

Credo in unum musica

Those of you who have worked with me for a reasonable amount of time know that I developed an exercise some time ago which is aimed at having a musician profess and assert the meaning of their personal call to be a musician in the world. I realize that phrasing it like this makes it sound religious, but credence is certainly as serious as religion regardless of your spiritual beliefs.

The English dictionary defines the word Credo as "a statement of the beliefs or aims which guide someone's actions." As you can see through this lens, it does not have to be exclusively used in a religious context.

I do, however, mean to highlight its seriousness, but perhaps not for the reasons, you may be thinking.

Some musicians straddle music and another career. Some of us restrict our music-making to projects we know we will enjoy. Some are more industrious and seemingly "impersonal" about music, viewing it as a skill of a trade which they possess and use to make money. Some feel highly misunderstood by their families, friends, and listeners. Others only feel alive when making music in the presence of people. Some play the same music in the same show eight times a week, leaving them little energy for much else, let alone making their own music. Others rage against capitalism and perceived societal expectations and purposefully make their music less available or less accessible to the public because they view it as privileged and proprietary. Some sing or play in a house of worship whose roots and beliefs they know little or nothing about. Aspiring young musicians always seem to be throwing spaghetti at the wall, waiting to see what sticks. They will apply to every school, every program, for every scholarship. They will enter every competition and carefully choreograph the moment in the middle of the piece when they hold that one note a split-second longer (because Lang Lang did it), or stop playing and lift the handkerchief out of the piano to wipe their indicatively sweaty brow.

The real question is this: Do any of them *definitively* know their own musical beliefs?

I believe the ability to be truly musical in the performance and composition of music is a result of the level of personal freedom the musician has. I use the word freedom because it is more fundamental to the human condition than something like "confidence," which is more of a learned skill, or dare I say, a mask we are taught to put on. Freedom, however, is a state of being.

I've spent a great amount of time in my life thinking about where this freedom comes from and how it is cultivated in musicians. I realized along the way that freedom comes from a few specific things:

1. The boldness of facing yourself without complacency.
2. The open exclamation of BOTH what you do well and what you do not do well.
3. The humility to *hearken* and not just "hear."

4. The childlike naiveté to remain in love with music, especially that which is not your own.
5. The unwavering commitment to ever-growing and sustaining craft and technique.

If we know who we are as musicians and what we were each put in the world to do with music, we can have this kind of freedom. The single greatest favor that any musician can do for themselves is to take the time needed to be clear and concise on this. If you know who you are as a musician and you make it your business to know the people in the world who need you, specifically, then a lot of the pain of rejection, criticism, relegation, and classicism you may feel will be a thing of the past.

Being a music entrepreneur, I strongly believe that no idea or truth that I hold inside myself can become "real" in the world until I say it aloud. This is the purpose of any credo: again, to profess a statement of beliefs that guide our actions. In the business world, we might call it a mission statement or a charter. Without this underlying assertion, our path winds a lot more than we can tolerate as human beings. We also let others control and dictate what we are to be in the world. We submit to commonly-held dreams of society...

Then we wonder why we have so much trouble being "original" or "stand-out" or "unique."

Write your Musician's Credo!

Here are some probing questions to help you think about it:

1. Aside from the literal definition of "sound organized in time," what is music to me?
2. What are the things I do well in music? What are those I do not do well?
3. In making music alone or with others, when do I notice myself feeling most "alive" or "energized?" What are the types of moments I find myself searching for in music?
4. Why do I have the audacity to ask others to pay money for my music? Aside from the sound or notation of my music, what am I giving them for their investment?
5. If music is my best friend, what can I do to ensure that I always treat it that way?
6. What types of environments feel most natural to me when making or sharing my music?
7. What types of ensembles most reflect the music of my inner ear and my thoughts?
8. Am I comfortable making music in just one, or multiple different scenarios?
9. Who are the people in the world making music that resonates with me and draws me closer to them?
10. If money, time, location, or other circumstances were not a factor, where would I be and what would I be doing in music? With whom? For whom?

11. What areas of craft and technique in music best facilitate my deepening understanding of what music is? In other words, am I a more "theory-driven" person or "listening-driven" or "exercise-driven" musical thinker?

12. How do I believe my musical skills can best be used for the betterment of the world?

13. Where have I observed musical needs around me? A specific style of music missing? A specific configuration of ensemble missing? An exposure problem with the music consumers I meet? An attitude among musicians and listeners around me that upsets me?

14. Where am I as a musician right here and now vs. 5-10 years ago? How far have I come? In which direction do I seem to be going?

I am Vince Peterson.

I am a musician. Music is my one, true vocation. I will not leave it, and it will not leave me. Music is my best friend. I believe music is a modality and a force that is continually undulating in the world. I live for witnessing it rush through the hands, hearts, and faces of those around me.

I am placed in the world to serve music with humility. I put the demands of music in the center of my heart, before fame, money, notoriety, or public deference. I am called to teach, compose, conduct, and produce music as my primary source of sustenance. I assert my lifelong commitment to this and, therefore, my professional expectations of those for whom and with whom I invoke music.

I believe in the human voice as the primary instrument of civilization. I believe in the power of the human psyche being attached to the voice. I believe the psyche is intrinsically connected to the sound. I believe in the innate power of human voices in chorus to change the world. I celebrate the ingenuity of physical instruments and their connection to the earth's precious natural resources. I believe in sound as a physical substance with medicinal properties.

I believe in music as a metaphor for the human form. I believe in the universality of the raw materials and syntax of music and their kinship across genres, styles, generations, geography, space, and time.

I believe in both the horizontal and vertical axes of music. I hearken to their dialogue and long to converse with them. I believe that the study of music is synonymous with wonder and awe. I believe in the equality of integrity and interpretation in rendering any score.

I believe the most authentic musicking possible comes from love before anything else.