Symphonic, Chamber, and Vocal Music for the Concert Stage; to Theatre, Experimental, Jazz, Electronica, and Music for the Media with works commissioned, performed, or recorded by global artists, orchestras, and ensembles.

His music released and published by Sony Classical, RCA Victor Group/BMG, Naxos, Universal Edition. Film and Game scores in cooperation with Tribeca Flashpoint, ZoopTek, the Ammunition Group, and others.

As recording artist, Miguel Kertsman’s solo releases and unique keyboard playing have also earned him a place in the international scene.

His discography as studio musician, arranger, producer, audio engineer, and recording executive span over 200 international releases including international prizes and Awards (Grammy Award nomination, Cannes Classical Award, etc.) Kertsman has designed the curriculum for the MA Programs at Danube University’s Center for Applied Media Research, holding lectures at universities such as Dartmouth College, Sibelius Academy / Arts Univ. of Helsinki, and others. <https://miguelkertsman.com>